

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	Name	Mary Mc Kernan
Media	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. It was a chaotic period with 1000s flooding into Dundee overwhelming all systems including the Church; one pre-existing Catholic church (St Andrew's, 1836) trying to absorb a huge, sudden Catholic influx, and then a second (St Mary's, from 1851) that only gradually relieved the pressure. Contemporary commentary notes that in the 1830s "a new Catholic church was constructed in the burgh, confidently able to take over a thousand people," and that by the late 1840s this one church was trying to cope with an estimated 9,000–10,000 Catholics in Dundee. It is fair to 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.

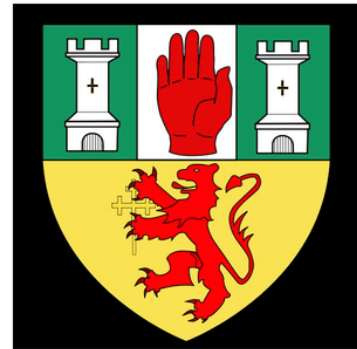
Emblem Key



AGHALEE ANTRIM



BELFAST



COUNTY ANTRIM



COUNTY ARMAGH



COUNTY CAVAN



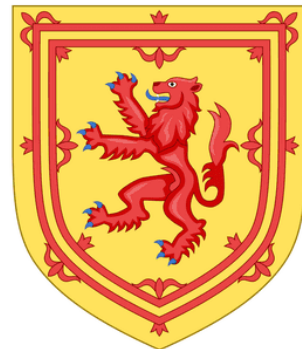
COUNTY FERMANAGH



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 by the number of kids in future generations, it is unlikely they are the only two kids in this family. No others have been found as of yet. 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 of the next generation gets named after the paternal grandfather. In our German lines it is the first born male who gets the father's name. So Neil Hannan is a guess based on tradition. 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 Slaven who was born in Dundee and her family also comes from Tyrone near Omagh. The Hannans are connected at least by marriage to Tyrone and we know that for sure. Whether that is our line's place of origin is still up in the air.

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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

Griffiths lists five; James, Thomas, Bernard, Henry. Could this be our line? Yes it could. 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, and Henry does show up in ours as does James and Thomas. There is no Neil nor John Hannan listed. In fact Neil doesn't show up in Griffiths anywhere. There are almost 130 John Hannan listed, all over the island.

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First Name: Neil
Family Name: HANNAN
County:
Barony:
Union:
Parish:

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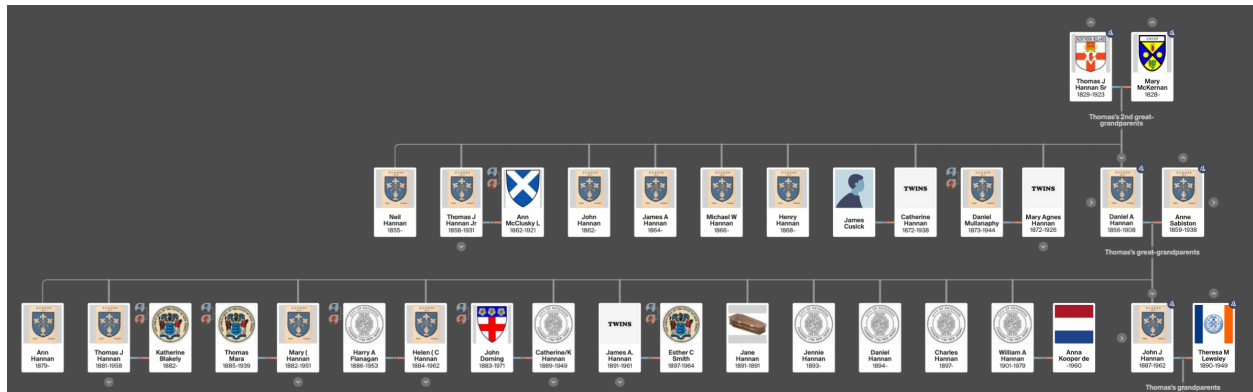
John's wife Helen is from Tyrone, and Thomas' wife Mary is from Cavan. Maybe everyone coupled in Dundee not Ireland. Older and younger brother move to Dundee, maybe with others, maybe they were the only two left to leave. We don't know. Thomas being younger and likely

more impulsive gets a woman pregnant first and starts having kids right upon arrival. There is no marriage record. John the older more pragmatic of the two I would assume waited a couple years and then in 1857 he got married and 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 because it is Cavan, and we know Mary McKernan comes from there.

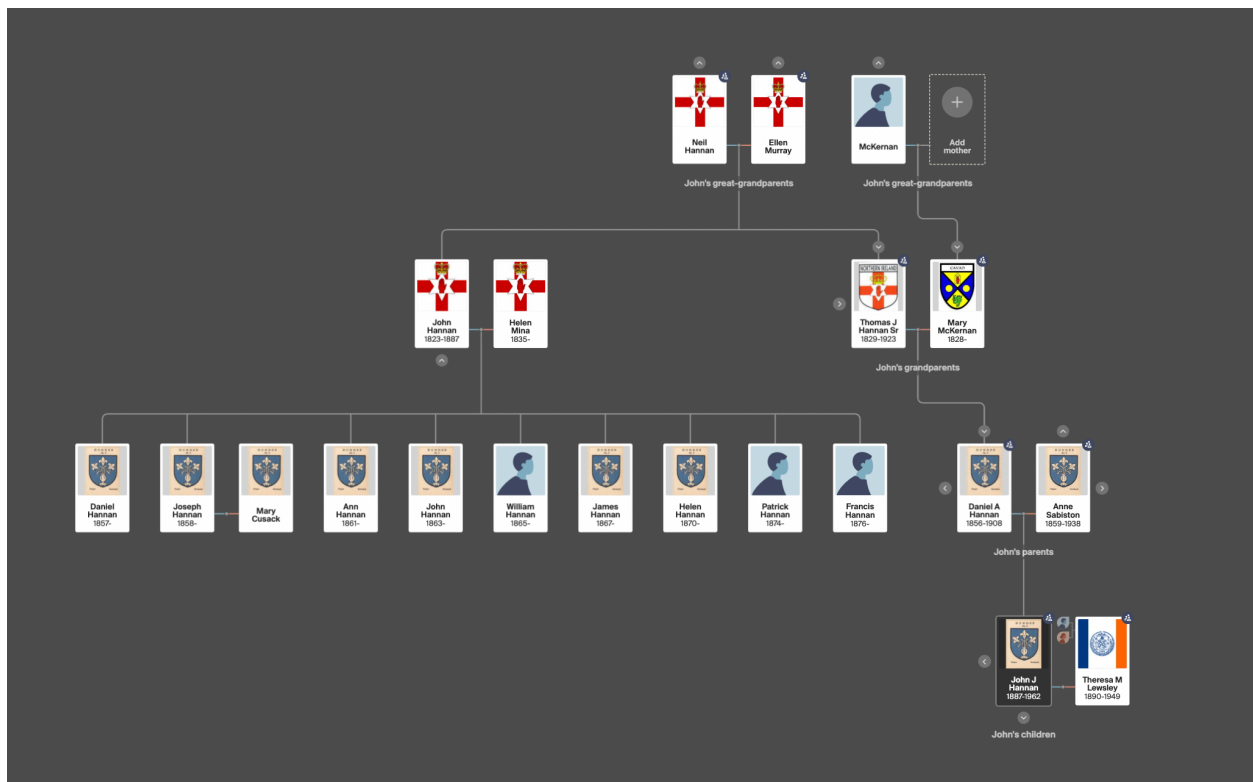
Our paternal grandfather, John Joseph Hannan, was born in 1887, the fourth child in a family that would eventually number eleven. Four years later came his brother James Aloysius, the surviving twin of a pair born in 1891. His twin sister, Jane, did not survive. John and James grew up close in age and 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.

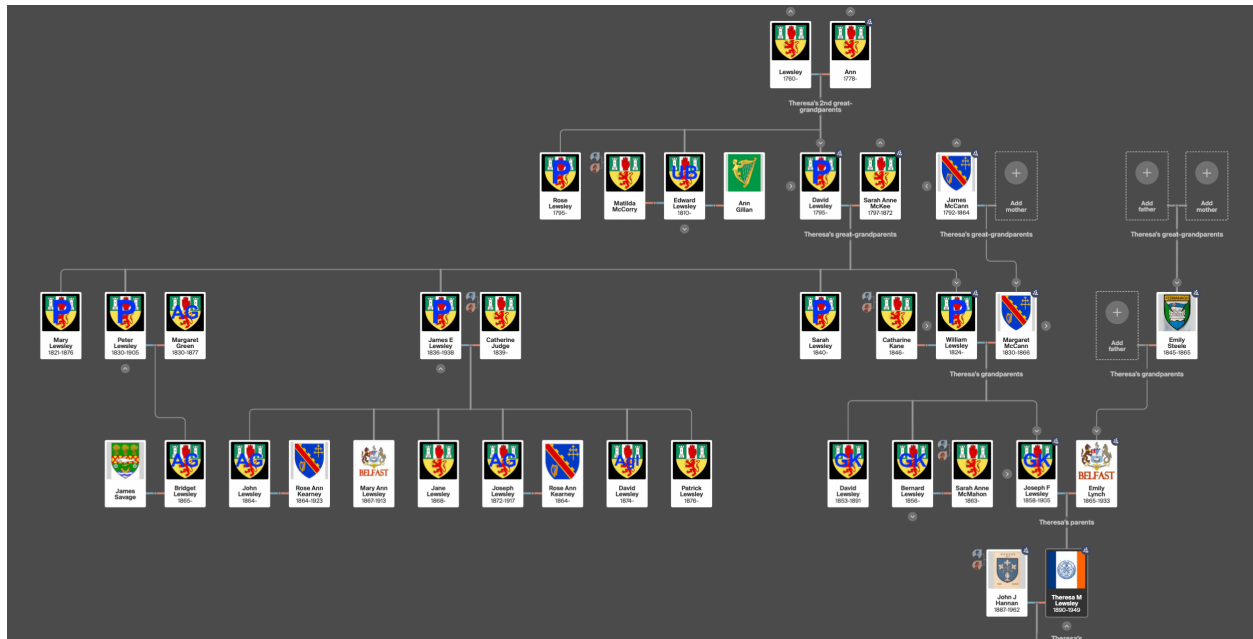


John Joseph Hannan married Teresa Lewsley in 1909, when he was nineteen years old. His brother James married Esther Smith in 1917, at the age of twenty-six. Both women were first-generation Americans, born in the United States to immigrant parents. Looking across the marriages in this generation, the 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.



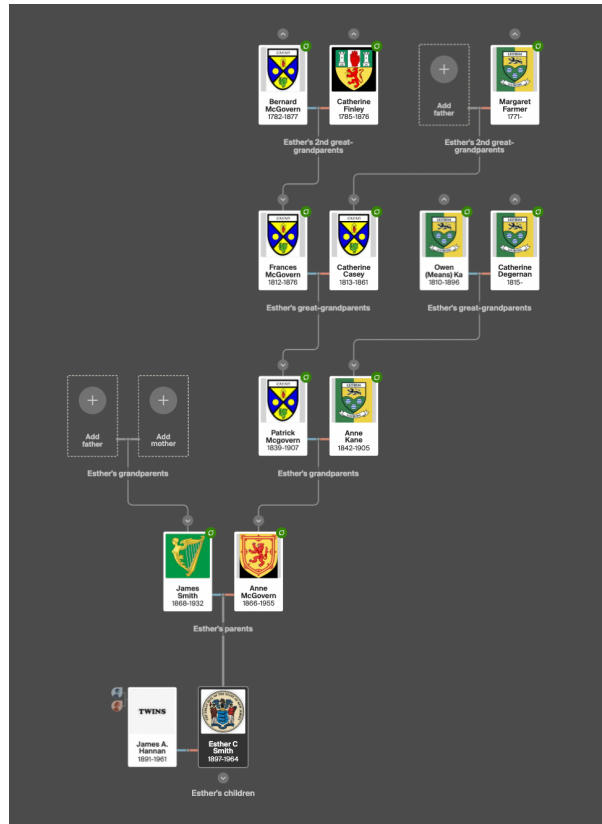
In the image above showing the Hannan line, what can be said with confidence is limited but consistent. DNA points to Northern Ireland, though no specific county can yet be named with any confidence. In previous releases from Ancestry, County Fermanagh has been directly mentioned. From there, the document 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 Lewisley line, the picture sharpens considerably. Teresa Lewisley'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 Lewisleys did not pass through Scotland. Their migration was direct, from Northern Ireland to the United States in the 1880s.

In the image below 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.

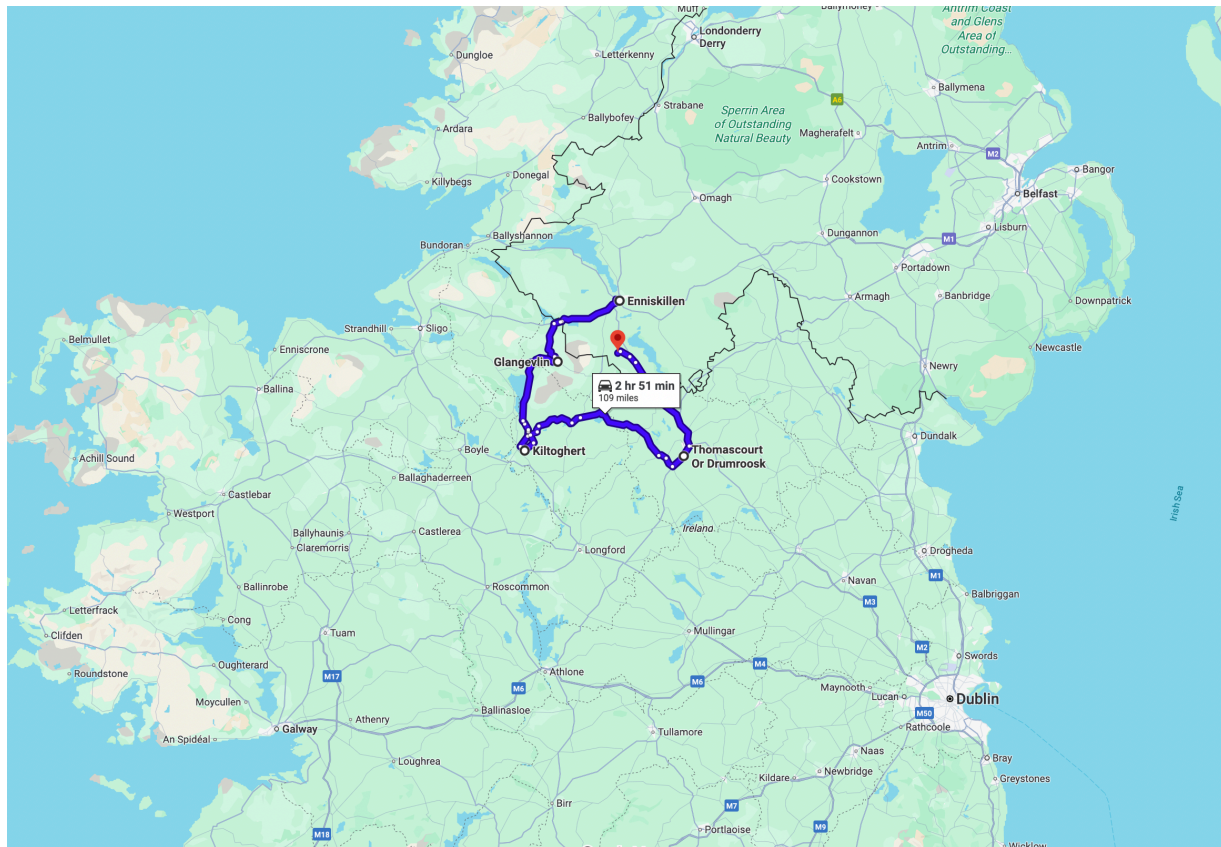


Taken together, these movements form a pattern that is entirely consistent with the historical record. But consistency alone does not give us proximity. For that, we have to look closer still. Just as important as what appears in these records is what does not. We do not see these families mixing widely 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.

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 below, 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.

Does Mary Kernan match the person in your tree? [?](#) Yes No Maybe ×

← Ireland, Census Fragments, 1821-1851 > 1841 > Cavan > Killeshandra



Magistrate. This Heading to be filled by the Enumerator.

County of Cavan Barony of Tullyhunco Townland of Killeshandra

Parish of Killeshandra Town or Village

No. in Census Book 2. } 11 Name of Head of Family } Patt Kernan Occupation

EXPLANATION OF THE RETURN.

I.—The object of this Return is to ascertain in the least intrusive manner, the information required by the Act, 3 & 4 Vict., cap. 100, intituled, "An Act for taking an account of the Population of Ireland."

II.—By this Act a penalty of £10 is imposed upon any person making a false answer, or refusing or neglecting to make answers to the questions contained in this Return.—Pattern Tables are given below as a guide.

III.—It is intended that the Enumerator shall call for this Return immediately after the night for which the account is to be taken, when he will assist such persons as are unable to fill it themselves. But when able, it is requested that they will fill it, or cause it to be filled as soon as possible after the said night, in order that the Enumerators may be enabled to complete their returns.

By a Family is meant of support, or seven common means of Families in one house is particularly

2. The 2nd TABLE persons belonging to said night. The counted for the ge happen to sleep on

3. The 3rd TABLE

Mary Kernan
Ireland, Census Fragments, 1821-1851

Detail Related Source

Name [Mary Kernan](#)
Gender [Female](#)
Residence [10](#)
Age [10](#)
Birth Date [1831](#)
Residence Date [1841](#)
Residence Place [Drumroosk, Killeshandra, Cavan, Ireland](#)
Death Date [1839](#)
Relation to Head [Daughter](#)
Occupation [None](#)
Household Members [3](#)

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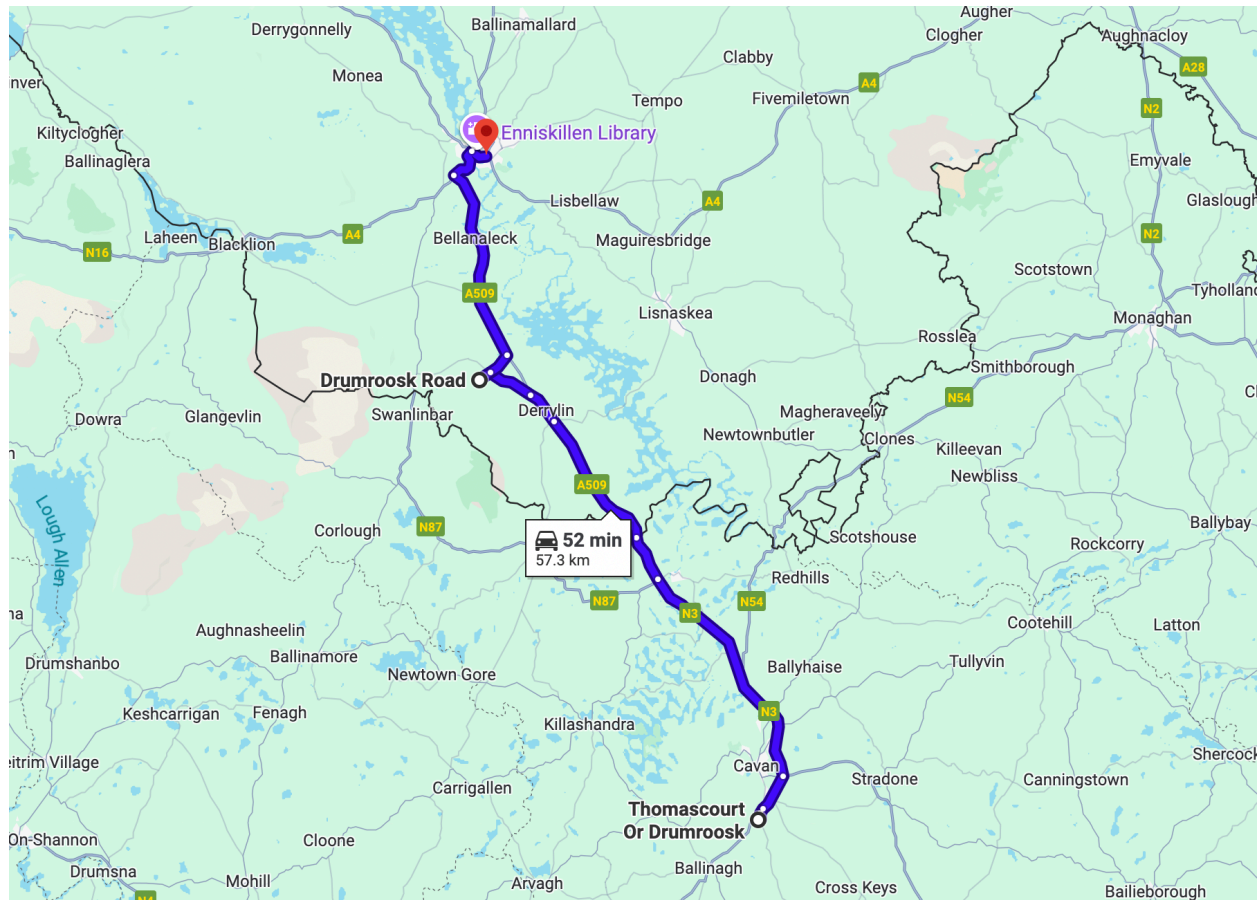
Others in Record

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 our 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.

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.



The image below 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.

Patrick M'Connell, Thomas M'Nulty, Michael Maguire,		James Fraser,	House and land, House and land, House and land,	263 3 29	0 17 0 3 4 0 2 1 0	0 10 0 0 3 0 0 6 0 0 4 0	5 0 0 1 0 0 3 10 0 2 5 0
		Total,		460 1 19	50 4 0	3 11 0	53 15 0
PARISH OF KINAWLEY.							
DUNMAKEEVER. (Ord. S. 6.)		Thomas Kuipe,					
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
g	Ter. M'Govern, jun.,		House, office, & land,		3 12 0	0 8 0	4 0 0
h	Patrick M'Govern,		House, offices, & land,	1233 2 4	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 Nolan,		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	60 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

VALUATION OF TENEMENTS. PARISH OF KILLASHANDRA.

No. and Letters of Reference to Map.	Names.		Description of Tenement.	Area.	Rateable Annual Valuation.		Total Annual Valuation of Rateable Property.
	Townlands and Occupiers.	Immediate Lessors.			Land.	Buildings.	

Screenshot 2026-01-04 at 17.36.15

				Total, .	174 0 6	80 14 0	7 11 0	34 5 0
DRUMROOSE. (Ord. S. 19.)								
1	a	Patrick Gannon, John Maguire, .	Reps. Hugh Wallace, Same, .	Land, Miller's house, corn- mill & waste land, .	8 3 21	7 0 0	—	7 0 0
2	a	Rev. John O'Reilly,	Same, .	House, offices, and land,	0 1 32	—	8 0 0	8 0 0
	b	Bridget M'Govern,	Free,	House,	3 0 26	3 0 0	3 0 0	6 0 0
	c	Grave-yard,	No rent, (see Exemptions).		—	—	0 5 0	0 5 0
3	a	Joseph Reilly, .	Reps. Hugh Wallace,	Land,	8 1 34	2 10 0	—	2 10 0
4	a	Hugh Prior, . . .	Same,	Land;	0 1 24	0 5 0	—	0 5 0
	b	Hugh Prior, . . .	Same,	House, office, and land,	13 0 7	8 10 0	0 15 0	9 5 0
	c	John Mulligan, .	Hugh Prior, . . .	House,	—	—	0 5 0	0 5 0
5	a	Patrick Devine, .	Reps. Hugh Wallace,	House,	—	—	0 5 0	0 5 0
6	a	Owen Darcy, . . .	Same,	House, office, and land,	4 8 11	3 5 0	0 10 0	3 15 0
	b	Thomas Gormley, .	Same,	Land,	8 1 32	5 15 0	—	5 15 0
7	a	Felix King, . . .	Thomas Gormley, .	House and garden, .	0 0 25	0 2 0	0 8 0	0 10 0
8	a	Thomas Gormley, .	Reps. Hugh Wallace,	Ho., off., forge & land,	3 2 38	2 5 0	0 15 0	3 0 0
9	a	Patrick Short, . .	Same,	House, offices, and land,	10 3 30	7 0 0	0 15 0	8 5 0
10	a	John Reilly, . . .	Same,	Land,	0 3 23	0 10 0	—	—
	b	James Reilly, . .	Free,	House, office, and land,	3 2 38	2 15 0	0 5 0	3 0 0
11	a	Thomas Mackesson,	Reps. Hugh Wallace,	House,	—	—	0 5 0	0 5 0
	b	James Mackesson,	Same,	House, office, & land, }	16 0 15	5 12 0	0 10 0	6 2 0
	c	Thomas Mackesson,	Same,	House, office, & land, }	—	5 12 0	0 15 0	6 7 0
	d	James Mackesson,	Same,	Bog,	8 1 20	0 3 0	—	0 3 0
	e	Thomas Mackesson,	Same,	Land;	—	0 3 0	—	0 3 0
12	a	James Mackesson,	Same,	Land;	1 2 25	0 10 0	—	0 10 0
13	a	Daniel Kiernan, .	Same,	House and land, . .	16 0 1	10 15 0	0 5 0	0 10 0
14	a			Water,	4 0 30	—	—	11 0 0
				Total of Rateable Property,	105 2 1	66 2 0	10 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	10 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'

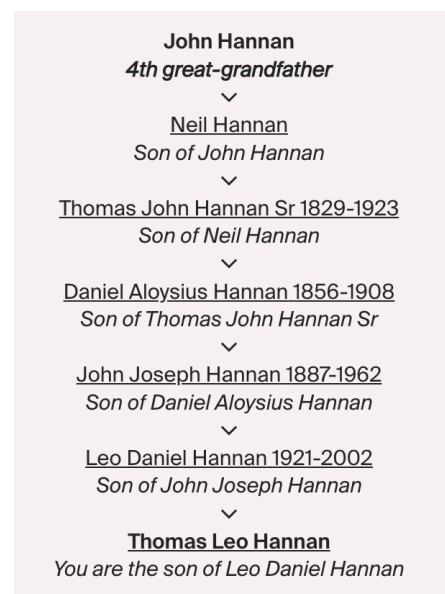
only serves to get us in the right area of Ulster, not the bullseye.

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.



A search of the Barony of Tullyhunco 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.

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Griffith's Valuation

The Primary Valuation was the first full-scale valuation of property in Ireland. It was overseen by Richard Griffith and published between 1847 and 1864. It is one of the most important surviving 19th century genealogical sources.

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

Results 1 to 3 of 3

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Click the **map** icon to see a Griffith's Valuation map

Results 1 to 3 of 3

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				

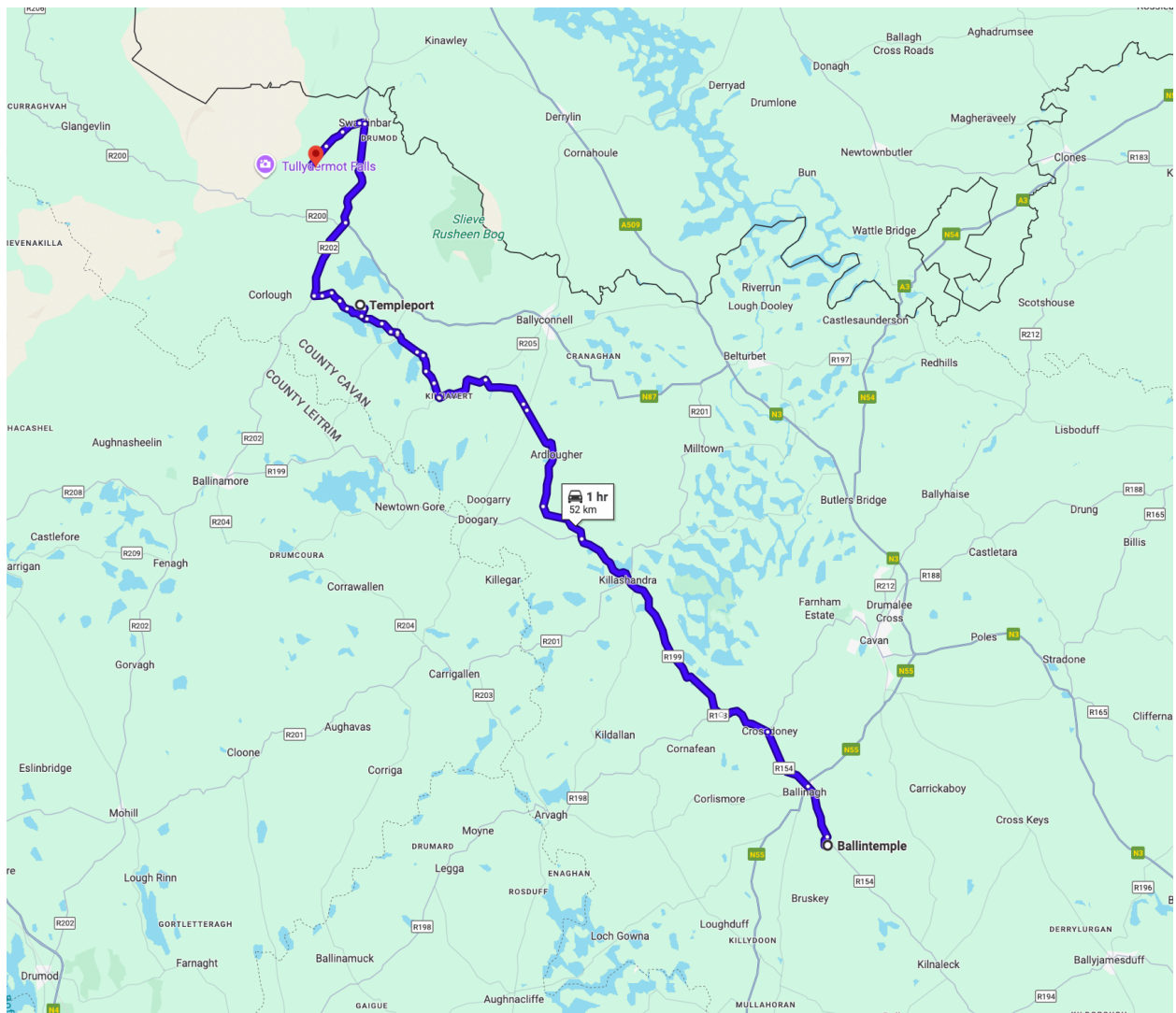
Results 1 to 3 of 3

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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

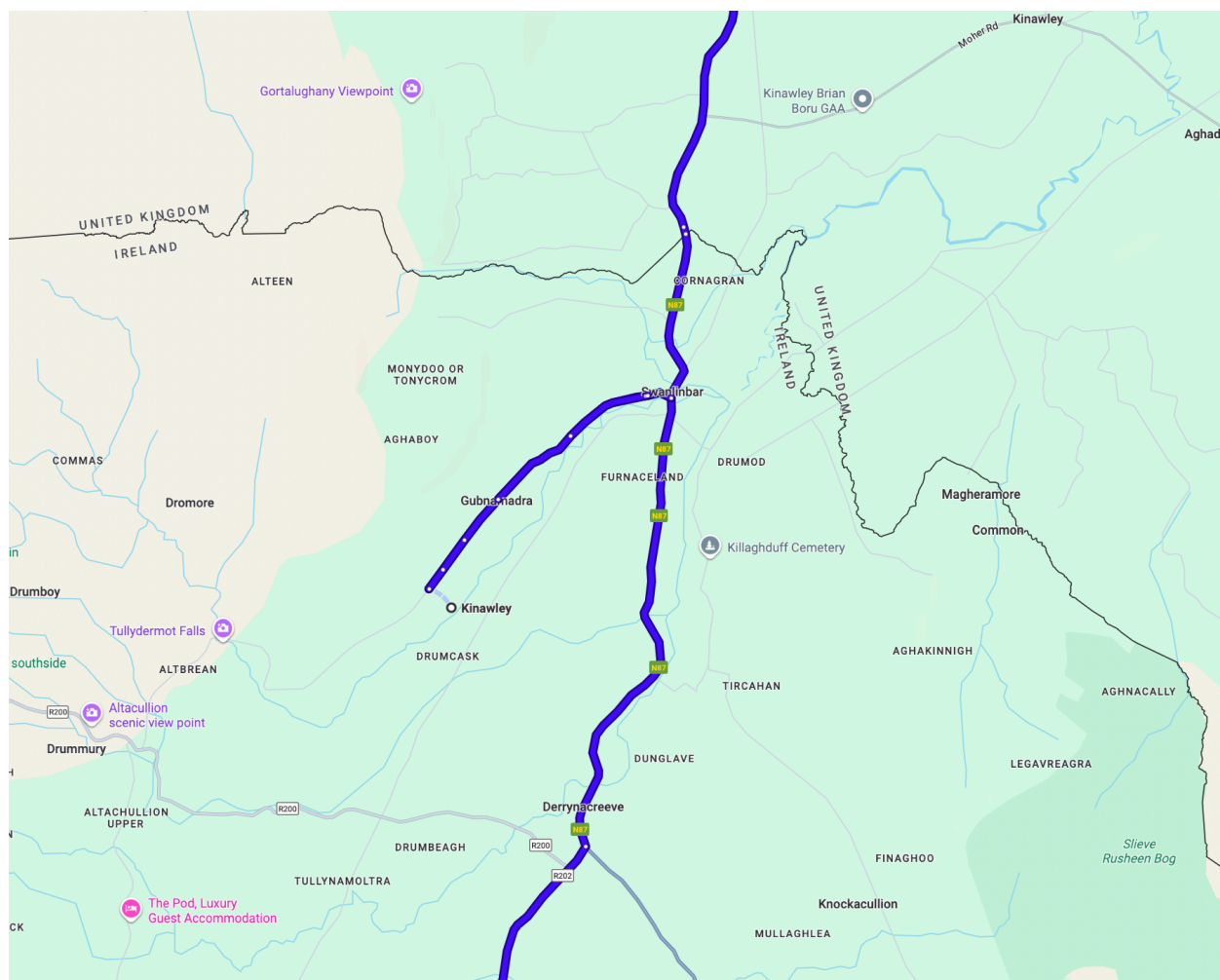
showing Griffith's Valuation entries for the barony, we see McKernans listed under both spellings. Within Tullyhaw itself, several appear, and across County Cavan there are nearly sixty entries when spelling variants are counted. It is difficult to imagine that none of these families connect to Mary.



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



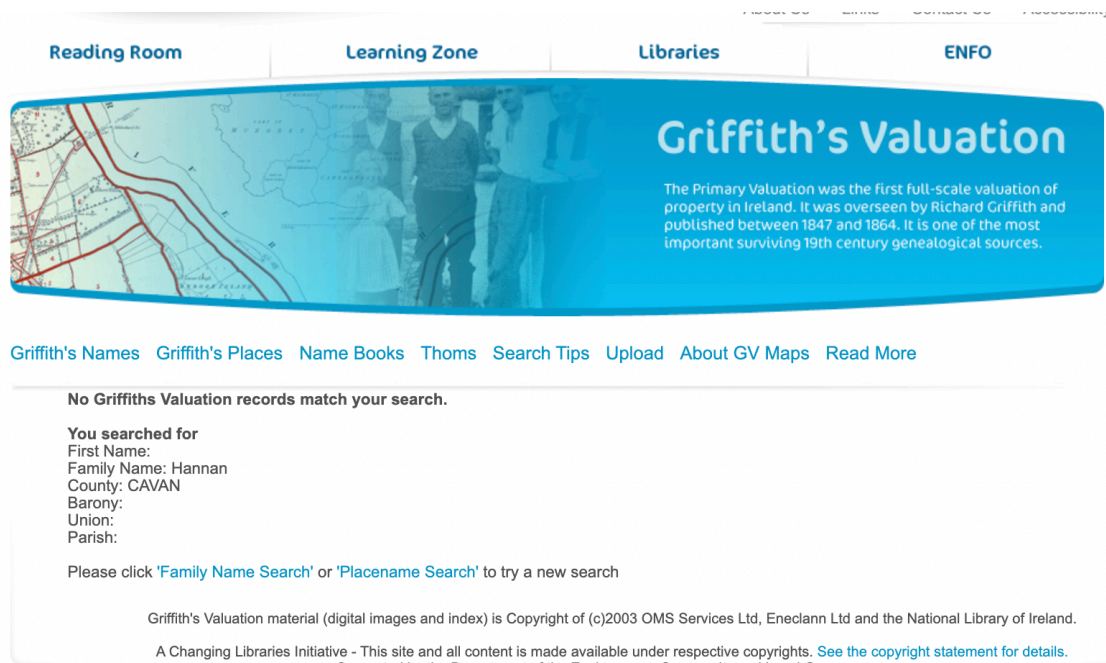




The Ireland UK border 9.6 km (6 miles) away. The parallel with the German borderland origins is remarkable to say the least. See: *Borderland Lives in 18th Century Germany*
<https://aletheus.com/2025/06/20/borderland-lives-from-18th-century-germany-hesse-bavaria-ancestry-family-history/>

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.



The screenshot shows the Griffith's Valuation website interface. At the top, there are navigation links: Reading Room, Learning Zone, Libraries, and ENFO. Below these is a large blue banner with the title "Griffith's Valuation" and a description: "The Primary Valuation was the first full-scale valuation of property in Ireland. It was overseen by Richard Griffith and published between 1847 and 1864. It is one of the most important surviving 19th century genealogical sources." Below the banner is a navigation bar with links: Griffith's Names, Griffith's Places, Name Books, Thoms, Search Tips, Upload, About GV Maps, and Read More. The main content area displays a search result: "No Griffiths Valuation records match your search." Below this, it shows the search criteria: "You searched for First Name: Family Name: Hannan County: CAVAN Barony: Union: Parish:". It then provides instructions: "Please click 'Family Name Search' or 'Placename Search' to try a new search". At the bottom, there is a copyright notice: "Griffith's Valuation material (digital images and index) is Copyright of (c)2003 OMS Services Ltd, Eneclann Ltd and the National Library of Ireland." and a statement: "A Changing Libraries Initiative - This site and all content is made available under respective copyrights. See the copyright statement for details. Supported by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government."

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.

The screenshot shows the Griffith's Valuation website interface. At the top, there are navigation links: About Us, Links, Contact Us, and Accessibility. Below these are four main menu items: Reading Room, Learning Zone, Libraries, and ENFO. A large blue banner features a map of Ireland and the title 'Griffith's Valuation'. The banner text states: 'The Primary Valuation was the first full-scale valuation of property in Ireland. It was overseen by Richard Griffith and published between 1847 and 1864. It is one of the most important surviving 19th century genealogical sources.' Below the banner, there is a search bar and a list of links: Griffith's Names, Griffith's Places, Name Books, Thoms, Search Tips, Upload, About GV Maps, and Read More. The search results section displays: 'No Griffiths Valuation records match your search.' Below this, it shows the search criteria: 'You searched for First Name: Family Name: Hannan County: FERMANAGH Barony: Union: Parish:'. A message suggests clicking 'Family Name Search' or 'Placename Search' to try a new search. At the bottom, there is a copyright notice: 'Griffith's Valuation material (digital images and index) is Copyright of (c)2003 OMS Services Ltd, Eneclann Ltd and the National Library of Ireland. A Changing Libraries Initiative - This site and all content is made available under respective copyrights. See the copyright statement for details. Supported by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.'

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.



[Griffith's Names](#)
[Griffith's Places](#)
[Name Books](#)
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[Search Tips](#)
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 Click the **details** icon to see all the details of that valuation record and any user-contributed additional materials.
 Click the **page** icon to see a scan of the original document page.
 Click the **map** icon to see a Griffith's Valuation map

Results 1 to 20 of 70 [\[next\]](#)

Occupier Surname	Occupier Forename	County	Parish	Details	Original Page	Map Views	Upload your content for this record
HANNAN	JOHN	ANTRIM	ANTRIM				
HANNAN	DANIEL	ANTRIM	SHILVODAN, GRANGE OF				
HANNAN	THOMAS	ANTRIM	SHILVODAN,				

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 McCann,	Same,	House,	—	—	0 10 0	0
d	John Lavery,	Same,	House,	—	—	0 10 0	0
e	Thomas McGlelland,	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
	Margaret Hannan,	Same,	House and land,	1 1 0	1 10 0	1 0 0	1
	Henry Mallon,	Same,	House, offices, and land,	14 1 0	17 0 0	1 10 0	18
	Hill Smith,	Same,	House, offices, and land,	34 2 25	40 0 0	3 10 0	43
	Richard Cousins,	Hill Smith,	Land,	18 1 25	22 0 0	—	50
83 a	Phoebe Mulholland,	Same,	House, offices, and land,	17 2 15	22 0 0	8 0 0	2
- b	James Forsythe,	Same,	House and garden,	0 0 35	0 10 0	1 15 0	0
- c	John Doogan,	Same,	House,	—	—	0 5 0	0
- d	Thomas Morris,	Same,	House,	—	—	0 5 0	0
- e	William Burns,	Marquis of Hertford,	House and garden,	0 0 25	0 5 0	0 10 0	0
a	Alice Burns,	Same,	House, office, and land,	1 0 0	1 10 0	1 0 0	2
b	John Best,	Same,	House and sm. garden,	—	—	0 5 0	0
c	James E. Best,	Same,	House, office, and land,	1 3 25	2 5 0	1 10 0	3
d	Eliza Lonsdale,	Same,	House and garden,	0 0 25	0 10 0	2 5 0	1
e	Anne Best,	James E. Best,	House,	—	—	0 5 0	0
f	Thomas Little,	Marquis of Hertford,	House and land,	1 0 15	1 7 0	0 8 0	1
a	Unoccupied,	Same,	Land,	0 3 35	8 15 0	—	8
b	Mary Anne Martin,	Thomas Little,	House,	—	—	1 0 0	1
		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, & 68.)			2.
1	a	William J. Seston,	Marquis of Hertford,	House, offices, and land,	13
—	b	James M'Cann,	William J. Seston,	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
6 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	GLENVY		  	 	
MCKERNAN	WILLIAM	ANTRIM	GLENVY		  	 	
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.

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**