Manx Y-DNA Study – Current Progress

Key Findings

New insights have been gained from the study which are able to provide more information on the early population of the Isle of Man during the period 1000-1500AD.

1. **Scandinavian Influence**: From investigating the male population of the Isle of Man in the period just after the end of Scandinavian rule we can identify a part of the legacy of their occupation of the Island immediately after the end of Scandinavian rule. Based on the sample of men tested in the study, **approximately a quarter of the men of this early population of the Isle of Man, with male descendants surviving today, had male ancestors who previously came from Scandinavia and Northern Europe**. The remainder came from neighbouring areas, mainly Ireland, Scotland and early Britain. The proportion of Scandinavian genes in the male population of the Isle of Man today will have been reduced however since then, as a result of the influx of population into the Island in the 19th and 20th centuries.

2. **Genetic consequences of the evolution of Gaelic family names:** The study results have shone a new light on the process that occurred when early patronymic Gaelic names evolved and became hereditary. In early times individuals were originally only known by their single or personal names.

   The patronymic system meant that individuals were identified by using the name of their father as well as their personal name e.g. Cormac MacNeill (or Cormac son of Neill). Other family names might be also adopted which perhaps described some other attribute of the individual, their appearance, their trade, for example or the name of the place they lived, but the Celtic patronymic surname based on Mac = "the son of" was the most common.

   Over a period of time these family names started to be adopted permanently (hereditary) and then passed down from male generation to male generation unchanged. This is believed to have occurred gradually on the Isle of Man in the period between 1050 to 1300AD.

   This one-time transformation in the durability of a Gaelic origin family name, from lasting only for a single male generation and changing to being permanent and multigenerational, has been seen within the study to have two different and unanticipated consequences, that can affect the expected connection between a family name and its associated Y-DNA profile.

2.1 Parallel name formation: Different Y-DNA profiles with same family name

Under normal circumstances, in a small population like the Isle of Man, it would be expected that Y-DNA analysis would show that each family bearing the same family name today would descend from a single male patriarch.

In the early stages of the study it became apparent that a small number of male line families, despite bearing the same name, showed different Y-DNA profiles from others with the same family name. Deeper analysis of the genealogy and DNA data revealed that this was a result of the same hereditary family names being adopted in early times, in parallel, by different families. The families were descended from different patriarchs not genetically related to each other and who for centuries had lived in different parishes from each other, elsewhere on the Island.

But, when we consider the generic nature of the formation of these Gaelic family names which originally were patronymic in form, it is entirely possibly that different genetic families could end up with the same hereditary name today, as a consequence of the irrevocable change from transient to permanent and identical family names. This characteristic has been seen in 7 of the 130 surviving indigenous Manx families so far.

2.2 Genetic persistence: Same male Y-DNA profiles but with different names

Another unexpected finding to emerge from the study has been the extent to which the male lines of Manx families with entirely different names are connected to each other genetically.

Analysis shows that a number of families, bearing totally different family names, have been found each to share a common male ancestor, who lived in a relatively recent time period, but before names became hereditary.

The phenomenon that must have occurred is that individual men had sons, who themselves then reproduced to create separate lines of new generations of male descendants. These descendant family lines lived separately from each other, but by the time when patronymic family names started to become hereditary, each family had already adopted a different family name from each other, depending on their individual father's name at that time. So genetically all these men were related and were descended from one common male ancestor, but they adopted different permanent, hereditary family names for their descendants. In hindsight this can be seen as an inevitable consequence of a changeover from a Gaelic patronymic naming system to a hereditary one.

In most societies the dominant situation is that most male line family names are of multiple genetic origins, i.e. The Browns and Smiths etc are not just descended from one man, and these names are widely used. The Manx family names are low frequency names and originate only on the island. Therefore, by contrast, one would expect them each to be descended from just one male patriarch because of the small population and low population mobility. Accordingly, it was unexpected to find a number of Manx names (7) with different genetic origins, but with the names adopted in parallel. It was even more unusual and unexpected then to find so many families with different names who were in fact closely related without knowing it.

3. **Early Family Origins Identified:** The unique Y-DNA signatures of more than 100 Manx family lines (out of 130) have been identified so far and new insights gained into their early origins before they arrived on the Isle of Man. More than 510 men with Manx ancestry have been tested from some 118 families and research continues to test and analyse fully those remaining family names.

4. **Unique Manx Family Names**: Those familiar family names (e.g. Curphey, Bridson, Kennaugh etc) which we consider to be typical of and unique to the Isle of Man are shown to be indeed so. Y-DNA analysis indicates that they were not connected to any similar names existing elsewhere and thus have had to have been formed and created on the Island. This is equally true of all those Manx names of frequent Gaelic construction which occur and are also formed elsewhere (e.g. Kelly, Cowell, Cowley etc.). The Manx families bearing these names adopted such names on the Island and are found to have no genetic connection with other families originating elsewhere with the same name. **So "Kelly from the Isle of Man" is truly from the Isle of Man!**

5. **Manx Name Variants:** Where there are different variants of the same original Manx family name, which are popularly assumed to be equivalent, e.g. Gell, Gale and Gill, Collister and Callister, Cowell and Cowle, Carran and Karran, Keig and Kegg etc, the genetic evidence has confirmed that they are indeed variants of each other.

6. **Non-Paternal Event Incidence: One in eight men tested in the study did not show the Y-DNA profile which was typical of his family name**. This occurs as a result of a previously unknown and unrecorded break in the male genetic line for that man's family, at some time in the previous 34 generations during which the family name was in use. Whilst this might appear on

the face of it to be a high figure, it only equates to a level of non-paternal event of 0.4% per generation, over the 34 generations or so on average that hereditary Manx family names have been in use.

7. **Exported Manx Names**: Several groups of men with Gaelic-sounding names, not found on the Isle of Man, have been found to be the descendants of several indigenous Manx families. In each case, a Manxman had left the Island in the 17-18th centuries and his name had evolved into a version of the name not found on the Isle of Man. Several of these groups of men believed they had Irish origins, but in fact were found to be Manx.

8. **Closeness of the Manx Community**: The study concentrated on the Y-DNA testing of men of Manx origins, as only analysis of the male Y-DNA is capable of providing the insights and understanding over the last 2000 years that we are researching. This analysis demonstrates that many of the present-day descendants of the families, bearing our unique Manx names, are in fact even more closely related to each other than they ever knew or suspected through the sharing of their male line ancestry. However, additional testing of the autosomal DNA of a random selection of both men and women with Manx ancestry has also been carried out within the study as a side activity and provides another anecdotal perspective on this characteristic. This autosomal analysis provides further evidence of the relatively close genetic relationships currently present within people of Manx descent, both men and women.

Overall, the findings from this study have given us new information on where the early population of the Isle of Man, at a family level, came from, and also provides insights into the process whereby our early Manx family names might have been formed.