



## Reconnecting Place and People:

# The Moycullen Heritage DNA Project and the Irish Diaspora



American Conference for Irish Studies

An Chomhdháil Mheiriceánach do Léann na hÉireann

# The Irish Diaspora and Migration



Irish migration has created one of the world's most extensive diasporas



Millions of descendants now live outside Ireland, particularly in the United States, Australia, and Britain



Migration often weakened connections to specific local communities



Descendants frequently retain a general Irish identity but lack knowledge of precise ancestral places



Reconnecting diaspora descendants with specific localities presents both challenges and opportunities

# Research Focus and Argument

This presentation examines the Moycullen DNA Project as a case study of diasporic reconnection.



Genetic genealogy functions as a modern diasporic practice



It enables descendants of emigrants to reconnect with place, kinship networks, and community



It demonstrates the continuing importance of locality in diasporic identity



It shows how digital tools and community initiatives sustain transnational relationships





# Maigh Cuilinn/ Moycullen: The Granary of Galway



## Rich Agricultural Heritage

Moycullen has a long history of agricultural productivity, earning its title as the Granary of Galway.



## Modern Community Growth

The village now supports a vibrant community of about 5,500 people with modern facilities and amenities.



## Encompassing 58 Townlands

10km Northwest of Galway City on the west coast of Ireland, Moycullen parish merges rural and village landscapes, reflecting a blend of tradition and progress.



# Moycullen Heritage and Community History



Moycullen Heritage is a volunteer historical society founded in 1995



Dedicated to documenting and preserving local history



Supported by the Irish Community Archive Network (iCAN)



Uses digital platforms to share historical knowledge



Provides a foundation for community-based historical research and diasporic engagement

# Migration and the Moycullen Diaspora



Thousands of individuals emigrated from Moycullen over the past two centuries



Migrants settled in the United States, Britain, Australia, and elsewhere



Migration often resulted in loss of knowledge about specific ancestral places



Descendants frequently retained Irish identity but lacked precise genealogical connections



The diaspora represents an extension of the parish beyond Ireland

# Diaspora, Memory and Reconnection



Diasporic identity is often shaped by family stories and inherited memory



Connections to place may weaken across generations



Genealogy provides a means of reconstructing these connections



Digital communication has expanded opportunities for participation



The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated online engagement between local and diaspora communities

# Origins of the Moycullen DNA Project



Developed during the COVID-19 pandemic through online participation



Enabled diaspora descendants to engage remotely with Moycullen Heritage



Created to expand knowledge of parish history



Sought to reconnect diaspora descendants with their ancestral community



Combined DNA testing, genealogy research, and digital communication





# Historical Foundations: The Blake Census of Moycullen



Compiled by Father Francis Xavier Blake  
between 1793 and 1825



Recorded all householders within the parish  
by townland



Included detailed information on marriages,  
deaths, and migration



Supported by unusually complete parish  
records



Provides a critical historical anchor for  
genealogical and DNA research

# Project Overview

The Moycullen DNA Project consists of four interconnected elements



## DNA Testing

of local residents descended from historic parish families



## Construction

of a comprehensive parish family tree



## Creation

of an online genealogy community

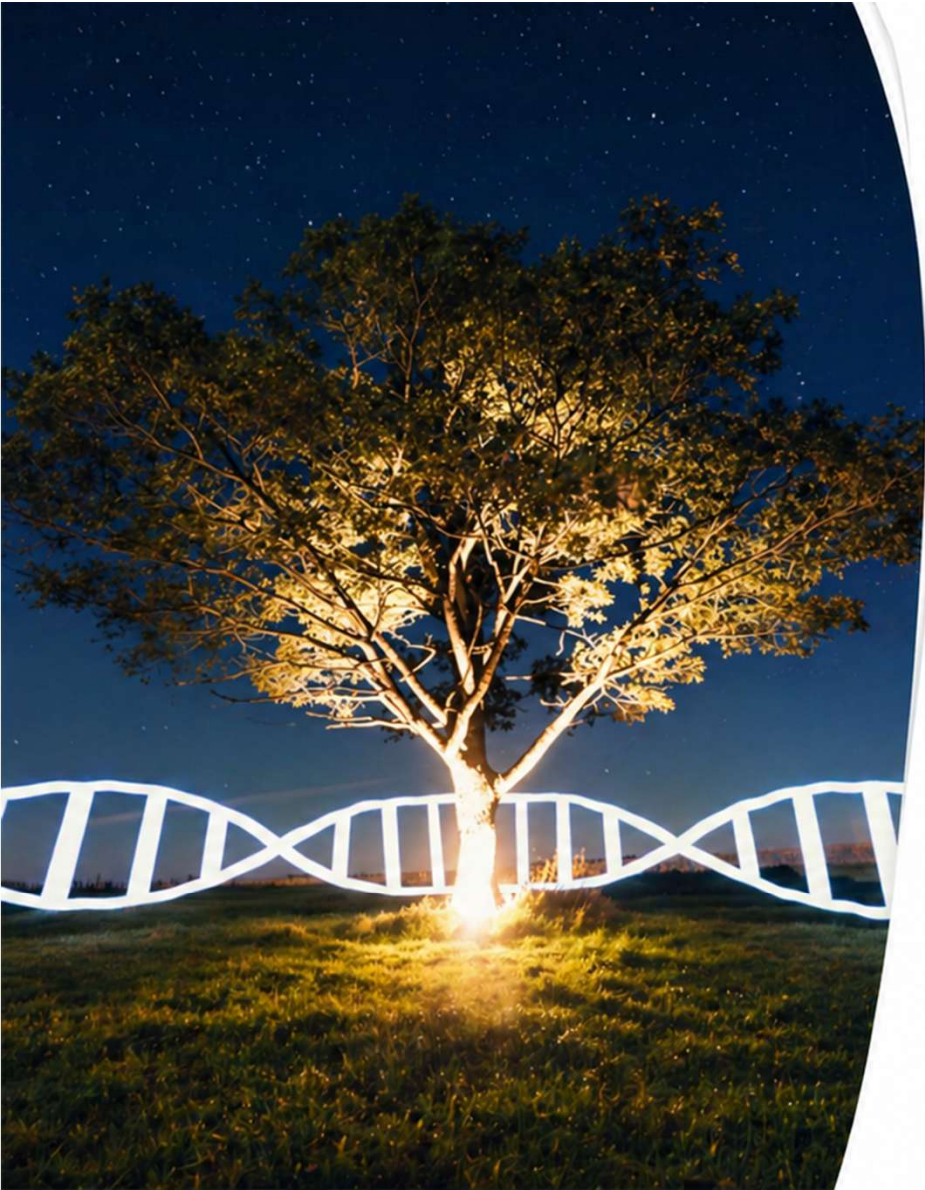


## Personal Engagement

with diaspora descendants, including visits



**Together, these elements reconnect people, place and history**



# DNA Testing and Genetic Genealogy



DNA testing provided to parish residents with Blake Census Ancestry



Over 60 participants tested



Fundraising enabled free testing



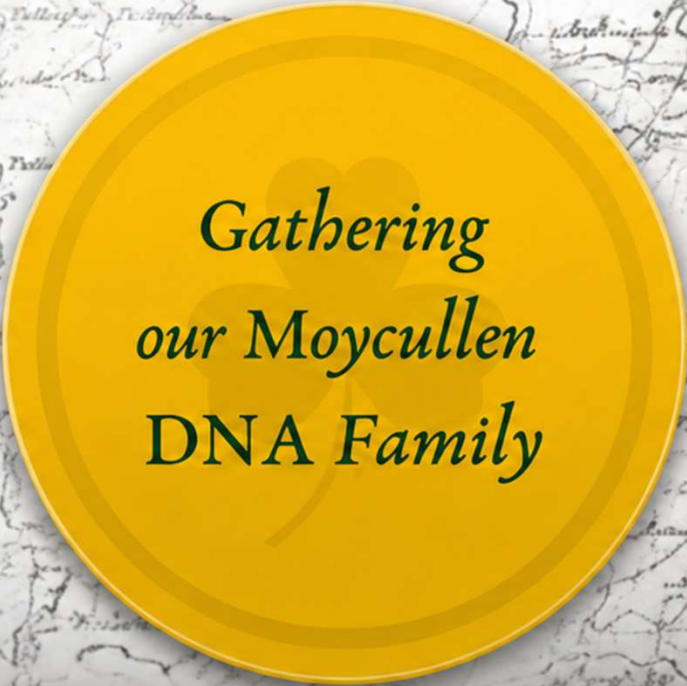
DNA results identified connections between participants



Combined with archival research to reconstruct family relationships



**DNA provides scientific evidence of historical kinship**



*Gathering  
our Moycullen  
DNA Family*



Group by Moycullen Heritage

## Moycullen Heritage Genealogy

Private group · 902 members



# Online Community and Digital Diaspora



Moycullen Heritage Genealogy Facebook Group established



Currently approximately 900 members



Members located in Ireland, UK, New Zealand, Australia



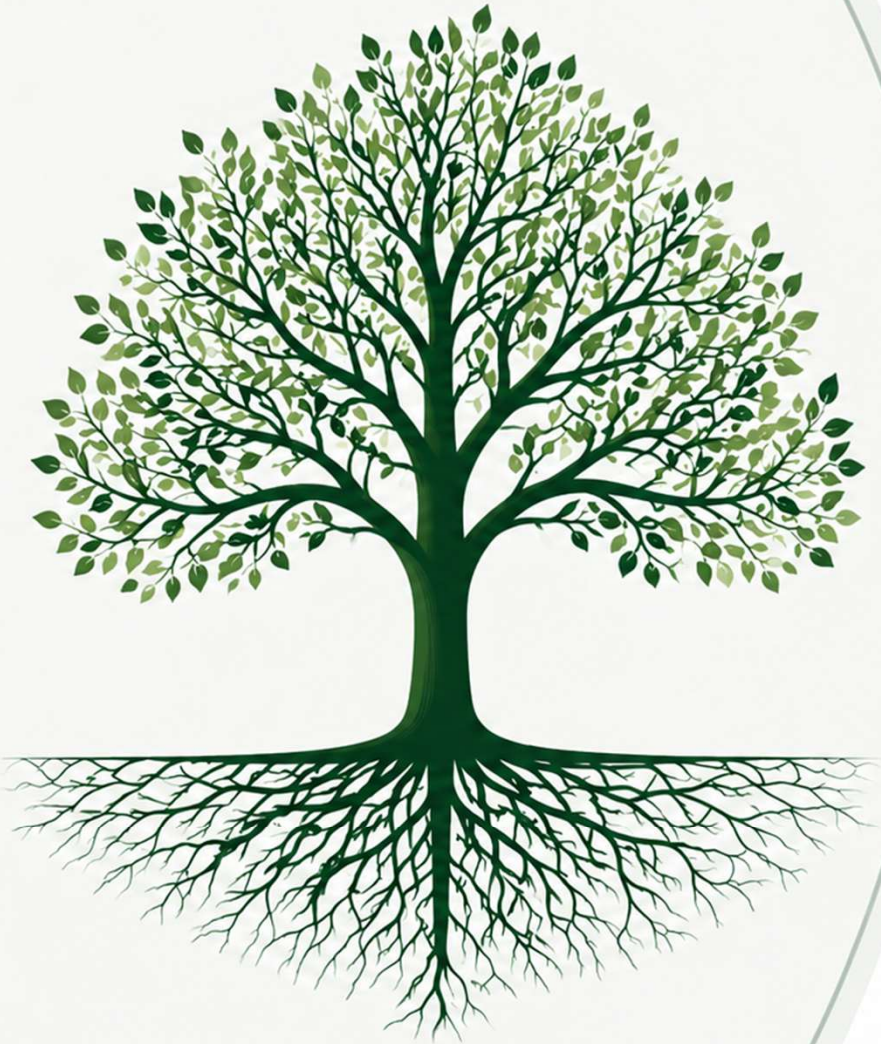
Enables sharing of genealogical information and historical knowledge



Provides a digital space for diaspora engagement and collaboration



**This online community functions as a transnational network**



# Creation of Parish Family Tree



Parish-wide genealogical database constructed



Currently includes over **27,500** individuals



Integrates DNA results, archival records and census data



Links local residents and diaspora descendants



Reconstructs historic kinship networks at a community scale



**This transforms family history into community history**



# Reconnecting Descendants with Place



Moycullen Heritage facilitates visits by diaspora descendants, helping them reconnect with their ancestral place and people.



**More than 50 diaspora visits** have been supported



**Place becomes real** through experiencing the landscape firsthand



**Visitors are connected** to ancestral townlands and family homes



**Reconnection fosters** personal and cultural understanding



**DNA connections** enable meetings with previously unknown relatives



**Stronger bonds** between local community and global diaspora



**Place becomes real rather than abstract**



Connecticut to Parke



Oregon to Oldtown



Dallas to Cloonabinnia



Los Angeles to Danesfield



Colorado to Killagoola



Boston to Loughwell

# Expanding Knowledge of Irish Migration



Project has led to new historical research on Moycullen emigrants



Identified Moycullen Diaspora communities in the United States



Expanded understanding of migration patterns



Connected local parish history with global migration history



Demonstrates how local research contributes to broader migration studies



# Genetic Genealogy as a Diasporic Practice



Genetic genealogy represents a modern diasporic practice because it:



Enables descendants to actively reconstruct ancestral connections



Links individuals to specific places rather than national identity alone



Rebuilds kinship networks disrupted by migration



Facilitates sustained relationships across national boundaries



Integrates scientific, archival and community knowledge



**Diaspora becomes an active process rather than a passive inheritance**

# Conclusion and Implications for Migration and Diasporic Studies

The Moycullen DNA Project



## Dynamic Diaspora

Diaspora connections remain active, evolving, and ongoing



## Place & Identity

Place continues to shape and anchor diasporic identity



## Digital Reconnection

DNA and digital tools enable new forms of reconnection



## Community Research

Community-driven work reconstructs transnational relationships



## Local → Global Impact

Local initiatives can carry global historical significance



**Together, these insights show how people, place, and technology reconnect diasporic communities**



**go raibh maith agat**



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