

# Ireland Homeland

Hopefully the day will arrive when some young, energetic, next generation genealogist travels to Ireland and uncovers documentation that might help us understand exactly where our Blackburn ancestors lived in or around Loughgall, Ireland. For now, we have to rely on stories about the region generally to understand how our ancestors lived and how that area shaped their lives.

Quaker records clearly indicate that our Blackburns were from Loughgall in County Armagh, but at first blush that could be a very broad statement about their homeland. Loughgall is the name of a parish in County Armagh and within that parish there are more than 30 townlands and boroughs.

Ireland is sub-divided in a very unique way. The island is divided into four provinces – Ulster, Munster, Connacht and Leinster. The provinces basically fall along boundaries of kingdoms that existed before the island was conquered by the Normans. [A fifth kingdom, Meath, was gradually merged through history into Leinster.] The county of Armagh is part of the province of Ulster.

Ulster consists of nine counties in the northern part of Ireland. When the Irish Republic achieved independence in 1922, Ulster was divided up. Three counties with heavily Catholic majorities were ceded to Ireland. The remaining six counties became what is now commonly known as Northern Ireland, its Protestant majority deciding to align with the United Kingdom in 1922. Interestingly enough, 90 years later, the majority of the population in Northern Ireland is now, again, Catholic.

Armagh remained part of that northern group of counties, together with counties Antrim, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone.

Irish counties are then divided up into baronies, probably set apart as the name infers – as related to a particular baron. Loughgall is in Oneilland barony, which was later divided east and west, Loughgall being in the west.

The next level of division is that of the parish. County Armagh has 27 civil parishes, of which Loughgall is one. One might compare this division to that of a township in the North America, townships often being 36 square miles in area and containing several towns, boros, villages, etc. So, the parish of Loughgall has several divisions within including the townland of Loughgall, which is now more of a small town surrounded by rural area.

Even though Loughgall is the name of a parish, it is most likely that the Blackburns were actually residents of the townland of Loughgall within the parish of Loughgall. Those early Quaker records were reasonably specific when it came to naming the home area of a particular family, the townland really being the form of reference.

Just to the east of the townland of Loughgall is the parish of Kilmore. On the western edge of that parish we find, from north to south, the townlands of Ballyhagan, Money, Creenagh and Richhill. These townlands were a very short distance from one another, much closer than one sees between the villages of rural North America.

Ballyhagan was the townland in which the Quaker meeting was established that became the spiritual home of the Blackburns. Just to the southeast was Money, where John and Elizabeth Blackburn are buried (parents of John the immigrant), as well as William and Elinor Morton (parents of Rachel the immigrant). Moving back to the southwest we come to Creenagh, the ancestral townland of William and Elinor Morton. And then a little to the southeast one comes to Richhill, the townland that housed the merged Quaker meeting when Ballyhagan was closed.

A recent article entitled “History and Tradition in the Parish of Kilmore” by Benedict Fearon tells us a little bit about Ballyhagan:

*The Ballyhagan area in pre-Plantation times was noted for its apples. The Ulster Chieftans received their apples from these parts. A wild apple grown on a farm in Ballyhagan was grown commercially in North Armagh until a few years ago. In the hedgerows the wild apples still grow in abundance. Mention Ballyhagan today and of course you think of the school, or Davitts football team. The school was opened in 1868, the principal teacher being Henry Lee followed by Mr. James Lee and Mr. Joseph Rafferty. It was closed in 1975. Ballyhagan Davitts football team was amongst the earliest founded in County Armagh.*

*Over 330 years ago Ballyhagan was the centre of a flourishing Quaker community or as they are known by the name of the Society of Friends and indeed friends they have been to all sections of the Irish people. The Ballyhagan meeting house was used in 1654 until 1793 when it was transferred to Richhill. The ruins of the old meeting house are still visible to this day on Ballyhagan hill. The descendants of the first Quaker families are still in this area today but they are no longer Quakers. Some are Catholic and some are Church of Ireland. The Quakers of Ballyhagan suffered badly in the Williamite wars when the rival armies of James II and William III encamped in Ballyhagan. Local tradition always claimed that the army of James II went over “Bloomhill” on their way to Derry. After the Battle of the Boyne the Quakers of Ballyhagan wrote to Dublin about their experiences during the recent occupation.*

*A letter addressed to Anthony Sharp of Dublin from two Quakers in Ballyhagan named William Williamson and Robert Robinson dated 4<sup>th</sup> June 1690 gives us an account of life in Ballyhagan almost 300 years ago. The Ballyhagan area had been in the thick of the 1641 rebellion, and now their way of life was interrupted by the Williamite War. To the settlers a degree of normality had returned, their houses had been repaired, and the fields were being tilled to grow corn and wheat, cattle grazed on the rough pasture which had not yet been cleared. Then one morning the peace was shattered by the arrival of the Irish Army of James II early in the year 1689. They were on their way to capture Derry, which was holding out for William. The Irish army did not delay too long. The wagons were filled with provisions, hay was got for the horses and then they were off. Having failed in their mission at Derry, Ballyhagan was worth a return visit on their way home to Dublin.*

*Bur worse was still to come for soon after the Irish left, there arrived the mercenary soldiers of William Prince of Orange composed of English, Danes and French. An English regiment of Dragoons arrived first and when they had eaten, and hay and corn collected for the horses, they moved on. Then two French regiments stayed all winter and spring and quartered themselves on the local inhabitants living to the best and paying nothing their keep. They grazed the fields and meadows with their horses and killed the cattle to supply the soldiers with fresh meat, the farms were raided and the oats were seized to feed the wagon horses.*

*Now the farmers had another problem, how to save the seed corn for the spring sowing, so with typical Quaker initiative they outwitted the soldiers and sowed the corn at daybreak. The Danes were no different from the French, they took everything they could find and paid little or nothing. The Quaker meeting house was taken over and the soldiers brewed ale in it, using the seats and forms and doors for fuel. On top of all this the rector of Kilmore demanded his pound of flesh, namely the tithes due to him, and the landlord wanted his rent. Financial ruin was staring them in the face, but they seemed to have weathered the storm for their descendants are still around today.*

It’s so interesting that Mr. Fearon begins his article about Ballyhagan talking about apples being at the heart of the economy. As has been discussed in this newsletter before, the Blackburns brought this expertise in orchardry with them and the area where they settled north of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania is still today at the center of the apple industry in North America. Blackburns moving from there to Bedford, PA and as far west as Washington state also continued that family tradition.

In Fearon’s article he also provides a brief overview of town of Richhill. The Blackburns left Ireland before the Ballyhagan and Richhill meetings became integrated, but one paragraph is interesting to note:

*In 1835 an ordinance Survey of the ownership etc of the lands of Kilmore gives the landlords as follows: Richardsons of Richhill owned 20 townlands, Count De Salis 10, Copes of Loughgall 7, Primate lands attached to the see of Armagh 9, Church or Glebe lands 3, Colonel Verner 1, Lord Viscount Dungannon 1, General Molyneaux 1, Captain Atkinson 1, Lord Mandeville 1 and Reverend H. Caufield.*

So, a century after the Blackburns left for new opportunities in North America in 1736, land in Ireland in 1835 remained in the hands of what was appropriately known as the “landed gentry”. Residents in this area were primarily tenants, so getting access to land in North America was truly a life-changing event – and would change the course of history for the descendants of those families.

The townland of Loughgall was controlled for centuries by the Cope family and the Blackburns were undoubtedly tenants of this family during their years there. Loughgall Manor was occupied by the Cope family for more than 350 years. Future issues of *Blackburn Beginnings* will address some of the history of this family and perhaps additional research will uncover the economic relationship between the Cope and Blackburn families. It is interesting to note that a given name that was quite common among the Cope family is that of Anthony – an unusual name in Ireland at that time and a name that appears quite often among the early Blackburns. Even though landlord and tenant, maybe the families had a good relationship.

Today the village of Loughgall is quite small, with the 2001 census listing just 285 residents. Loughgall Manor is now the home of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, which includes a group focused on Apple Research & Development. The Loughgall Country Park is set on a large estate of open farmland and orchards, with a golf course attached. So, 21<sup>st</sup> century Loughgall lives within the heart of its 17<sup>th</sup> century ancestor.