

The following excerpt from Irish Roots Magazine (Issue Number 2, 2000, Page 9) was kindly forwarded to me by Carolyn Devine of Peterborough.

The Irish Surname Expert Column by Paul Mac Cotter

O'Devine

Carolyn Devine of Peterborough queries the origins of this surname, born by her Donegal ancestors. She recounts a family tradition that her ancestor was a Frenchman called De Vin, who fought at the Boyne, and wonders as to the veracity of this. Carolyn's query reminds us of the very common phenomena where families with perfectly 'native' names often have traditions of exotic foreign origins which, on examination, have no basis in reality.

There is nothing foreign about the Ó Daimhín (Devine) sept. This rare Christian name occurs in the early genealogies of the Airghialla people, who inhabited Fermanagh, Monaghan and Armagh in early historic times. One of these men was ancestor to this sept, the first of whom to merit mention was Dunchadh Ua Daimhene, coarb (hereditary possessor of church land) of Derry, who died in 1066. A descendant must have been the Domhnall Ua Daimhíne slain at the church door of the monastery of Derry in 1212. The mainline of the family were aristocrats of the Airghialla and kings of one section of that people, the Fir Manach, who give their name to modern Fermanagh. The annals record the obituary of Flaithbertach Ua Daimhíne, king of Fir Manach, in 1278. Soon after this the family were superseded in the kingship by their distant relatives, the Maguire sept, and confined to the sub-kingship of the smaller territory of Tir Cennfota, now the barony of Tirkennedy in mid-Fermanagh. The obituaries of two Ó Daimhín kings of this territory are recorded, that of Donn Ua Daimhíne in 1349 and of Brian Ua Daimhíne in 1427.

An entry of 1447, which records the slaying of a Maguire claimant to Fermanagh by 'the sons of Ua Daimhín' in the service of a rival Maguire, suggest that the sept were still powerful in Fermanagh then. We know that in the period that followed, however, the Maguire's ramified to the extent of dispossessing most of their under-kings and giving their lands to their own younger sons, so's that within a few decades the Maguire clan owned virtually the whole of Fermanagh. After this we hear no more of noble Devines, rather of such men as Cuconnacht and Jenkin "O' Devane" who, after the conquest of Ulster in the early seventeenth century, conformed to the Protestant religion and were awarded lands under the Plantation of Ulster. This was around Dungannon in County Tyrone, which was still, in the mid-nineteenth century, the county with the greatest number of Devine households in Ireland, with nearly 100 of a total of around 550. Derry / Londonderry came in next, with 60, while only three Devine households occur in Fermanagh. The remaining households were well scattered throughout Ulster, Leinster and Connacht.

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