

## **Section: Family, Land, and the Home**

### **Lesson: Gaelic Clans & Their Battle Cries**

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Since ancient times, onto the Christian era, and up until the total conquest of Ireland by the British; which culminated with the flight of the Earls in 1607, Ireland was not seen as one nation of people with one voice under one centrally controlled government.

Rather, the island was comprised of many clan-based groups, each occupying traditionally held territories and each exercising limited power and sovereignty over their familial domains.

There was no concept of the nation of Ireland or the state or the Republic in the sense we are used to today. Unlike with the monarchical systems found on the European continent, dominion and right to rule in Ireland was not confined to the sole overarching ruler, but rather it was conceptually decentralised into smaller portions of influence amongst individual members of a tribe or a family group. This was symbolised in part by the holding of portions of family land.

The concept of individual or divided sovereignty can be found throughout Irish historical identity. Where a free man was once seen to be lord of his own portion, his home was his castle, his personal property was his to dispose of. His lands were his domain. And while occupied by him, he is king.

Early Irish medieval society was structured around and advanced in intricate social order, where an individual's grade of status was carefully defined. Though individuals were always seen to be part of their wider clan group, and were treated as such under the laws, in like

fashion to the tribal structure of the Native Americans, each family group and collection of families occupying a territory were seen to be their own sovereign and independent nation.

Each family and their line of descent were seen to be a people of their own, managing family affairs, internally electing their own clan leaders as representatives, sharing the duty of raising good mannered and honourable children, and each bearing the honour and the burden of the family name on their shoulders.

There is no doubt, therefore, that the Irish organised themselves into independent factions which were primarily based on ties of blood and marriage, often influenced by proximity of geographical location, mutual interests in common defence, access to resources, and to respect or forge longtime familial allegiances. And as they lived, so too did they fight.

This faction based self-image and deep connection with defending the family name, the stock, and the land, meant the Irish clans were much too prone to engage in common feuds, wars of vengeance and family rivalries. And it is this sad fact that bears Ireland's greatest historical weakness when it came to defence against the invasion of the Anglo-Normans.

Each of these family-based factions had their own 'sluagh-ghairm' or 'battle cry' associated with their family line or tribe. Usually derived by the followers of great families or chieftains to act as a human cry, a rallying call to all able bodied kinsmen. A cry of war from which its hearers drew an almost supernatural and ancestral strength and courage to fight on.

Literally speaking, the word sluagh-ghairm is derived from a combination of the old Irish word 'sluagh', meaning an army, a host, or an assembled force; and 'ghairm', meaning to cry, to shout out or proclaim. As such, we get the combined meaning of the 'cry or proclamation of an assembled force'.

Interestingly, it is from sluagh-ghairm that the English word 'slogan' is derived, and this gives us a good idea of what it really was. It was the slogan, the motto or the catchphrase that identified and marked out one family faction from another on the fields of battle.

By the time of the reign of King Henry VIII of England, these family battle cries had become a common feature of Irish society and could be heard ringing out across the land during

every pitched battle. So prolific were they, that during the 10th year of his reign, Henry enacted a statute to proclaim that no person, regardless of their estate, their condition or degree, should use the words, quote: "Crom-Abú", "Butler-Abú" or other words like ... but to call only on St. George or the name of his sovereign lord, the king of England, end quote.

The cry of 'abú' is the most common exclamation found among the Irish clans. It derives from the old Irish 'bua', meaning victory, and its use can still be found in the modern Gaelic valediction 'beir bua', meaning 'grab victory'. Other forms of this common cry are hubbub, hub-bob-boo, lullaloo, and even hullabaloo; a word that has spitefully found its way into the English language to mean "a confused uproar or a ruckus caused by a large group of people." Hullabaloo, along with the word hubbub and hurrah, are also said to derive from this same source.

Abú was seldom used alone, but rather found connected to some deity, family name, an ancestral hero, an ancestral headquarters, a traditional occupation, or some special symbol associated with the family faction.

So let's take a look at a few examples of these cries. The slugh-ghairm of the warriors of the great O'Neill clan was "Lamh Dearg Abú," proclaiming the "Red Hand to Victory" in honour of the ancient family symbol still found on the flag of the Ulstermen to this day.

The O'Hanlons, who held the traditional honour of bearing the Ulster standard, made the cry of "Ardchully-Abú" from 'ard-choill', meaning 'high forest', taught to be in reference to the family's customary gathering grounds.

In the neighbouring Tyrconnell, County Donegal, the leading family would call on their ancestral name, shouting "O'Donnell Abú". Similarly, the O'Moores cried "Conlon Abú" after their own famous ancestor, Conall Cearnach. The O'Heffernans used, quote, "The Right of the Scholars to Victory, which in Irish "Ceart na Suadh Abú".

The shout of the O'Briens; the descendants of King Brian Boru, was "Lamh Laidir Abú", meaning "Strong Hand to Victory". The O'Sullivans of Munster used "Lámh Foisteanac Abú", meaning 'restful hand'. While the McGillapatricks used "Gear-laidir aboo" or the "sharp and strong".

Descendants of the Fitzgeralds of the southern Desmond Line, originally Anglo Normans who had adopted Irish ways becoming "more Irish than the Irish themselves" would call out "Shandid-aboo," in glory of the "old place"; their fortified round-hill-base located in the Limerick Mountains.

If you want to find out more about these sorts of topics, visit the site Brehon Academy, where you will find a number of blog posts and useful resources covering all sorts of information related to early Ireland.

You should also check out our online courses, Irish Mythology and Ancient Ireland Culture and Society, which you can find the links to in the description section.

And one last thing before you go. If you enjoyed this video and you want to hear more of this content, please hit the subscribe button so you'll be the first to know when we upload new videos.

Thank you for listening.

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### List of Gaelic Clans and Their Battle Cries

Family Name	Slogan	Meaning	Additional Information
<b>Barry</b>	<i>Barragh-aboo</i>	A man of the Barrys	-
<b>Butler</b>	<i>Butler-aboo</i>	Butler Aboo	Battle cry of the Butlers, Earls of Ormond.
<b>De Burgh</b>	<i>Gallruagh-aboo</i>	The Red Foreigner	Derived from "Iarla-Ruadh", Richard de Burgh, the red Earl of Ulster.
<b>Decies</b>	<i>Geraldagh-aboo</i>	Geraldagh Aboo	Cry of Decies, a Geraldagh or Geraldine.
<b>Doyle</b>	<i>Killole-aboo</i>	Killole Aboo	Probably refers to a coille or wood.

<b>Fitzgerald</b>	<i>Shanid-aboo</i>	Shanid Aboo	Taken from the stronghold in County Limerick.
<b>Fitzgerald</b>	<i>Crom aboo</i>	Crom Aboo	Taken from Crom Castle in County Limerick.
<b>Fitzgerald</b>	<i>Shandid-aboo</i>	In glory of the old place (Shanid Castle)	Desmond line, originally Anglo-Normans
<b>Fitzpatrick</b>	<i>Gear-laider-aboo</i>	Sharp and Strong	Battle cry of the Fitzpatricks or McGilla Patricks.
<b>Kavanagh</b>	<i>Kinshelagh-aboo</i>	Kinshelagh Aboo	Refers to the men of Hy Kinshelagh.
<b>MacGilla Patrick</b>	<i>Gear-laidir aboo</i>	Sharp and strong	-
<b>Magennis</b>	<i>Shanbodagh-aboo</i>	The Old Churl	Battle cry of Magennis of Down.
<b>McKenna</b>	<i>Keartlevarry-aboo</i>	The Ball of Tow Yarn	Possibly wore this as a distinguishing badge.
<b>McSwyne</b>	<i>Battail'lah-aboo</i>	Battle Aboo	Refers to the gallow-glasses, or battle-axe men, who formed the main body of the army.
<b>Nugent</b>	<i>Tynsheog-aboo</i>	Tynsheog the Ash Tree	Used by the Delvin men.
<b>O'Brien</b>	<i>Lamh-laidir aboo</i>	Strong hand	Descendants of King Brian Boru
<b>O'Brien</b>	<i>Lamh-laidir-aboo</i>	The strong hand aboo	Cry of the O'Briens of Thomond, also used by Fitzmaurice
<b>O'Carroll</b>	<i>Slowac-aboo</i>	Hawk	Battle cry of the O'Carrolls.
<b>O'Connor</b>	<i>Faliagh-aboo</i>	Faliagh Aboo	Battle cry of the O'Connors.
<b>O'Connor</b>	<i>Farliagh-aboo</i>	Farliagh Aboo	Derived from their remote ancestor Failghe.
<b>O'Donnell</b>	<i>O'Donnell-aboo</i>	O'Donnell Aboo	The battle cry followed the "Cathach" or "Battle Book" of the O'Donnells.
<b>O'Donnell</b>	<i>O'Donnell Abu</i>	-	Leading family in Tír Chonaill (Donegal)
<b>O'Dwyer</b>	<i>Duibhir Abu</i>	O'Dwyer forever	Clan from County Tipperary
<b>O'Hanlon</b>	<i>Ardchully-aboo</i>	High Wood or Height of the Wood	Derived from Ard-choill or ard-coille, probably a well-known hill that was the gathering place of the clan.
<b>O'Hanlon</b>	<i>Ardchully-aboo</i>	High forest	Traditional standard bearers of Ulster
<b>O'Heffernan</b>	<i>Cearr na suadh abú</i>	The right of the scholars to victory	-

<b>O'Moore</b>	<i>Conlan Abú</i>	In honor of ancestor Conall Cearnach	-
<b>O'More</b>	<i>Conlan-aboo</i>	Conlan Aboo	Taken from the name of a place in Queen's County.
<b>O'Neill</b>	<i>Lamh-dearg-aboo</i>	The Red Hand	The O'Neill red-hand symbol was borne on their banner.
<b>O'Sullivan</b>	<i>Lámh Foisteanac Abu</i>	Restful hand	Munster family
<b>O'Sullivan</b>	<i>Fustine-stelly-aboo</i>	-	Battle cry of the O'Sullivan clan
<b>O'Toole</b>	<i>Fernock-aboo</i>	Men of the Hills	Describes the clan who dwelt among the hills of northern Wicklow.