

The O'Neill Connections to the Portglenone, Co. Derry Area

September 14th 2025

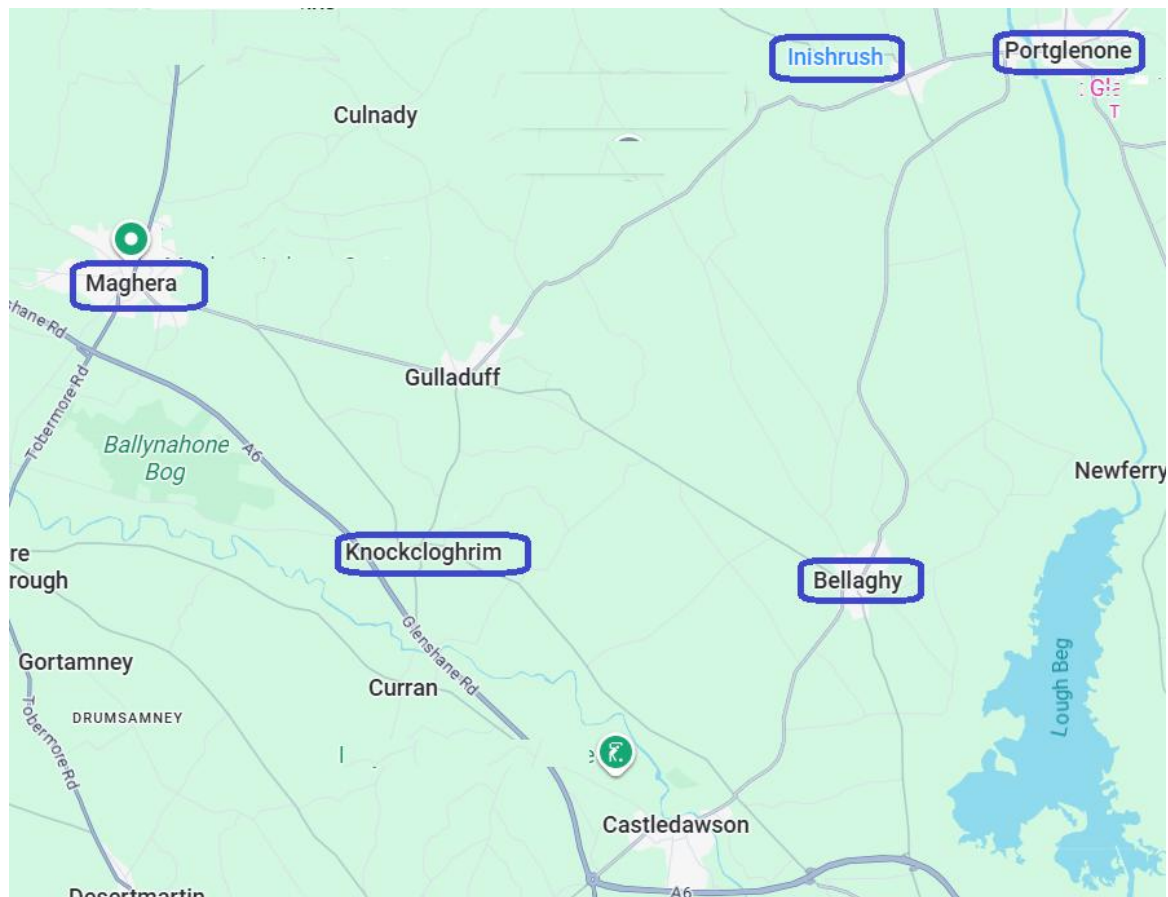
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This paper provides an overview of the O'Neill families from the Portglenone, Co. Derry area and their connections to their O'Neill past.

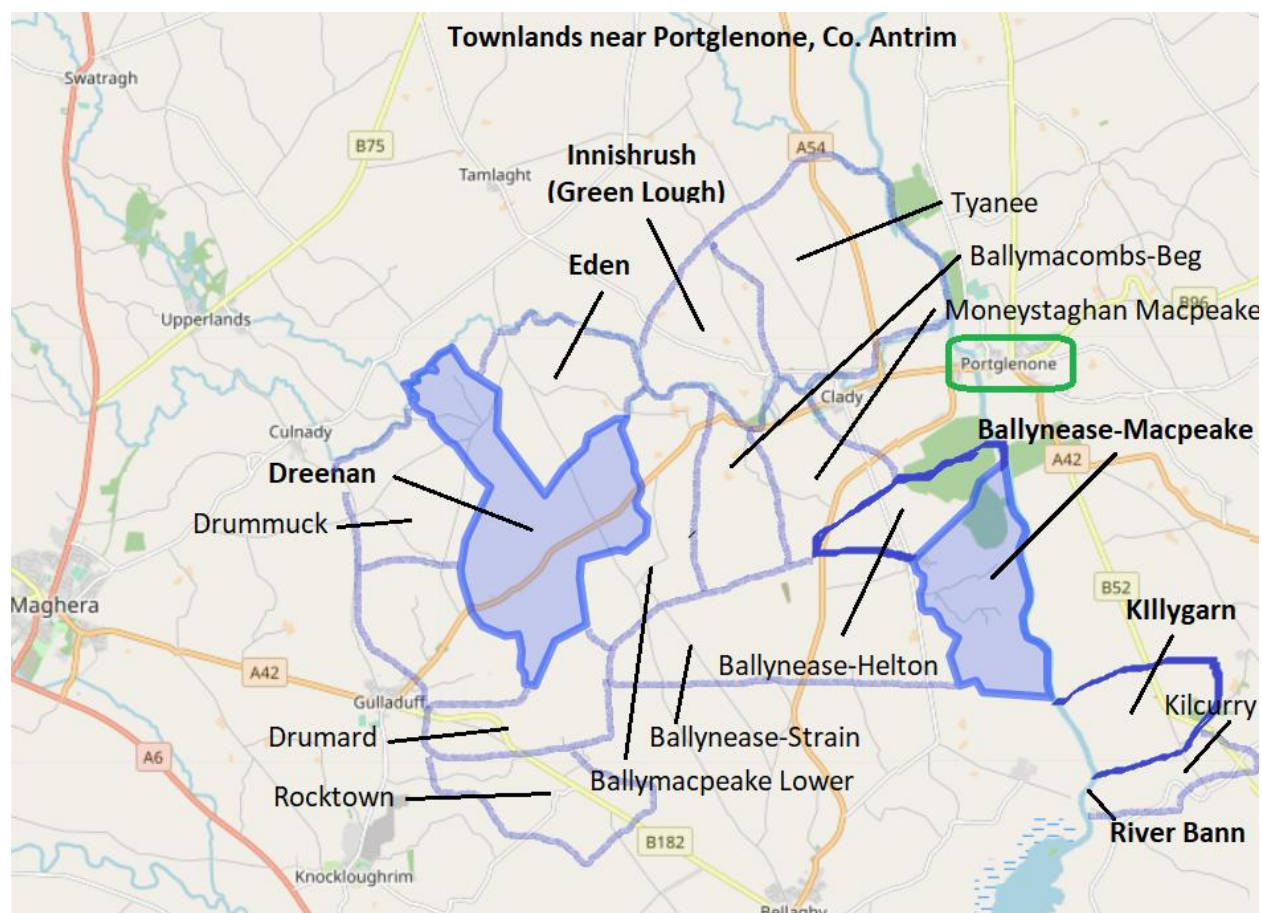
O'Neill Family Presence in Portglenone Area

There are currently about 200 O'Neill individuals in the Portglenone area with about half in Portglenone itself and the other half in the area southwest of Portglenone (Maghera, Knockcloghrim and Bellaghy).



This area has historically had a strong O'Neill presence.

The following diagram highlights the townlands with O'Neill households in the 1800's.



The following table summarizes the number of households (and individuals when available) from the 1831 Irish Census, the Griffith's Valuations and the 1901 Irish Census for these two areas. There is a very strong and persistent presence of O'Neill families through the 1800's.

Table Summary of O'Neill Families in the Portglenone Area

O'Neill Families Summary for Area						
Greenlough Area, Co. Derry						
	1831 Census		1858 Griffith's		1901 Census	
Townland Name	Households	Individuals	Households		Households	Individuals
Dreenan	18	95	16		6	44
Drummuck (to east)	2	5	1		2	7
Drumard (to south)	1	10	1			
Eden (to north)	2	11	2		1	1
Inishrush (to east)	4	16				
Ballymacpeake Lower (to east)	7	41	7		12	61
Tyane (to east)	5	21	1			
Moneystaghen- Ellis (to east)	1	8	2		2	6
Total	40	207	30		23	119
South of Portglenone, Co. Antrim						
Killygarn	N/A	N/A	4		5	15
Kilcurry (to south)	N/A	N/A	5		4	16
Ballynease - Mcpeake (across the river)	N/A	N/A	23		9	51
Ballynease - Strain (across the river)	N/A	N/A	3			
Ballynease - Halton (across the river)	N/A	N/A	0		2	10
Total			35		20	92
Grand Total			65		43	211

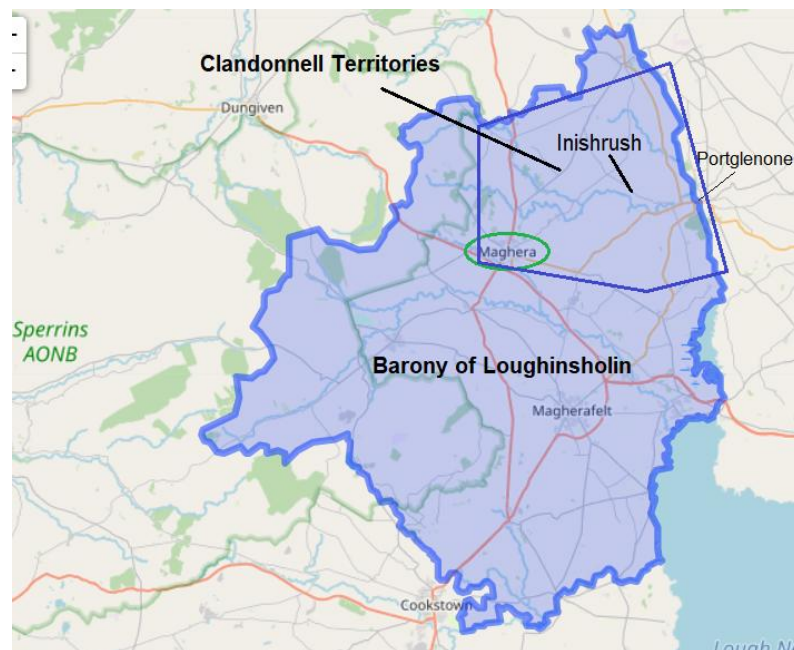
In the Greenlough (Innisrush) area, there were about 40 O'Neill families and 207 individuals in 1831 then reducing to about 30 families by around 1860 then again reducing to about 23 families and 109 individuals by 1901. Dreenan was the focus in this area with almost a half of the O'Neill families residing in this townland. However, there was an O'Neill presence in townlands adjacent to Dreenan and eastward.

South of Portglenone was also an area with a concentration of O'Neill families. In the Griffith's Valuation from around 1860 there were about 35 O'Neill families and this was reduced to about 20 families and 92 individuals by 1901. The townland of Ballynease – Mcpeake was the focus in this area with an O'Neill presence in townlands to the north and west and across the River Bann.

Overall, these two areas more or less had around 100 O'Neill families and about 300 individuals during the 1800's concentrated around the townlands of Dreenan and Ballynease – Mcpeake which were located just west and also south of Portglenone.

Clann-Donnell Donn of Bann (Clandonnell)

Clandonnell (from Irish Clann Domhnaill, meaning 'Donal's offspring') is an ancient Irish district in what is now southern Co. Derry, Northern Ireland and was part of the former barony of Loughinsholin, with Clandonnell forming the northern part reaching as far south as Maghera.

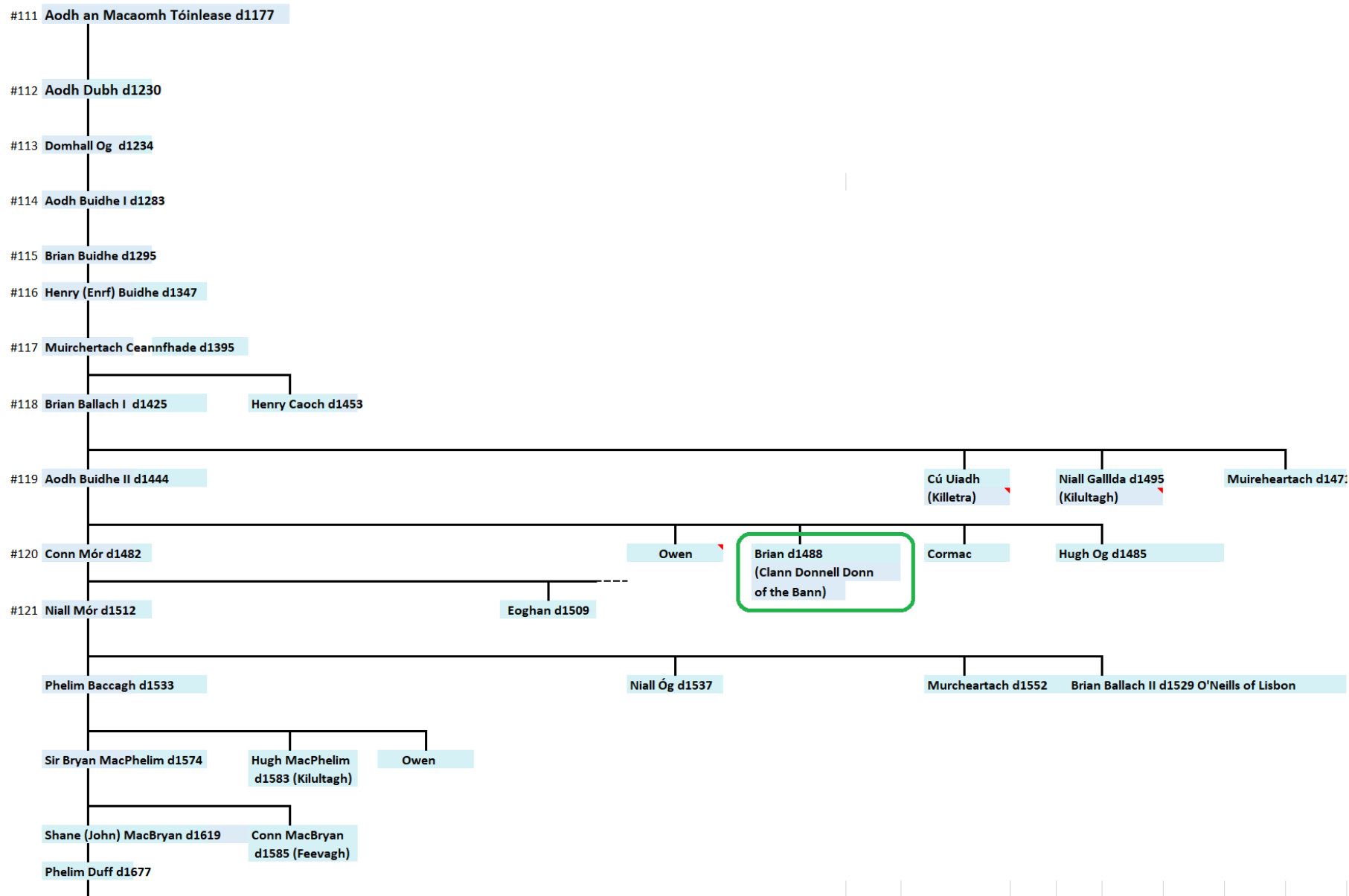


Clandonnell derives its name from the Clann Domhnaill Donn na Banna a branch of the Clandeboye O'Neills. The Clann Domhnaill Donn na Banna descended from Domhnall Donn, son of Brian mac Aodha Bhuidhe (shown within green box in following diagram). They ruled the area from the 15th century until the Plantation of Ulster in the 17th century.

The most celebrated descendant of Domhnall Donn was his great-grandson Brian Carrach O'Neill who is stated as being the last lord of Loughinsholin. His stronghold was based at the crannog at Inishrush, which is also known as the Green Lough. Brian Carrach O'Neill died in 1586, and in that same year Marshal Bagenal described Brian's territory as "Brian Carraghe's countrey" and as the "fastest grownde of Irelande". The latter statement meant that the area was amongst the most impenetrable parts of Ulster.

Brian Carrach died and his son Shane boy during the Nine Years War (1593 – 1603) provided 'rebel forces' with 50 men and 10 horse which would have represented a very small O'Neill sept.

Clandeboyne Lineages - January 2023 Update



Clandeboyne O'Neill Lineage and Y-DNA

About 90 O'Neill surname males have completed Big Y testing that provides information on their Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms (SNPs). These genetic variants are formed from time to time at a son's birth. SNP mutations that are initially formed then are passed down from father to son through each generation. SNPs are named and SNP haplotrees illustrate their relationships. A Y-DNA haplogroup (such as R-Z1513) is a group of testers who share a common ancestor on their paternal line.

The Y-DNA signature (haplogroup) associated with Aodh an Macaomh Tóinleas (the progenitor of the Tyrone, Fews and Clandeboyne O'Neills) is R-DF27 > ZZ12_1 > FTT1 > FGC78762 > ZZ19_1 > Z31644 > Z37492 > PH2047 > Z1513.

R-FGC49739 is a branch of Z1513 that is associated with the Clandeboyne O'Neills. There are about 36 males that have completed Big Y testing and are under R-FGC49739. Most of the testers are shown in the FTDNA O'Neill Project Y-DNA Chart (<https://www.familytreedna.com/public/oneill?iframe=yresults>)

A DNA kit with haplogroup R-FGC49744, a branch under FGC49739, has an O'Neill lineage associated with the Clann-Donnell Donn of Bann. Based upon this connection and the prevalence of the O'Neill surname and two other kits with their earliest known geographic location in the 1800's near Portglenone (Eden and Killygarn townlands), haplogroup R-FGC49744 is associated with the descendants of Domhnall Donn, son of Brian mac Aodha Bhuidhe and the Clandeboyne Clann-Donnell Donn of Bann.

One would assume that most if not all of the O'Neills in the Portglenone area would be descendants of the Clandeboyne Clann-Donnell Donn of Bann since it was prominent O'Neill clan of the area and the DNA connections of the O'Neill kits in that area to that clan.

Cenél Eóghain DNA Kits

R-FGC80436 is a branch of R-S588 which is associated with the Cenél Eóghain. The Cenél Eóghain or Kinel-Owen ("Kindred of Owen") are a branch of the Northern Uí Néill and descend from Eógan mac Néill d c465, son of Niall Noigiallach (Niall of the Nine Hostages). As of August 2025, FGC80436 has about 95 Y DNA testers and with a total of 65 subbranches. Surnames that are common for FGC80436 include O'Neill/Neill, McGrath/Mcgraw, Traynor/Trainer, Devlin, McCann/Crossey/Cross and McAtee.

The BY35717 > BY55263 clade under FGC80436 has 11 Big Y kits with the O'Neill/Neill surname and another 2 kits with the Redfern surname.

To date, FGC80436 has not been associated with any specific Cenél Eóghain line however it has been speculated that it may be Uí Neill.

The birth locations of the earliest known paternal ancestor for the O'Neill/Neill kits are in the counties of Derry, Tyrone and Fermanagh. Of special interest are three kits with two of the kits with their earliest known O'Neill paternal ancestors from Ballynease – Macpeake (Ballymacpeake), Co. Derry which is directly south of Portglenone and a third kit from Upperlands which is west of Portglenone. As shown previously, there were 23 families listed for Ballynease – Macpeake in the 1858 Griffith's Households and 9 families with 51 individuals in the 1901 Census.

It is of special interest that there are Cenél Eóghain descendants with the O'Neill surname in the Portglenone area that was historically associated with the Clandeboye Clann-Donnell Donn of Bann. There is no indication of this in the historical records.

Individuals in Irish society would typically be very conscious about the family roots and their relationship to others so it is possible that the O'Neills of the Portglenone area would have been aware of these different O'Neill roots. Is it possible that some members of this Cenél Eóghain O'Neill clade sought refuge with the O'Neills of Clann-Donnell Donn of Bann in an area that was remote and "amongst the most impenetrable parts of Ulster"?

Further Research

O'Neills in the Portglenone area can go ahead with Y DNA testing to explore their O'Neill connections. O'Neill men pass their Y DNA down to their sons and grandsons. O'Neill women that are interested can approach their father, uncles or male O'Neill cousins to test and then explore their O'Neill line.

The FT DNA Cenel Eoghain Y-DNA Project is offering to cover the cost of the basic Y DNA for O'Neills in the Portglenone area. If interested, please contact the author by email at clandeboye_oneill@protonmail.com.

Summary

Many of the O'Neills from the Portglenone area can trace their lineages to the Clandeboye Clann-Donnell Donn of Bann who are well documented in the historical papers and documents.

However, it has now come to light that some of these O'Neills from the same area now trace their lineages to the Cenél Eóghain.

Y DNA testing is an avenue for O'Neills in the Portglenone area to explore their O'Neill connections.