Working Theories
and the evolving nature of family history research

Like science, family history advances by way of working theories. You assemble the evidence you have, construct the most coherent explanation possible, and proceed with it, knowing full well that the theory holds only as long as it continues to explain the facts. When new records surface, when contradictions accumulate, or when patterns refuse to align, the theory has to be revised or abandoned. This is not failure. It is simply the discipline of inquiry, practiced over time.

In the case of the McKERNAN family's origins, two such theories had already been tried. Both were reasonable. Both were grounded in the records available at the time. And both eventually stopped holding up under closer scrutiny. What follows is the result of returning to the evidence without allegiance to those earlier conclusions and allowing the shape of the explanation to change as new information came into view.

Drumlin country typical of County Cavan. The hills of central Leitrim and western Cavan can be seen on the horizon. Image taken near to Killashandra, Co Cavan, Ireland.
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We now contend that Mary McKernan did not come from Old Machar in Aberdeenshire, nor from County Down, as had been hypothesized at various points in the past. As of early 2026, those theories no longer fit the record. A different explanation has emerged, supported not by a single decisive document but by a growing coherence among many contextual circumstances.

It would seem Mary McKernan did come from County Cavan as stated in the 1851 Scottish Census. She had at least two known sisters/cousins, Susan and Catherine,

both recorded with her in Dundee. The others in the lodgings were from West Meath. (They need to be researched further.)

Associated facts

Media

Name	**Mary Mc Kernan**
Age	23
Estimated Birth Year	abt 1828
Relationship	Lodger
Gender	Female
Where born	Ireland, county kevan
Parish Number	282
Civil parish	Dundee
County	Angus
Address	184 Seagate Stewart Land
Occupation	Mill Worker
ED	7
Page	19
Household schedule number	78
Line	18
Roll	CSSCT1851_60

Household members

Name	Age
Thomas Kilduff	50
Ann Kilduff	40
Ann Kilduff	17
Thomas Kilduff	7
Peter Kilduff	4
John Kilduff	1
Mary Conner	19
Susan Mc Kernan	25
Mary Mc Kernan	23
Catharine Mc Kernan	18

Interestingly, but not surprising, twenty years later in the 1871 census Mary and her husband Thomas J. Hannan

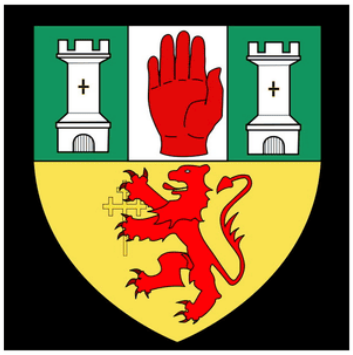
are listed as living just a few blocks away from Seagate and 35 Peter Street. They stayed in the neighborhood.

We have never known whether they migrated to Scotland together or if they met in Dundee and married there. There are no records of a marriage. We learned something that can explain the lack of marriage records for this pair. It wasn’t until 1855 that civil marriages were required to be recorded. These two likely tied the knot prior to or exactly at the turn of the year. Neil Hannan was born in Dundee in 1855, month unknown. They may well have been married in 1854 - if they got married at all. Many did not go through the motions and solemnize their unions. For a big slice of famine-era Irish immigrants in 1850s Dundee, the most historically honest default when records cannot be found: Assume a lot of those unions simply were never formally married in church at all, and that this was normal for that migrant shanty-town world, not an odd exception.

Emblem Key

AGHALEE ANTRIM

BELFAST



COUNTY ANTRIM

COUNTY ARMAGH

COUNTY CAVAN

COUNTY FERMANAGH

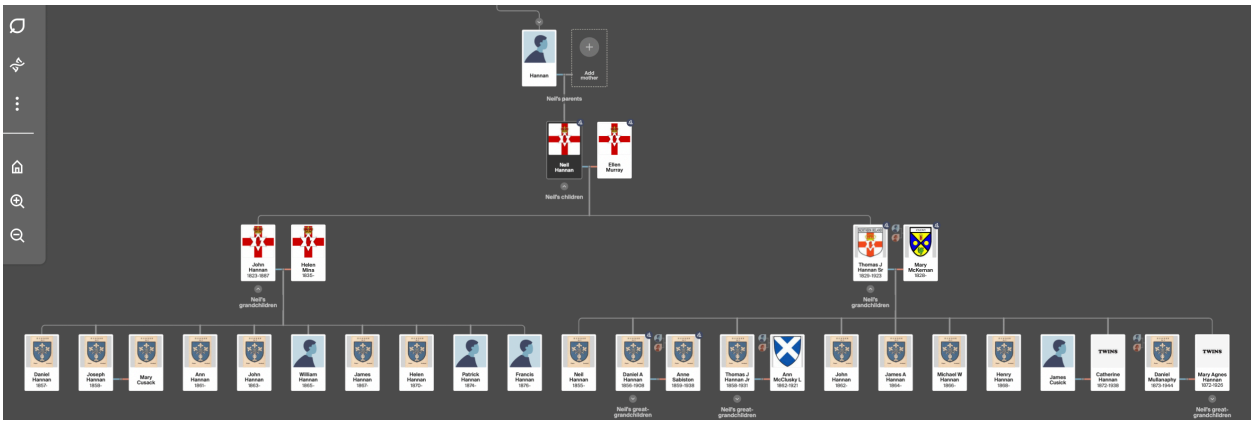
DUNDEE

OLD IRISH EMBLEM pre Partition

SCOTLAND

However, the bigger issue has been that we do not know where in Ulster (Northern Ireland) HANNAN came from. It

was only recently discovered he did not come from Cork, Clare or Limerick as had been the family story. Through DNA match we discovered an older brother of Thomas named John, from Ulster. John was six years older than Thomas. Judging the number of kids future generations had, had to fathom that they are the only two kids in this family. What happened to the rest of them? Below see the two brothers, each having nine children all in Dundee.



We have named John and Thomas' father Neil because that is the name of Thomas' first born male and he is the first born male of the two brothers kids as well. That has been the established tradition; first male gets named after the paternal grandfather. In our German lines it is first born male gets father's name. So Neil Hannan is a guess. Note that John's first born is Daniel, and that Thomas' second born is named Daniel. Why didn't John name is first born Neil? We do see Daniel continuously in the tree down to Leo Daniel (1922). The name Neil does not show up again in any of the dozens of children born thereafter. Following this naming tradition we could assume, for the time being, that Neil's father's name is likely going to be John.

John’s wife, Helen Mina’s (Minna, Milner) parents were both from Omagh, Tyrone. We see down the tree that one son, James Hannan (born Dundee 1867-1947) married Ann Slavan born in Dundee and her family also comes from Tyrone near Omagh. The Hannans are connected at least by marriage to Tryrone and we know that for sure. Whether that is our line’s place of origin is still up in the air.

Griffiths lists five; James, Thomas, Bernard, Henry. Could this be our line? Yes. I am not convinced, however it won’t be dismissed wholesale. The places these families come from in Tyrone are just over the border of Fermanagh. I would expect more than a few from this clan. We do see the name Bernard in the Lewsley line. But if we are to take the naming tradition seriously, there is no John Hannan listed. Is that enough to completely dismiss this? No. But it encourages us to move on and look further.

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Results 1 to 12 of 12

Occupier Surname	Occupier Forename	County	Parish	Details	Original Page	Map Views	Upload your content for this record
GRUMLEY	JOHN	TYRONE	ERRIGAL KEEROGUE				
MARTIN	JAMES	TYRONE	ERRIGAL KEEROGUE				
HANNAN	JAMES	TYRONE	ERRIGAL KEEROGUE				
HENRY	JAMES	TYRONE	ERRIGAL KEEROGUE				
CUNNINGHAM	JANE	TYRONE	ERRIGAL KEEROGUE				
MCCALLION	JOHN	TYRONE	ERRIGAL KEEROGUE				
ANDERSON	JAMES	TYRONE	ERRIGAL KEEROGUE				
HANNAN	JAMES	TYRONE	ERRIGAL KEEROGUE				
MCCALLION	JAMES	TYRONE	ERRIGAL KEEROGUE				
HANNAN	THOMAS	TYRONE	AGHALURCHER				
HANNAN	BERNARD	TYRONE	ARTREA				
HANNAN	HENRY	TYRONE	CLONOE				

Results 1 to 12 of 12

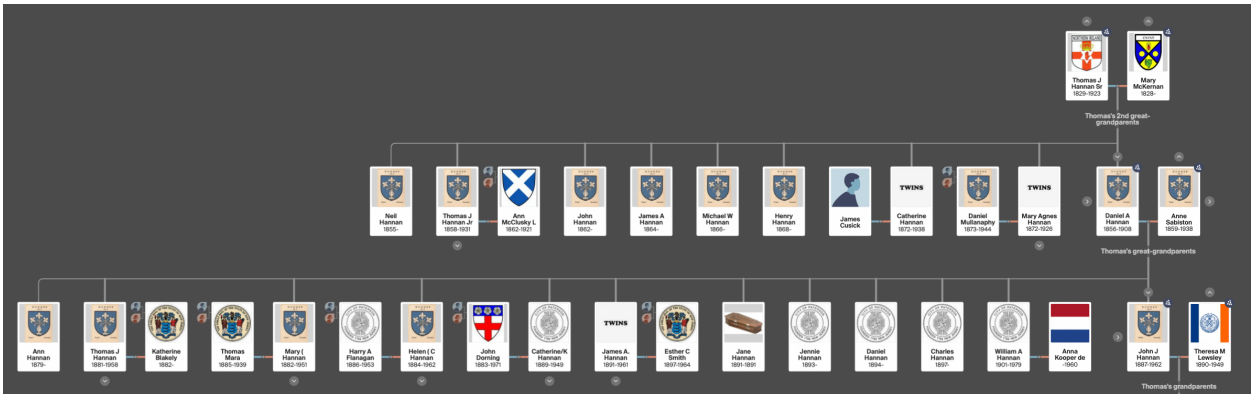
John’s wife Helen is from Tyrone, and Thomas’ wife Mary is from Cavan. Starting to think everyone coupled in Dundee. Older and younger brother move to Dundee, maybe with others, maybe they were the only two left to leave. We don’t know. Thomas being younger and likely more impulsive gets married first and starts having kids

right upon arrival. John the older more pragmatic of the two I would assume waited a couple years and then in 1857 he started to have children with his wife Helen. Since we aren't going to go down the Tyrone rabbit hole, we need to start looking elsewhere. Scrolling through the hints on Ancestry I noticed some hints and this guy pops up:

Patrick McGovern, Birth SEP 1839 • County Cavan, Ireland, Death 03 NOV 1907 • Red Hook, Kings, New York, USA. Relation: maternal grandfather of wife of granduncle. I think I will go down this rabbit hole.

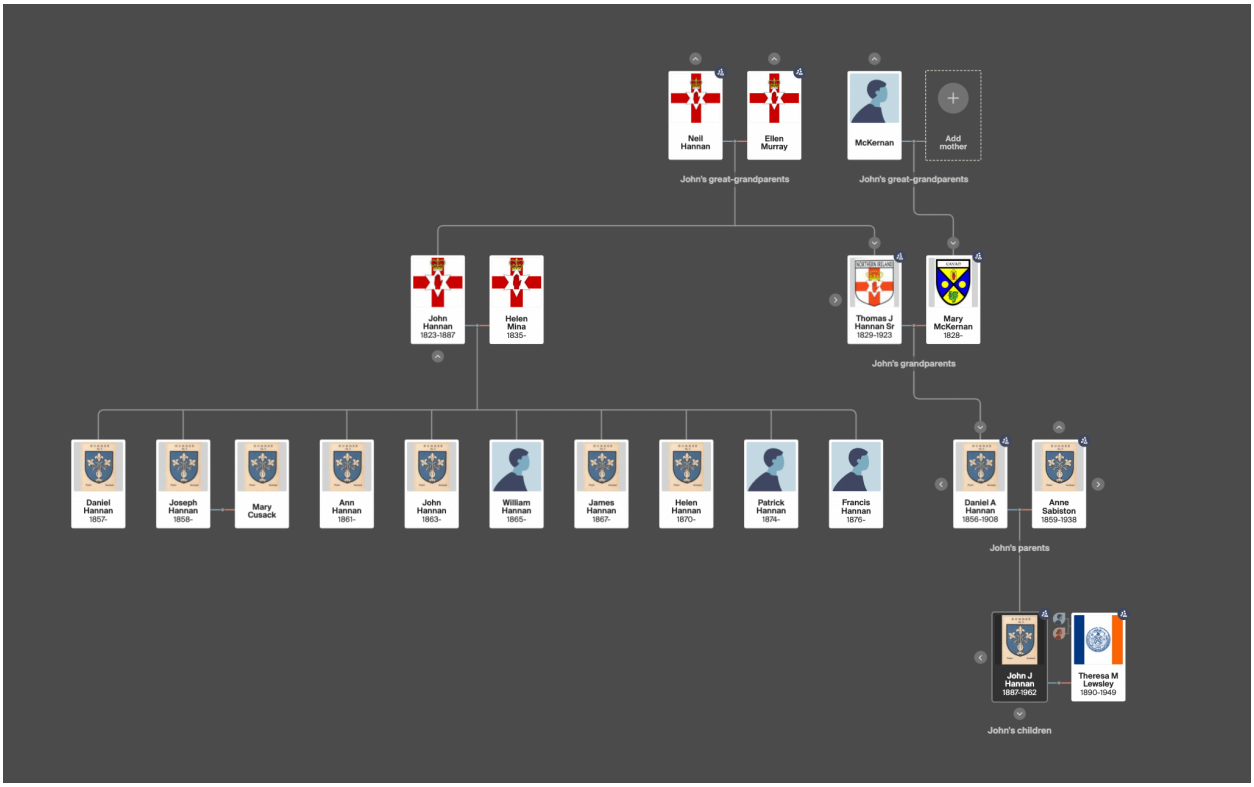
***

Our paternal grandfather, John Joseph Hannan, was born in 1887, the fourth child in a family that would eventually number eleven. Four years later came his brother James Aloysius, the surviving twin of a pair born in 1891. His twin sister, Jane, did not survive. John and James grew up close in age and circumstance. John was the last child born in Dundee in 1887. The next, a sister Catherine, was born in Paterson, NJ in 1889, followed by brother James A. in 1891. In the tree fragment shown below, we see the two brothers positioned within their family context. Their parents were both born in Scotland, while their grandparents were born in Ulster. On the McKernan side, that origin points to County Cavan.

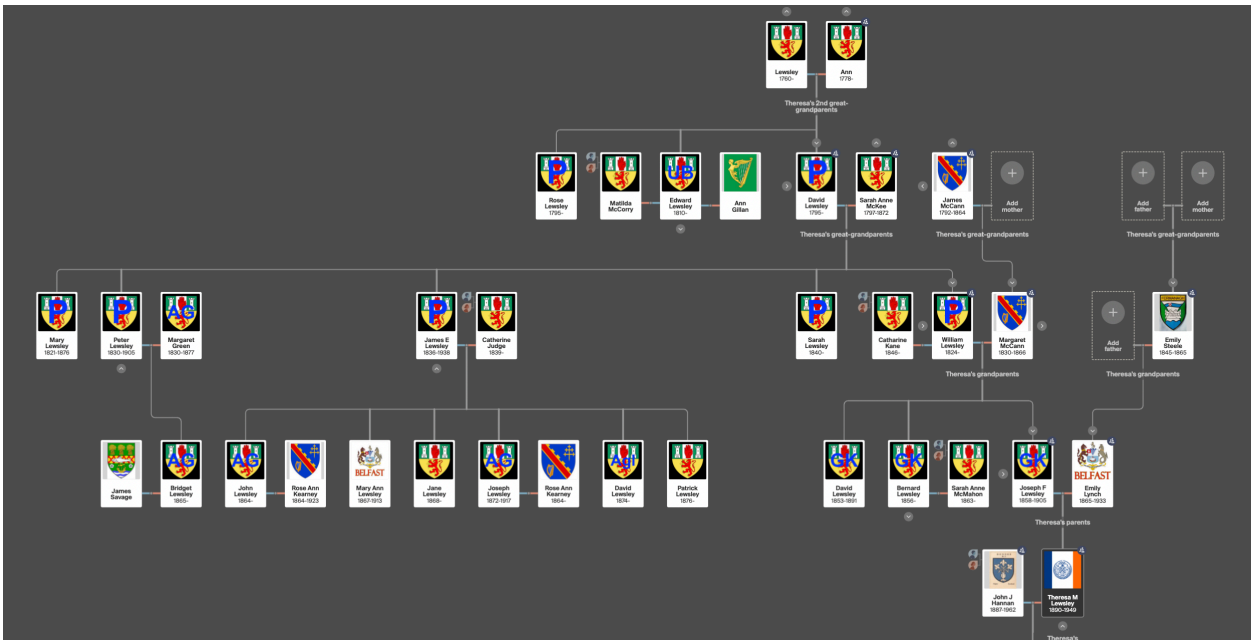


John Joseph Hannan married Teresa Lewsley in 1909, when he was just nineteen years old. His brother James married Esther Smith in 1917, at the age of twenty-six. Both women were first-generation Americans, born in the United States to immigrant parents. Looking across the marriages in this generation, the pattern is largely unremarkable for the time. With only two exceptions, those who married did so within families of Irish or Scottish origin. One marriage crossed into an English line, another into a Dutch one. This kind of endogamy, geographic, cultural, and religious, was typical in immigrant communities that had only recently arrived. Proximity to one’s own is consistent across time and place.

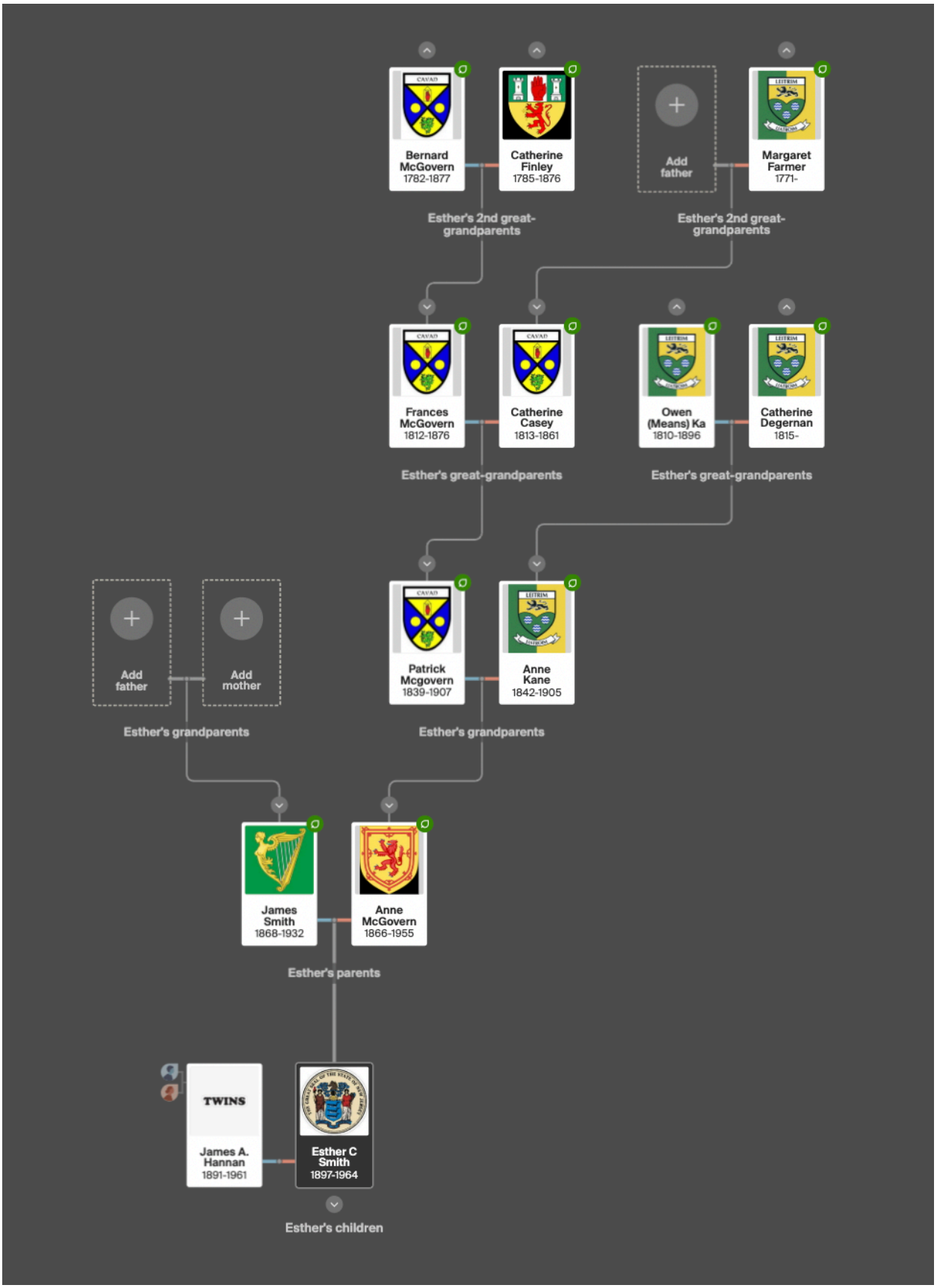
What becomes interesting is not the pattern itself, but what happens when the Smith and Lewsley families are examined more closely.



In the image above showing the Hannan line, what can be said with confidence is limited but consistent. DNA points to Northern Ireland, though no specific county can yet be named. In previous releases from Ancestry, County Fermanagh has been directly mentioned. From there, the document trail shows a migration from Ulster to Dundee, aligning with the well-documented movement of Irish families into the Scottish mill towns during and after the famine years.



In the image above showing the Lewsley line, the picture sharpens considerably. Teresa Lewsley’s mother came from Belfast, while her maternal grandmother was from Enniskillen in County Fermanagh. On her father’s side, the family traces back to County Antrim, particularly the Portmore–Lisburn area, with a smaller presence in Armagh. Unlike the Hannans, the Lewsleys did not pass through Scotland. Their migration was direct, from Northern Ireland to the United States in the 1880s.


Bernard McGovern 1782-1877
Catherine Finley 1785-1876
Add father
Margaret Farmer 1771-
Esther's 2nd great-grandparents
Esther's 2nd great-grandparents
Frances McGovern 1812-1876
Catherine Casey 1813-1861
Owen (Means) Ka 1810-1896
Catherine Degernan 1815-
Esther's great-grandparents
Esther's great-grandparents
Add father
Add mother
Patrick Mcgovern 1839-1907
Anne Kane 1842-1905
Esther's grandparents
Esther's grandparents
James Smith 1868-1932
Anne McGovern 1866-1955
Esther's parents
TWINS
James A. Hannan 1891-1961
Esther C Smith 1897-1964
Esther's children

In the image above showing Esther's maternal line we see a familiar pattern. Her mother's family moved from Ireland to Scotland, most likely Dundee as that is where Ulster Irish Catholics went, while Protestant Irish went to Glasgow. It was there in Dundee born Ann McGovern married an Irishman. Then her daughter Ester Smith born in New Jersey also marries an Irishman, maybe from the same area as her great grandparents and further back. Despite the movement the connection to Ireland is maintained through marriages.

Taken together, these movements form a pattern that is entirely consistent with the historical record. But consistency alone does not give us proximity. For that, we have to look closer still. Just as important as what appears in these records is what does not. We do not see these families mixing widely or randomly. Marriage remains largely confined within familiar boundaries: Ulster, Ireland, and Scotland, specifically Dundee rather than Glasgow. It is this repeated closeness, this insistence on proximity, that begins to matter.

Dunmakeever Heading NNE from the R200 near to Glangevlin, Co Cavan, Ireland.
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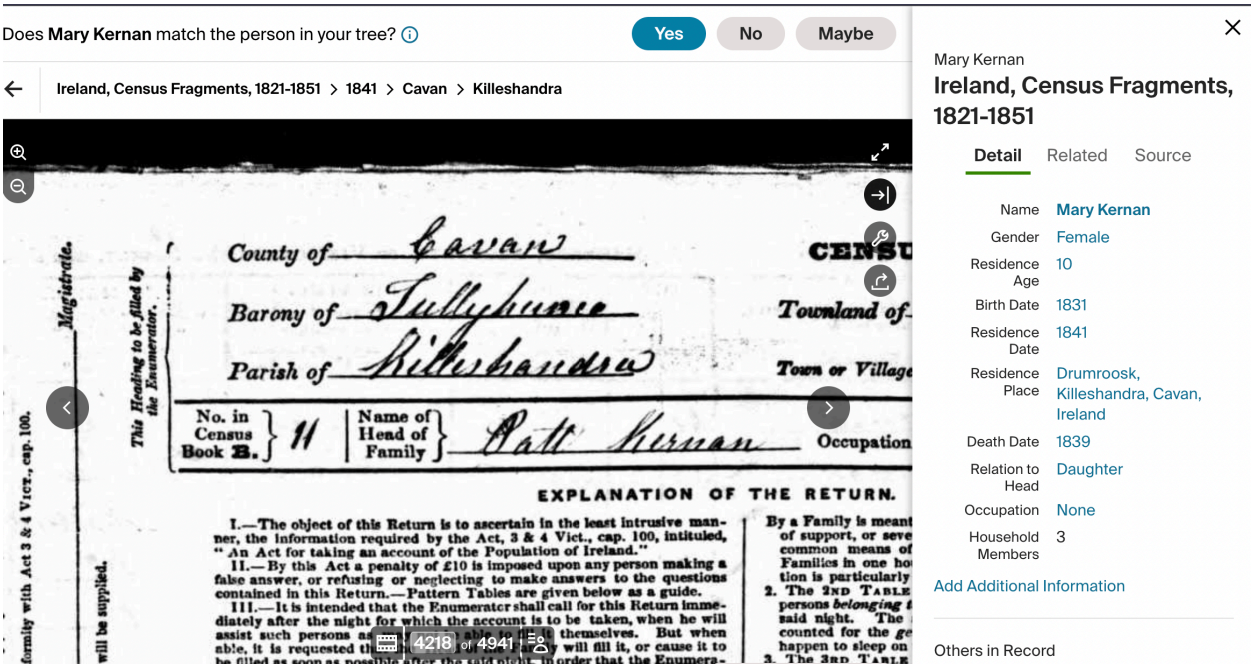
When we look more closely at the residence locations associated with Esther Smith's family, a distinct cluster emerges in the borderland region between what is now the United Kingdom and Ireland, particularly along the county boundaries of Fermanagh, Cavan, Leitrim, and Antrim. The geography is tight, repetitive, and by now familiar.

What sharpens this further is a connection linking the Smith line, through the McGoverns, to the McKernan family. Another hint pops up. Close in age and location according to the 1851 census; it makes sense Ancestry would push this forward.



In the image shown above, we see an 1841 record for a Mary Kernan, age ten, living in Drumroosk with her father and two siblings: a younger sister, Margaret, age eight, and a baby brother, James, just three months old. No mother is listed, and it is reasonable to assume she died in childbirth. This Mary is very likely not our Mary. The ages do not align, and our Mary is known to have sisters or cousins named Susan and Catherine. Patrick Kernan is a man in Cavan with a daughter with the same name as out Mary.

What stands out instead is where they were living. There are two townlands named Drumroosk within roughly fifty kilometers of one another, one in County Cavan and one in County Fermanagh. Both fall within the same barony of Tullyhunco. (See blue dots on maps below.)

Drumroosk is in the Electoral Division of Killashandra, in Civil Parish of Killashandra, in the Barony of Tullyhunco, in the County of Cavan

Drumroosk is on Logainm.ie: Drumroosk.

Map

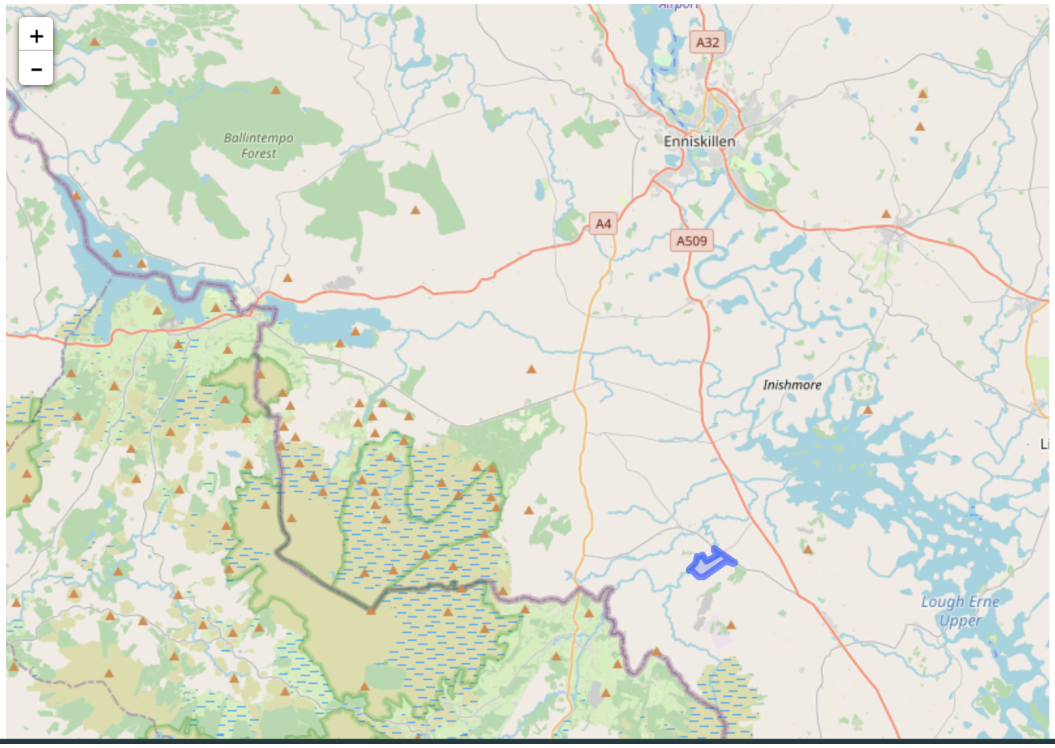
It is located at 54° 0' 3" N, 7° 31' 36" W.

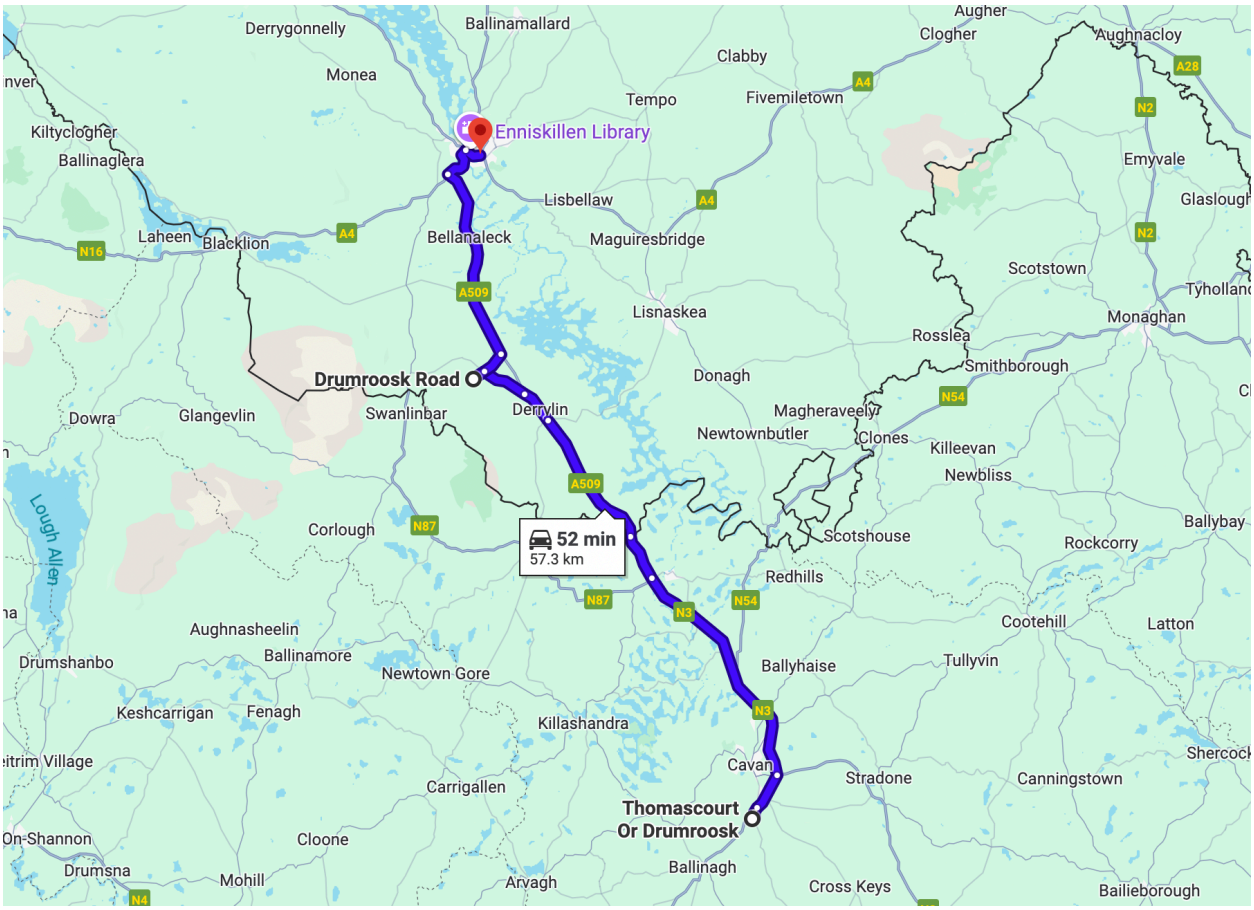
Drumroosk is in the Electoral Division of Aghakellymaude, in Civil Parish of Kinawley, in the Barony of Knockninny, in the County of Fermanagh

Drumroosk is on Logainm.ie: Drumroosk.

Map

It is located at 54° 12' 54" N, 7° 38' 1" W.





This places a McKernan family and a McGovern family within very close proximity. These townlands were sometimes no more than clusters of farms rather than formal villages, yet they could still support thirty to fifty people. In communities of that size, everyone knew, or knew of, everyone else, and nearly everyone was connected in some way, often through marriage.

	e Thomas M'Nulty,	James Fraser, .	House and land,	265 3 29	0 17 0	0 3 0	1 0 0
	f Michael Maguire,		House and land,		3 4 0	0 6 0	3 10 0
			House and land,		2 1 0	0 4 0	2 5 0
			Total, . .	460 1 19	50 4 0	3 11 0	53 15 0

PARISH OF KINAWLEY.

	DUNMAKEEVER. (Ord. S. 6.)						
	a Peter Fitzpatrick,		House, offices, & land,		5 2 0	0 8 0	5 10 0
	b Edward Fitzpatrick,		House, offices, & land,		2 12 0	0 8 0	3 0 0
	c Thomas Fitzpatrick,		House, offices, & land,		2 12 0	0 8 0	3 0 0
	d Terence Fitzpatrick,		House, offices, & land,		2 12 0	0 8 0	3 0 0
	e Michael Dolan,		House, offices, & land,		5 2 0	0 8 0	5 10 0
	f Ellen Dolan,		House, offices, & land,		2 12 0	0 8 0	3 0 0
1	g Ter. M'Govern, jun.,	Thomas Knipe,	House, office, & land,	1233 2 4	3 12 0	0 8 0	4 0 0
	h Patrick M'Govern,		House, offices, & land,		3 12 0	0 8 0	4 0 0
	i Thomas M'Govern,		House, offices, & land,		3 2 0	0 8 0	3 10 0
	j Patrick M'Govern,		House, offices, & land,		12 10 0	0 15 0	13 5 0
	k Ter. M'Govern, sen.,		House, offices, & land,		10 0 0	0 15 0	10 15 0
	l Thomas Cassidy,		House, offices, & land,		8 15 0	0 15 0	9 10 0
	m Peter Dolan,		House, offices, & land,		3 15 0	0 10 0	4 5 0
	n Thomas M'Govern,		House, offices, & land,		3 15 0	0 10 0	4 5 0
			Total, . .	1233 2 4	69 13 0	6 17 0	76 10 0
	ESHVEAGH. (Ord. S. 6.)						
	a Charles Brady,		House, office, & land,		3 5 0	0 10 0	3 15 0
	b Francis Dolan,		House, office, & land,				

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Occupier Surname	Occupier Forename	County	Parish	Details	Original Page	Map Views	Upload your content for this record
MACKESSON	JAMES	CAVAN	KILLASHANDRA				
MACKESSON	THOMAS	CAVAN	KILLASHANDRA				
MACKESSON	JAMES	CAVAN	KILLASHANDRA				
KIERNAN	DANIEL	CAVAN	KILLASHANDRA				
		CAVAN	KILLASHANDRA				
		CAVAN	KILLASHANDRA				

[previous] Results 21 to 26 of 26

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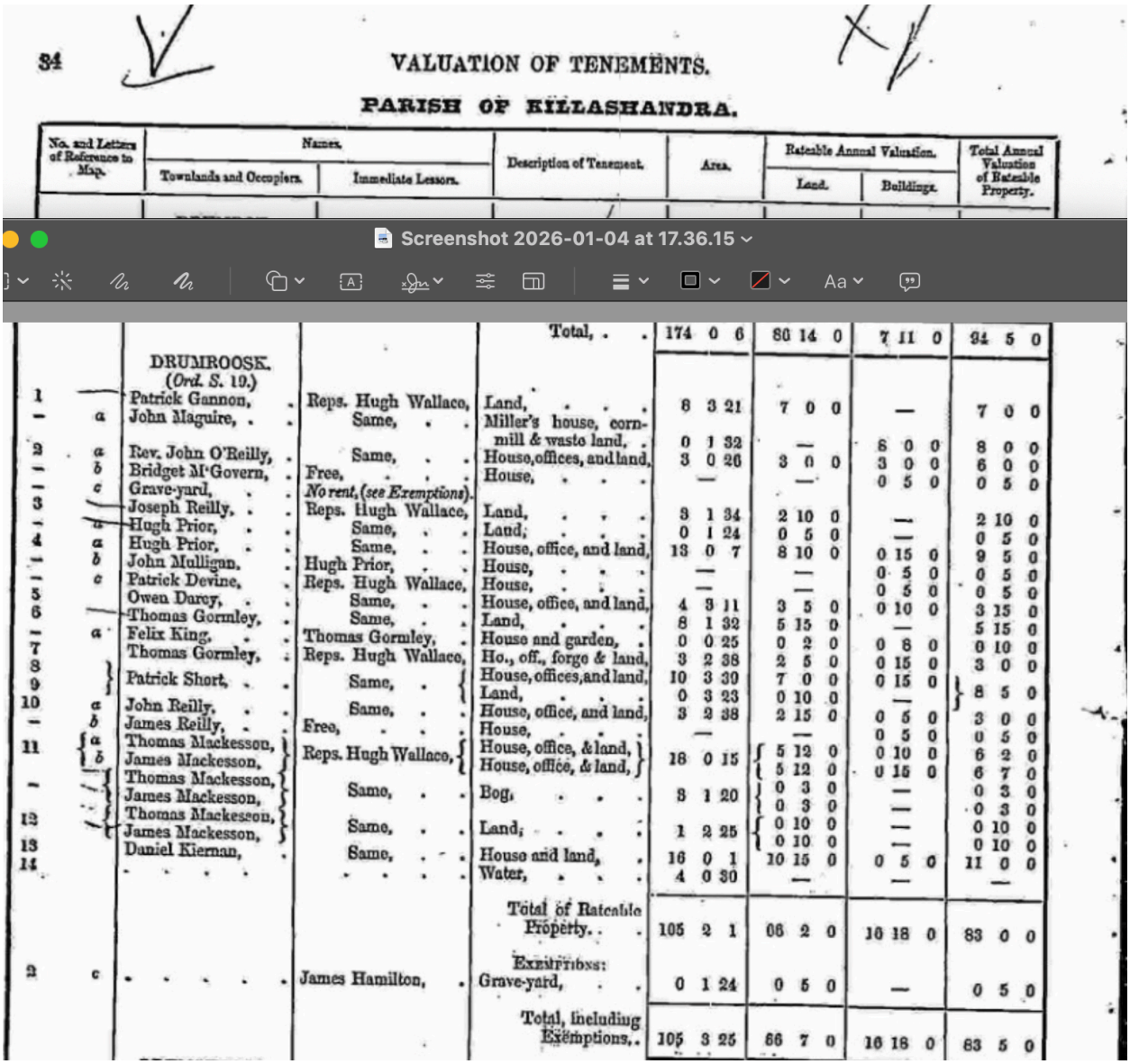
The image above showing Griffith's Valuation for Drumroosk illustrates this density. Twenty-six occupants are listed as holding property in the townland. Further

down the same list appears another Kiernan: Daniel Kiernan. As shown in the image above, Daniel held sixteen acres and one perch of land, along with four acres and thirty perches of water. The land was valued at ten pounds fifteen shillings, with an additional five shillings attributed to an outbuilding, bringing the total rateable value to eleven pounds.



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VALUATION OF TENEMENTS.

PARISH OF KILLASHANDRA.

No. and Letters of Reference to Map.	Names. Townlands and Occupiers.	Names. Immediate Lessors.	Description of Tenement.	Area.	Rateable Annual Valuation. Land.	Rateable Annual Valuation. Buildings.	Total Annual Valuation of Rateable Property.
			Total, . .	174 0 6	86 14 0	7 11 0	94 5 0
	DRUMROOSK. (*Ord. S.* 19.)						
1	Patrick Gannon, .	Reps. Hugh Wallace,	Land, . . .	8 3 21	7 0 0	—	7 0 0
— a	John Maguire, . .	Same, . .	Miller's house, corn-mill & waste land, .	0 1 32	—	8 0 0	8 0 0
2 a	Rev. John O'Reilly, .	Same, . .	House, offices, and land,	3 0 26	3 0 0	3 0 0	6 0 0
— b	Bridget M'Govern, .	Free, . . .	House, . . .	—	—	0 5 0	0 5 0
— c	Grave-yard, . .	*No rent, (see Exemptions).*					
3	Joseph Reilly, . .	Reps. Hugh Wallace,	Land, . . .	3 1 34	2 10 0	—	2 10 0
— a	Hugh Prior, . .	Same, . .	Land, . . .	0 1 24	0 5 0	—	0 5 0
4 a	Hugh Prior, . .	Same, . .	House, office, and land,	13 0 7	8 10 0	0 15 0	9 5 0
— b	John Mulligan, .	Hugh Prior, . .	House, . . .	—	—	0 5 0	0 5 0
— c	Patrick Devine, .	Reps. Hugh Wallace,	House, . . .	—	—	0 5 0	0 5 0
5	Owen Darcy, . .	Same, . .	House, office, and land,	4 3 11	3 5 0	0 10 0	3 15 0
6	Thomas Gormley, .	Same, . .	Land, . . .	8 1 32	5 15 0	—	5 15 0
— a	Felix King, . .	Thomas Gormley, .	House and garden, .	0 0 25	0 2 0	0 8 0	0 10 0
7	Thomas Gormley, .	Reps. Hugh Wallace,	Ho., off., forge & land,	3 2 38	2 5 0	0 15 0	3 0 0
8	Patrick Short, . .	Same, .	House, offices, and land,	10 3 39	7 0 0	0 15 0	8 5 0
9			Land, . . .	0 3 23	0 10 0	—	
10 a	John Reilly, . .	Same, . .	House, office, and land,	3 2 38	2 15 0	0 5 0	3 0 0
— b	James Reilly, . .	Free, . . .	House, . . .	—	—	0 5 0	0 5 0
11 a	Thomas Mackesson,	Reps. Hugh Wallace,	House, office, & land,	18 0 15	5 12 0	0 10 0	6 2 0
b	James Mackesson,		House, office, & land,		5 12 0	0 15 0	6 7 0
—	Thomas Mackesson,	Same, . .	Bog, . . .	3 1 20	0 3 0	—	0 3 0
	James Mackesson,				0 3 0	—	0 3 0
12	Thomas Mackesson,	Same, . .	Land, . . .	1 2 25	0 10 0	—	0 10 0
	James Mackesson,				0 10 0	—	0 10 0
13	Daniel Kiernan, .	Same, . .	House and land, .	16 0 1	10 15 0	0 5 0	11 0 0
14	. . . .	. . . .	Water, . . .	4 0 30	—	—	—
			Total of Rateable Property. .	105 2 1	66 2 0	16 18 0	83 0 0
			EXEMPTIONS:				
2 c	. . . . .	James Hamilton, .	Grave-yard, . .	0 1 24	0 5 0	—	0 5 0
			Total, including Exemptions, .	105 3 25	66 7 0	16 18 0	83 5 0

Could Daniel have been Mary's father? Possibly. Unlikely. He may have been related to Patrick Kernan. Patrick may have been Mary's father, with Susan and Catherine belonging instead to Daniel, perhaps as cousins? It is also possible that none of these scenarios is correct. At this stage, what we have is not proof but plausibility. This 'lead' only serves to get us in the right area of Ulster, not the bullseye.

This is where naming conventions begin to matter. A well-established tradition holds that the firstborn son of the next generation was named after his paternal grandfather.

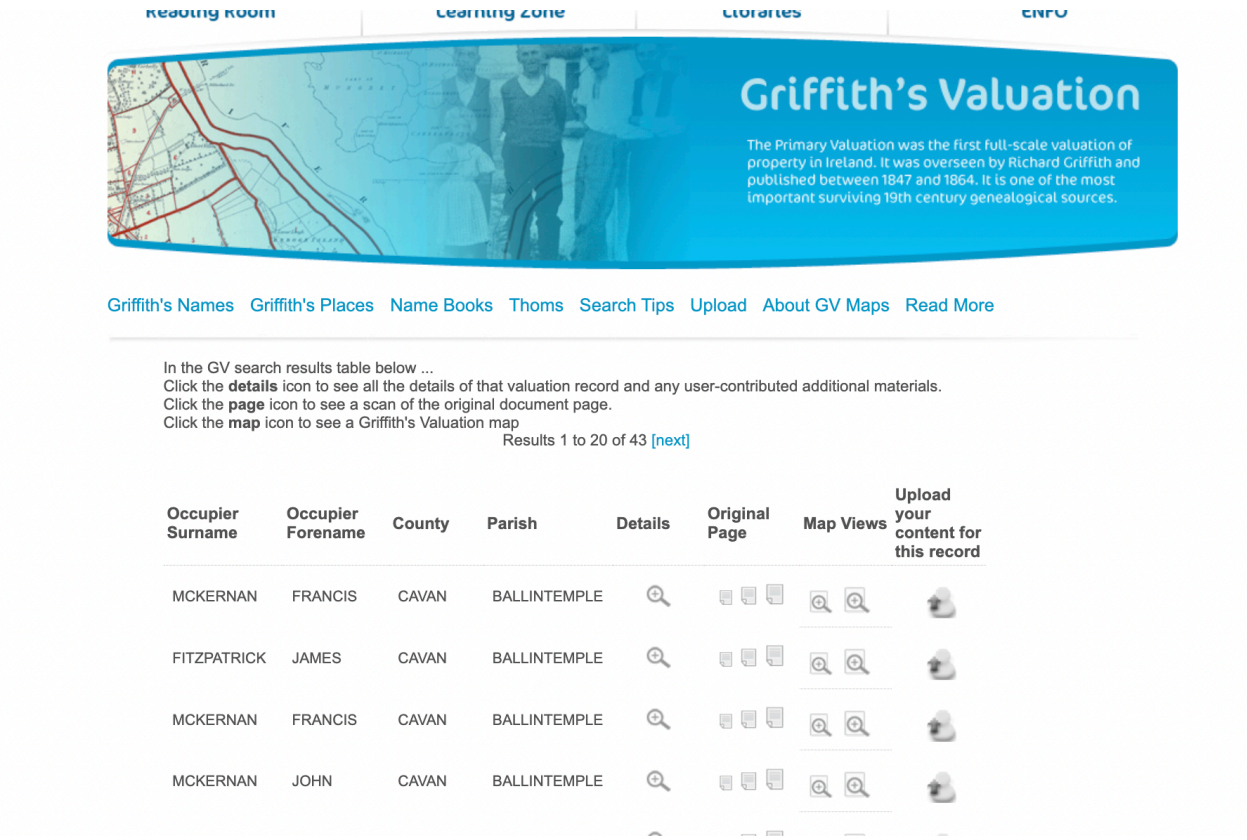
- Thomas J is the first in the next generation to have a son. He is named Neil after the baby's grandfather.
- Thomas J's son Daniel has the first male of the next generation and names the boy Thomas J.
- John J. Hannan named his first born son after the boy's grandfather Daniel.
- Then John J's son Leo Daniel named his first born after Thomas J.

A more than 150 year naming tradition. We see the overlaps of the same names in most of these large families. We do not see Robert, Christopher, Stephen, Mark, Patrick. We see Thomas, John, James, Daniel and Aloysius. For the girls it is Mary, Margaret, Ann, Helen, Theresa. Not Brigid, Barbara, Elizabeth, Susan.

And with this we can reasonably infer that the tradition started prior to the first Thomas John (1823). We can make a plausible assumption that his and John's father's name was named Neil. And then the guess would be that Neil's father's name was John, if we say that Thomas' brother John is the first born. For the time being this is the configuration we are working with. It is the best we have at the moment.

John Hannan
4th great-grandfather
⌄
Neil Hannan
Son of John Hannan
⌄
Thomas John Hannan Sr 1829-1923
Son of Neil Hannan
⌄
Daniel Aloysius Hannan 1856-1908
Son of Thomas John Hannan Sr
⌄
John Joseph Hannan 1887-1962
Son of Daniel Aloysius Hannan
⌄
Leo Daniel Hannan 1921-2002
Son of John Joseph Hannan
⌄
Thomas Leo Hannan
You are the son of Leo Daniel Hannan

A search of the Barony of Tellhunco where Patt lived for any McKernans turned up nothing. But on a hunch I searched nearby, the Barony of Tullyhaw. Paydirt. Approximately 40 McKernans show up in the townlands in this barony of Cavan.



Occupier Surname	Occupier Forename	County	Parish	Details	Original Page	Map Views	Upload your content for this record
MCKERNAN	FRANCIS	CAVAN	BALLINTEMPLE				
FITZPATRICK	JAMES	CAVAN	BALLINTEMPLE				
MCKERNAN	FRANCIS	CAVAN	BALLINTEMPLE				
MCKERNAN	JOHN	CAVAN	BALLINTEMPLE				

Tullyhaw *(Irish: Teallach Eathach, which means 'the Territory of Eochaidh', an ancestor of the McGoverns, who lived c. 650 AD) is a Barony in County Cavan in Ireland. The area has been in constant occupation since pre-4000 BC. Located in the northwest of the county, it has been referred to as Cavan's panhandle. …. In 1584, Sir John Perrot formed the shire into a county in Ulster. It was subdivided into seven baronies: two of which were assigned to Sir John O'Reilly and three to other members of the family;* ***two remaining, possessed by the septs of McKiernan Clan*** *and • • Mac Shamhráin (McGovern or Magauran)* [Wikipedia]

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Results 1 to 3 of 3

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MCKERNAN	JOHN	CAVAN	TEMPLEPORT				
MCKERNAN	JOHN	CAVAN	TEMPLEPORT				

Results 1 to 3 of 3

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Occupier Surname	Occupier Forename	County	Parish	Details	Original Page	Map Views	Upload your content for this record
MCKEIRNAN	JOHN	CAVAN	KINAWLEY				
MCKEIRNAN	EDWARD	CAVAN	KINAWLEY				
MCKEIRNAN	THOMAS	CAVAN	TEMPLEPORT				

Results 1 to 3 of 3

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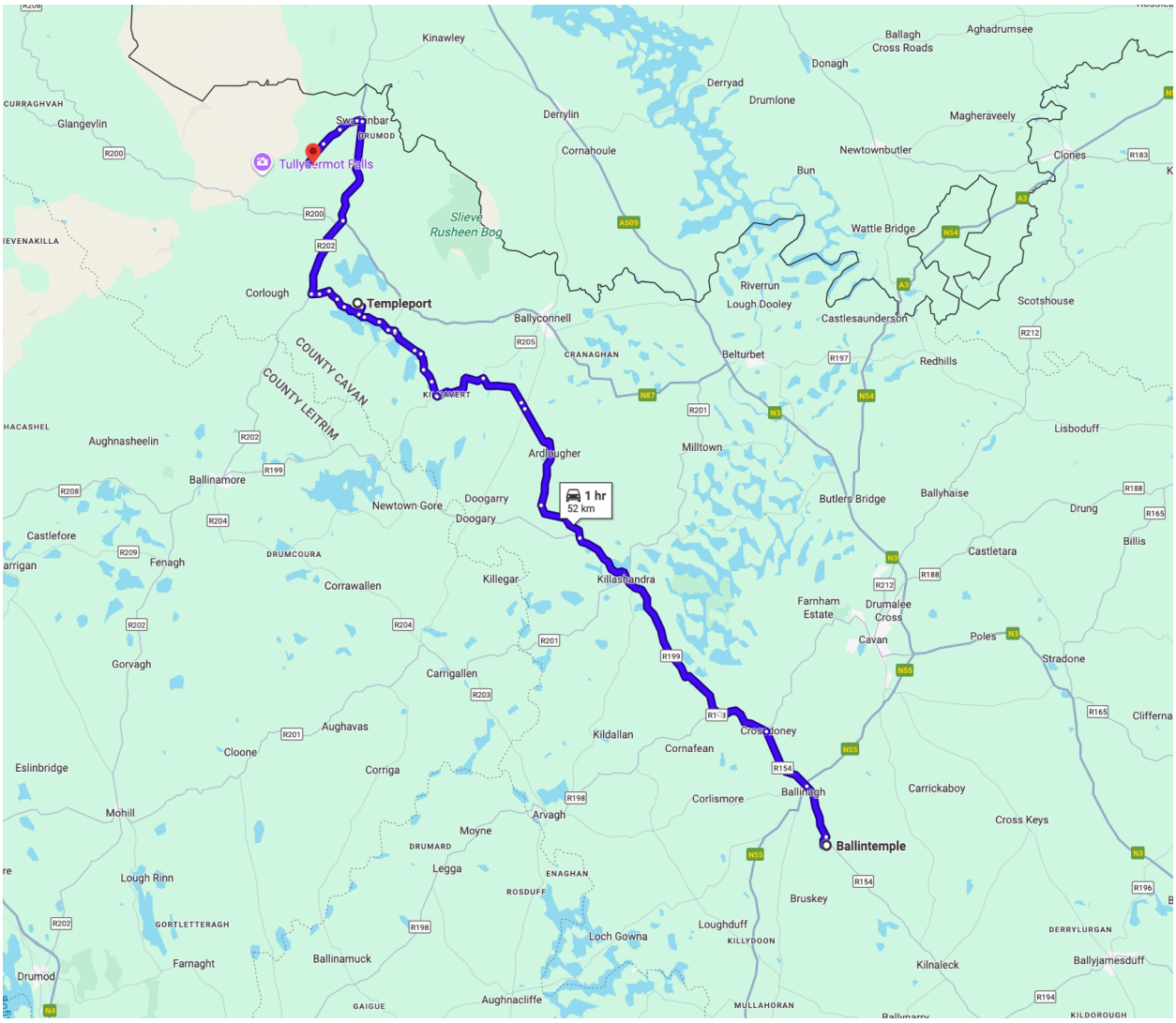
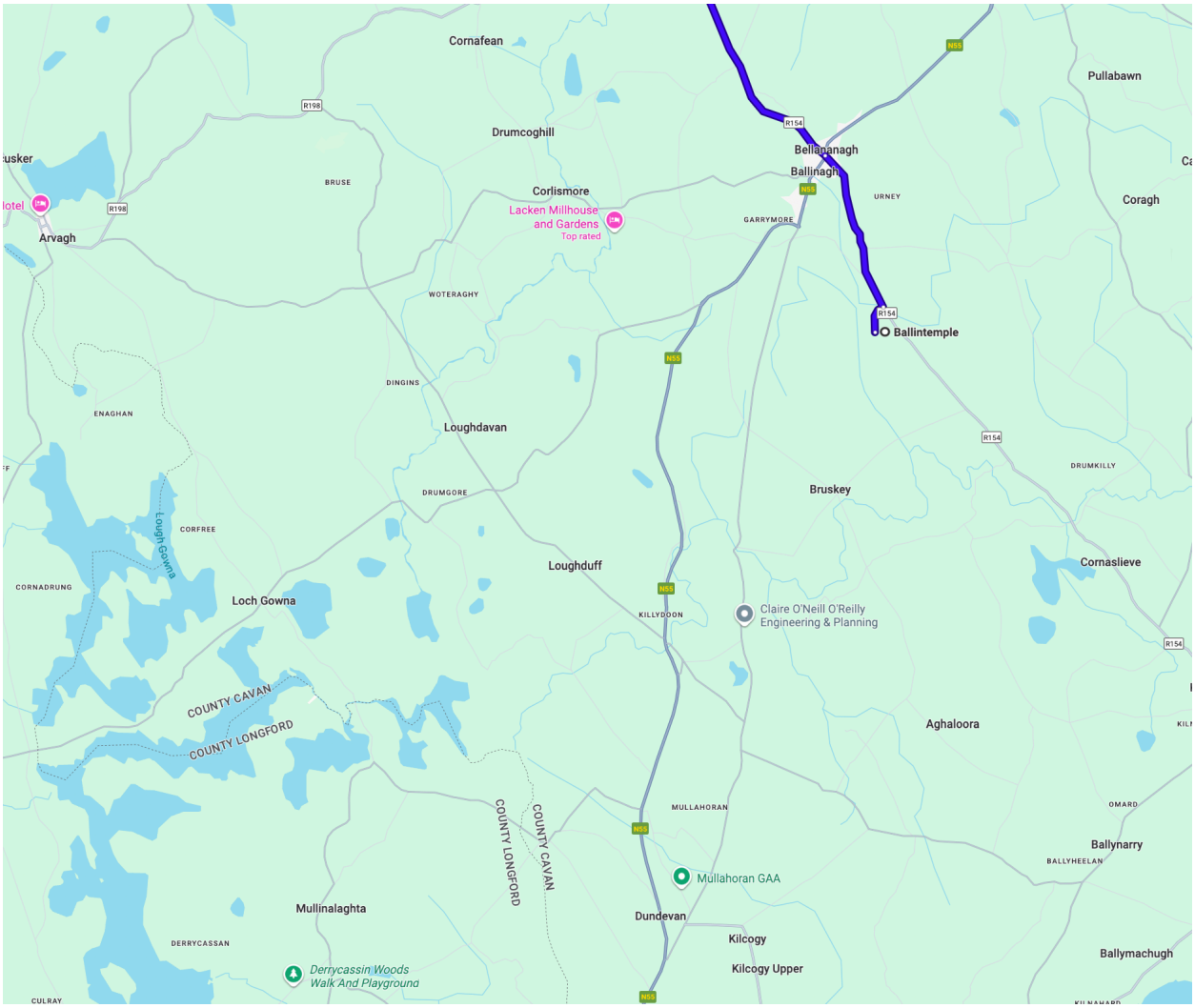
The quoted description of Tullyhaw above provides additional context. Long occupied, positioned at Cavan's northwestern edge, shaped by overlapping authorities and kin groups, **it was historically associated with both the**

McKiernan and McGovern septs. In the images above showing Griffith's Valuation entries for the barony, we see McKernans listed under both spellings. Within Tullyhaw itself, several appear, and across County Cavan there are nearly sixty entries when spelling variants are counted. It is difficult to imagine that none of these families connect to Mary.



Note the proximity to the county and country borders of the McKernan places listed in Griffiths.

The Cavan Leitrim Border 8.8 km (5.5 miles) away.



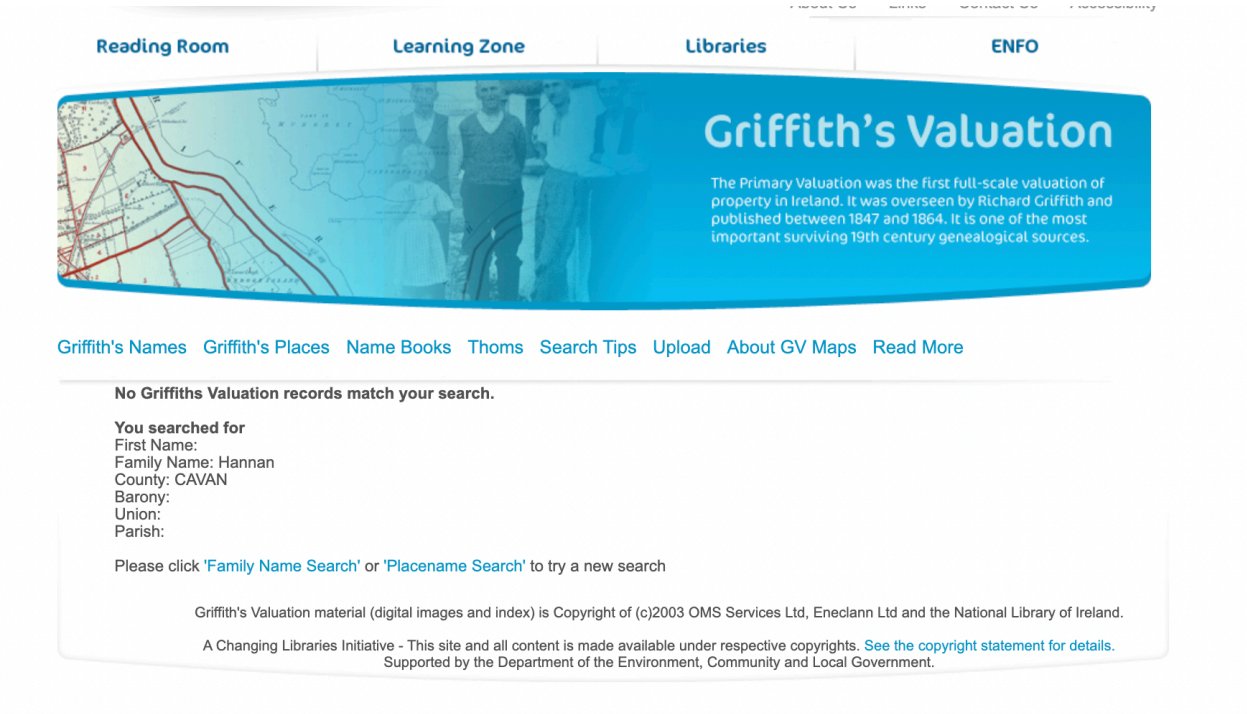
The Cavan Longford Border 8.9 km (5.6 miles) away.

The Ireland UK border 9.6 km (6 miles) away. The parallel with the German borderland origins is remarkable to say the least. See: *Borderland Lives in 18th Century Germany* https://aletheus.com/2025/06/20/borderland-lives-from-18th-century-germany-hesse-bavaria-ancestry-family-history/

Now that we have Mary McKernan's place origins plausibly set in County Cavan, for the time being, we can move on to the HANNAN place original with new eyes and leads.

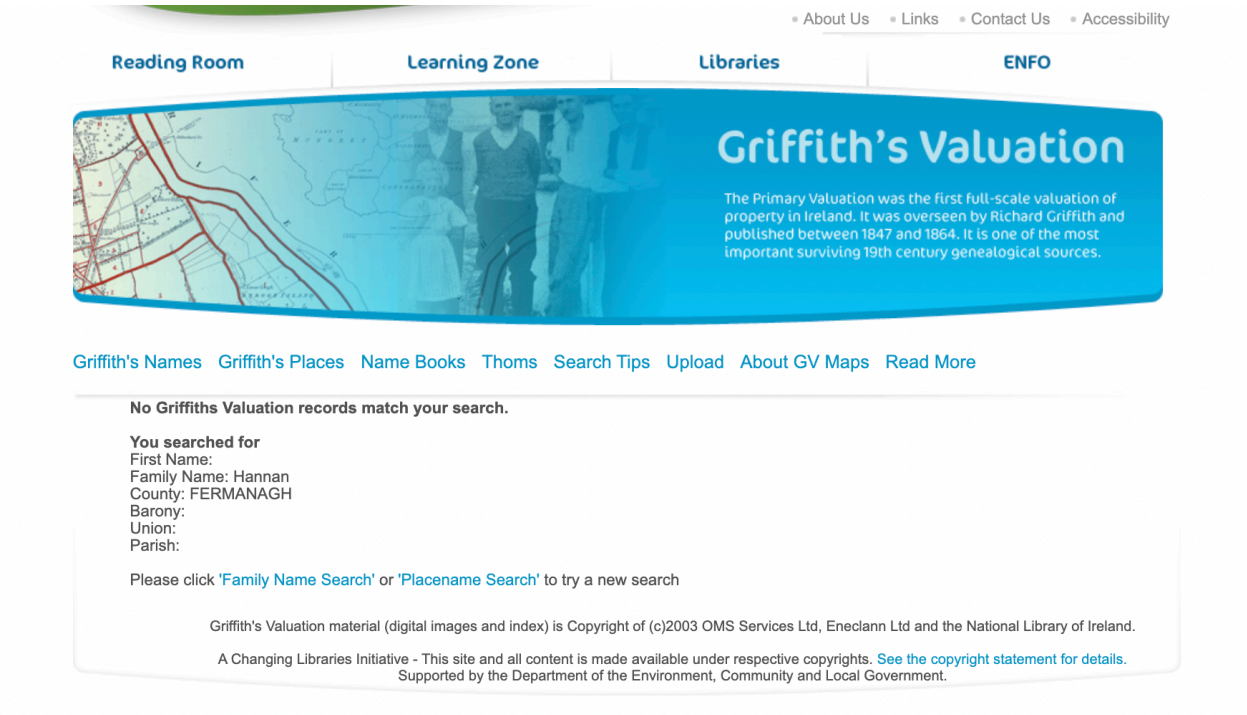
***

Did Thomas Hannan and Mary McKernan know one another in Ireland before leaving for Dundee, or did they meet only after arriving in Scotland? It is tempting to wonder whether Hannan, like McKernan, might also have originated in Cavan or just across the border in Fermanagh. At times, the DNA evidence from Ancestry appeared to point in that direction.



To test this, Griffith's Valuation was checked for Hannan entries in County Cavan. None appear. The same search in County Fermanagh also returns none. This leaves two plausible but not exclusive possibilities. Either Hannans in these counties were too poor to hold rateable property and therefore left no trace in the valuation records, or Hannan

is not a Cavan or Fermanagh family at all. There is surely a lot of grey area in-between. We can only work with what we have at hand. We keep looking. Maybe something will pop up.



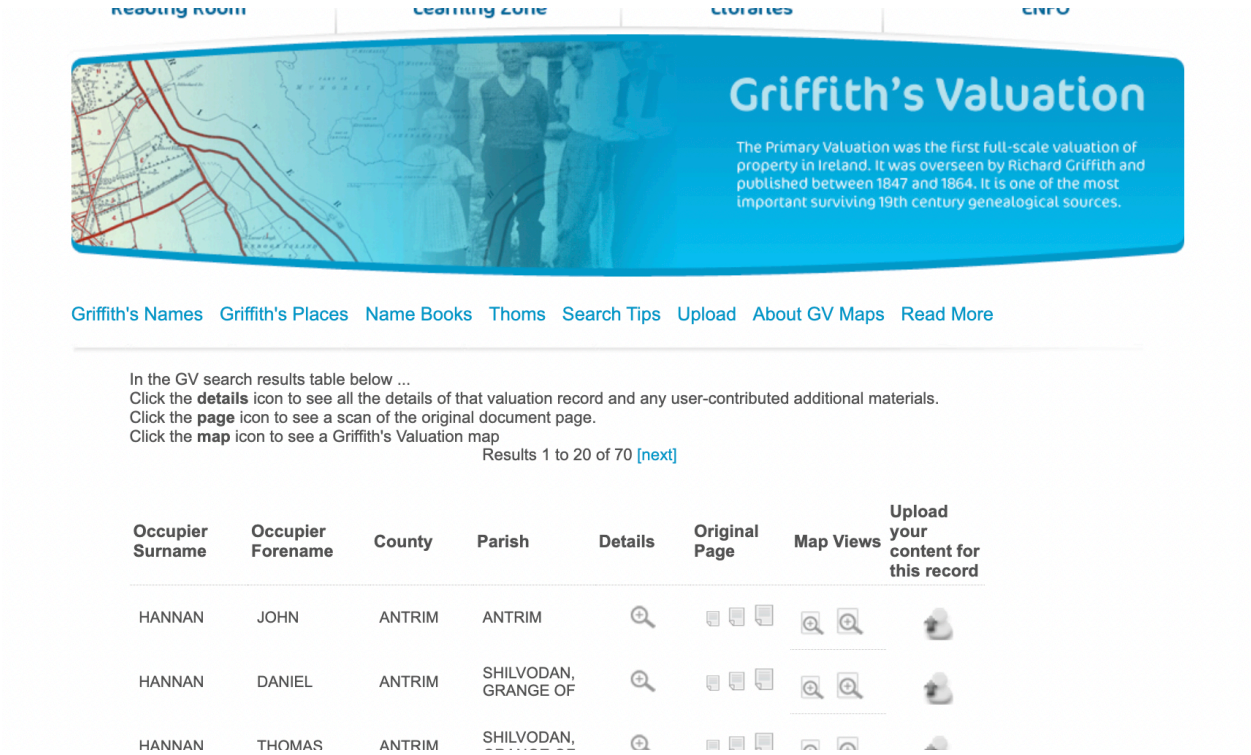
There is a silver lining here. If Hannans are absent from both counties, this strengthens the possibility that **the Fermanagh-associated DNA signals are coming not from the Hannan line, but from the Lewsley side of the family.** The DNA comes from the grandchild of Theresa Lewsley and therefore 25% comes from her. (50% from each parent, 25% from each grandparent.) What initially appeared to complicate the picture instead helps clarify it.

This brings us to Ancestry.com ethnicity estimates. In practice, these are largely noise. Labels such as Munster

or Leinster reflect how Ancestry clusters older Gaelic DNA, not where eighteenth- or nineteenth-century ancestors actually lived. Ulster Catholics share substantial older DNA with populations across Munster and Leinster due to deep Gaelic population structure and centuries of internal migration. The result is that **the algorithm often assigns southern labels to people whose documented ancestors never left Ulster**.

The same applies to **Connacht and Donegal** components. These **represent older northwestern Gaelic signals rather than evidence of recent ancestors from those counties**. Many Gaelic surnames now found in Ulster trace back to Connacht or the mid-west centuries earlier, before sending branches north. On Ancestry, the Donegal label often covers a broad northwestern Ulster cluster rather than modern County Donegal alone.

Seen in this light, years of DNA interpretation slightly misdirected the inquiry. The discovery of Esther Smith's family did not provide the answer directly, but it clarified where the answer was not, narrowing the field considerably. At that point, a simple question reframed everything. **Are there Hannans in County Antrim?** Yes. As shown in the image below, there are roughly seventy entries. Notice their first names.



The next question followed immediately. Are any of them located near the Lewsleys? Again, yes. One in particular stands out. In the image below, we see a **Margaret Hannan in Aghalee**, the same place where at least three Lewsleys are recorded as living.

c	Richard M'Cann,	Same,	House,	—	—	0 10 0	0
d	John Lavery,	Same,	House,	—	—	0 10 0	0
e	Thomas M'Clelland,	Same,	House and sm. garden,	—	—	1 0 0	1
f	John Delany,	Same,	House and sm. garden,	—	—	1 0 0	1
	Sarah Hill,	Same,	House, office, and land,	0 2 20	1 0 0	1 5 0	2
	John Rollins, sen.,	Marquis of Hertford,	House, office, and land,	14 3 15	18 0 0	1 5 0	21
			House and land,	1 1 0	1 10 0	1 0 0	
	Margaret Hannan,	Same,	House, offices, and land,	14 1 0	17 0 0	1 10 0	18
	Henry Mallon,	Same,	House, offices, and land,	34 2 25	40 0 0	3 10 0	43
	Hill Smith,	Same,	Land,	18 1 25	22 0 0	—	50
			House, offices, and land,	17 2 15	22 0 0	8 0 0	
33 a	Richard Cousins,	Hill Smith,	House and garden,	0 0 35	0 10 0	1 15 0	2
— b	Phoebe Mulholland,	Same,	House,	—	—	0 5 0	0
— c	James Forsythe,	Same,	House,	—	—	0 5 0	0
— d	John Doogan,	Same,	House,	—	—	0 5 0	0
— e	Thomas Morris,	Same,	House and garden,	0 0 25	0 5 0	0 10 0	0
a	William Burns,	Marquis of Hertford,	House, office, and land,	1 0 0	1 10 0	1 0 0	2
b	Alice Burns,	Same,	House and sm. garden,	—	—	0 5 0	0
a	John Best,	Same,	House, office, and land,	1 3 25	2 5 0	1 10 0	3
b	James E. Best,	Same,	House and garden,	0 0 25	0 10 0	1 5 0	1
c	Eliza Lonsdale,	James E. Best,	House,	—	—	0 5 0	0
	Anne Best,	Marquis of Hertford,	House and land,	1 0 15	1 7 0	0 8 0	1
	Thomas Little,	Same,	Land,	6 3 35	8 15 0	—	8
a	Unoccupied,	Thomas Little,	House,	—	—	1 0 0	1
b	Mary Anne Martin,	Same,	House,	—	—	0 10 0	0

Looking more closely at the surrounding entries, as shown in the image below, reveals familiar names. **LYNCH**. **MCCANN**. These surnames recur in the family tree, appearing in the same small places and at the same times. While the McCanns currently appear in the tree as originating from County Armagh, relocation following events such as the Armagh disturbances remains a possibility. For now, what matters is that these names appear together.

		AGHALEE. (*Ord. S.* 62, 63, & 66.)			s.
1	a	William J. Sefton,	Marquis of Hertford,	House, offices, and land,	13
—	b	James M'Cann,	William J. Sefton,	House,	
—	c	James Fletcher,	Same,	House,	
—	d	Margaret Lynch,	Same,	House,	
2	a	Francis Higginson,	Marquis of Hertford,	House, offices, and land,	6
—	b	Philip Johnston,	Same,	House and garden,	0
3		Russ Higginson,	William Gawley,	House, office, and land,	0
4		James M'Veigh,	Marquis of Hertford,	House, office, and land,	2
5		Thomas Thompson,	Same,	House, offices, and land,	0
6		William Gawley, sen.,	Same,	Land,	1
7				House, offices, and land,	11
8				Land,	13
	8 a	James Higginson and Richard Lavery,	William Gawley, sen.,	House & small garden,	
9		Thomas Gawley,	Marquis of Hertford,	House, offices and land	0

Individually, none of these details proves anything. Taken together, they form a pattern that is difficult to ignore. At this point, the generic “Northern Ireland” designation for the Hannan line can reasonably be replaced with something more specific. The current evidence points us toward County Antrim, with Tyrone a close second.

***

When tidy baptisms or marriages are missing, genealogy has to rely on proximity and networks. The same small parishes. The same clusters of surnames. The same migration paths. The same religion. The same economic tier. When all of these align, the result may not be mathematically proved, but it becomes strongly plausible.

It would be tempting to stop here and call it a tidy package. But not so fast.

A search of Griffith's Valuation for McKernans in County Antrim turns up fourteen entries. Once again, the details matter. Which parishes do they occupy? Which townlands? Which first names recur?

MCKERNAN	JAMES	ANTRIM	FINVOY
MCKERNAN	WILLIAM	ANTRIM	RASHARKIN
MCKERNAN	MICHAEL	ANTRIM	CARNMONEY
MCKERNAN	OWEN	ANTRIM	LAYD
MCKERNAN	THOMAS	ANTRIM	BALLINDERRY
MCKERNAN	JOHN	ANTRIM	GLENAVY
MCKERNAN	WILLIAM	ANTRIM	GLENAVY
MCKERNAN	WILLIAM	ANTRIM	AGHALEE
MCKERNAN	HANNAH	ANTRIM	SHANKILL
MCKERNAN	FRANCIS	ANTRIM	SHANKILL
MCKERNAN	CATHERINE	ANTRIM	SHANKILL

The density of McKernans in Antrim, particularly in the same parishes as the Hannans and Lewsleys, increases the likelihood that Mary had family links there, even if she herself was born in Cavan.

A minor road, running south east through flat countryside, from the Lisburn Road, Glenavy, as it approaches the crossroads with the Crewe Park Road. © Copyright Albert Bridge and licensed for reuse under this Creative Commons License.

Scottish records showing Thomas and Mary arriving within a narrow window of time, with no long gap between his arrival and the birth of their first child could indicate that they may have met in Antrim and started their relationship there if not solidified it with marriage. Knowing this helps us focus future research in Antrim for marriage records.

The famine context could reinforce this interpretation. South-west Antrim, particularly the Lough Neagh belt, was moderately affected. Mortality was significant, emigration heavy, especially among small Catholic and mixed-farming households. At the same time, the linen industry provided some economic buffering.

5 km W of Aghalee, Co Antrim, Northern Ireland. Lough Neagh (borders five counties) The largest inland area of water in the British Isles, in places you would not easily see the opposite bank, famous for Lough Neagh pollan (fish). © Copyright Kenneth Allen and licensed for reuse under this Creative Commons License.

Cavan tells a harsher story. Barony-level data show population losses in the 1840s and 1850s approaching twenty-five to thirty percent through death and emigration. Families in areas like Tullyhaw were more dependent on the potato, worked poorer land, and lacked industrial alternatives.

For Mary's McKernan family, the push out of Cavan would have been strong. Moving first toward relatives or surname-kin in the Antrim linen belt, and from there into

Dundee’s mills, fits well with known famine-era migration routes from Cavan into Ulster’s industrial districts and onward to Scotland. Putting it together, a coherent picture emerges.

Ballinderry Road, Aghalee Heading south west towards the intersection with Soldierstown Road and Lurgan Road © Copyright Kenneth Allen and licensed for reuse under this Creative Commons Licence.

The Hannans and Lewsleys appear as locally rooted Catholics of the south-Antrim linen district, embedded in an industrial landscape with established pathways outward, moving along a familiar corridor from Antrim to Dundee and eventually to the United States.

The McKernans of Tullyhaw, by contrast, came from a far more fragile position. **They were smallholders in one of the most severely affected baronies of County Cavan**, pushed hard by famine, land pressure, and limited alternatives. For families like theirs, survival often meant attaching themselves to existing networks, precisely the kinds of Antrim and Dundee connections now visible in the record.

Killeshandra, Main Street north facing Co Cavan, Ireland
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Mary McKernan and Thomas J. Hannan almost certainly moved within a single, intertwined Ulster network stretching from the shores of Lough Neagh to the mills of Dundee. Whether they formed their relationship in Antrim and left together, or met in Dundee and recognized overlapping McKernan–Hannan–Lewsley connections there, both scenarios are historically credible. Either way, their marriage looks less like coincidence than like an Ulster neighborhood re-forming itself, this time along the narrow streets of an industrial Scottish city.

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ADDENDUM: Richard Seymour-Conway, **4th Marquess of Hertford**, landlord
Several of the properties that the ancestors rented were owned by the Marquess.
This speaks directly to the situation the native Irish faced under English occupation.

"*Captain Richard Seymour-Conway, 4th Marquess of Hertford (22 February 1800 – 25 August 1870) was an English aristocrat,* ***with extensive land holdings in the south of England and the north of Ireland,*** *and sometime politician who spent his life in France devoted to collecting art. From birth to 1822 he was styled Viscount Beauchamp and from 1822 to 1843 Earl of Yarmouth….*Although Lord Hertford was born in England, he was brought up in Paris by his mother, who had become estranged from his father….**While Earl of**

Yarmouth he served as a British MP for County Antrim from 1822 to 1826, but is not recorded in Hansard as having made any contributions to debate. He spent most of his life in Paris, in a large apartment in the city and, from 1848, on its outskirts at the Château de Bagatelle, a small country house in the Bois de Boulogne formerly in the possession of the Count of Artois, the brother of the Louis XVI…In 1842, as the 4th Marquess of Hertford, **he inherited a 10 by 14 mile Irish estate in Lagan Valley, including the town of Lisburn, on which some 4,000 tenants (and many more sub-tenants) provided an income of £60,000 (or £5 million in today's money**). He was to visit it but once, and then with the wish that, "pray God!", he should never have to do so again. When the edge of the Great Irish Famine reached the valley in 1847 and 1848, the Marquess declined to join the local mill owners in subscribing to the relief efforts." [Wikipedia]

Next Chapter: **Life in Dundee**