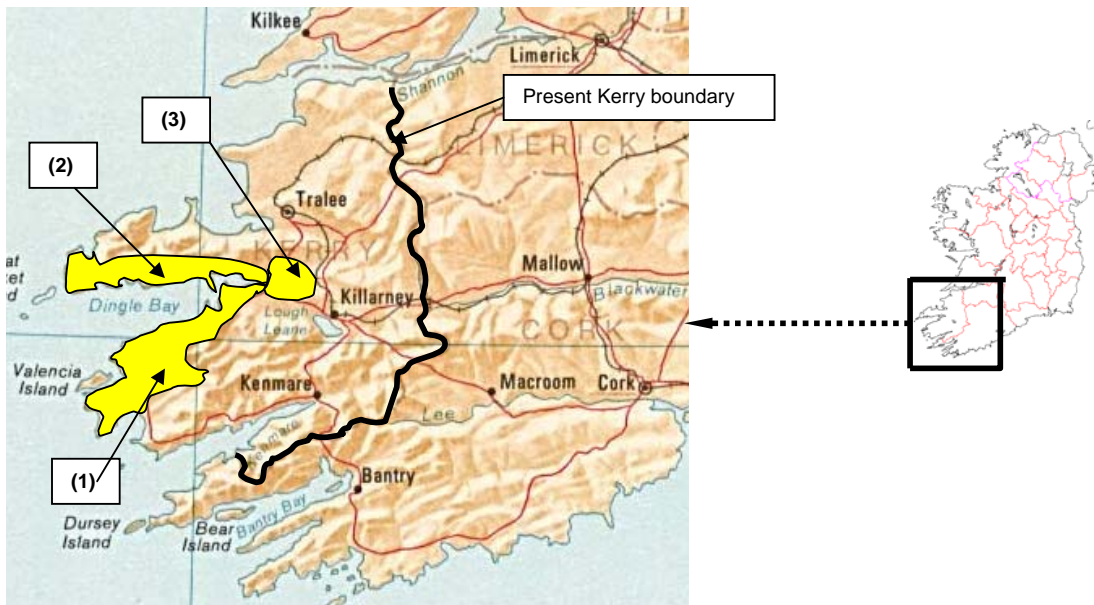


# The Origins and Expansion of the O'Shea Clan

At the beginning of the second millennium in the High Kingship of Brian Boru, there were three distinct races or petty kingdoms in what is now the County of Kerry. In the north along the Shannon estuary lived the most ancient of these known as the *Ciarraige*, reputed to be descendants of the Picts, who may have preceded the first Celts to settle in Ireland. On either side of Dingle Bay and inland eastwards lived the *Corcu Duibne*<sup>1</sup> descended from possibly the first wave of Celtic immigration called the Fir Bolg and also referred to as Iverni or Erainn. The common explanation of Fir Bolg is 'Bag Men' so called as they allegedly exported Irish earth in bags to spread around Greek cities as protection against snakes! However as bolg in Irish means stomach, generations of Irish school children referred to them gleefully as 'Fat bellies' or worse. Legend has it that these Fir Bolg, as we will see possibly the ancestors of the O'Shea clan, landed in Cork. Reputedly small, dark and boorish they settled in Cork and Kerry and were the authors of the great Red Branch group of sagas and the builders of great stone fortresses around the seacoasts of Kerry. Finally around Killarney and south of it lived the *Eoganacht Locha Lein*, descendants of a later Celtic visitation called Goidels or Gaels.



The territories of the people of the Corcu Duibne with subsequent sept strongholds; (1) O'Sheas (2) O'Falveys (3) O'Connells

The Corcu Duibne were recognised as a distinct race by the fifth or sixth century AD. In later times it became important for individuals to be able to trace a direct unbroken line back to a figure of importance of the early occupation of Ireland, preferably one with royal associations. Great store was placed in the genealogies and family trees produced by learned professionals, with the results being a mixture of mythology and fact. The Corcu Duibne are said to be descendants of Corc the grandson of Conaire II the 111<sup>th</sup> High King of Ireland. Legend has it that Corc was born by the incest of his father Caibre Musc with his own sister Dubinn; hence the name Corcu Duibne. If true it was not the most propitious start as local nobles blamed some misfortunes on the circumstances of Corc's birth and attempted to capture him and consume him with fire. Perhaps it is just as well for the current generation of O'Sheas that they didn't succeed!

<sup>1</sup> Also spelt Corcu Dhuibhne and in other ways. For simplicity I have standardized on Corcu Duibne

The Eoganacht Locha Lein were associated with the powerful Eoganacht race whose corporate headquarters was located in Cashel in Tipperary. By both military prowess and political skill they had become dominant for a long period in the South of Ireland, exacting tributes from lesser kingdoms such as the Corcu Duibne. At the time this amounted to 1000 cows and 1000 oxen a substantial transaction for a society who measured wealth in terms of ownership of cattle. The Corcu Duibne, occupying territory that was remote, heavily wooded and consequently difficult to both access and manage from a remote site, were an independent people, who continually struggled to maintain that independence. In fact the Eoganacht considered the level of their independence as unacceptable and possibly as a consequence did not always fulfil their own responsibilities as overlords, often neglecting to give them the gifts due to them as sub-kings. In the pecking order of the day, the Eoganacht considered themselves superior to earlier peoples such as the Fir Bolg and their off-shoots the Corcu Duibne, who they claimed included *'Everyone who is black-haired, a tattler, guileful, tale telling, noisy, contemptible - - the disturbers of council - - who loves not music'*. Racism in Ireland is obviously of an ancient vintage.

One commentator<sup>2</sup> says the Corcu Duibne were a gifted people who built great stone forts and between the sixth and tenth centuries had as their capital a 'city' called *Fahan*, situated to the west of the present Dingle. They probably invented the first Irish form of writing, the ogham script and made a notable contribution to the spread of Christianity, not only in Kerry but in north Munster, which then included both the present south Leinster and south Connacht. The name of this people is now reflected in the name of the modern barony of Corkaguiney, in effect the Dingle peninsula, but at a later stage their power base had shifted to Ballycarbery near the modern town of Cahersiveen on the opposite side of Dingle Bay.

At this time throughout Europe individuals were known by their Christian names only. In Ireland this gave rise to names such as Cormac mac Domhnall or Cormac the son of Domhnall. In due course Cormac's own son might be called Fionn mac Cormac. As the population of the country grew, such identification became unwieldy leading in 1002 AD to the High King, Brian Boru, issuing an edict that all clans should adopt surnames so they could more readily be distinguished from each other. The people of the Corcu Duibne readily accepted the sense of this and over a period split into three distinct dynasties or septs each named after an ancestor whose memory as a valiant warrior and wise ruler had remained in the folklore. The people on the south shore of Dingle Bay chose the name of an ancestor called Seagha or Seaghdha to become the Ua Seaghdha or literally the 'grandson' or 'descendent of Seaghdha. The name itself comes from the same Gaelic root as the word for 'hawk', giving rise to conjecture that it means 'hawk-like or 'dauntless'.<sup>3</sup> Later the 'Ua' became 'O' and the 'Seaghdha' became anglicised to 'Shea' giving rise to the current Irish surname of 'O'Shea'. The remainder of the Corcu Duibne territory was divided between the Ua Failibhe (O'Falveys) on the north shore of Dingle Bay in what is now the barony of Corkaguiney and the Ua Congaile (O'Connells) inland in an area approximating the western part of the present barony of Magunihiy, although there is some doubt as to the origins of these O'Connells.

The new surnames caught on, as within a relatively short time the annals (historical reports) list the deaths of an Ua Segda in 1041 and a Mathghamhain Ua Seaghdha in 1095. The inclusion of O'Sheas in these annals indicates that although a petty kingdom, their leaders had a certain prestige outside their own territories. The designation Corcu Duibne did not die away quickly, being still in use almost 200 years later, but gradually the three clans grew apart. Each clan is mentioned separately in a famous topographical poem, describing the native Irish clans and territories prior to the Anglo-Norman invasion. Compiled by the learned historian Giolla na Naomh O Huidhrin around 1400 it gives

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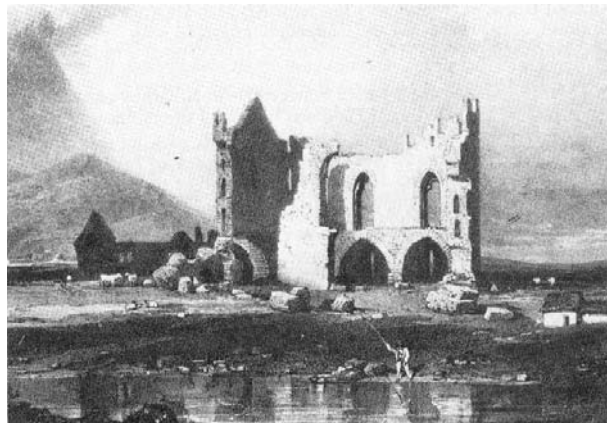
<sup>2</sup> T. J. Barrington *Discovering Kerry* (Dublin, 1976)

<sup>3</sup> MacLysaghts Irish Surnames. The Irish for 'Hawk' is 'Seabhac'. It has also been suggested that the name could be equally derived from 'Seaghais' (pleasure, delight) or 'Seagal' (Rye).

*O'Conghaile (O'Connell) of the slender swords,  
 Over the bushy fortified Magh O'gCoinchinn (Magunihy);  
 A hazel tree of branching ringlets,  
 In the Munster plain of horse-hosts.  
 From the Maing (The river Maine) westwards is hereditary to them;  
 O'Failbhe (O'Falvey) is owner as far as Fionntraigh (Ventry, Dingle peninsula)  
 O'Seagha has obtained without denial,  
 A country not wretched; he is king of Ui-Rathach (Iveragh peninsula)*

The area occupied by the O'Sheas known as Ui Rathach<sup>4</sup>, later became known as Iveragh, by which the whole peninsula takes its name and the majority of the land area on the peninsula, the largest in Ireland, became known as the barony of Iveragh, where Cahersiveen is currently the main town. Then the chief seat of the O'Sheas was located at *Sisceann Ui Sheaghdha*<sup>5</sup> near the source of the river Inny in the centre of the Iveragh peninsula. This area is no longer so called but it is shown on a sixteenth century map as *Sheskinan* and in a later nineteenth century map as *Sheskanane*<sup>6</sup>. Its northern boundary would be close to the current spectacular pass of Ballighisheen (Oisín's way), which divides Iveragh from Glencar. The extent of the O'Shea territory may have extended north to the present coastal town of Castlemaine, as a later family pedigree mentions an *O'Shees cove on the banks of the river Leman, at its entrance into the sea in the county of Kerry*. I can find no current cove called O'Shee but the river Leman may well be the present river Laune running from the lakes of Killarney to the sea at Castlemaine.

Another important O'Shea centre was at Ballycarbery, on a sea inlet close to Cahersiveen. There is a tradition that Cairbre O'Shea, whose windswept grave can still be seen at the site, built a Caher or fort here. Later the McCarthys, recognising the suitability of the site, built a magnificent castle there, whose ruins are still prominent. It was for a time occupied by the McCarthy Mór<sup>7</sup> although later the McCarthy chiefs tended to reside in castles at Pallice and elsewhere closer to Killarney



**The ruins of the McCarthy castle at Ballycarbery near Cahersiveen. The site was once an O'Shea stronghold**

The O'Shea kinsmen, the O'Falveys, were renowned as sailors and in later years became admirals of the McCarthy fleets. No doubt the O'Sheas with numerous accessible landing points, including the strategically important Valentia Harbour within their territories, were also expert seamen. This strong naval expertise gave the kinsmen greater power and status than the inhospitable terrain around Dingle Bay might suggest. However although close kin and near neighbours, the two dynasties conducted an incessant and bitter rivalry that effectively ensured that neither side ever rose to more than local prominence. Possibly in a diplomatic onslaught to limit the damage being caused by this rivalry, an agreement was brokered to alternate the Kingship of the Corcu Duibne between the two families. This wasn't a great success as in 1115 Lochlainn O'Falvey is recorded as slain by Murchad O'Shea and some years later possibly in a retaliatory strike Tadh O'Shea was murdered by the O'Falveys assisted by the foreigners (Norse) of Limerick. The recruitment of the foreigners by the O'Falveys may indicate that at the time the O'Sheas were in the ascendancy. As well as fighting amongst themselves both used their naval expertise to fight with neighbouring coastal tribes such as the O'Mahonys in West Cork.

<sup>4</sup> A current tourist walking trail running through the Iveragh peninsula is called 'Sli Uibh Rathach' or 'The Kerry Way'

<sup>5</sup> Literally O'Sheas marsh and often rendered as Seskan, Shaskan or even Texnane O'Shea.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Nimmo's map of Iveragh for the Bogs Commissioners 1811

<sup>7</sup> The elected head of the McCarthy clan

It was perhaps unfortunate that the neighbouring coastal tribes could not have lived in harmony ready to offer a united defence to any intruders to their West Kerry strongholds. As has been said both sects were still under the overall kingship of the Eoghanacht of Cashel. Like the Corcu Duibne these had also migrated into different kinship groups including the McCarthys, O'Sullivans and O'Callaghans. The McCarthy's ancestors had once ruled Munster but their influence had declined and their dominant position had been usurped by first the Dal Cais (O'Briens) of Clare and Limerick and later by the O'Connors of Connaught. Under new leadership the McCarthys began a period of expansion which due to the strength of their various neighbours in other directions had, by necessity, to be directed westwards from Cashel towards Cork and Kerry. By 1110 by both military and diplomatic means the McCarthys had expelled many local kings in Kerry and had commenced occupying lands around Killarney. By 1124 they had advanced into the O'Shea heartland and their charismatic leader, Cormac, expelled the O'Shea chief, Murchad, who obviously rallied his followers as he is reported as been slain shortly afterwards, presumably trying to regain possession of the O'Shea hereditary lands. The O'Sheas did seem to retain possession of some lands, at least for some short time and probably were forced to pay higher tribute to their McCarthy overlords. Despite the McCarthy threat they continued to quarrel with the O'Falveys whose king they managed to kill as recorded in the annals of Inisfallen for 1158. This may have the final O'Shea triumph, as it is the last reference to them in the various annals.

International events now seriously impacted on the beleaguered O'Sheas with the arrival in Waterford of the Anglo Normans who quickly moved west threatening Cashel and occupying Cork city. The McCarthys, O'Sullivans and O'Donoghue were all forced west, dispossessing less powerful clans and occupying lands in West Cork and throughout Kerry where they had tactical military advantages over the heavily armoured Anglo Norman forces. The McCarthys were by 1200 firmly in control of all O'Shea lands in Iveragh although fighting for their lives on other fronts. They staunchly defended Iveragh, settling their wives and children in an area near the present Waterville while they tackled the formidable invaders. Thus by this time the ancient kingdom of the Corcu Duibne on both sides of Dingle Bay had disappeared without trace, unfortunate victims of the power struggles of greater dynasties and foreign invaders where there was little room for lesser kings. They were not alone as many of the minor kingdoms throughout Ireland also disappeared without trace with only a handful of the hundred or so petty kingdoms mentioned in sources of the twelfth century surviving into the thirteenth. One of the few place name reminders of the once powerful O'Sheas is the small townland of Ballyheabought (Baile Ui Sheaghda) near Dingle.

The chiefs of the O'Sheas appeared to weary of the perpetual struggle and given their historic antithy to the McCarthys seemed unwilling to remain as underlings to them. The McCarthys did appear to come to an accommodation with the other Corcu Duibne clans as the O'Falveys were employed as admirals of their fleet and the O'Connells, who themselves were being forced out of their lands in mid Kerry by the incursions of the stronger O'Donoghues, eventually became constables<sup>8</sup> of the McCarthy castle at Ballycarbery. A decision appeared to be made by at least some of the remaining O'Shea chiefs to quit the area and start afresh elsewhere. In the early thirteenth century the Anglo Normans were consolidating their power throughout the occupied native Irish lands. In South Tipperary this necessitated acquiring substantial numbers of non-military settlers to clear forests and exploit marginal lands. This may have attracted the O'Sheas. Alternatively perhaps in a deal to rid themselves of the troublesome O'Sheas, the McCarthys may have negotiated a deal with the Anglo Normans including an offer to resettle them. However it occurred, records of the early fourteenth century records the presence of Shethes and Shees in the vicinity of Drangan in south-east Tipperary not far from the medieval town of Fethard. It is generally believed these originated from the Kerry O'Sheas. Over a number of generations they became relatively prosperous and built up relations with their Anglo Norman overlords, the Butlers, controllers of much of Tipperary. By 1381 they had become so acceptable to their masters that Odoneus O'Shee was granted letters of

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<sup>8</sup> Guardians or wardens

Denization<sup>9</sup> and a coat of arms by the English King of Arms thus becoming one of the first member of a Gaelic family to be awarded such a prized possession.



The arms of Sir Richard Shee encompassing on the top four quarters within the shield, the older arms of Odoneus Shee and his three brothers William, John & Edmond [Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland]

By 1500 descendants of the Tipperary settlers had spread to Kilkenny, generally known by the anglicised surname 'Shee' and by 1600 headed by the enterprising, competent and at times ruthless Sir Richard Shee had become one of the most important and wealthiest families in Kilkenny. For almost 150 years Shees were one of the dominant families in the region with extensive estates in both Kilkenny and Tipperary. Although recognised as a Gaelic rather than an old English family, they worked closely with the establishment. Descendants of the various prominent families of this period were both Catholic and Protestant and confusingly some retained the 'Shee' while others adopted O'Shee, O'Shea and Shea. A current sign of their once prominence is evidenced by the existence of the 'Shee's Alms House' in present day Kilkenny as a tourist attraction. As staunch royalists, many Shee estates were confiscated; first after their defeat by Cromwell and later after the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. Nevertheless some descendants managed to still own very substantial estates in Kilkenny, Waterford and Galway in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Others emigrated and distinguished themselves in

European armies particularly in France where many either married into minor noble houses or were themselves awarded French titles for services rendered. Although those who remained in Ireland generally kept their Catholic religion they were completely Anglicised and would have been considered by Irish nationalists as being no different to the Anglo Irish ruling landlord class, resulting in the burning of probably the finest remaining seat of the Shee descendants, that of the Poer-O'Shee residence at Gardenmorris near Kill in Co Waterford, by the IRA in the 1920s. The Shee name and descendants are now virtually extinct in Ireland although still to be found in other parts of the world.

What happened those of the clan that remained on in Kerry? In 1261 at the Battle of Callan near Kilgarvan a MacCarthy sect inflicted a stinging defeat on the Anglo Normans which in effect left the Iveragh peninsula and south Kerry in Irish hands until the collapse of the old Gaelic order in the early 1600s. The McCarthy Mór controlled the territory with the O'Sullivan Mór also a significant power although subservient to the McCarthys. McCarthy Mór for a while resided at Ballycarbery as the annals record the death there of Tadhg McCarthy in 1428 being '*the best, the greatest - - - and the most reputed for wine drinking*'. All through this period there is little or no mention of the O'Sheas.

When the chiefs vacated Kerry c 1200 they left a leadership vacuum there that to an extent was never filled. Chiefs by the nature of Irish Feudal society had the experience, confidence and wealth to manage their kinsmen and the clan's fortunes to the best advantage of all within the clan structure. The withdrawal of this layer of leaders left those remaining with little status and with no real job opportunities except working, possibly as 'unfree men', for the ruling McCarthys and O'Sullivans at the bottom rung of the social ladder of the day. Whereas in 1330 the McCarthy's welcomed 'blow-ins' like the O'Mahonys and granted them lands in Iveragh there is no account of any O'Sheas receiving similar treatment. In fact by 1600 McCarthys possessed about 60% of Iveragh with

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<sup>9</sup> By Roger Mortimer, Earl of March and Ulster, at Clonmel 6/11/1381. This to all intents and purposes made these Shees and their descendants, English citizens.

O'Sullivans the majority of the remainder with O'Sheas owning nothing. Papal records of the time do make some references showing that the O'Sheas were still in the area, such as a report that in 1473 'Dermot Osega, priest, detained possession of the vicarage of Kyllarne [Killarney] without title for between five and seven years'. Other than that there is little or nothing in the records covering the fortunes of the O'Sheas in Iveragh from 1200 to 1600 when Gaelic power ruled with little interference from the Anglo Norman conquerors until the collapse of that power after the battle of Kinsale in 1601. There is evidence that the O'Sheas gravitated towards service and contact with the O'Sullivans who had acquired vast tracts of land in South Kerry and West Cork rather than the McCarthys. Even the Shees in distant Tipperary who were rising up the social ladder, when attempting to arrange a marriage settlement with one of the daughters of the ruling Gaelic families in Kerry, significantly chose Anna, the daughter of the O'Sullivan Mór of Dunkerron (near Kenmare) rather than a daughter of one of the many McCarthy branches.<sup>10</sup>

The west Kerry area itself was a vibrant place in the late 1500s in the last days of real Gaelic power. In 1569 it was said that every year 200 vessels from Spain fished off the coast and carried away '2000 *beyffes, hydres and tallow*.' Dingle was an important port with a substantial trade in timber and iron. Nearly all the wine of France and much of that of Spain was casked in Irish timber, especially from Munster with the province also supplying timber for many English ships. However the plain people lived in very simple circumstances. Their houses were round, thatched, like beehives, with the fire in the middle and a hole in the roof for a chimney. The women struck many observers as very beautiful but badly dressed, the men being big with their hair down over their eyes. Meals consisted of butter and oaten bread, with sour milk with half-cooked meat for special occasions. Much of the land in Iveragh was covered with bogs and forests with few roads and fewer bridges making anything but subsistence farming difficult. The main enterprise was cattle with some tillage utilising the ancient Irish method of ploughing by the tail as harness, saddles and other ploughing gear had not yet been adopted. Woollen cloth was manufactured for clothing and rugs and flax was woven into linen. Some O'Sheas were involved in the many insurrections of these turbulent times as just before the battle of Kinsale Owen O'Sullivan Mór with hundreds of others was pardoned for rebellious activities by a *fiant*<sup>11</sup> of Queen Elizabeth. Amongst those pardoned were eleven O'Sheas who must have served under his leadership. In banter it has often been said to me that 'The O'Sheas were the horse-boys of the O'Sullivans' and somewhat to my dismay it would appear that this might well be based on historical fact.

County	No of O'Shea families in 1659
Tipperary	131
Kilkenny	100
Cork	71
Kerry	63
Waterford	20
Limerick	11
Laois	8
Clare	5

Table 1.1

Sir William Petty conducted the first attempt at a survey of the Irish population in 1659. Called the *Down* survey its findings are interesting although they have to be viewed with a certain amount of caution. The results [table 1.1] show the dispersal of O'Sheas throughout the country. Surprisingly Kerry the ancestral base lags behind Tipperary and Kilkenny who are seen to be the main seats. Petty coined the term *Titulado* for individuals of prominence in each barony and for Iveragh listed three O'Connells, a McCarthy and a Hussey with no mention of an O'Shea. However in Kilkenny he lists a total of eight O'Shea 'Tituladoes' and a further one in Tipperary, showing how the pendulum of O'Shea power had swung from Kerry. Within Kerry itself, as expected, the O'Sheas are prominent in Iveragh. Petty's surveyors in conducting the survey noted that while O'Sheas were plentiful on the ground, not

one owned an acre of land, indicating how low the fortunes of the clan had fallen there, since the heady days when they ruled over a sizeable territory. In fact records do show that three O'Sheas did own minor holdings on the Dingle peninsula that were confiscated in 1657 under the Cromwellian settlement, but no such confiscation occurred in Iveragh as it was accepted that no O'Shea owned land there.

<sup>10</sup> Robert O'Shee married Anna O'Sullivan c 1380

<sup>11</sup> *Fiant* (edict) no 6555 of 22/06/1601 in the reign of Elizabeth I

Not being landowners meant that obligatory transportation to Connacht under the Cromwellian resettlement scheme was unlikely, although one could be moved as a servant of one forced to move. O'Shea being an uncommon name in Connacht suggests that few ended up there. However the O'Shea fellow-septs that had fared better under the McCarthy occupation now, as influential Catholic families who had participated in the 1641 rebellion, fared worse under the new Commonwealth regime. Dermot O'Falvey of Kilkeeveragh was transported with family and retainers numbering 115 persons, as were his relation Hugh Falvey of Faha. In 1641 Muiris O'Connell the head of the O'Connell clan resided, as constable of the MacCarthy's in the magnificent Ballycarbery castle. Tradition states that Cromwellian forces battered it with guns and having captured it blew it up from the inside. Muiris with his family and supporters totalling 59 persons with 14 acres of summer corn, 40 cows, 20 garrans and 30 sheep was transported to Brentree near Lisdoonvarna in Clare but being an old man, didn't survive the journey, dying on route. His youngest son Charles also forfeited as did two other O'Connell families in Iveragh and two in Killarney. Muiris's grandson Sean O'Connell poured out his bitterness at the fate of his and other native Irish families in his lengthy poem entitled 'The Dirge of Ireland'

*Whither shall we go in future? Or what shall we do  
No shelter for us, hills, woods, mountains - -  
and to God  
Are you deaf, or whither are you looking?*

Petty's survey indicates a sizeable O'Shea presence in Cork in 1659, spread fairly evenly throughout the county. A Pieres Shea was accepted as a freeman of Cork in 1641 paying 33s 4d "- *whereof, in regard of his poverty 20s was restored unto him*". The existence of an O'Shea merchant family in Cork City in the 17<sup>th</sup> century is acknowledged in a story of how an Elizabeth Thompson of a wealthy Cork merchant family eloped to Spain to marry Eugenio O'Shea, a wine merchant and ship owner in Cadiz, who came from an old Cork family. Later in the 18<sup>th</sup> century a Shea family was considered one of the three dominant Catholic business families in Cork City with interests in wine, shipping and butter. One of these Sheas, John, was connected by marriage to the Richard Hennessy who was to later make his name in Cognac near Bordeaux in France. Another, a Henry Shea, was a wealthy merchant and ship owner. One local historian commented that Henry could be considered Cork's first mercantile tycoon, although he died in somewhat reduced circumstances in Lisbon in 1800 due to misjudged investments in the adverse economic conditions prevailing in the last decade of the century. It is not known if these Cork City Sheas were an offshoot of the successful Kilkenny traders many of whom had large families who were farmed out to other areas of promise like Bristol and Spain with sufficient funds to start a business. They could of course have come directly from Iveragh in Kerry, whose inhabitants were renowned for their seamanship and were well versed in both the wine and butter trades, the former through smuggling and trading links with Spain and France, the latter due to the suitability of the Kerry cow and the mild climate to the production of butter.

Shees also had a presence in Limerick where in 1600 Rory McShee was described as chief of his name, being listed as one of those who had 'the greatest and best part of the county of Limerick'. Unlike their kinsmen in Kilkenny, these McShees were rebels who 'from the cradle inclined to mischief'. As a result Rory's brother Murtoogh Óge was executed in Cork in 1597 by 'having his arms and thighs broken with a sledge and hung in chains'.<sup>12</sup>

After the dispossessions and transportations in Kerry, land in Iveragh was made available to ex soldiers and financiers in lieu of wages due and monies loaned. However the area was not too popular as a potential homestead due to the perceived poverty of the land and remoteness of the area. Those who did settle there had somewhat mixed feelings and complained bitterly of harassment by the natives, a poor road system making even the shortest journey a challenge and a shortage of like-

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<sup>12</sup> Calendar of State Papers Ireland Undated 1597, Oct 1598 & Dec 1600

mindful planters. A report in 1673<sup>13</sup> claimed there was only one English for every 150 papist families and that in Iveragh *'The Irish are all branches of a few families and chiefly of the Sullivans and Carties but most of the Sullivans'*. Again the O'Sheas are conspicuous by their absence. The new land owners needed the native population to both work their land and to staff the various industries, such as fisheries, iron works and quarries that they had established. Presumably the O'Sheas were among those employed.

Despite the setbacks both the O'Connells and to a lesser extent the O'Falveys gradually resurrected their fortunes in Iveragh in the eighteenth century. This culminated in the emergence from Cahirsiveen of Daniel O'Connell, the 'Liberator', the most influential Irish politician of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the most famous progeny of the old Corcu Duibne line. The two families intermarried, socialised and as at least one of the Falveys had turned Protestant, they 'fronted' for the Catholic O'Connells in the purchase and ownership of lands. However no O'Shea emerged as a landowner or person of influence. They seemed unable to take advantage of the occasional opportunities that arose to advance whether through trade, smuggling or by marriage. It almost appeared that all vitality had been sucked out of the clan. In 1758 a Rev Pococke writing of a trip around Kerry described Iveragh as *'The place from which that family (the Shees in Kilkenny) came, about Oliver's (Cromwell) time'*. Although getting his dates wrong it did show that he considered the area more famous for being the ancestral home of the distinguished Kilkenny offshoot, than being the actual home of direct descendants of the original owners. Some genealogical maps showing the locations of Irish families in Kerry at this time now often excluded the O'Sheas entirely, showing the O'Sullivans and McCarthys in Iveragh and the O'Falveys and others in the Dingle peninsula. Strange as it would appear to us in the third millennium, there would appear to have been a possibility that the Kerry branch of the O'Shea clan would become extinct.

The dominant Protestant minority introduced racist anti-papist laws in the early eighteenth century. Called the 'Penal Laws', amongst other draconian measures these barred Catholics from inheriting, owning or leasing land. Iveragh was saved from the worst effects of the laws by its remoteness. Its people were well used to travel as it is recorded that *'When they have sown their summer corn in the spring, many families go to Spain and spend the summer in begging and wandering up and down in the northern side of that kingdom'*. There is also an account of a woman in Ballinskelligs who asked a neighbour for a loan of a mantle. Being queried on how far she proposed to go she replied *'Only to Spain'*. By 1750 population increase and good rental payments made landlords wealthy leading to a demand for hard-to-obtain luxury goods such as wines, brandies and tobacco. The O'Connells grasped the opportunity and for decades smuggled in the necessary goods becoming one of the wealthiest Catholic families in Kerry in the process. Valentia became a great smuggling centre and many innocent ships were also caused to be shipwrecked by being lured onto rocks by the display of false navigation torches. Locally made butter was transported by horse to the distant butter market in Cork City exposing the local inhabitants to that rapidly expanding trading city. This tempted some wealthy local merchants such as Thomas Trant of Dingle to move to Cork City, take up residence there and to start what was to become a lucrative trading business. Such travel and exposure to other ways of life may well have caused O'Sheas to move out of the area and settle in county Cork

O'Sheas, in common with all rural based clans increased their numbers substantially in the century 1750 to 1850. The Griffith Survey of 1852, although not a census, gives the first real data on land ownership and occupancy in Ireland. Despite their low profile the Kerry O'Sheas<sup>14</sup> had regained their historic position as the main Irish base. [Table 1.2] Within Kerry the barony of Iveragh with 35% of the O'Sheas is clear leader and in Iveragh the parish of Dromod, the exact heartland of the O'Sheas territory in Corcu Duibne times, is the most populous. It is amazing that with all the upheavals in almost a millennium the O'Shea heartland

County	O'Shea tenants
Kerry	1583
Cork	930
Kilkenny	526
Tipperary	383
Limerick	203
Waterford	128

Table 1.2

<sup>13</sup> The state of Kerry 27/05/1673 by Lord Herbert & others

<sup>14</sup> For simplicity O'Shea is used to include all derivations such as Shea, O'Shee, Shee etc. In fact in Kerry all are listed as 'Shea' with not a single 'O'Shea'.

hadn't moved from near the source and the valley of the river Inny. From almost extinction the clan had risen to become once again one of the most common family names in the area possibly by dint of prodigious breeding in the period 1750 to 1850. They weren't wealthy but they were now once again plentiful.

Next to Iveragh the most O'Shea tenants were to be found in the baronies of Beara in West Cork and Glanerought and Dunkerron South in South Kerry all located south of Iveragh in areas historically associated with the O'Sullivan clan. Except for a substantial presence in the Dingle peninsula there is remarkably little O'Shea presence in Mid or North Kerry, again suggesting that over the generations the Kerry O'Shea's gravitated towards the O'Sullivan lands rather than areas historically associated with the McCarthys and other prominent families. This drift was accentuated by the job opportunities available in the flourishing copper mines on the adjacent Beara peninsula in south west Cork.

Closer examination of the Griffith survey shows that in Kerry although numerous as tenants, there were few O'Shea 'Lessors' or people owning land. In Iveragh the biggest landowners were various O'Connell and Blennerhasset families, and the Marquis of Lansdowne with O'Sheas owning little. Nationally the largest O'Shea landowner was Nicholas Poer O'Shee, a direct descendant of the previously mentioned Sir Richard Shee of Kilkenny (died 1608), with 7,500 acres in Waterford and Kilkenny and Sir George Shee, descended from Sir Richard's brother Elias, with 738 tenancies near Tuam in Co Galway. Sir George (1784-1870)<sup>15</sup> was the son of Sir George Shea (1754-1825) who had made his fortune in India, being for a while secretary to Warren Hastings the CEO of the East India Company. On his return to Galway in 1780 he purchased the Ross estate comprising some 11,000 acres, thus becoming the only Kilkenny Shee descendent to create landholdings to rival that of his ancestors. Ironically almost 700 years after the clan's demise in Kerry, the most influential and wealthiest O'Sheas within the island of Ireland were the descendants of those who had found their way to Kilkenny.

Throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries O'Sheas emigrated in their thousands from all parts of Ireland, growing to an enormous scale during the famine period of 1846-1850. The United States was the main early destination, later replaced by Britain, but all the British dominions were also recipients. O'Sheas to-day can be found throughout the English speaking world. The Kerry clan's fortunes gradually improved in the twentieth century despite the hardships of the war of Independence and a civil war that was fought with particularly ferocity there. Table 1.3 shows the number of O'Shea entries in the current Irish telephone directories. Although this cannot be taken as a precise assessment of actual numbers it is useful as a guide to show how the O'Shea clan is now distributed throughout the island. Cork is seen to have overtaken Kerry as the main base, reflecting the population movement from poor farming areas of West Kerry to the more industrialised Cork area. Dublin appears for the first time in these tables showing how job opportunities in the capital have sucked in people from rural areas. The old concentrations in Kilkenny and Tipperary have died away, as have any entries for the once plentiful 'Shees'. One thing that the figures do show is that the O'Sheas are still very much a Munster based clan. Currently in Kerry, O'Shea is the third most popular surname after O'Sullivan and O'Connell but it struggles to get into the top twenty in Cork which is headed again by O'Sullivan followed by Murphy and McCarthy. The surname is in the top fifty of the most common surnames in the whole of Ireland and its bearers are inheritors of a rich and varied clan tradition and a name going back almost a thousand years.

County	Telephone entries
Cork	640
Kerry	585
Dublin	354
Limerick	140
Waterford	97
Kilkenny	90
Tipperary	87

Table 1.3

<sup>15</sup> On his death the estate passed to his daughter Letita who had married Robert Deering and it became known as the Deering Estate. It then passed their son George Edmund Deering an eccentric living in Hertfordshire in England who never visited it. He lived a double life with even his closest acquaintances believing him to be a bachelor only to discover after his death that he had married 50 years earlier and had a married daughter who was left property valued in excess of £250,000. The Deering estate was purchased in 1915 by the Irish Land Commission

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January 2010