

O' SULLIVAN Legacy

In Irish, O'Sullivan is Ó Suileabhain. The derivation of the name is in dispute among scholars. There is no doubt that the root word is súil (eye), but, but whether it is to be taken as one-eyed or hawk-eyed must be left an open question. While not quite as numerous as Murphy or Kelly, Sullivan, which is by far the commonest surname in Munster, comes third in the list for all Ireland. Almost eighty per cent of the Sullivans (or O'Sullivans) in Ireland today belong to the counties of Cork or Kerry, the remainder being mostly of County Limerick, or of the city of Dublin, in which, of course, families from all the four provinces are found. Thus the O'Sullivans, as is almost always the case with the great Gaelic septs, are still concentrated in or near their ancient homeland.

It was not until after the Anglo-Norman invasion that the O'Sullivans came to the fore. Their origin, however, is illustrious: descended from Eoghan (Owen) Mór, the father of the famous Oiloil Olum, they were, with the O'Callaghans, the MacCarthys and the O'Keeffes, one of the leading families of the Munster Eoghanacht. Some, at least some of them, were lords of a territory near Cahir prior to the invasion: from 1200 onwards, however, they are to be found in the extreme south-west of Munster. There they became very numerous and powerful, dividing into a number of branch septs of which O'Sullivan Mór and O'Sullivan Beare were the most important. The former had his principal castle at Dunkerron on the shore of Kenmare Bay, the latter was lord of the modern baronies of Beare and Bantry.

Though seldom appearing in any of the Annals before the year 1400, they were prominent in the sixteenth century. Outstanding at that period was Donal O'Sullivan Beare (1560-1618), hero of the siege of Dunboy and particularly famous for his almost incredibly hazardous march to Ulster after the disasters of the battle of Kinsale and the capture of Dunboy. His nephew, Philip O'Sullivan Beare (1590-1660), was a soldier in the Spanish army, but is better known as a historian: his *Historiae Catholicae Iberniae Compendium* recounts the events of the Elizabethan wars as told to him by his uncle and other participants. From a junior branch came Col. John William O'Sullivan (b. 1700), close companion of "the Young Pretender" in his Rebellion of 1745. Since his time, the name has been made famous by many O'Sullivans and Sullivans. In the field of literature, Owen Roe O'Sullivan (1748-1784) and Tadhg Gaolach O'Sullivan (d. 1800) were two of the best of the eighteenth century Gaelic poets: Humphrey O'Sullivan (1780-1837) kept a most interesting diary in Irish which has been partially published by the Irish Text Society: the brothers A. M. Sullivan (1830-1884), and T. D. Sullivan (1827-1914), as well as being authors of note, were leading Nationalist M. P.'s, the former being a Young Irelander in 1848. On the stage, Barry Sullivan (1821-1891), and Charles Sullivan (1848-1887), were celebrated actors, and Maureen O'Sullivan is famous today in the same sphere, while Sir Arther Sullivan (1842-1900), of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, was of Irish descent. If we add, from a very different sphere, John L. Sullivan (1858-1918), perhaps the best known pugilist of all time, we have recorded but a tithe of the O'Sullivans of note to be found not only in Ireland itself, but also in the Irish Brigades, in the French Revolution (on both sides) and in the history of the United States.