

History of Kilkelly (Mac Giolla Cheallaigh) name – 1500 to 1900

HISTORY OF
KILKELLY
FAMILY



1500 TO 1900

1500-1800's

Around 1500 AD there were five main “*slughts*” or branches of the Kilkellys and they lived in the Kilcolgan area of Co. Galway. Slught was a name for a branch of a family. The Kilkelly base was at Cloughballymore Castle, just outside the present day village of Ballindereen. The territory of land they held was known anciently by the name of Cinéal nGuaire (also Cineal Ghabhra or Kinel Gowry) and it consisted of “18 quarters” (which is roughly equivalent to 2,000 acres). This land had descended to the clan McGillikelly from their ancestor Daithi Mac Fiachra, Lord of the Hy Fiachra. Five brothers or cousins: Shane, Cosnagh, Teig Duff, Hugh and Gildernew were leaders (or principal men) of the the five “slughts”. The Kilkellys built Cloughballymore Castle near Balindereen, Drumsharna castle near Ardrahan and others.



Cloughballymore Castle



Drumsharna Castle

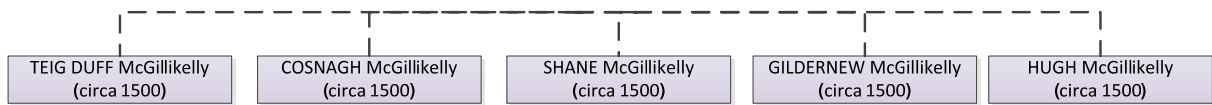
The record we have of the Kilkelly family from 1500 onwards (and it is a considerable record) is owed in large measure to Charles Randolph (CR) Kilkelly of Drimcong House near Moycullen in Co. Galway. Charles Randolph was a prominent landholder and one time High Sheriff of Galway. He commissioned a genealogist called Philp Crossle to complete a pedigree or family tree for the Kilkelly family. Crossle completed this work in 1921 and his timing was particularly fortunate since a large portion of the records relating to births, deaths, census etc were destroyed by fire in 1922 during the civil war.

Crossle assembled a very large family tree complete with approximately 500 pages of supporting documentation. The originals of these records are available to view in the old library in Trinity College, Dublin. The fact that they are there is due to the efforts of Tomás O Cadhain fom Moycullen. Tomás also made sure a copy of the document was made available in Galway City Library at Nun's Island. In 1949 this document was microfiched by the Family Search LDS Library in Utah USA and is also available in their archives. I first became aware of Crossle's work through contact with two ladies in the U.S. who both have Kilkelly family connections: Fran MacPhail and Jo Murphy. I am extremely grateful to both of them. The family tree has the long and grand title of “*Pedigree of Mac Giolla Cheallaigh of Cineál Ghabhra, anglicised Mac Gillikelly of Kinel Gowry, County Galway and eventually Killikelly and Kilkelly of County Galway*”. Crossle's work goes on to trace the desendants of the five “principal men of their slughts” from about 1500 onwards.

What follows is an attempt to summarise the history of these five septs from Crossle's documents.

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Around 1500 AD five men were at the head of the Kilkelly family, at that time known as the McGillikelly clan.



1) Teig Duff McGillikelly

There is far more information on this line of the Kilkelly family in Crossle's work than on any of the other four lines. This is hardly surprising as it is from this line that Crossle's sponsor Charles Randolph Kilkelly descended.

Teig's descendants lived in south Galway near Kilcogan until about the 1650's when, during the Cromwellian resettlements, his descendant, Murtagh Killikelly, was dispossessed of these lands and replaced by the Ffrenches. The Ffrench family would later build Tyrone House on these lands. From this point on, the descendants of Teig Duff are further split into three main strands I.) Beaghmore, II.) Lydican and III.) Littlebridge.

- I. BEAGHMORE – (Beaghmore is a townland in Donaghpatrick parish in north Co. Galway, near a village called Caherlistrane).

Despite being dispossessed of his lands and perhaps surprisingly, Murtagh Killikelly formed a friendship with the Ffrench family which was to last for generations. In fact after having his lands handed to the Ffrenches and been given lesser lands in Lydacan, further south in Co. Galway, he preferred to remain on the old lands as tenants to the Ffrenches rather than move to the new lands at Lydacan. Later many Kilkellys went on to become professionals to the Ffrench family, most notably in the legal profession.

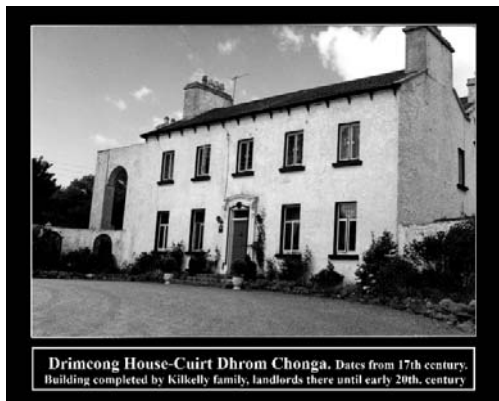
Around 1680 the Ffrench family had some trouble with lands they owned at Beaghmore in north Galway. Ownership of this land was disputed by the Kirwin family who lived close by and the Ffrenches felt the lands had come under threat. Murtagh Killikelly (who died 1713 and was a son of the Murtagh who had earlier being dispossessed) was sent to look after the land in Beaghmore on behalf of the Ffrench family. His descendants settled in that area of north Co. Galway and later branched into Tuam and surrounding regions. Prominent members of this family are buried in Ross Abbey, Headford, Co. Galway. Fr. Bryan Kilkelly was guardian of Ross Abbey in 1641.



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Patrick Kilkelly, a descended of Murtagh who had moved to Beaghmore was partner in a Dublin legal practice in 1804 when he purchased an estate in Drimcong near Moycullen, Co Galway. This man was the great, great grandfather of Charles Randolph Kilkelly, the man who commissioned the family tree by Crossle. Charles Randolph was a man of considerable note being High Sherriff of Galway in 1914. He served as a surgeon major with the grenadier guards in 1898 in India and Africa. His son Edward was killed in action at Ypres during World War One at the age of twenty one. He was said to be a benevolent land lord and was involved in a Moycullen co-operative society and store in Moycullen along with the rest of the local community. He set up a trust fund to aid those in need in that area. He sold Drimcong in 1927 and moved first to Canada and later to Kenya. Charles Randolph died in 1957 and is buried in Kenya.

Charles Randolph's two brothers were sportsmen of some note. Frank (Francis Frederick) Kilkelly played cricket for Ireland and Patrick Percy Kilkelly was an accomplished cyclist, winning several Irish National cycling championships.



Drimcong House, Moycullen, Co. Galway

Another prominent descendant of Murtagh Killikelly was John Michael (JM) Kilkelly of Mossfort House who was a registered magistrate (RM). John Michael's father, also named John, bought the Mossfort estate in 1853 from Christopher St. John of Tyrone (in Co. Galway). He had been leasing the lands prior to this. John Michael is mentioned widely in newspaper cuttings of the time as a leading member of Tuam society and director/shareholder in the Athenry and Tuam Railway Company. JM Kilkelly is reported in the Tuam Herald of 1873 as providing the site for the Roman Catholic church in Caherlistrane. In the 1870's John Kilkelly owned over 1,000 acres and Mossfort House was built on the estate. During the 1890's, when there was tension among landowners and tenants, he was threatened with a gun while coming from mass. He sold the property at Mossfort and left the area shortly afterwards. John Michael Kilkelly married Nina Moore, a daughter of the well known Irish politician George Henry Moore of Moore Hall in Mayo. John Michael's son, John, was killed in action during World War I while serving with the flying corps. Many of this branch of Kilkellys are buried in the family plot in Glasnevin cemetery, Dublin.

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Mossfort House.

II. LYDACAN – is a townland between Ardrahan and Gort in south Co. Galway.

As mentioned previously, Murtagh continued to live in Kilcolgan as a tenant of the Ffrenches, as did his son Flann. Flann's son, Bryan Kilkelly b. 1652-1727, also continued to live as tenant in Kilcolgan under Arthur Ffrench for some time but he eventually moved to Lydacan and Raheen-Kilkelly near Gort. His son Dr. Peter Kilkelly 1703-1783 was a Dominican and Bishop of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora for 30 years. He earned a reputation as an important bishop in penal times and helped keep the Catholic faith alive at a time when mass and other Catholic practices were outlawed. Many of the rest of Bryan's descendants became merchants and traders. They later immigrated to the West Indies (to places such as Barbados, Dominica and Grenada).

Some also settled in Spain, mainly around Bilbao in northern Spain. They became known as "de Killikelly" in Spain and this form of the name still survives there. Katherine Kilkelly (de Killikelly) of Bilbao who died sometime after 1821, married George Moore (1727-1799). George had gone to Spain during Penal Times and made his fortune through the wine and brandy trade in Alicante. He returned to build Moore Hall in Co. Mayo.

III. LITTLEBRIDGE – is a townland in Kilconieron, near Athenry, Co. Galway

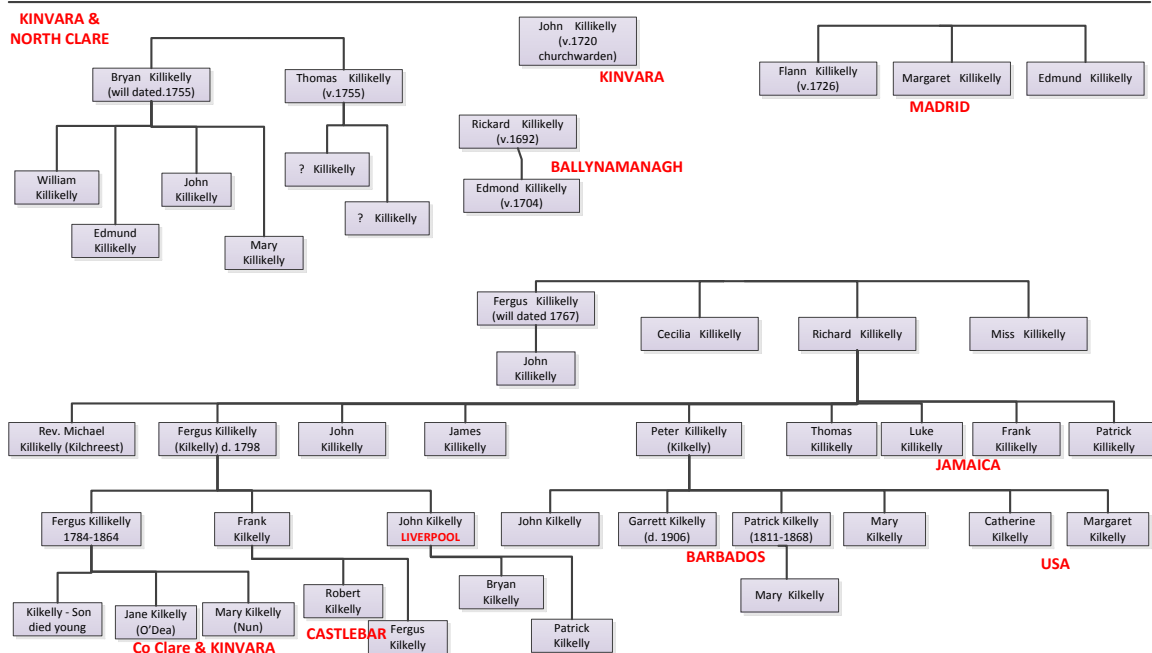
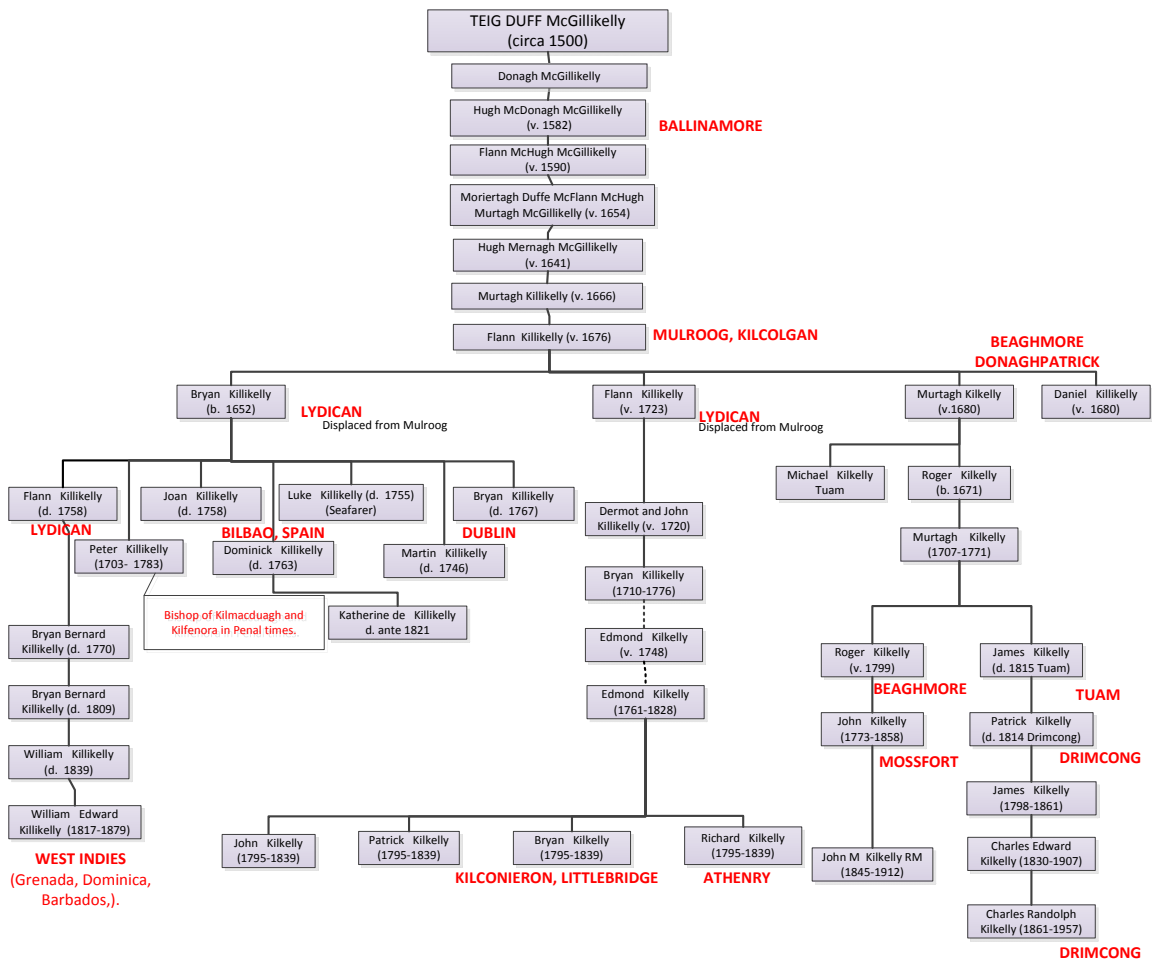
Relatives of Bryan Killikelly of Lydican, mentioned above, settled in Coolraugh, Lickerick and Littlebridge (also known as Lissalondon) near Kilconieron, Athenry around the 1700's. Some are buried in the old Kilconieron churchyard. Amongst them are Bryan Killikelly 1710-1776 and Bridget Kilkelly 1760-1820. Another Bryan Kilkelly owned some 90 acres of land in this locality around 1825 but by 1865 there is no record of any land holdings by Kilkellys in this area. This is most likely due to the effects of the famine of the 1840's and also later evictions which were carried out with significant frequency by a local landlord called Daly of Dunsandle Castle. One member of this Littlebridge line was Richard Killkelly who is recorded as living with his family in Athenry in the 1821 census. He was a publican and his address was 13 Northgate Street. He also held 3 ½ acres of land in Caheroyan. Richard was married to Sarah and they had 6 children living with them; Michael, Patrick, James, John, Mary and Edmond in 1821. Richard Kilkelly, most probably another son, lived at 25 Cross Street in 1856. This Richard had 3 children baptised in Athenry RC church. I believe this line may be the roots of my own great grandfather Michael who was born in 1827.

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Crossle notes that whilst the Lydican line spells the name “Killikelly” the Beaghmore and Littlebride lines spell it “Kilkelly” from about the mid 1700’s leaving him to conclude a closer relationship between these lines.

Crossle also records some families from the Kinvara area loosely aligned with this branch but he hasn’t shown the direct links between the families. There are many Kilkelly families around Gort, Ardrahan, Kinvara and north Co. Clare who are likely descended from this line.

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2) Cosnagh McGillikelly

Cosnagh's descendants lived at Cloghballymore Castle (near Ballindereen) and later at Raheen-Kilkelly (near Gort). Brian Reogh McGillikelly, descendant of Cosnagh, was a man of much strength from about 1580 onwards. His cousins from the other septs tried to drive him out due to his power. Much of his lands were forfeited around 1641 during the Cromwellian invasion and the family moved to Raheen-Kilkelly near Ardrahan in 1695. Garret Killikelly died around 1790 and the lands at Raheen-Kilkelly were sold to the O'Haras to pay off his debts.

This Kilkelly branch included:

- Hyacinth Killikelly: convicted of taking part in the United Irishmen rebellion of 1798.
- Redmond Kilkelly: said to have prospered in Manilla/West Indies trade and died in 1741 "leaving a considerable fortune."
- Daniel Kilkelly of Summerville House (also called Thomastown) near Menlough. He was well known through his law practice in Dublin. The Summerville estate included a big house with its own man made lake.



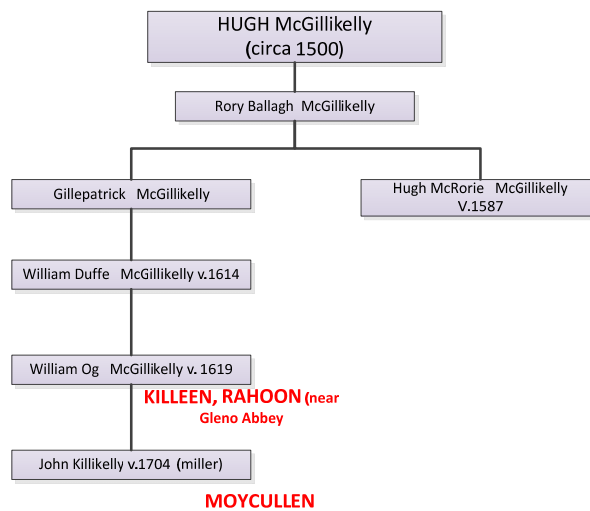
Summerville House and Lake



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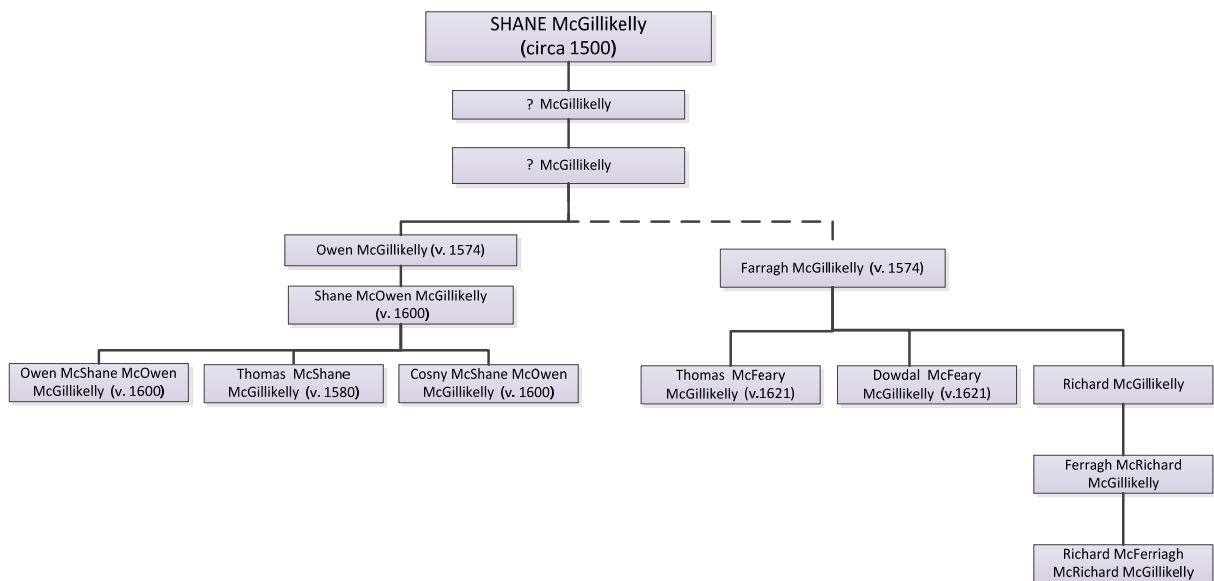
3) Hugh McGillikelly

William Duffe McGilligelly in about 1590 was sole heir of this line. After several legal disputes over ownership of his land, he sold most of it to Brian Riogh McGillikelly and the remaining land was either seized or sold off. The last records we have of this line are of William McGillykelly living in 1619 in Ragoon, Galway and John Kiliikelly “of the town of Galway” who was also a miller in Moycullen between 1660 and 1704. No further records are listed.



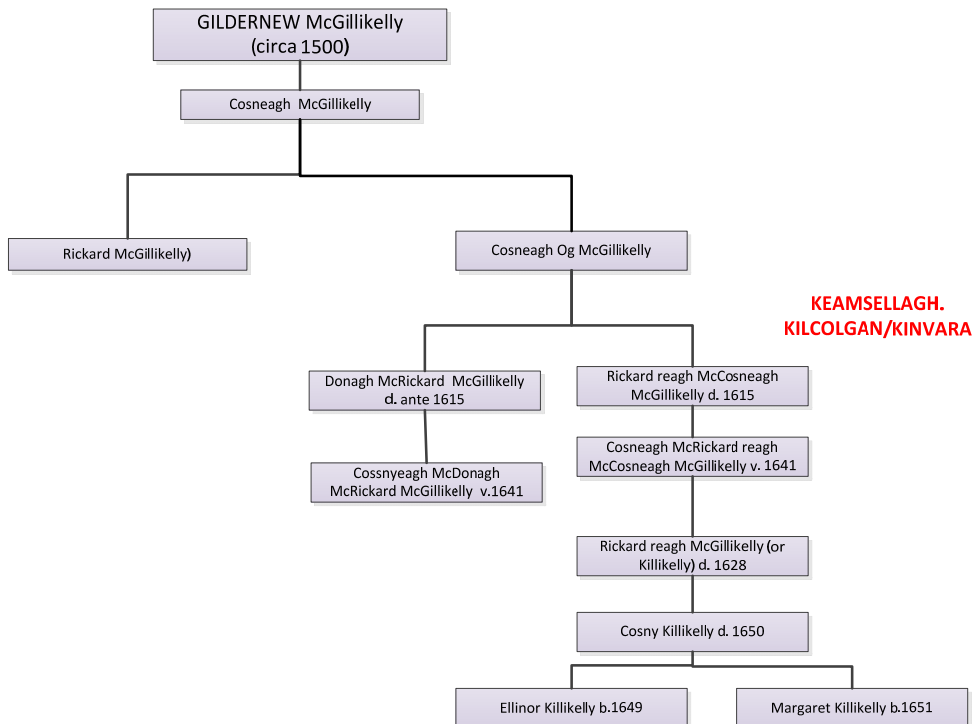
4) Shane McGillikelly

This slught lived in the Kilcolgan area of Galway. They sold all their lands to Michael Kirwan some time before 1615. No mention of this branch after 1641 when Owen McGillikely is recorded as the last Chieftain of this clan.



5) Gildernew McGillikelly

This Kilkelly line was short lived and ended with Cosny Killikelly of Keamsellagh near Kilcolgan who died in 1650 with no sons.



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Many of the early prominent members of the Kilkelly family are buried in St Sourney's church in Drumacoo near Kilcolgan (see below).



Jerome Fahy in his book "The history and antiquities of the diocese of Kilmacduagh" states: "Within the church there are but few monuments more ancient than the seventeenth century, and those belong to a distinguished and very old family, the Kilkellys, who....occupied the neighbouring castle of Cloghballymore, and owned some of the adjoining estates."

The Kilkellys also have a very strong link with the town of Athenry from ancient times. Francis Grosse a historian wrote in 1791 of Athenry Abbey that "the cemetery of the monastery was a great place of internment and in it were laid De Burghs, Oheyne, Killikellies ..etc". There are also records of monks with the family name Kilkelly serving in the monastic abbey.

Summary:

The Kilkellys were a prominent family in the south Galway area and right up to the 15th century held a high degree of influence and territory. This influence and territory was whittled down initially by the Norman conquests in the 11th century and later by Elizabethan displacement in the 16th Century and Cromwell dispossessions in the 17th century.

In the 1840's famine and devastation visited Ireland. Many Kilkellys left Ireland at this time mainly for the United States and England but no doubt some were not so fortunate!