

The McManus Surname in Ireland

Dr. Tyrone Bowes



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A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink.

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INTRODUCTION

There are approximately 5000 surnames associated with medieval Ireland. Those surnames can be of Irish, Viking, Norman, English, Welsh, and Scots origin. Some of these surnames have changed considerably since they first appeared, with essentially all Gaelic-Irish surnames being extensively anglicised. As a result of this anglicisation process the original meaning of many Gaelic-Irish surnames and their origin is lost, as the anglicised surname becomes gradually indistinguishable from its English equivalent. Additionally, as the English language has evolved, the spelling of each surname has changed over time and distance, with spelling variations typically arising as ones ancestors moved further and further from the place of origin.

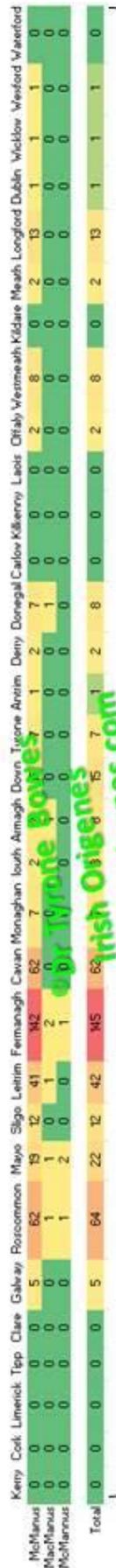
However, since Ireland has remained an agricultural based society each surname can still be found concentrated in the area where the surname first appeared or where one's ancestors first settled. Hence an examination of each surnames distribution can reveal clues as to whether a surname was of Gaelic-Irish, Viking, Norman, or Scots origin. In addition one's ancestors have left evidence of their ancestral link with an area in its history, castles, and placenames, which means that an examination of modern maps and historical records can reveal additional information about one's ancestral origin and the origin of one's surname.

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The McManus surname first appeared in Ireland. When the McManus surname occurs outside of Ireland it is as a result of Irish emigration. In contrast to most Irish surnames McManus has remained remarkably similar to the original 'MacMagnus,' which translates as 'son of Magnus.' Magnus is a Viking personal name which could indicate that some of those with the McManus surname today are descendants of Viking settlers in Ireland. McManus is the most common spelling of this surname with MacManus and McMannus occurring as rare variations.

And like the surname is typically passed from father to son and since Ireland has remained essentially an agricultural based society, McManus farmers can still be found farming the lands where their ancestors settled or where the surname first appeared. An examination of the 1911 census of Ireland reveals 431 McManus (or variant/heads of household) farmers who were overwhelmingly Catholic, see **Figure 1**. By plotting the location of these McManus farmers one reveals that the surname is almost exclusive to the northern half of the Island where it clusters in distinct groups, see **Figure 2**. There is also a correlation between McManus farmer clusters and McManus placenames or townlands. The 'townland' is the smallest unit of geographical land division in Ireland. The entire country is divided into an estimated 62,000 ancient townlands which predate the arrival of the Normans in Ireland in 1169AD. Ireland is quite unique in that many of its townlands reflect the Clans and families that lived there.

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Farmer households (heads of household in 1911)

Figure 1: Number of farmers with the surname Mc/MacManus found throughout the 32 Counties of Ireland.

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Figure 2: Distribution of McManus farmers and placenames throughout Ireland. Pins have been placed in **Panel A** in the townlands where McManus farmers lived in 1911 (pin size is indicative of frequency). **Panel B** shows the location of McManus Townlands/placenames. The significant population clusters and placenames are located in the northern half of the Island.

How many McManus Clans?

A closer inspection of the area between South Roscommon and Northern Fermanagh where the McManus farmers are found reveals at least 5 clusters, see **Figure 3**. Each of these groups could have arisen from a single 'McManus-Adam' (the first to take that surname who lived approximately 1000 years ago). Some of these groups may be related, arising as a result of migration, in addition the location of these McManus clusters may hold clues as to their Irish or Viking origin.

By far the largest cluster of McManus is centred upon County Fermanagh where McManus reaches its maximum frequency on the northwestern shore of Upper Lough Erne, see **Figure 4**. To the northeast one finds a townland called Knockmacmanus (MacManus summit) a placename which may pre-date the arrival of the Normans and evidence of the McManus long association with this area. The remoteness of this location and the absence of Viking placenames would suggest that these McManus are of Gaelic Irish origin. There does appear to be another smaller cluster of McManus in neighbouring County Cavan close to the Leitrim border but given its proximity it may simply be reflective of a population migration or simply the result of the mountainous terrain.

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Figure 3: There are 5 major clusters of McManus farmers in Ireland. A close inspection of the distribution of McManus farmers reveals 5 major clusters centred upon Fermanagh(1), South Roscommon(2), Armagh/Down/Louth border(3), Mid-Leitrim(4), and Mayo(5).



Figure 4: The largest cluster of McManus farmers are found on the northwest bank of Upper Lough Erne in County Fermanagh. A closer inspection of the largest McManus cluster reveals that this group is centred upon Kinawley on the west bank of Upper Lough Erne. There is a smaller cluster upon Catronnagilta in neighbouring Cavan which given its proximity is likely to be the result of migration.

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The second largest cluster of McManus are found much further south on the west bank of the river Shannon, close to Athlone town in southern Roscommon, see **Figure 5**. The Shannon was a favoured route for Viking raiding and their presence here may be an indication that this cluster is of Viking origin. Viking settlement may also be the source of the McManus cluster which occurs on the northern shore of what would have been called (in its original Norwegian) 'Kerlingfjörðr' or Carlingford lough, see **Figure 6**. A third putative Viking cluster appears to be centred on the southern shore of lough Allen which lies further north from Athlone on the river Shannon, see **Figure 7**. Interestingly, along the course of the Shannon between Athlone and Lough Allen one finds Lismacmagnus or MacManus fort (see **Figure 3**). This suggests that the 'Viking' McManus had long exploited this river for raiding, eventually settling permanently along its banks close to both Athlone and Lough Allen.



Figure 5: The South Roscommon McManus cluster. There is a large cluster of McManus farmers on the western bank of the river Shannon in southern Roscommon. This cluster of McManus could be of Viking origin as Viking-related surnames are found scattered along the length of this river.

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Figure 6: The McManus farming cluster centred upon the northern shore of Carlingford lough. Carlingford is derived from the Norwegian 'Kerling fjörö' meaning 'narrow sea-inlet of the hag.' This could be an indication that the McManus in this area are of Viking origin.



Figure 7: The McManus cluster on the southern shore of lough Allen. Lough Allen is formed by the river Shannon which was favoured by Viking raiders and a possible indication that this McManus cluster is of Viking origin.

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The final cluster of McManus can be found in County Mayo close to Cartronmacmanus (McManus portion of land), see **Figure 8**. This clustering of placename and McManus farmers could indicate a distinct Gaelic Irish McManus Clan associated with this area. However, many Irish were forcibly relocated to this part of Ireland after the Cromwellian conquest (1646-53) and it is also possible that these McManus may be the scattered descendants of transplanted Irish (of both Irish and Viking descent).



Figure 8: Transplanted McManus of County Mayo? There is a cluster of McManus farmers in North Mayo close to Cartronmacmanus. Only commercial ancestral Y-DNA testing will reveal whether these are distinct Gaelic Irish, Viking descendants, or the result of the transplantations of people that occurred after the Cromwellian conquest. The townland of Curry may have required its additional 'MacManus' name in the 17th Century as a result of transplantations.

SUMMARY

If your surname is McManus then science has demonstrated that there is a 50% chance that you are directly descended from a McManus-Adam (the first to take that surname who lived approximately 1000 years ago). However this study has demonstrated that there were at least 5 distinct McManus-Adams who were potentially unrelated to one another. In addition there is evidence to suggest that some of the McManus-Adams were of Viking origin. Commercial ancestral Y-DNA testing will determine which McManus cluster one is descended from and whether one's McManus ancestors were descendants of Vikings or Gaels.