

The Viking Associated Surnames of Ireland



Commissioned by Mr Michael Doyle

Dr Tyrone Bowes

This report accompanies the Irish Origenes 'Viking Ireland' Map

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INTRODUCTION

There are approximately 5000 surnames associated with Pre-Plantation Ireland. Those surnames can be of Gaelic-Irish, Viking, Norman, English, Welsh, and Scots origin. Some of those surnames have changed considerably since they first appeared, with essentially all Gaelic-Irish and Viking surnames being extensively anglicised. As a result of this Anglicisation process the original meaning of many Irish surnames *and their true origin* is lost as the anglicised surnames become gradually indistinguishable from their English equivalents. 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 the people who once lived there.

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Ireland's Viking age began at the end of the 8th Century and lasted for almost 400 years. The impact of the Vikings on Ireland was enormous; they founded Ireland's first towns which include Dublin, Wexford, Waterford, Cork and Limerick. They also introduced Scandinavian personal names like Rognvaldr/Ragnal and Hrothrekr which were incorporated into new Irish surnames like Reynolds and Rourke which were adopted by both the Gaelic Irish natives and Viking settlers. As a result having a Viking derived surname does not necessarily equate to Viking ancestry.

There are relatively few placenames in Ireland derived from the Norse language and most of those are unsurprisingly found along the coast, see **Figure 1**. Inland, Irish placenames reveal a wealth of information regarding the people who lived or settled there. The entire Ireland is divided into an estimated 64,000 'townlands' which are Ireland's smallest unit of geographical land division. These townlands typically pre-date the arrival of the Normans in 1169AD and are often named after the Clans or people who lived there. Some of these townlands contain the word 'Gall/Gaul' or 'Dane;' both terms used by the Gaelic Irish to describe the Vikings. When one examines the location of Viking towns (Dublin, Wicklow), Viking-placenames (Carlingford, Skellig) together with townlands that include the words 'Gall' or 'Dane' one can see clear areas associated with permanent Viking settlement which are particularly evident in the east and south, and surprisingly within the Irish midlands, see **Figure 1**. Probably the most notable Viking associated surnames are Doyle (Dhubh-ghall or dark foreigner) and Rourke. When one examines Viking placenames together with the distribution of Doyle and Rourke farmers a clear link is observed, see **Figure 2**. In addition,

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many Irish placenames are a clear reference to surnames that arose in that area and one can examine for example Doyle farmer locations together with Doyle placenames and see a clear correlation, see **Figure 3**. Hence, if you have a Viking-associated surname linked to an area of Viking settlement (identified in Figure 1) then one may in fact have genuine Norse ancestry. Ultimately only modern commercial ancestral Y-DNA testing can determine whether one's recent Irish ancestor was of genuine Viking origin.



Figure 1: Viking towns, placenames and townlands. An examination of the location of Viking towns and placenames reveals them concentrated within Eastern, Southern and Central Ireland.

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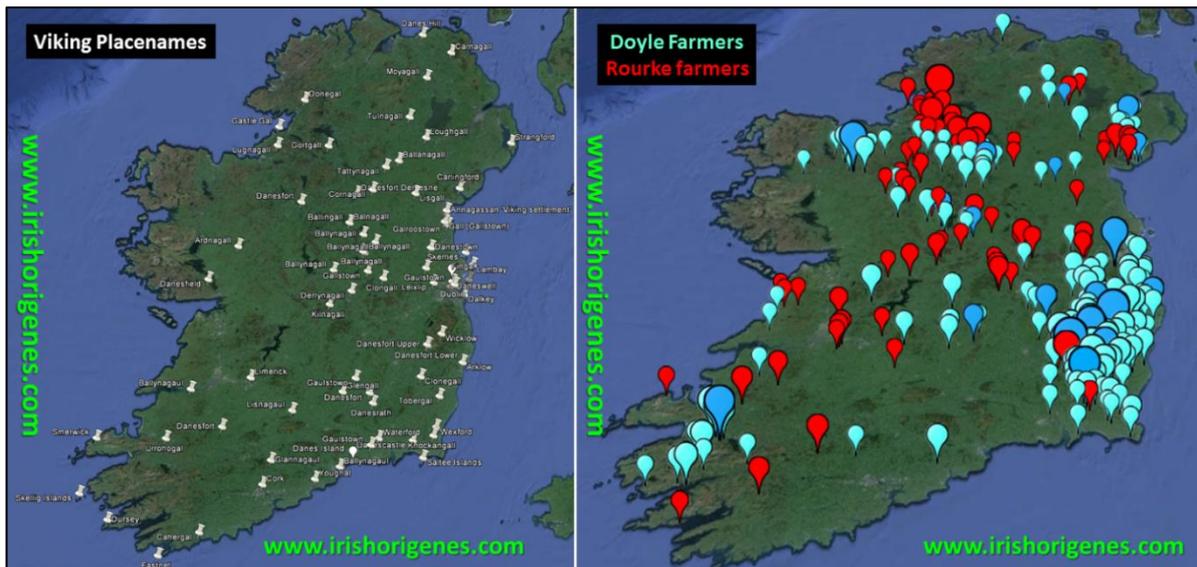


Figure 2: The correlation between Viking placenames and Viking surnames. Doyle and Rourke are two of the most notable of Viking-Irish surnames. An examination of Viking placenames (**left panel**) and where farmers called Doyle and Rourke were found in early census data (**right panel**) reveals clear common areas of association, particularly within the Southeast, Southwest and Central Ireland.

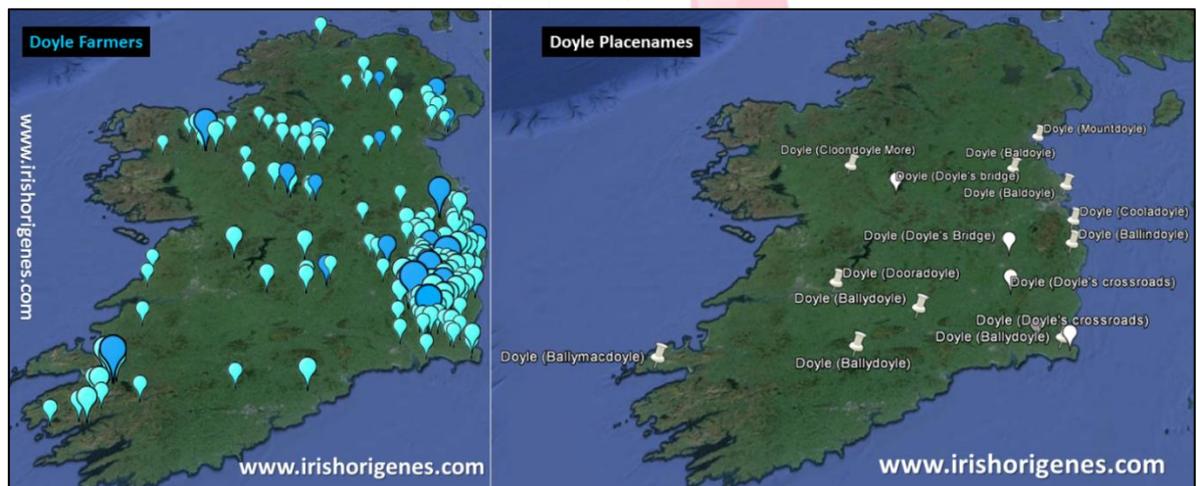


Figure 3: The correlation between Doyle farming communities and Doyle placenames. When a surname has been associated with an area for long enough that association is reflected in local placenames. Doyle farmers (**left panel**) are found within the Southeast, Southwest, Central and Northeast Ireland where one also finds Doyle townlands and other local placenames (**right panel**).

Viking Towns

Besides monastic settlements there were few permanent towns found within Ireland until the arrival of the Vikings. Within a few years of their appearance the permanent Viking settlements of Cork, Dublin, Limerick, Waterford, Wexford and Wicklow began to appear. The Vikings farmed the area surrounding each town and overtime adopted the paternally inherited surnames which were common amongst their Gaelic Irish neighbours. Today, particularly in the farmland that surrounds the Cities of Dublin, Limerick and Wexford one can still find Viking surnames in the local farming communities. In North and South Dublin

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one can find farmers with surnames like Doyle, Loughlin, McManus ('son of Magnus'), Kettle, Thunder, Seaver, Sweetman, Grimes, and Harford. Along the upper course of the River Liffey in neighbouring Kildare and Wicklow one finds Gill, Rourke, Ivory, Higgins, Halpin, Broe and Whittle, in addition to some putative Viking surnames like Butterfield (Viking surnames in Ireland can be locational), Balfe and Broughall. Although Viking surnames are numerous throughout County Wexford, a small number including Sane, Merriman, Reck and Brawdars appear in the farming community that surrounds the modern town. To the west surrounding the modern city of Limerick one finds Boland, Stritch, Kett, O'Rourke and Higgins. In contrast only Kirby and Kenefick are found surrounding Cork City, while Whittle and Gaul surround Waterford City. In the farmland surrounding Wicklow Town one finds the surnames Storey, Doyle and Arthur while Stack, Loughlin and Troy surround Youghall in County Waterford. The Troy surname is also found in North Wexford close to Viking-Arklow. Other Viking surnames found to the south of Arklow include Loughlin, Boland, Doyle, and Berney, in addition to the possible Viking surnames Owley and Noctor.

Modern archaeological investigations are also uncovering Viking settlements that did not survive. In 827AD the Annals of Ulster recorded the first Viking raids on the inhabitants of Oriel (County Louth). By 841AD the Vikings had begun to settle permanently in Oriel with the establishment of a longphort near the modern village of Annagassan on the Louth coast. Annagassan was once as important as the Viking settlement of Dublin and in the countryside one does find a scattering of putative Viking-placenames like Gallstown ('foreigners town'), Galroostown ('the red foreigners town') and Carlingford (Carling *fjord*). There are also a number of possible Viking surnames found in the surrounding area including Reynolds, Harmon, Johnson, Grimes, Halpenny and Dromgoole. Dromgoole is one of the few Irish locational surnames which is also found in Wexford which would support its Viking connection.

Other Viking Areas

South Down

South Down from Viking 'Carlingford' to 'Strangford' contains a large number of Norse surnames. Doyles, McManus, Culls, Higgins and Rourkes surround Carlingford. While Jennings, and the rare but unique surnames Torney, Crangle and Branniff surround the lower reaches of the Ards peninsula. It is also near the Ards peninsula where one of Ireland's few Viking themed events 'the Magnus Viking Festival' takes place. The festival celebrates this areas notable Viking heritage and is named after 'Magnus Barefoot' (or Barelegs) 'King of Norway' who was killed and buried near Downpatrick. Ancestral DNA studies have found that King Magnus recruited much of the army for his Conquest of nearby Galloway in Southwest Scotland from amongst the Gaels and Vikings of South Down. Many of the descendants of that army would later return to South Down as English speaking Lowlander Protestant Scots during the Plantation of Ulster over 500 years later.

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Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland

Vikings were first recorded in Lough Neagh in 840AD and there are historical references to them settling in the area. The Viking raiders may have used the Bann River which divides most of the modern Counties of Derry and Antrim to reach Lough Neagh as along its course one finds the placenames Gortgall, Moyagall and Danes castle together with the McCotter and Higgins surnames. Only one local Viking placename 'Oxford Island' derived from Norse Ost-Fjord meaning 'East inlet' survives on Lough Neagh. Oxford Island is situated on the southeast corner of the lough, further south one finds Loughgall (foreigners lake), while further west lies Tullnagall (Foreigners hill). It is in the area surrounding Tullnagall that one finds a significant number of Viking surnames including; Doyle, O'Rourke, Hurson, Toner and Grimes. Other putative Viking surnames surrounding Lough Neagh include Blacker and McKeever which concentrate just north of Loughgall, Toner is found further south while the possible Viking surname 'McStravick' concentrates on the eastern shore.

The Three Sisters

Since the Vikings took advantage of Ireland's waterways for the purposes of raiding it should come as no surprise to find evidence of the Vikings in the surnames along the course and catchment area of the three sisters. The Three Sisters refers to the Rivers Barrow, Nore and Suir. The Suir and Nore both originate within County Tipperary, while the Barrow begins its journey in the Slieve Bloom Mountains in County Laois; all three join the Atlantic Ocean in the same bay which lies southeast of Waterford City. The area along the Suir where it forms the border between Counties Tipperary and Waterford is particularly notable being associated with the Sweetman, Boland, Trehy, Halpin, Norris and Keaver surnames. Between the upper reaches of the Suir and Nore in eastern Tipperary one finds Doyles, Searsons, Hackett, Kerwick and Kendrick, while on the Laois/Kilkenny border one finds Broderick and Dollard. Between the upper reaches of the Nore and the Barrow in eastern Laois one finds Rourkes, Higgins, McLoughlins and Doyles. In neighbouring eastern Kilkenny one finds Bambricks, Burns and Ivorys.

Blackwater River Valley

The Blackwater river begins its journey in the Mountains of County Kerry and flows east through County Cork to Waterford before turning south at the town of Cappoquin and draining into the Atlantic ocean at Viking Youghal. However, it is only along the course of the Blackwater at the border between Cork and Waterford that one finds evidence of Viking surnames including Brackett, Ivis, Higgins, Cotter, Bowdren, Reynolds and Stackpoole. Close to this area one finds evidence to support Viking settlement in the townlands of Glannagaul (Glen of the foreigner) and Garrynagoul (Wooded glen of the foreigner).

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Tralee Bay in Northwest Kerry

A scattering of Viking-associated surnames including Segerson, Sugrue, Boland, Sayers and Johnson are found all along the Kerry coastline. However, the greatest density of Viking surnames can be found in the area that surrounds Tralee Bay in Northwest Kerry. It is there that one finds the surnames; Johnson, Harman, Broderick, Trant, Rourke, Higgins, Gaynor, Halloran and Byrnes. While to the south on the northern shore of Lough Leane near Killarney town one finds Viking Doyles and Randles.

The Shannon River

The Shannon is Ireland's longest river and Viking surnames occur along its entire course. There are particular points along the Shannon where these Viking surnames concentrate which would indicate permanent Viking settlement. One such area is the north-eastern shore of Lough Derg in the farmland that surrounds the town of Portumna where one finds the Viking surnames Broder, Broderick, Dolphin, Rourke and Gohery. Further north along the southern shores of Lough Ree, surrounding the modern town of Athlone one finds Viking-McManus, Grenham, Byrne, Henson, Hafford together with the ubiquitous Doyles and Rourkes. In the upper reaches of the Shannon in the borderlands of Roscommon, Longford and Leitrim Viking surnames are prevalent but scattered. County Leitrim was dominated in medieval times by the Gaelic Irish Clans McReynolds and O'Rourke both surnames derived from Viking Ragnal and Hrothrekr respectively. Other Viking surnames found in the surrounding area include Doyle, McManus, Loughlin, Cull, Gill, Rawl, Higgins, Stakem, Herson and O'Beirne. One theory for the prevalence of Viking surnames in this area is that the Vikings who settled there served as mercenaries to the local Irish chieftains and over time were assimilated into Gaelic Irish society. In turn the Chiefly lines of the local Gaelic Clans adopted the notable warrior-associated personal names of their mercenary Vikings.

Liscannor Bay in West Clare

In the area surrounding Liscannor Bay in West Clare one finds farmers with the Viking associated surnames Rourke, Cotter, Boland and Reynolds. The Medieval Gaelic Irish Clan that dominated the area to the north of Liscannor were the O'Loughlins which is also a Viking surname. This small clustering would suggest a small settlement of Vikings who may have served as mercenaries for the local Irish Chieftains.

Clew Bay

Clew Bay is situated on County Mayo's west coast. It is along the southern shores of Clew Bay from the towns of Louisburg to Westport where one finds (in the local farming community) the Viking surnames Kitterick, Gill, Higgins, Kirby and Johnson. Further inland

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one finds Gronnell, Tonra and Grimes. This small scattering of Viking-associated surnames would indicate some type of Viking contact within this area.

Killala Bay and the Moy River

Killala Bay lies on the west coast of Ireland between Counties Mayo and Sligo. Along the shores of Killala Bay one finds Viking Dolphin, Boland, Hannick and Calpin. The Moy River flows into Killala Bay and it is in the upper reaches of the Moy where the borders of Mayo, Sligo and Roscommon converge that one finds the highest density of Viking-associated surnames within Ireland. Many of these are classic Viking surnames like Doyle, Halloran ('stranger from across the sea'), McKeever, Stenson, Seery, Broder, Higgins, Grennan, Boland and McLoughlin. However, there are no Viking associated placenames found within this part of Western Ireland and few historical records to explain when and why they settled there. Further south, particularly on the northern borderlands of Roscommon and Galway one finds another cluster of Viking surnames including McManus, Loughlin, Stritch, Swanick, Coll, Gill, Bligh, Broderick, Tarmey, Cottle (Kettle), Higgins and Rourke together with a solitary placename 'Ardnagall' meaning 'Hill of the Foreigners.'

Sligo Bay

There is little evidence to support Viking settlement in the area that surrounds Sligo Bay. The Higgins and McLoughlin surnames that are found in the surrounding countryside can also be of Gaelic Irish origin although there is a Lugnagal (the foreigners hollow) and Castlegal found close by. However, these could also be references to later Norman or even mercenary Scottish Gallowglass settlers in the area. The best evidence of Vikings in Sligo can be found near Templehouse Lake on the Owenmore River which lies to the south of Sligo town. In the area that surrounds the lake one finds the Viking surnames McGetrick, Tonyr and Hever.

The Lakelands of Central Ireland

The lakelands of Westmeath in Central Ireland and neighbouring parts of Meath, Longford, Offaly and Cavan contain a surprising number of Viking associated surnames and placenames. Within Westmeath alone there are 5 townlands known as 'Ballynagall' and one called 'Gallstown;' both of which mean 'foreigners town.' Four of these Ballynagalls are located between Loughs Lene, Owel and Derravaragh in North Westmeath.

Westmeath's Viking connections began soon after the first Viking raids on Ireland and can be traced to the almost mythical Viking Chief 'Turgesius' who its believed founded Dublin and later sailed up the River Shannon and the River Brosna into Lough Owel where he placed his headquarters and was later drowned after his capture by the Gaelic Irish. The largest island on neighbouring Lough Lene is named after him, see **Figure 4**. The seventeenth century historian Geoffrey Keating wrote an enlightening account of

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'Turgesius's' capture at the hands of Maoilseachlainn of Westmeath in the Foras Feasa ar Éirinn;

"Now at this time Maoilseachlainn with a body of soldiers was with his daughter, and he directed a number of those youths who were with her disguised as women, the moment Turgesius should lay hands on his daughter for the purpose of detaining her with him, to seize him by force and take him captive, and another party to take possession of the arms that were in the house, and to spring upon the chiefs who were within; and he said that he himself with his body of soldiers would be near the house, and that he would rush into the house at the first cry to help them slay the Lochlannaigh (Vikings). Thereupon the maiden with her ladies went in by a back door of the house and reached the room of Turgesius; and when they had come into his presence, he glanced at the maiden and her ladies and none of them pleased him but herself, and then he laid hands on her to detain her with him. When the youths who were with her saw this, a party of them seized Turgesius by force and made him captive; the remaining party seized the arms and held them in their possession, and then Maoilseachlainn with his party of soldiers came in, and they sprang on the party of Lochlonnaigh that were in the fortress, and slew them all, both chiefs and underlings except Turgesius alone; and when they had stripped the fortress bare they led Turgesius to the duinlios of Maoilseachlainn where they kept him for a time in captivity."

In that text the Vikings are described as the 'Lochlonnaigh' which evolved into the Irish surname 'Lochlan' meaning 'People of the Lakes.' Today, the surnames Loughlin and McLoughlin are found amongst the farming community of neighbouring Meath and Longford respectively. Many other Viking surnames including Dolyes and Rourkes are found throughout Westmeath and bordering areas. While it was the abundance of Religious settlements in Central Ireland that first led Viking raiders to this area, it may have been the abundance of rivers and lakes which led them to settle permanently.



Figure 4: Turgesius Island on Lough Lene. Turgesius Island (centre) and Nuns Island (right) are located on the southern end of Lough Lene in County Westmeath. Although it was the abundance of religious settlements like Nuns Island that first attracted the Vikings to Westmeath it was the lakes and rivers which may have enticed the water loving Norse to stay.

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DNA EVIDENCE

Re-Writing Irish History

Since the Vikings assimilated so completely into Irish society it is simply not enough to have a Viking-associated surname and an ancestral connection to a part of Ireland where one finds evidence of Viking settlement to conclusively prove one's Viking roots. That conclusive proof can only be made via a simple painless modern commercial ancestral Y-DNA test. The results of that test will reveal the surnames of the people with whom one shares a common male ancestor over many millennia. If your paternal ancestors settled within Ireland 1000 years ago then one will be a close genetic match to people with Irish surnames. However, an earlier ancestral link with Viking-Scandinavia will be revealed in more distant genetic matches to people with Scandinavia surnames. The DNA test not only has the ability to confirm one's Viking roots but to pinpoint precisely where in Scandinavia one's Viking ancestors originated and precisely where they subsequently settled within Ireland.

Commercial ancestral DNA testing is also re-writing the history of Ireland. One example involves the O'Hallorans of County Galway. The Halloran surname translates as 'stranger or pirate from across the sea.' This interpretation led many to believe that the O'Halloran surname was a reference to their Viking roots. However, commercial ancestral DNA testing has revealed that Galway Hallorans carry a very ancient DNA signature that arose in the Inishowen peninsula in the far north of Donegal *in Ireland* many thousands of years ago. At some point (certainly before the Vikings arrived in Ireland) these 'strangers' from Northwest Ireland arrived by sea and colonised the area that surrounds the modern City of Galway. Many of the other surnames that surround Galway City are also positive for this Northern Irish genetic marker. Today, the Northern Irish and Southern Irish sound very different, this difference was noted by the natives of Galway and was incorporated into the surname of the 'foreign' Northern Irish who colonised the area.

**Contact me for a copy of the Irish Origenes Viking Ireland map:
tyronebowes@gmail.com**

You can also contact me to find out how to take part in commercial ancestral DNA testing. If you have the results of a commercial ancestral DNA test then contact me for a FREE CONSULTATION on your DNA results.

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Viking Surnames featured on the Viking Ireland Map

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Arthur	Cull	Granny	Hetharstan	Maxey	Stamp
Aspel	Coppinger	Grattan	Hewson	Merriman	Stakem
Balfe	Cotter	Grenham	Hurson	McManus	Stackpoole
Bambrick	McCotter	Grennan	Higgins	Noctor	Stenson
Beirne	Crangle	Grimes	Ivers	Norris	Storey
Bernie	Crosbie	Groarke	Eivers	Orford	McStravick
Burns	Dollard	McGroder	Ivis	Owley	Stritch
Byrnes	Dolphin	Hackett	Ivory	Parle	Sugrue
Blacker	Doyle	Hafford	Hever	Rahill	Swan
Bligh	Dromgoole	Harford	McGeever	Rawl	Swanick
Boland	Duke	Halloran	McKeever	Rath	Sweetman
Bowdren	Eagney	O'Halloran	Jennings	Reck	Sweetnam
Brackett	Earnar	Halpenny	Johnson	Reville	McSwiggan
Branniff	Eliffe	Halpin	Kett	Reynolds	Tarmey
Brawdars	Fenlon	Calpin	Kettle	Randles	Tormey
Brazil	Gaule	Hannick	Cottle	Rourke	Torney
Broder	Gaynor	Harman	Kenefick	Sane	Thunder
Broderick	McGetrick	Harmon	Kerwick	Sayers	Toner
Broe	McKitterick	Harold	Kirby	Seaver	Tonra
Broughall	Gill	Herald	Kitson	Searson	Tonry
Brunnock	Magill	Hendrick	Liffey	Segerson	Trant
Butterfield.	McGill	Kendrick	Loughlin	Seery	Trehy
Byron	Gohery	Henson	McLoughlin	Siggins	Troy
Colfer	Grannell	Herrick	O'Loughlin	McSorley	Wadding
Coll	Gronnell	Herson	Mackessy	Stack	Whittle

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Placenames (as detailed on the Viking Map)

Agha/Augha = field

Ard = height/summit

Arklow = Norse 'Arknel'

Bally/Ballin = town/townland

Caher = stone fort

Cappna = 'plot of land of the..'

Carlingford = Norse 'hags bay'

Carna = 'rock of the..'

Carrowna = 'subdivision of land of the..'

Clon = Clan or family

Dalkey = Irish/Norse 'thorn island'

Dane = A term used to describe Vikings, in some instances it is a corruption of the Norman surname 'Deane.'

Derry = forest or wood

Donegal = fort of the foreigners

Fastnet = Norse meaning "sharp-tooth isle"

Fingal = foreign tribe

Ford = fjord

Gall/Gaul/Gault/Goul/Goll = A Gaelic Irish word used to describe the Vikings meaning 'foreigner.'

Gauladoo = foreigners mound?

Galroo = red foreigner

Garryna = 'wooded Glen of the..'

Gearhan = woodland

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Gort = land

Glanna = 'glen of the..'

Helvick = Norse 'Rock shelf Bay'

Howth = Danish 'headland'

Kilna = 'wood of the ..'

Knockan = little hill

Lambay = Norse 'lamb island'

Leixlip = Salmon leap

Lisna = 'fort of the..'

Lough = Lake

Lugna = 'hollow of the...'

Moya = 'plain of the..'

Skellig = rocky pinnacle

Skerries = sea rocks

Smerwick = Known in Irish as Iorras Tuaiscirt ("north peninsula") and Gall-Iorras ("peninsula of the strangers").

Strangford = Norse 'Violent inlet'

Tattyna = 'measurement of land of the..'

Tober = well

Tullyna = 'hill of the..'

Urrohagal = 'belonging to the chief of the foreigners??' or 'Green wood'

Waterford = Danish 'Vadre's fjord'

Wexford = Danish 'West Fjord'

Wicklow = Norse 'Viking Meadow'

