

THE O'HANLONS

The surname O'Hanlon has a long association with the County Armagh area. Up until the time of the Plantation the O'Hanlons were among the most notable Gaelic clans of Ulster. From around the 12th Century until the early 17th Century the chief of the O'Hanlons, 'The O'Hanlon', was Lord of Orier. Orier was then much bigger than the barony that exists in Co. Armagh today and covered most of eastern Co. Armagh stretching into north Louth ¹, where the surname is also common to this day. However, over a period of about 90 years, roughly 1560-1650, the status of the O'Hanlon dynasty was drastically reduced. Through stages of confiscation during this period, the ancestral lands of the O'Hanlons were lost to the English crown and the former rulers were replaced by English and Scottish settlers or 'planters'. The O'Hanlon headquarters at Tandragee was lost to the incoming St. John family by 1610 and by 1653 the last of the O'Hanlon landowners in Co. Armagh was dispossessed during the Cromwellian confiscation. It is against this backdrop that we see by the 1670s the most notable O'Hanlon of his time, Redmond, not playing the role of a Gaelic chieftain but leading a life of crime as an outlaw ² [known in Ireland at this time as a Tory and later Rapparee] on the highways and byways of County Armagh and beyond.

CHRONOLOGY

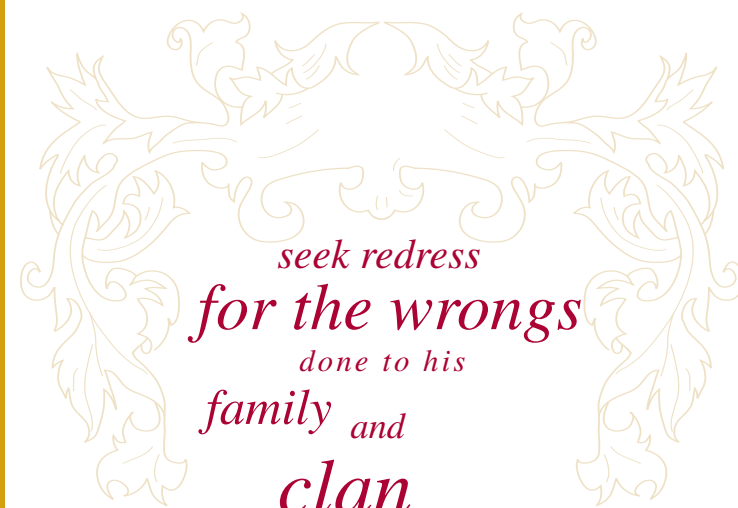
- 938 - First mention of surname O'Hanlon [Ui Anluain] in the Annals of Four Masters.
- 1111 - The O'Hanlon chief is described as Lord of Oneilland [north Armagh].
- 1246 - By this time the O'Hanlons have moved south. Murrough O'Hanlon is described as Lord of Orier.
- 1442 - O'Hanlon chieftain submits to English Viceroy.
- 1542 - The last abbess at the monastery of St. Monnina in Killeavy is named O'Hanlon.
- 1566 - The O'Hanlons side with the O'Neill clan in an insurgency against the crown.



THE O'HANLON'S *lose their lands and status*

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| 1569 - The first Act of Confiscation. Much of O'Hanlon land is granted to a Thomas Chatterton. | 1610 - St. John family move into Tandragee castle, the former O'Hanlon seat of power. |
| 1571 - Chatterton is given a royal commission to 'subdue the natives' in O'Hanlon territory. | 1641 - O'Hanlons join the rebellion lead by Phelim O'Neill and recapture Tandragee briefly. |
| 1570s - Chatterton is unsuccessful in Orier. He forfeits the land back to the crown. | 1643 - The Battle of Clones. One Ardall O'Hanlon is injured fighting for Owen Roe O'Neill. |
| 1580s - 90s Sir Eochaidh O'Hanlon, head of the O'Hanlon's, makes a series of submissions to the crown and is regranted his lands on condition of loyalty. From this time Eochaidh alternately sides with the crown or with the O'Neill insurgency as best suits O'Hanlon interests. | 1653 - Act of satisfaction [Cromwellian confiscation] the last of the O'Hanlon landowners in Co. Armagh is dispossessed in on going retribution for the 1641 Rebellion. |
| 1598 - Battle of Yellow Ford. Turlough O'Hanlon fights with Hugh O'Neill against the English. | 1662 - One Hugh O'Hanlon is unable to recover his lands in the Act of Settlement. |
| 1604 - Sir Eochaidh is in financial difficulty. He sells 7 town lands near Newry. | 1669 - A Loughlin O'Hanlon of Killeavy is sentenced to death for stealing a horse [but is pardoned]. |
| 1608 - Sir Eochaidh's son Eochaidh Og joins the O'Doherty rebel lion. Because of this he forfeits his right to succeed his father as 'The O'Hanlon - Lord of Orier' and is exiled to Sweden. Eochaidh senior will be the last O'Hanlon Lord of Orier. Eochaidh is forced to leave the Tandragee headquarters and is given a pension of £80 per year for life. He receives the last in 1623. | 1674 - First appearance of Redmond O'Hanlon in history. He is proclaimed an outlaw [Tory] and a reward of £10 is offered for his capture. |

Photograph: 'Tandragee Castle' Courtesy of Tayto [NI] Ltd



REDMOND O'HANLON *villian or hero?*

The family tree of Redmond O'Hanlon cannot now be traced, but it is not unreasonable to assume that he was descended from one of the many brothers or sons of Sir Eochaidh O'Hanlon the last Lord of Orier ³. As such he may have viewed himself as the rightful ruler of Orier and embarked on a life of crime to "seek redress for the wrongs done to his family and clan." ⁴. Historical evidence about Redmond O'Hanlon is scant indeed, and largely written by those who were trying to catch him. They had little interest in his motives, which cannot now be determined. However, as Joseph Canning asserts, the link between land settlement and the phenomenon of Toryism in Ireland is generally accepted by historians ⁵. Oral tradition has preserved the memory of Redmond O'Hanlon as a type of 'Robin Hood' figure who only robbed from the rich and who helped the poor. Below are some of the facts that can be gleaned from historical sources.

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Redmond O’Hanlon AT LARGE

“earned unequal notoriety as highwayman”

1674

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Redmond O’Hanlon along with several others [including O’Hanlons] is proclaimed an outlaw and a reward of £10 is offered for his capture.

1676

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Redmond is again ‘proclaimed’. An award is offered for his capture, this time dead or alive!

May 1679

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Landlords of Armagh, Down & Monaghan take joint action. They hire 30 mercenaries at 9p per day for 3 months to hunt down the O’Hanlon gang. The reward is £30 for Redmond and £20 for others.

Sept 1679

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Although Redmond is not there, gang members murder Henry St. John, landlord and committed Tory-hunter at Tandragee. [St. John’s son earlier died from a fever incurred whilst hunting the gang]

Late 1679

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Letters tell how Redmond O’Hanlon operates as “a kind of separate sovereignty in three or four counties” and how he raises more in protection money than the King raises in taxes in the area.

1680

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Redmond O’Hanlon mentioned in London press as having “earned unequal notoriety as a highwayman in Ireland”. [Letter from a Sir Francis Brewster].

Jan 1680

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A proclamation that the families of the outlaws would be jailed unless they are captured or killed, is issued.

Jan 1680

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Viceroy Ormond takes notice. He offers £100 for the head of Redmond O’Hanlon and £50 for his brother Loughlin.

June 1680

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Seven outlaws are killed but again Redmond escapes.

March 1681

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Lucas of Dromantine is given the command against Redmond O’Hanlon. Lucas enlists help of Art O’Hanlon. The bounty for Redmond is raised to £200.

April 1681

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Redmond O’Hanlon is killed by Art O’Hanlon [who infiltrated the gang for this purpose] near Hilltown, Co. Down. Art is paid £200 and Lucas is given a command in the English army.

The ever increasing rewards on offer and measures employed demonstrate the frustration of the authorities and their determination to end the outlaws ‘reign of terror’. He evaded capture for over 8 years because of his own cunning and thanks to the protection of the common people.

IN FOLK MEMORY

Redmond O’Hanlon

Many stories survive about the exploits, cunning and ‘near shaves’ of Redmond O’Hanlon. These include tales of how he often swapped his horses’ shoes to avoid being tracked and how his men wore reversible jackets to appear like redcoat soldiers as the need arose. Others tell of cunning robberies such as that of a landlord of Mullagbane [see below] and magnanimous gestures to the poor. It can not be determined if these are fact or fiction and as Marshall points out, the figure Redmond O’Hanlon has so captured the popular imagination that he may have been credited with the deeds of other less well known figures.⁶

Redmond O’Hanlon IN THIS AREA

1. Born near Poyntzpass in the townland of Aughantaraghan in 1640, according to a pamphlet produced anonymously in 1682 called “The Life and Death of the incomparable Tory, Count Redmond O’Hanlon”.*

2. According to Stephen Dunford who dates Redmond’s birth at 1620 he fought at the Battle of Benburb 1646 on the Irish side⁷. Most historians agree there is little reason to doubt the DOB given in ‘Life and Death’ in which case he could not have fought at Benburb as he was much too young.

3. Redmond was employed by George Acheson of Markethill and was sacked for trying to sell a stolen horse which he had tried to disguise by attaching a false tail.*

4. Redmond escaped from Armagh jail by trickery.*

5. Slieve Gullion area was Redmond’s main base. One tradition states he was born here but there may be confusion with gang member Turlough O’Hanlon from nearby Annacloughmullion.

6. One anecdote relates how Redmond robbed a wealthy landlord from Mullagbane by getting his army escort drunk and encouraging them to empty their guns by firing celebratory volleys in the air after which his gang emerged to relieve them of their wealth and uniforms⁸.

7. Another story tells how Redmond was outfoxed near Jonesborough by a young man who threw what later turned out to be an empty purse into a bog and made off with Redmond’s horse as he tried to retrieve the loot⁹.

8. Glen Woods south of Poyntzpass was another base of Redmond’s. Letters tell how it was cut down in 1679 to prevent him from hiding there.

9. Tandragee, the former residence of O’Hanlon chieftains was the scene of the shooting of Henry St. John, landlord and committed ‘Tory-hunter’, by members of Redmond’s gang in 1679. Although not present this earned Redmond unprecedented notoriety and the hunt for him really began in earnest.

10. Eight Mile Bridge near Hilltown, Co. Down was the scene in 1681 of the killing of Redmond O’Hanlon by Art O’Hanlon [possibly the foster brother of Redmond] who had infiltrated Redmond’s gang for this purpose.

11. Ballynabeck graveyard is the supposed resting place of Redmond O’Hanlon’s headless corpse. After his death his head was placed on a spike at Downpatrick jail as a warning to others.

⁶Information given in the anonymous pamphlet published in 1682 entitled “The life and death of the Incomparable Tory, Count Redmond O’Hanlon”