

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Introduction

The history of the Isle of Man would indicate that the bulk of the male population is of old Irish genetic origin, with more recent traces of Scandinavian genes from the time of the Norse rule of the Island. Further genetic diversification then came from later incursions by neighbouring Scots and English.

A study was carried out in 2003<sup>1</sup> to investigate the genetic make-up of the whole of the British Isles which included testing 62 Manx men resident on the Isle of Man and possessing traditional Manx family names. This research was published at the time as part of the BBC series “Blood of the Vikings”. Amongst other findings, this study confirmed the existence in the male population of the British Isles of genetic traces of people of Scandinavian origin in places where Vikings were known to have settled, including the IOM. The broad inference drawn from these results was that approximately 29% of Manx males showed a possible Scandinavian genetic origin (Haplogroups R1a + I1) and the remaining 71% (Haplogroup R1b), a Celtic origin<sup>2</sup>.

The precision of these particular tests and analyses by today’s standards however is relatively crude and imprecise, as DNA testing and interpretation has progressed markedly since 2003. In August 2010, John Creer, a man of Manx descent living in Cheshire, started a new specific Manx Y-DNA project<sup>3</sup> to take advantage of these newer developments.

### 2.2 Study Objectives

The study was set a number of objectives, namely:

- a) Through Y-DNA testing, to identify and evaluate the different genetic origins of the male lines of the surviving indigenous Manx families.
- b) To assess approximately how long these male genetic lines had lived on the Island and, where possible, identify their origins prior to arrival on the Island through the identification of early genetic connections with neighbouring areas.
- c) To provide new information on the genetic origins of these families to be assessed against the published origins of these Gaelic names, according to the linguistic and historical research of the last century, (JJ Kneen, AW Moore et al.). Thus possibly enabling new research to take place examining how these names were originally formed.
- d) As a result of the above objectives – to provide unique and new insights into the early origins of the people of the Isle of Man, in a way that no one else has been able to do so far.

### 2.3 Manx History until 1400<sup>4</sup>

It is likely that the first Celts to inhabit the island were Brythonic tribes from mainland Britain. It has been speculated that the island may have become a haven for druids and other refugees from Anglesey after the sacking of that island in 60AD. There is little evidence to suggest that the Romans ever landed or had any influence on the island.

Irish migration to the island probably began in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. It is generally assumed that the Irish invasion or immigration formed the basis of the modern Manx language. This is evident in the change in language used in Ogham inscriptions. The transition between Manx Brythonic (like Welsh) and Manx Gaelic (a Goidelic language which remains closely related to Irish Gaelic and Scottish

---

<sup>1</sup> Capelli et al 2003

<sup>2</sup> Some 85% of the male population of the British Isles belongs to Haplogroup R1b and can be loosely classed as being of “Celtic” origin.

<sup>3</sup> See [www.manxdna.co.uk](http://www.manxdna.co.uk)

<sup>4</sup> Acknowledgments to Wikipedia

Gaelic) may have been gradual but by the 7<sup>th</sup> century the language was essentially identical to that of the Irish Gaelic indicating the then major influence of the Irish on the local population. Tradition attributes the island's conversion to Christianity in around 500AD to St Maughold an Irish missionary who gives his name to the Manx parish of the same name.

From 800AD onwards the island became subject to Viking raids from the sea and within 100 years it was under the control of the Scandinavian Kings of Dublin and then from 990AD under the Norwegian Earls of Orkney. Various Scandinavian rulers continued to rule until King Magnus of Norway ceded the island to Scotland in 1266AD. The island then alternated between periods of Scottish and English rule until 1346AD, when the English finally took control permanently. At several times during this latter period the island was subject to sporadic influxes of foreign settlers. Following the battle of Clontarf in 1014 the Norse-Gael king of Dublin, Brian Boru, was killed and appreciable numbers of Norse-Gaels fled to the Isle of Man for sanctuary and possible settlement. There is also some evidence to suggest that there was a new influx into the island by Scottish members of Robert the Bruce's contingent after his invasion in 1313.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Incoming Settlement</b>	<b>Where from</b>
100AD	Brythonic Celts	Wales/Anglesey/England
400AD	Goedelic Celts	Ireland
800AD	Scandinavian	Norway, Denmark
1000AD	Norse-Gael	Ireland, Western Isles and Scandinavia
1300AD	Scottish	Scotland
1346AD	Anglo-Saxon	England

Thus, we can assume that there will be traces of these patterns of immigration within the genes of men of Manx origin that could be uncovered through Y-DNA testing today.

## 3. Characteristics of Manx Family Names

### 3.1 Evolution of Family Names

There are approximately 130 family names, which are popularly identified as having been formed on and regarded as being indigenous to the Isle of Man and which still remain in use today by people of Manx descent living on the Island and elsewhere. These are family names that can be at least traced back to records in the surviving IOM Manorial Rolls of 1511 and where the classic Manx reference books (Kneen, Moore and Quilliam) seek to define their linguistic origins. Men bearing these names today can therefore be judged to be genetically representative of an early Manx population from at least around 1100-1400AD and this is the population being examined in this study. Y-DNA testing of the present-day male population bearing these names can provide a picture of the genetic diversity and origins of that earlier male population.

In early times individuals were originally only known by their single or personal names. Such personal names were often nicknames or descriptive (e.g. Duggan = "little dark man") but some thousand years or so ago the Celtic patronymic system of names started to be adopted. The patronymic system meant that individuals could be 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, unique to the island and formed there, started to be adopted permanently (hereditary) and passed down from father to son unchanged. This is believed to have occurred gradually in the period between 1050 to 1300AD. However, during the 16<sup>th</sup> century the large majority of these Gaelic, patronymic-based, hereditary names lost the "Mac" at the beginning of the name and evolved into the modern form of these names that we see today. So for example the name we recognise today as Kelly was at one time MacHelly, Creer was MacCreer and so on.

Whilst today there are about 130 hereditary surnames still surviving in use today, originally, the early range of different Manx family names would have amounted to more than twice that number. A large proportion of those names have not survived over time to the present day, as the male line has "daughtered out" and the surname has no longer been passed down to the succeeding generations.

However it is important to note that because these Manx family names originated within a Gaelic-speaking society, some of them will be similar or identical to other family names adopted and evolved in other Gaelic-speaking areas like Ireland and Scotland in parallel and at a similar time, who also used a patronymic naming system. Examples of Manx family names that have also appear to have originated elsewhere in parallel are Kelly, Condra, Casement, Morrison etc. It is unlikely that the Manx Kellys are related to the Irish Kellys for example, but without genetic evidence it is impossible to prove that.

### 3.2 Classification of Family Names

One of the objectives of the study was to try and assess how long each of these Manx families has lived on the Island and where their early ancestors came from before their arrival. Examination of these family names however does already give us some preliminary insight into that information and we can apply a rough categorisation based on the current perceptions of their origins which will assist in answering such questions

**Early Unique Names:** There are a substantial number of family names whose origins unambiguously can only be attributed to the Isle of Man and are not found anywhere else – e.g. Curphey, Bridson, Kennaugh etc. A family with such a "unique" name must have been living on the

Island from at least before 1100-1200AD, (ie when family names were being created and adopted) in order for their name to have been formed and remaining on the Island.

**Imported Names:** There are some family names where records show they have been in use on the Isle of Man prior to 1500AD, but which do not obviously appear to be of Gaelic origin and there is some evidence to suggest that they have been formed elsewhere - e.g. Wattleworth, Skillicorn, Radcliffe.

**Possible Multiple Origin Names:** Finally there are those family names found on the Isle of Man and which are normally attributed as Manx, but which are identical or very similar to Gaelic names found and originated elsewhere. By and large, there are no early surviving family records, other than family legend, to prove or deny a connection between such families and so, without genetic evidence, there is no means of proof. However, once Y-DNA analysis demonstrates that the Manx family is not connected to another with the same name off-island then this name can be viewed as a "early unique" Manx name and again the male line must have been living on the Island prior to 1100-1200AD

Thus an understanding of such classification is useful when interpreting the Y-DNA analysis of a family, in order to put into context how long that family's male line might have lived on the Island.