

CHAPTER 4 – FLAN O'CLERY 1600-1665

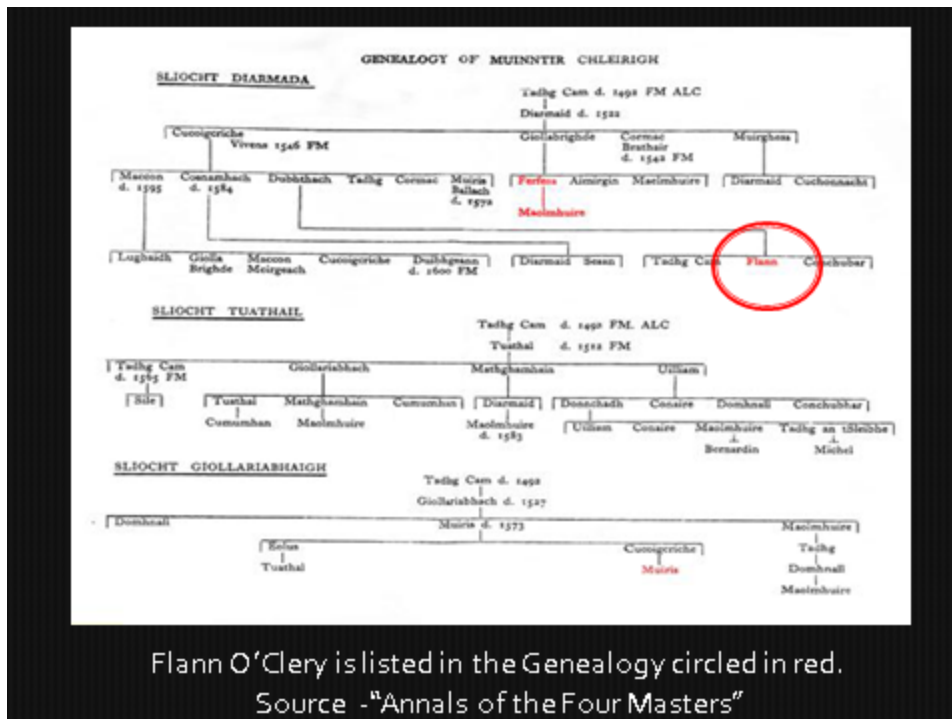
Madeleine Cleary



In 2015 I was asked to give a talk about my ancestor Flan O'Clery who was born circa 1600 and died in 1665. The purpose of my talk was to give an idea of how the O'Clerys lived during this time- that is, those O'Clerys who were not famous annalists and lay brothers.

Family Background

Genealogy of Muintir Chléirigh)



In previous chapters I have set the background story which helps to place him in context. You can see, from this slide, that Flan's great great grandfather Tadhg Cam O'Clery who died in 1492 had three sons – Diarmaid, Tuathal and Giollariabhach. Diarmaid's family was called Sliocht Diarmada and was considered to be one of the senior branches of the clan. Flan, son of Dubhthach, was Diarmaid's great grandson. He was a first cousin of Lughaidh O'Clery who was the last hereditary Ollamh to the O'Donnell chieftains and who died around 1630. Flan was a third cousin of Brother Michael O'Clery and Conaire O'Clery, and a second cousin of Cú Choigríche, who were three of the four scribes who compiled the Annals.

So Flan was fortunate to be born into a highly respected and privileged branch of the O'Clery family. He benefitted from this prosperity and privilege during his lifetime. Crucially, he would also have benefitted from the access his family connections gave him to information about strategic thinking, both nationally and abroad. This knowledge would have helped to inform his decisions since there was so much change and turbulence during his lifetime. I hope that my research shows that he proved himself to be pragmatic and politically savvy as he did not squander his inheritance, despite living through some very challenging times. On the contrary, he consolidated this prosperity to ensure the future of his family. This transition presented enormous challenges to him, as a senior member of the O'Clery family, in his role to provide food and protection for his family, his clan, and his chieftain. Flan owned and farmed land at Drumacrin in Bundoran. Flan was an elite swordsman as part of his responsibilities involved fighting for the O'Donnell chieftains and defending their territories and cattle.

Flan's Physical and Social Environment

As I said earlier, Flan was born around 1600 and he died in 1665. The fact he lived for roughly 65 years is very interesting in itself, considering that in those times people often did not have long lives, normally being cut down prematurely through illness or warfare. So he must have been a robustly healthy man. We do not know what Flan looked like but I like to think that he would have matched the general description of the Irish males that was given by Captain Francisco de Cuellar, shipwrecked from the Spanish Armada who lived for almost a year in the North West of Ireland. De Cuellar said that *'the men are all large-bodied and of handsome features and limbs; and as active as the roe deer'*.

Today, most of you would have driven here by road. During Flan's life time roads were mere tracks. Flan would have travelled by horse mainly but he would also have sailed by boat on rivers and the sea to get from place to place locally and to travel abroad. Currachs and small rowing boats would have been used for local coastal trips, and sailing ships plied their trade between the busy ports of Ballyshannon and Killybegs to Continental Europe and beyond. These ships brought luxuries such as silk, wine and brandy to Ireland, and provided a means of transport and communication to and from Europe.

Flan, as an educated member of the O'Clery clan, would have been literate and would have spoken Latin, Gaelic, and some English and was well-travelled. I am sure he would have had many long and interesting conversations with his cousins Lughaidh, Micheal and other kinsmen, about the changing situation in Ireland. He would have kept horses, cattle and hogs and used turf for fuel. He and his family would have eaten potatoes, oaten bread, meat, fish, butter, and bacon and drunk whiskey and beer. Their clothes would have been made of wool and linen and animal skins.

Flan's first cousin Lughaidh lived in Kilbarron Castle, a tower house which was a small fortified castle. While Flan lived on ancestral land it is unclear the type of dwelling he had. I would assume, given his status, that his dwelling would have been substantial to reflect his place in Gaelic society. Land was very important to the family and they lived off the land. There is no doubt that cattle-raising was the basis of the rural economy in Gaelic Ulster.

We do not know how many times Flan was married, nor do we know how many children he had, but we do know that he had at least one son Conor, and two daughters Anna and Catty, which probably stood for Catherine.

The Political Landscape

Having been born circa 1600, Flan's life straddled the end of the old Gaelic world and the successful colonisation of Ireland by the English. So, as I said earlier, he would have witnessed and lived through tumultuous changes and turbulent times politically. I think it is useful to give a brief overview of the political landscape and challenges that would have impacted on Flan going about the business of living and protecting his family in 17th century Ireland. When he was born circa 1600, the process of plantation by the English in Ireland was already taking shape under

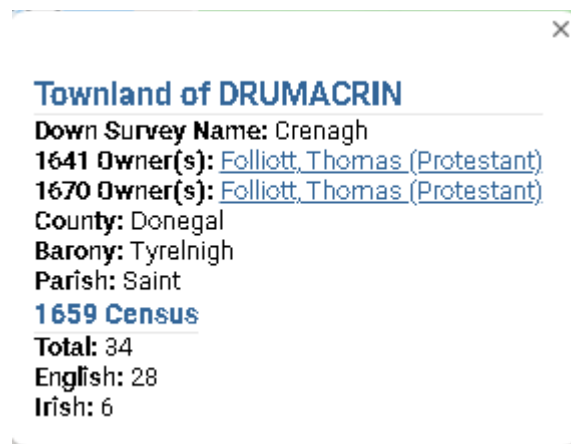
Elizabeth 1st of England. In 1601, a year after he was born, the Irish and Spanish were defeated at Kinsale. This was a catastrophic turning point for the O'Donnell and O'Neill chieftains and their supporters, including the O'Clerys. The Chieftains' power bases were irreparably weakened and they fled to Spain. It was the end of the Gaelic order and paved the way for the Plantation of Ulster, the most ambitious programme of confiscation and colonisation ever planned in Western Europe. Three years into Flan's life, in 1603, came the death of Elizabeth 1st in England. During Flan's lifetime, he would experience the consequences of the reigns of three other British monarchs- King James 1 (1603-25), King Charles 1 (1625-49), and King Charles II (1660-85). He would also endure the impact of the British Commonwealth (1649-60) most cruelly administered by Oliver Cromwell in Ireland. In Spain in 1598, Philip III had taken over from his father who had left him with an immense debt from waging wars to protect his empire. The new king was extravagant and dismissed his father's experienced and loyal advisers. Although a close ally of Catholic Ireland, the Low Countries, not Ireland, would always be Spain's strategic priority.

We don't know much about Flan's early days but I would assume that he belonged to the Gaelic military class –a group who appear to have acted as farmers, but also as horsemen, expert swordsmen and light infantry for a Gaelic chieftain, in Flan's case an O'Donnell, when the need arose. Most likely, as Flan belonged to a senior branch of the O'Clery family, he was a horseman and an elite swordsman. With the breakdown of the Gaelic system, the position of these elite swordsmen and professional retainers became redundant and they had little choice but to make their living in foreign armies in order to supplement their incomes. Flan is first mentioned in *Wild Geese in Spanish Flanders 1582-1700* by Brendan Jennings as *Don Florencio Cleri* in Brussels. During the period 1621-22, Flan was enlisted as part of a levy or recruitment drive in Ireland for the Spanish army of Flanders in the Spanish Netherlands. He received a special grant of two Crowns monthly by virtue of a letter from King Philip III of Spain to Archduke Albert the King's Deputy in the Spanish Netherlands. The letter from the King stated "*his ancestors having served in the Catholic cause*".

In 1622 he received a further special grant of 2 Crowns monthly for serving in the Irish Infantry so this service also gave him an opportunity to make some extra money. He would have spoken Latin initially as a means of communication but no doubt became proficient in Spanish. So we know that Flan fought for the Spanish. What we don't know is if he brought his family abroad with him, if he really

wanted to leave Ireland, or if he had no choice and was enlisted into the Spanish fighting forces as payback for support the Spanish had given to the Ulster chieftains.

Given official hostility to soldiers returning from foreign armies it was extremely difficult for a soldier to return to Ireland. Official leave was almost impossible – in the army of Flanders it was granted only on three conditions – an incurable illness or wound, the taking up of an inheritance or the fulfilment of a religious vocation.



This leads me to believe that Flan was invalided out of the army as he did return home to Donegal, because in 1630 he is listed as a tenant in Fayagh in the barony of Tyrhugh and his cousin Morris was a tenant in Coolmar and Keeran. As you see the Drumacrin townland was given to Thomas Folliott

However, Flan returned to a very changed and dangerous political and social environment. Now, instead of being a landowner, he was forced to become a tenant as part of the Ulster plantation. Despite this, he and other relatives continued the old Gaelic system of living in family groups for protection and sustenance. Flan and his extended family group would have ensured that Brother Michael and the other scholars were fed, watered, accommodated and protected during their time in Donegal.

Fayagh Tenant List 1630

Manuscript P/25/124-TCD

Carrigrohane 2 ballib.	Corn: M. Costa	22-17-0
Ballysuddilly 1/2 R.	Francis V. Stagh	30-10-0
Ballymichael 1 R.	Conagher M. Gilligan	20-10-0
Ballymichael 1 R.	William O. Clery	9-10-0

In the same Tenant list of 1630, I noticed that John Richardson Bishop of Ardagh represented the children of an English planter Mr Francis Brassey who were awarded tenancies at Rosnonlagh-dorinish (Rossnowlagh), Ballymicward and

Rosnowlagh 1.2 R.	The children of M ^r Francis Brassey.	
Dereenice 2/3 of 12 R.		
Ballymicward 6 Ballibors.	John Bp. of Ardagh: And The children of M ^r F. Brassey.	
Carrigrohane 2 ballib.		1-0-0
Lillogh 2 ballib.	The children of M ^r F. Brassey	
Rabbalshanagh 2 acres mill		

Rabbalshanagh. These lands incorporated Kilbarron Castle, the ancient home of the O'Clery clan.

In 1634 a lease which had been granted to deceased father Mr Francis Brassey by the Bishop of Raphoe was extended to Francis Brassey junior on reaching his majority at 16, so I would hazard a guess that young Francis was born circa 1618.

It must have been a bitter pill for Flan to swallow, to see the castle of his first cousin Lughaidh, usurped and gifted to an English planter Francis Brassey. But swallow it he did. My research seems to indicate that not only did he learn to accept this change but he built up a positive relationship with the young Francis Brassey in order to blend in with the new ruling class. It looks as though Flan took Francis Brassey under his wing and protected him in his youth. It must have been a respectful relationship and mutually beneficial as Francis in his will dated 1687 refers to Flan's daughters Anna and Catty as his 'foster' sisters.

Harvest failures in the late 1630s together with rising imposition of harsh rules and regulations of central government and an economic downturn affected all

groups in Ulster and Flan's family would have suffered. Harvests in 1640 and 1641 were bad. There was also a shortage of labour since many Scottish settlers in Ulster had fled to Scotland to escape the Dublin Government's penal legislation which wanted them to become Protestant and English speaking, whereas they were Presbyterian and spoke Gaelic. A large army raised by Dublin for service against the Covenanters in Scotland was also quartered in Ulster. The result was an economic crisis.

On 23rd October, 1641, the Ulster Irish rose in revolt. In the weeks that followed, thousands of British colonists had been driven out; thousands more had been murdered; and about two thirds of the nine-county province had fallen to the rebels. It is believed that Kilbarron Castle was finally destroyed at this time. The rising was ultimately unsuccessful for the Irish.

However, there was to be no respite from the violence of war. Cromwell arrived in Ireland on 15th August 1649. He made it clear that he intended to avenge the 1641 massacres in Ulster. He did so through military victories, and the Commonwealth's draconian legislation that followed them ultimately ensured the recovery and reinvigoration of the British colonisation of Ulster.

We do not know what, if any part, Flan took during all these upheavals, but we do know that he survived!

In the Hearth Tax Money Rolls in 1661 and 1665, Flan is listed as living in Parkhill (then known as Kilcarbery) in the parish of Kilbarron. He had one hearth i.e. one chimney! His second cousins Fearfasa, Myles and Morris are also mentioned. In those times, having one chimney was a sign of prosperity. Also listed in the 1665 hearth roll is Francis Brassey, Drumore townland, who had two hearths which meant two chimneys on the house.

Parish of Drumhome

Francis Breassy

of Drumore 2

John Wissell.	"	"	"	Edward Jones.	"	"	"
William Barnott.	"	"	"	James Bard.	"	"	"
William Stevens.	"	"	"	Patrick O'Queen, of Balline managh	"	"	"
Robert Henderson, of Kilsarney.	"	"	"	Morie O'Leary.	"	"	"
William Anderson,	"	"	"	Deale Mr G. Clespich.	"	"	"
James O'Clery.	"	"	"	Connogher O'Fallagher.	"	"	"
Morie Conelly.	"	"	"	Bryan O'Diver.	"	"	"
Conn? O'Clery.	"	"	"	Richard O'Shanaghan.	"	"	"
William Rothcliffe.	"	"	"	Hugh O'Morea.	"	"	"
Phelomy O'Mulkerran,	"	"	"	William Fletcher.	"	"	"
Roger Conelly.	"	"	"	Francis Parle.	"	"	"
Flan O'Leary.	"	"	"	Phelomy O'Boyle.	"	"	"
Farfary O'Leary.	"	"	"	William Brennan.	"	"	"
Inyles O'Leary.	"	"	"	Robert Ferrott.	"	"	"
Donell O'Kernan.	"	"	"	Donell O'Morea.	"	"	"
John O'Gomes.	"	"	"	Ralph Sharpe.	"	"	"

Flan's Death

And so we come to the end of Flan's life, lived during a tumultuous time in Irish history.

Flan died in 1665, we do not know how, and was buried in Assaroe Cemetery Ballyshannon – Grave no 353 Section 3. His funeral service was probably conducted by his kinsman, James O'Clery, who was Parish Priest of Kilbarron parish from 1655-1704

His headstone, which was erected by his fifteen-year old son Conor, is the oldest visible headstone in the cemetery. It is a huge flat stone of rectangular shape composed of two separate squares which, when pieced together, form the whole headstone.

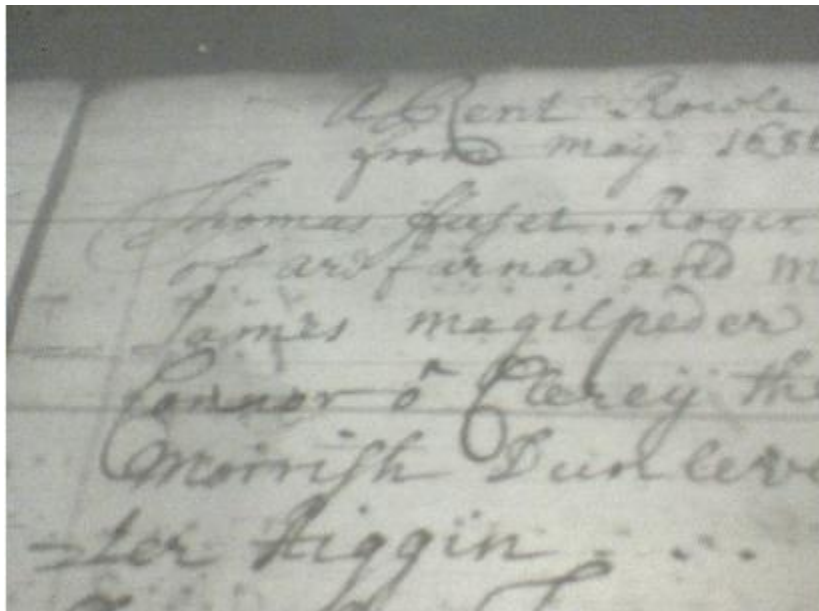
Gravestone inscription

The inscription is written around the edge of the stone. The inscription is in English and this may have been a requirement of burial at that time. Interestingly the centre is filled with an elaborate design of the old Celtic key-pattern motif. These circles, cup marks and simple spirals dated back to the Stone Age heritage. I like to think that this was Conor's way of communicating Flan's roots and status in Gaelic Ireland. The size of the tombstone would suggest that Flan managed to retain respect and standing in Donegal. The fact his son erected this also suggests that he was proud of his father and that they had a respectful, loving relationship.



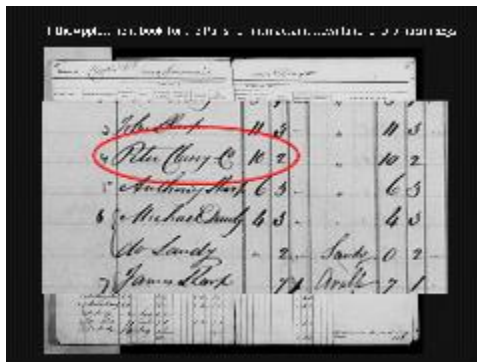
There are many gaps in information about how Flan negotiated his way through the many challenges faced by him and his family. However, based on what I was able to find out about both Flan and the times he lived through, I have come to the conclusion that Flan was a survivor, a linguist, politically savvy, and courageous at a time in our history when survival was everything. He could have stayed on the Continent, like so many others, but he came back to Donegal. Obviously, he wanted to retain the family's birthright and presence on O'Clery land and he did so both as a landowner and a tenant. He also wanted to pass on the legacy of land to his family.

He succeeded in this as his son Conor was taken under the care of Francis Brassey and later became his agent and receiver. He must have been a comparatively well-off young man as he was also appointed one of the Commissioners for Supplies for Co Donegal (Tax Collector) by King James 11 who ruled from 1685-1688.



Due to the Williamite wars, Conor had to flee his lands for six months and take refuge with relatives near Castlebar, Co Mayo. Despite the fact that his Donegal holdings including Ramore (Rathmore) were taken over by new tenants, Conor is listed as a defendant in a hearing between landlords William Connolly/Thomas Poe/ Trinity College Dublin in 1695 which dragged on till 1702 as he was still liable for the rent for his period of absence

After the Court Hearing Conor negotiated a new arrangement with William Connolly. It did not state in the manuscript what the arrangement was. This ensured the ongoing lease of lands to O'Clerys in Ardfarna and Drumacrin after Conor's death in 1720. This is a grey area as early Connolly estate records list major tenants only. We have to fast forward to 1771 onwards where it states in the rent rolls for the Connolly estate that a Daniel O'Clery and partners (including Con O'Clery, according to family oral history) followed in 1783 by another Flan and Peter, renewed 10 year leases for Ardfarna and Drumacrin that dated back to **30/4/1702**. The date 1702 leads me to believe that Conor agreed these leases as part of his new arrangement, as a tenant, with William Connolly.



Tithe Applotment book 1832

The name Flan carried down through the generations. Yet another Flan was born in 1814.

In 1899, this Flan's 17 year old grandson Peter inherited this very same land in Drumacrin, Ardfarna and Rathmore which amounted to 100 acres in total. Peter was my grandfather. In 1946, Peter's son Joe, my father, inherited this land.

I think that my ancestor Flan, the subject of this presentation, would have derived great satisfaction from this. It would have vindicated his life's struggle and achievement to preserve and pass on his family's birthright into the 20th century. I like to think that Flan would have been proud that the land was still in the name of a Cleary and that it had gone from freehold (as an O'Donnell grant) to tenancy and reverted back to full ownership by our family.

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