

Towey Origin at Ballaghaderreen

Family Legends Provided by Irish Cousins in Ireland To Richard E. Towey (OR) in 1980's

Version 1:

Peter Towey, Stockport, England, who was born and raised in Barnaboy Townland, near Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon, wrote this to me in 1989:

About 300 years ago, our ancestors were chased out of Ulster by anti-Catholic gangs. Their name was O'Neil. One man and his seven sons settled in Barnaboy. He was known as "Thuffy O'Neil" meaning the Banished O'Neil. After a period the O'Neil was dropped and he was known as "Thuffy". The authorities [English of course] found it difficult to pronounce so it became Towey. They were weavers by trade and indeed I have seen some of the tools of that trade in my life time. Rita [Peter's sister, Margaret McGreevy of Ballaghaderreen] has an implement known as a "scotching block" found in our house behind one of the roof beams. I'm sure it's still in existence. It seems they grew flax and processed it to Irish linen. I expect they done a bit of farming as a side line. But it's all rather vague.

Version 2:

Mrs. Kathleen Walsh, Foxford, Co. Mayo, who also grew up in Barnaboy, was told this version by Padraic Towey of Barnaboy, 1847-1940:

In the 17th Century, one of the O'Neills of Tyrone lived in Co. Armagh. His name was Tuatach O'Neill. He had seven sons. Tuatach, his sons, and relatives carried on guerrilla warfare against the English Lords and ex-army men who had got large grants of land in that area. Eventually, Tuatach was killed and his sons moved southwards until they reached the lands of Lord Strickland [actually Viscount Dillon; Strickland was his overseer in the mid-19th century] in the Ballaghaderreen region. Strickland being a Catholic [Strickland was; the various Lords Dillon were not, at least after the 17th century] gave the seven brothers some land in Barnaboy and in Crennaun. They settled down as tenants of Lord Strickland, married and raised families.

The brothers' names were Martin, Edward, Denis, Owen (or Eoin), Michael, Thomas and Sean. Because they wanted to lead a comparatively peaceful life, they abandoned the name O'Neill and adopted their father's name as surname, O'Tuathaigh (Towey). It was a common name in Ireland at the time.

Version 3:

Michael (Martin) Towey, a farmer of Barnaboy and acknowledged by many in Ballaghaderreen as the local authority on our origins, told us the following in July 1981:

The Toweyes were originally O'Neills from Ulster, who had to drop their surname when they arrived in Barnaboy because it was too controversial for the local English rulers of the area. Our O'Neill ancestor was the brother or nephew of the great Hugh O'Neill of Tyrone. Towey is derived from "Tohaig O'Neill" – the "banished O'Neill", which would originally have been pronounced "Toe Hoe." Our O'Neill ancestor had seven hefty sons, and he chose to settle in the wilderness of Barnaboy because he thought it was so poor that no one would ever want to move him again. The land passed to Lord Dillon's ownership at Cromwell's time.

Remarks By Genealogist Richard E. Towey:

A member of the O'Neill family was indeed transplanted by Oliver Cromwell from Co. Tyrone to the Ballaghaderreen area. His name was Turlough McArt oge O'Neill, and he was the grandson of Turlough Luineach O'Neill, "The O'Neill" from 1567 to 1593. The younger Turlough was actually transplanted twice by the English: (1) Following the seizure of Ulster, his family's lands near Newtown were given to Scots in 1610-14 and he was assigned the manor of Caslane in Carnteel near Dungannon, and (2) After Turlough served as a Colonel in the Irish army during the revolt of the 1640s, he was ordered to resettle in Kilmovee Parish in 1656 on lands taken from the English Viscount Dillon who supported the royalists. But King Charles II restored the Dillon lands in the 1660s, and leading members of Turlough's family were among the "Wild Geese" on the European Continent. Some present descendants are said to live in Majorca. We are presumably lesser members of the O'Neills who remained mostly as Dillon tenants until many were able to purchase their farms in the early 1900s. But is there any evidence of Turlough O'Neill's actual presence in the Ballaghaderreen area?

Incidentally, he had six brothers: Neill Oge, Con, Bren, Cormack, Henry and Owen, and his wife Sorcha was the granddaughter of Hugh O'Neill, "The O'Neill" from 1593 to 1616 via his daughter Catherine and her husband, Henry Og O'Neill. The surname O'Neill was outlawed by the English parliament in 1569 and sometimes enforced