

Ireland

Mediæval Ireland

Ancient Ireland was divided into about one hundred and fifty tiny kingdoms; each ruled over by a local king who was little more than a clan or tribal chieftan. These kings could lead their own people into battle, but issued legislation only in times of emergency such as plague or war. They did not own the land they claimed as king; instead they were farmers like everyone else. Their wealth was counted in the area of land they farmed and the number of cattle they owned. Each king was selected from the males of the royal family; thus a king could be succeeded not only by a son or grandson, but also by an uncle, nephew or cousin. Beneath the king were nobles who were warriors and owners of cattle, freemen who were tillers of the soil, and slaves about whom little is known and were likely not numerous.

These tiny kingdoms were grouped together into five main kingdoms; each ruled by an overking:

- Ulster or Uladh
- Connacht or Cruachain
- Meath or Midhe
- Leinster or Laigen
- Munster or Mumhan

Finally, there was the High King of Ireland. From atop the Hill of Tara in the ancient Kingdom of Meath the High King could see hills in each of the other four kingdoms. The High Kingship of Ireland was open to kings of each of the other four kingdoms. The High King enjoyed a precarious supremacy not unlike that of the early kings of Mercia and Northumbria who claimed a general overlordship of all England. The struggle for the honour of holding this position eventually led to the arrival of Anglo-Norman knights in the 12th century; thereby ending forever the prospect of an Irish King actually ruling over all Ireland.



Throughout the early middle ages, Ireland remained comparatively isolated from Europe. The Romans made no attempt at conquest, and Ireland was spared from the Anglo-Saxon invasion. Ireland was untouched until the Viking raids that began in the late 8th century. Towns including Dublin, Wexford, Waterford, Cork and Limerick were established by Viking settlers in the 9th and 10th centuries.

Virtually every king, including the most minor who were really only tribal chieftains, had their own poet who was responsible for preserving the oral history, mythology and genealogy of the group. Literature and the arts were held in high esteem during a time when Europe was in chaos. Although early mediæval Ireland had no towns as such and was entirely rural, monasteries fulfilled the function of centres of learning. Rather than large stone buildings, monasteries consisted of a little town of wooden huts, laid out in streets and grouped around a small stone church. Scholars from abroad were attracted to Irish monasteries where learning and culture flourished. The Irish were most famous for their books.

Early Irish History

The Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters (usually shortened to *The Annals of the Four Masters*) claim to record the History of Ireland beginning just prior to Noah's Flood. The first entries in the *Annals of the Four Masters* are thought to date from about 550 AD; earlier (and perhaps later entries as well) must be considered to be partly legendary. However, we must be careful not to "throw the baby out with the bathwater" as these annals represent a unique view of the history of Ireland as recorded by someone who was 1500 years closer to the truth than we are in the 21st century.

The Annals of Inisfallen chronicle the history of Ireland beginning 433 AD, but are believed to have been written between the 12th and 15th centuries. *The Annals of Ulster*, beginning 431 AD, are thought to have been compiled in the late 15th century.

The first entry in *The Annals of the Four Masters* is as follows:

"AOIS domhain gus an m-bliadhoin-si na dileand, da mhile da chéad da fichet & da bhliadhoin. "Ceathracha la ria n-dilinn tainig Ceasoir go h-Eirinn, go c-caogaid n-inghen, & go t-triar b-fer.."

In modern English, this is:

"The Age of the World, to this Year of the Deluge, 2242.

"Forty days before the Deluge, Ceasar came to Ireland with fifty girls and three men . . ."

The arrival of St. Patrick is said to have occurred in 432 AD:

"Aois Criost, ceithre ched triocho a dó.

"Pattraic do theacht i n-Erinn an bliadhain-si, go ro gabh for baitseadh & beannachaigh Ereann, fiora mna, maca, & ingena, cénmótá uathadh na ro fhaomh baitsiodh na creideamh uadh, amhuil aisnedheas a bheatha."

Or:

"The Age of Christ, 432.

"Patrick came to Ireland this year, and proceeded to baptize and bless the Irish, men, women, sons, and daughters, except a few who did not consent to receive faith or baptism from him, as his Life relates."

Some problems arise if we attempt to take information as being totally accurate. For example, we find in *The Annals of the Four Masters* for the year 122 AD concerning Cathaeir Mor:

"The Age of Christ, 122.

"Cathaeir Mor, after having been three years king over Ireland, was slain by Conn, and the Luaighni of Teamhair, in the battle of Magh hAgha."

Over 300 years later in the year 435 we have mention of the grandson of Cathaeir Mor:

"The Age of Christ, 435.

"Breasal Bealach, son of Fiacha Aiceadh, son of Cathaeir Mor, died."

Clearly, Breasal Bealach could not have been a grandson of Cathaeir Mor. Perhaps Breasal Bealach was a descendant of Cathaeir Mor; but many generations must be missing. This sort of inconsistency hasn't deterred enthusiastic family historians from claiming an unbroken line from very early times in much the same manner as an unknown historian claimed a descent for the early kings of Wessex from Biblical figures dating back to Adam and Eve. (See *England, Legendary Origins*.) The Scots also claimed a legendary antiquity beginning with Gaythelos, son of a King of Greece who went to Egypt during the time of Moses. (See *Scotland, Dark Age Scotland*.)

Ancient Kings

Beginning in 935 AD, we have the following tentative (perhaps semi legendary) line of descent documented in *The Annals of Ulster*. Ui Chennselaig was a subkingdom of Leinster.

Cinaed macCairpre , King of Ui Chennselaig, died in 935.
Cellach macCinaeda , King of of Ui Chennselaig, died in 947.
Domnall macCellaig , King of of Ui Chennselaig, died in 974.
Diarmait macDomnaill , King of Ui Chennselaig, died in 996.
Donnchad Máel nam Bó , King of Ui Chennselaig, died in 1006.
Diarmait MacMáil nam Bó , King of Ireland & Leinster. Died on February 7, 1072. Dairmait married to Darbforgaill ingen Donnchada O'Brien (died in 1080), a granddaughter of Brian Bóru. (See Generation Three.) Brian Bóru is a known historical figure and it is with him that we will begin this genealogy.

Generation One

Brian Bóru, High King of Ireland

Born circa 941

Died (murdered) on Good Friday, April 23, 1014.

Brian Bórúma mac Cennetig, known popularly as Brian Bóru, is undoubtedly the most well known High King of Ireland and arguably the only High King who, like Ælfred the Great of England, actually controlled the entire country.

Brian Bóru was born circa 941 at Béal Bóru (from which he received his name), near Killaloe, County Clare, at a time when the Norse had secured many seaports and frequently plundered and harried the neighbouring countryside. In 976 he succeeded his brother Mathúin as king of Dál gCais and claimant to the kingship of Munster. By 999, after a series of wars, he was acknowledged as High King of Ireland.

The Battle of Clontarf

Brian Boru's reign was marked by continuous opposition. This came to a head in the early eleventh century. Máel Mórda, the king of Leinster, made an alliance with the Dublin Norse under Sigurd, Earl of Orkney and their overseas allies. Brian's forces defeated this union at Clontarf, about four miles north of modern Dublin, on Good Friday, April 23, 1014. Brian, too aged to fight, was awaiting news of the battle when he was slain in his tent by a Viking intruder. The battle of Clontarf marked the end of any major Viking involvement in Irish wars.

From this point on, the role of the Norsemen in Ireland was largely peaceful, and they intermarried with the Irish and concentrated on developing trade. However, with the death of

Brian Bóru in 1014, Ireland once again became an island of conflicting dynasties, with the High King unable to enforce acceptance by all the provinces.

Brian Bóru had at least three wives, one of whom was Gormflaith of Naas, a daughter of Murchad, King of Leinster. Brian Bóru and Gormflaith had a son:

- **Donnchad**, mentioned next.

Brian Bóru had by another wife a daughter:

- **Slani**, mentioned next.

(Weis, *Ancestral Roots*, Line 175-1, Line 239-1)

Generation Two

Donnchad, King of Munster in 1023, son of Brian Bóru and Gormflaith of Naas.

Died in 1064.

Donnchad went on a pilgrimage to Rome in 1064 and died the same year. Donnchad had a daughter:

- **Darbforgaill ingen Donnchada O'Brien**, mentioned next.

(Weis, *Ancestral Roots*, Line 175-2)

Slani, daughter of Brian Bóru and an unknown wife.

Slani married Sihtric of the Silken Beard, King of Dublin (died in 1042) who went on a pilgrimage to Rome in 1028.

Slani and Sihtric had a son:

- **Olaf of Dublin**, who was probably slain by “Saxons” while enroute to Rome on a pilgrimage in 1034. Olaf married Maícorcre, a daughter of Dunlang, King of Leinster and they had a daughter:
 - **Ragnhildir** (also Ranult and Ragnailt) who married **Cynan ap Iago** who had been excluded from the throne of Gwynedd and exiled to Dublin. (See *Wales*, Generation Twenty-five.)

(Weis, *Ancestral Roots*, Line 239-1, 239-2, 239-3.)

Generation Three

Darbforgaill ingen Donnchada O'Brien

Died in 1080

Darbforgaill married Diarmait MacMáil nam Bó, King of Ireland & Leinster. (See Ancient Kings, above) Diarmait was King of Leinster from 1042 to 1052, at which time he became High King of Ireland, a post which he held from 1052 until his death on February 7, 1072. When Diarmait became High King of Ireland in 1052, it appears that he resigned as King of Leinster and his son Murchad took over that post. Darbforgaill and Diarmait had the following son:

- **Murchad macDiarmata macMáil**, mentioned next.

(Weis, *Ancestral Roots*, Line 175-3)

Generation Four

Murchad macDiarmata macMáil, King of Leinster 1052 - 1070

Died in Dublin, probably on December 8, 1070.

Murchad married to Sadb, a daughter of MacBrice and they had a son:

- **Donnchad macMurchada**, mentioned next.

(Weis, *Ancestral Roots*, Line 175-4)

Generation Five

Donnchad macMurchada, King of Leinster 1098 - 1115

Died, killed in battle against Domnall Ua Briain in 1115

Donnchad married to Orlaith and they had a son:

- Diarmait MacMurchada, mentioned next.

(Weis, *Ancestral Roots*, Line 175-5)

Generation Six

Diarmait Mac Murchada, King of Leinster 1126 - 1171

Born in 1100

Died on January 1, 1171 at Ferns.

Dairmait Mac Murchada, also known as Dermot MacMurrough, was allied with Murtough MacLochlainn who was acknowledged as High King of Ireland in 1162. However, Murtough was overthrown in 1166 by Rory O'Connor and his ally Tiernan O'Rourke who seized the opportunity to settle an old score with Dairmait MacMurchada. Apparently Dairmait had either carried off, kidnapped, or otherwise had an affair with Tiernan's wife about fourteen years earlier.

Tiernan O'Rourke invaded Leinster, and Dairmait Mac Murchada fled to England in search of allies. King Henry II accepted Dairmait's allegiance, and gave him permission to recruit among his subjects for an expedition to Ireland. Dairmait struck a bargain with Richard FitzGilbert "Strongbow" deClare, 2nd Earl of Pembroke, who invaded Ireland, married Dairmait's daughter Aoife, and became King of Leinster when Dairmait died in 1171.

King Henry II, fearful that Strongbow would set up an independent kingdom, came to Ireland to assert his authority over the lands that had been occupied. The King granted Leinster to Strongbow, Meath to Hugh de Lacy; and most of the Irish Kings quickly recognised Henry as their overlord. The Norse towns were of vital military and economic importance. King Henry annexed Dublin, Wexford, Waterford, Cork and Limerick; and left garrisons in all of them.

Thus, Dairmait Mac Murchada is best remembered for having brought the English to Ireland and is generally held in low esteem in Irish History.

His obituary from the *Annals of the Four Masters* reads as follows:

“Diarmaid Mac Murchadha, King of Leinster, by whom a trembling sod was made of all Ireland, - after having brought over the Saxons, after having done extensive injuries to the Irish, after

plundering and burning many churches, as Ceanannus, Cluain-Iraird, &c., - died before the end of a year after this plundering, of an insufferable and unknown disease; for he became putrid while living, through the miracle of God, Colum-Cille, and Finnen, and the other saints of Ireland, whose churches he had profaned and burned some time before; and he died at Fearnamor, without making a will, without penance, without the body of Christ, without unction, as his evil deeds deserved.”

Dairmait Mac Murchada married to Mor, a daughter of Muirchertach Ua Tuathail (O'Toole) and they had a daughter:

- **Aoife (Eva) MacMurrough** who married **Richard “Strongbow” FitzGilbert de Clare**, 2nd Earl of Pembroke. (See *De Clare*, Generation Four) Their daughter:
 - **Isabel de Clare** who married **William Marshal**, 4th Earl of Pembroke. (See *Marshal*, Generation Three) Their daughter:
 - **Isabella Marshal** who married **Gilbert de Clare**, Earl of Gloucester, Hertford and Clare. (See *Normandy*, Generation Fifteen) Their daughter:
 - **Isabel de Clare** who married **Robert de Bruce**, Lord of Annandale. (See *Scotland*, Generation Twenty-seven)
- (Weis, *Ancestral Roots*, Line 175-6, 175-7, 66-26, 66-27, 63-28 and 252-28)

For the continuation of this line, see *Scotland*, Generation Twenty-seven

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