

Ballina, County Mayo

Michael O'Hara and Mary Cairns are currently our oldest ancestors, Michael being born sometime around 1790 and Mary around 1783. There is little knowledge so far about them except that Michael was a weaver and we would hope that this might have meant a slightly less arduous lifestyle for them and their family than was being experienced by the farm labourers.

They were located around the town of Ballina, Co. Mayo. **Ballina** (Irish: *Béal an Átha* or *Béal Átha an Fheadha*, lit. *mouth of the ford*) is a large town in north County Mayo in Ireland. It lies at the mouth of the River Moy near Killala Bay, in the Moy valley and Parish of Kilmoremoy, with the *Ox Mountain* range to the east and the *Nephin Beg* mountains to the west. The town occupies two Baronies; Tirawley on the west bank of the Moy River, and Tireragh, a Barony within the County of Sligo, on its east banks. Ballina is the postal address for a great deal of North Mayo including those who live in Erris, many miles to its north west.



The recorded population of Ballina's urban area is 10,409. Census 2006 figures released by the Central Statistics Office in September 2007 showed that Ballina had the highest rate of unemployment amongst large towns in the Republic of Ireland. Some 15.8% of Ballina's population was out of work when the 2006 census was taken

According to Encyclopædia Britannica the first signs of settlement on the site of the town dates from around 1375 when an Augustinian friary was founded. Belleek, now part of the town, pre-dates the town's formation, and can be dated back to the late 15th century, or early 16th century. However, what is now known as Belleek Castle was built in 1831. Ballina was officially established as a town in 1723 by O'Hara, Lord Tyrawley. (**Baron Tyrawley** was a title that was created twice, both times in the Peerage of Ireland. The first creation came in 1706 in favour of the soldier Sir Charles O'Hara. His son, James O'Hara, was a distinguished military commander. He had already been created Baron Kilmaine in the Peerage of

Ireland in 1722 when he succeeded his father in the barony of Tyrawley two years later. However, both titles became extinct on his death in 1774. The next creation came in 1797 in favour of James Cuffe, who was created **Baron Tyrawley**, of Ballinrobe in the County of Mayo. He sat in the House of Lords from 1800 to 1821 as one of the 28 original Irish Representative Peers. However, on his death in 1821 this title became extinct as well.)

Belleek Estate

The Belleek estate once occupied lands from the Moy River to the modern-day Killala Road. This included part of the 'Old French Road' which General Humbert marched on from Killala, and beside part of which in the Killala Road-Belleek area was Belleek's reservoir – presumably destroyed in the construction of Coca-Cola's 'Ballina Beverages' factory; the 'Old French Road' is now closed off at that point, with what amounts to diversion road signs claiming Humbert marched where he did not.

Old borders

Ballina is located on the west side of the County Mayo - County Sligo border. Part of what is now the town was once (prior to the *Local Government Act, 1898*) part of County Sligo, with the border for the most part once being the River Moy, east of which was in Sligo, including Ardnare], and Crockets Town (the Quay).



General Humbert and the French Landing - 1798

The Centenary memorial (the Humbert Monument) was dedicated on May 11, 1898 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the French landing at Killala in support of the Irish Rebellion of 1798. The monument was originally sculptured by a Dublin Craftsman but in recent years it has been restored locally. The figure on the monument is not Humbert but Mother Ireland. Maud Gonne, a famous Irish woman, unveiled the monument. At the event Maud Gonne famously poured water over another speaker's (an IRB member) head. The monument was moved to its current location on Humbert Street in 1987, where it was re-dedicated by Maud Gonne's son, Seán MacBride.

Megalithic tomb

The Dolmen of the Four Maols is located on 'Primrose Hill' behind Ballina's Railway Station. The dolmen dates from c2,000 B.C. and is sometimes called locally the 'Table of the Giants'. Legend has it that the dolmen is the burial place of the four Maols. The four Maols murdered Ceallach, a 7th century Bishop of Connacht and were hung at Ardnaree - the Hill of Executions. Tradition says that their bodies were buried under the dolmen.

The town has some notable architecture, including the 15th-century Moyne Abbey, and St Muredach's Cathedral, which is the Cathedral Church of the Diocese of Killala. Work on the Cathedral began in 1827. The stone was quarried locally and the roof and ceiling were completed before the Great Famine (1845). The spire was completed in 1855 and by 1875 the organ had been commissioned. Outside Ballina, on a small hill to the west, stands a dolmen, thought to have been erected 4000 years ago. The only all-boys' secondary school in the town, St. Muredach's College, celebrated its centenary on 10 September 2006.

Ballina has many listed buildings including Georgian Housing on the Banks of the Moy, the Ice House Building which has been converted into an exclusive hotel, and the former provincial bank, which now houses the Jackie Clarke Museum. The streets of Ballina consist mainly of three and four storey Georgian and Victorian buildings, though the structures of several buildings are actually far older.

There are 2 main bridges straddling the Moy in the town centre. The first, the Armstrong and West, or Lower bridge, was built in 1835. The second, the Ham or Upper bridge, was built in the following year of 1836 by Thomas Ham at a cost of £3,000.00. Both bridges are limestone, and have 4 and 5 arches respectively. Traffic flows in a one-way direction around these 2 bridges and is often heavily backed up on both sides, the reason for calls for a third bridge further down the river.

The Salmon Weir Bridge is a pedestrian bridge over the River Moy from Barrett St. to Ridge Pool Rd. The bridge, which was designed to resemble a fishing rod, was opened in July 2009.

The Ballina Salmon Festival is a 10-day festival held annually in July in the town. The festival includes Heritage Day, where most of the centre of the town is closed to traffic and the streets fill with arts and craft stalls and demonstrations of transport from days gone by. The festival finale was a Mardi Gras followed by a fireworks display, until 2010, when financial restrictions precluded the organisers from holding the Mardi Gras.

Between 1811 and 1821 Michael and Mary have three sons that we are aware of, Michael, John and Peter, but in all probability there would have been a much larger number of children given the age in which they lived. However, this is still to be discovered.

It would appear that the whole family had emigrated to Scotland by the mid to late 1840's as they are captured on the 1851 Census with Mary living with John and his wife at 118 Main Street, Gorbals, just three years prior to her death in 1854. Michael is not recorded and thus may well have passed away a short time after the trip across the Irish Sea. Interestingly, the census data would appear to suggest that the family had split up soon after they had arrived in Scotland for John and his family were in Gorbals but in 1861 Peter's wife was claiming Poor Relief in Carluke where Peter had been a miner, at Law Colliery, near Carluke.

Logically, the O'Hara's would have arrived in Glasgow from their sea crossing and settled originally in the Gorbals area, on the south bank of the River Clyde. There were a large number of Irish immigrants who inhabited the area and it would seem a reasonable suggestion for our ancestors to have done the same before finding their own feet further afield.

Towards the end of the 1700s the main industry was weaving. There were 556 looms in use in the area and the Gorbals area held a good reputation between 1790 and the end of the 19th century when industrialisation began to take over. Govan Colliery in the countryside to the south employed 200 men and used a steam engine to raise coal the 600 feet to the surface. As well as the Irish Catholics, a vibrant enclave of Jewish people had settled there and trade and commerce thrived. Much of the land was parcelled up and sold to local members of the wealthier class thus spawning the areas that still exist today Laurieston (John Laurie), Hutchesontown (George Hutcheson) and the ironworks and railway arrived. Only later did the reputation for gangs, tenements and high rise flats blight the area.

Michael O'Hara and Bridget McVey settled in Carluke.

Records show that the earliest inhabitants in Carluke, also known as Kirkstyle, were monks. A Roman road passed this way and a number of tower houses were built in the area.