

The Galloglass Warriors

The galloglass or galloglass – from Irish: gallóglaiġh (plural), gallóglach (singular) – were a class of elite mercenary warriors who principally were members of the Norse-Gaelic clans of Scotland between the mid 13th century and late 16th century. As Scots, they were Gaels and shared a common background and language with the Irish, but as they had intermarried with the 10th century Norse settlers of western Scotland, the Irish called them Gall Gaeil ("foreign Gaels").

The first record of galloglass service under the Irish was in 1259 when Aedh O'Conchobair King of Connaught received a dowry of 150 Scottish warriors from the daughter of the King of the Hebrides. Galloglass contingents were given land and settled in Irish lordships where they were entitled to receive supplies from the local population.

In 1569 Turlough O'Neill married Lady Agnes MacDonald of Kintyre. She was the daughter of Colin Campbell of Argyll. She earlier married James Macdonald of Dunyvaig. Her dowry consisted of at least 1200 galloglass fighters. Along with support of two young men and friends to assist or fight. The fighting force could easily have numbered over 5,000 future Galloglass warriors coming into this area of Tyrone.

By 1512, there were reported to be fifty-nine groups throughout the country under the control of the Irish nobility, though initially they were mercenaries. Over time they settled and their ranks became filled with native Irish men. The importation of galloglass into Ireland was a major factor in containing the Anglo-Norman invasion of the 12th century, as their ranks stiffened the resistance of the Irish lordships. Throughout the Middle Ages in Ireland, galloglass troops were maintained by Gaelic Irish and Hiberno-Norman lords alike. Even the English Lord Deputy of Ireland usually kept a company of them in his service.

Up to the time of the Norman invasion there had been no standing force at the command of the Irish leaders and so the English men-at-arms found little difficulty in overcoming their yeomen opponents. Trained fighting men were introduced from Argyll and the Outer Islands to aid the Irish.

The Hebridean clans had such close connections with the Vikings that they had learned to make and use Viking arms, essentially the same arms and tactics employed by the Normans. The Irish, on the other hand, until the Norman invasion, had no experience with heavy cavalry or armor. Their quilted linen war coats might provide some slight deterrence to a knife thrust, but would provide no protection at all against a Norman battle-axe or mace; and certainly no protection from the great range and penetrating power of the English longbow. It was only a matter of time before Irish chiefs sought the aid of their relatives in Scotland to help them against the Normans.

The Scottish mercenaries they employed to teach them to fight the Normans were called "gallóglaiġh" (galloglasses - foreigners in green) in Ireland; while in Scotland, a military caste of mercenaries evolved called the "buannachan," from the Gaelic "buanna," meaning a hired

soldier.

The leaders of the Irish gallóglaiigh belonged to a limited number of Norse-Scottish families among whom mercenary service became hereditary; i.e., the MacDonnells of Leinster, MacDonnells of Ulster MacDonnells of Mayo, MacSuibhnes, MacDowells, MacRuairidh, MacCibes and some others. The MacDonnells served in Ulster first, where they were employed as men at arms by the ÓCahans and the ÓNeills of Tyrone, to whom they were related by marriage. By the middle of the 14th Century they had spread to Connacht, where the ÓConnors and the Ó'Kellys employed them. By 1399, they also served such Gaelo-Normans as the Clanrickard Burkes of Mayo, the FitzGerald of Kildare and the ÓNeills of Clondeboye., MacDonnells of Clondeboye and Lecale, Galloglass families Scottish families who provided warriors in the fight against the Norman invaders were -

- Creedon
- Gallagher
- Gielty
- Kennedy
- McCabe
- McCann
- McCoy/Coy
- MacDonald
- McDonnell
- McFadden/McFadyen
- McGinley
- McGinty
- McGreal/Grealis – a sept of the McNeills
- McHale
- McLaughlin
- McNamara
- McNeill
- McRuairi
- McSorley
- Nevin
- Sheehy
- Sweeney/MacSuibhne

It is interesting to look at the residential record which are accessible of McNeill / McNeile families living in Ireland in the period of 1700 -1800. While in some instances we have been able to trace their ancestry migration from Scotland, there are many others whose ancestry is not so clear.

It seems quite likely that some are descendants of galloglass warriors who came from Scotland to fight against the Norman invaders in earlier years and remained in Ireland.