

The Henderson Surname in Ireland

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Part III

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INTRODUCTION

There are many thousands of surnames associated with Ireland. Those surnames can be of Irish, Viking, Norman, English, Welsh, or Scottish 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 was essentially lost as the anglicised Irish surname became gradually indistinguishable from its English equivalent. Additionally, as the English language has evolved, the spelling of each surname has changed over both 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. By examining the distribution and religious affiliation of people with a particular surname in early census data one can reveal clues as to whether a surname was of Gaelic-Irish, Viking, Norman, English or Scots origin, and when ones paternal ancestor first settled in Ireland. 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 Irish ancestral origin.

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The biggest genetic input into the Island of Ireland since pre-historic times was due to the arrival of mainly Lowlander Scots and Northern English during the Plantations of Ireland that began in the 16th Century. Census data reveals that the majority of Henderson farmers recorded in Ireland in 1911 were Protestant and lived predominantly in the north of Ireland. This indicates that the Hendersons arrived in Ireland during the plantations and settled on land forfeited by rebellious Norman-Irish Lords and Irish Chieftains, see **Figure 1**. The Henderson surname has remained remarkably stable with no identifiable variants found in census data. Henderson farmers exhibit a scattered pattern of distribution which is typical of plantation settlement, and in contrast to Gaelic-Irish surnames that arose in a single location and cluster in that location even after 1000 years. Some interesting trends are also revealed when one breaks down the denomination and location of each Protestant Henderson farmer; Presbyterians predominate in the northeast and northwest, with the more moderate Church of Ireland adherents increasing as one moves west and south. In Northern Ireland there has been little intermarriage between Catholic Irish and Protestant settlers and as a result there are only a handful of scattered Catholic Henderson farmers in the North. However a significant cluster of Catholic Henderson farmers are observed in County Laois in southern Ireland. County Laois was one of the first Counties to be planted and there are generally higher rates of conversion of Protestants to Catholicism observed in Southern Ireland.

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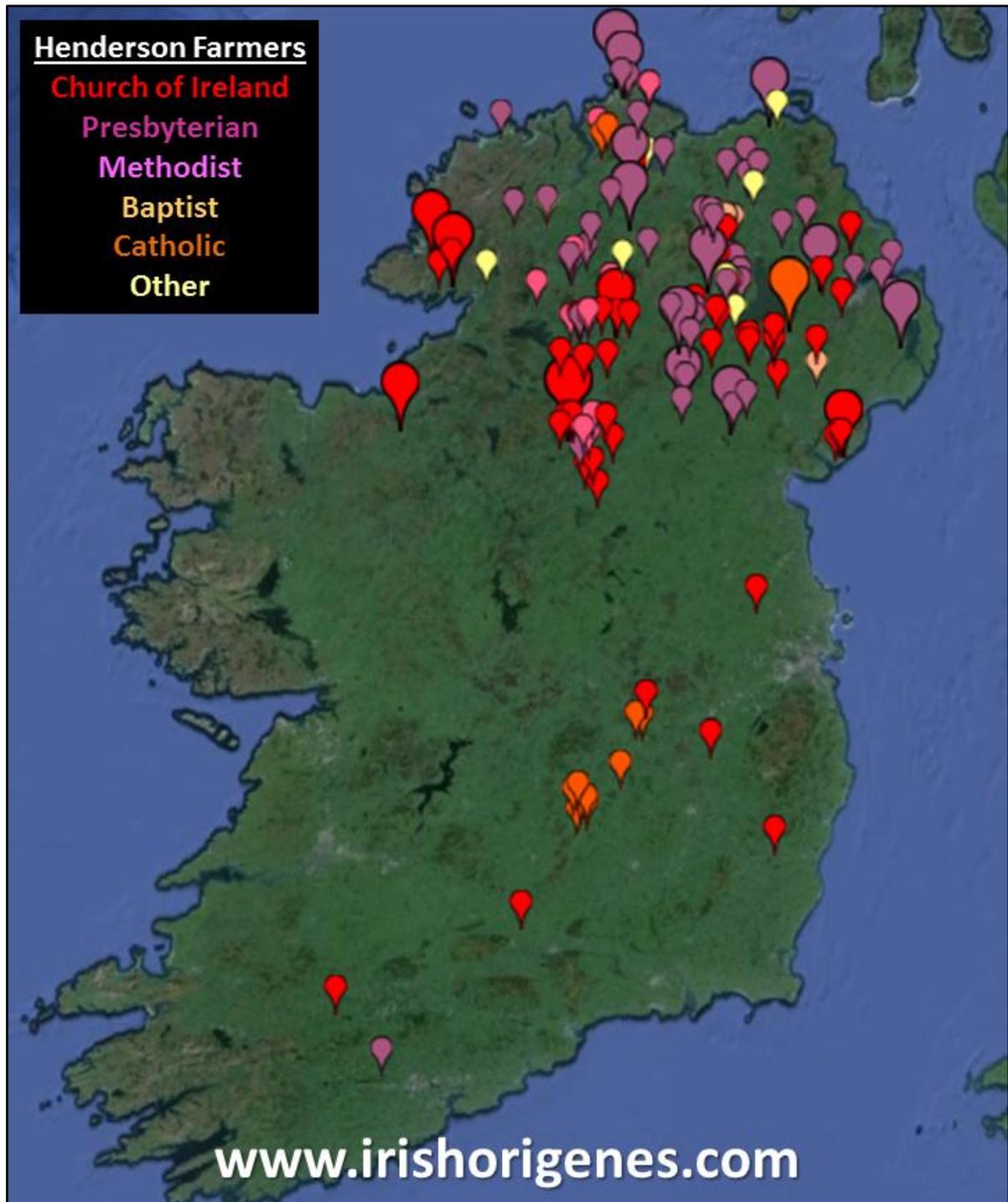


Figure 1: Distribution of Henderson farmers throughout Ireland. Pins have been placed in the townlands where each Henderson farmers (head of household) were recorded in 1911. Pin colour indicates the religious affiliation of each farmer. Pin size is indicative of frequency. The scattered distribution of Hendersons and their mainly Protestant religious affiliation in 1911 indicates that the Henderson surname arrived in Ireland during the 16th and 17th Centuries.

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Tracking Mr Henderson's Scots-Planter Ancestors

Mr Henderson's Y-DNA results revealed that his closest genetic relatives were the Williamsons and that his Viking ancestors had settled in the lands of the lowlander Scottish Hamilton family situated close to Glasgow on the river Clyde. The Hamiltons were a prominent Scottish family who were heavily involved in the Plantation of Northern Ireland. Hamilton involvement in the Plantations began when the Gaelic chieftain Conn O'Neill of Ulster rebelled and was imprisoned in 1602AD. In return for a royal pardon O'Neill relinquished half of his lands which were granted to Scottish nobles including James Hamilton from Dunlop in Ayrshire. James Hamilton persuaded members of his extended family to participate in the plantation, and to recruit their tenants from their Scottish Lowland estates. The first group of lowlander Scottish farmers from the various Hamilton estates arrived in 1606 to form the Ulster Scots settlement at Bangor.

Mr Henderson's papertrail indicates that his earliest known ancestors were Presbyterians living in the townland of Ballyagan in County Derry in Northern Ireland. When one considers that many families who shared common ancestry and religious affiliation (Presbyterian), and who lived on the same Hamilton estates in lowland Scotland left together to colonise Ireland, one can therefore examine the distribution of Hamilton, Henderson, and Williamson farmers to determine whether there is a common trend in their pattern of settlement. An examination of the census data reveals that Presbyterian Hamilton and Williamson farmers are both recorded close to Bangor, the earliest town founded by James Hamilton, see **Figure 2**.

As more land became available for settlement the Ulster-Scots including the Hamiltons, Hendersons, and Williamsons spread throughout Ulster. In 1619AD John Hamilton, the brother of James Hamilton acquired new lands in County Armagh and founded the towns of Markethill, Hamiltonsbawn, and Newtownhamilton, see **Figure 2**. An examination of the 1911 census data reveals that Hamiltonsbawn is an area where one finds Henderson and Williamsons farmers. More and more land was freed up for settlement after the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland, with Presbyterian Hendersons and Williamsons being recorded in 3 distinct areas to the northeast of Hamiltonsbawn; one group just west of the plantation town of Castlecaulfield, another close to Desertmartin, and the most northern group close to Ballyagan in County Londonderry where Mr Henderson's most distant paternal ancestor is recorded, see **Figure 2**.

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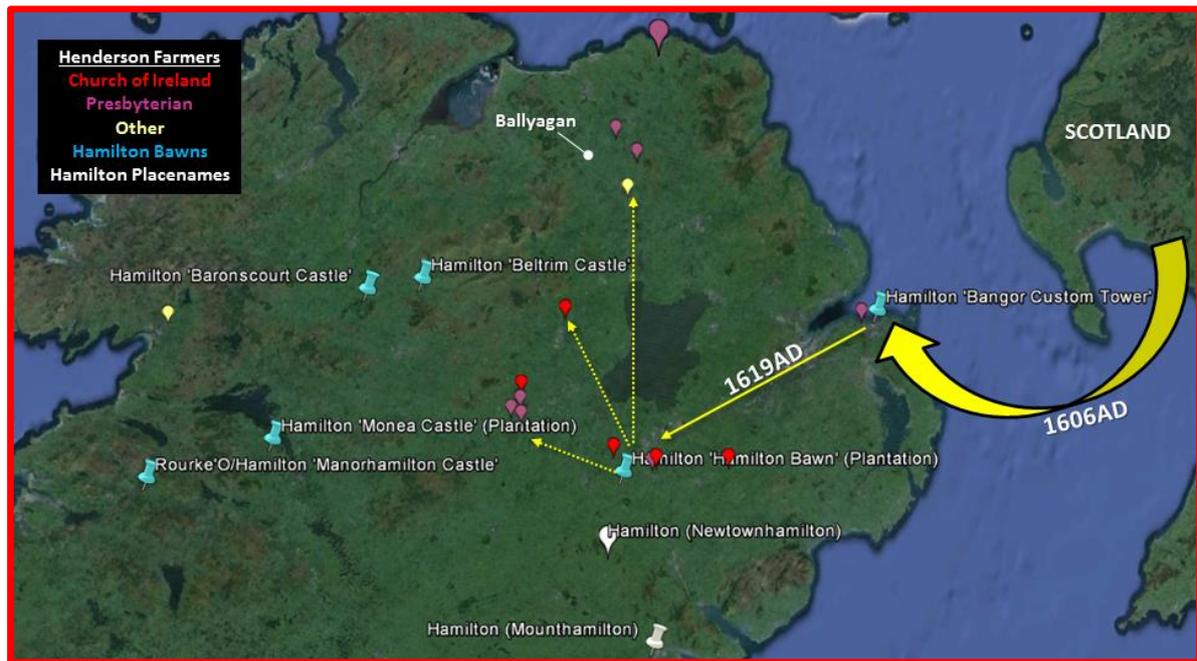


Figure 2: Mr Henderson's paternal ancestral journey in Ireland. Presbyterian Henderson and Williamson farmers are found in the area surrounding Bangor Custom House Bawn which was built by the Hamiltons in 1606AD. Farmers with these surnames are also found close to Hamilton Plantation Bawn in County Armagh built in 1619AD. Later, as more land became available for settlement, the Presbyterian Hendersons and Williamsons spread to the northwest, being recorded close to Ballyagan townland where Mr Henderson's paternal ancestors are recorded. Yellow lines detail the dispersion of Ulster-Scot Henderson and Williamson farmers.

How to Confirm Mr Henderson's Irish Ancestral Journey

To confirm the ancestral link to Bangor, Hamiltonsbawn, and the area surrounding Ballyagan will require the recruitment of Hamilton farmers from these areas for commercial ancestral DNA testing.

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