

The Crowes of County Clare: a summary

Philip Crowe

Edward MacLysaght, a leading authority in the 20th century on Irish surnames, wrote that ‘all Crowes in their homeland, Thomond, are of native Irish stock’. The Gaelic kingdom of Thomond was located in the west of Ireland encompassing the modern-day counties of Clare and Limerick and parts of County Tipperary. Thomond ceased to exist as a cultural and legal entity in the mid-seventeenth century with the confiscation of land held by Catholics, of both Gaelic and Anglo-Norman descent, following the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland.

The Irish name of ‘Crowe’ is an anglicised and shortened version of Mac Conchradha. The members of this clan descended from a person with the rare personal name Conchraidh. An early anglicisation of the clan name was Mac Enchroe which was ultimately truncated to Crowe.

DNA research into the patrilineal ancestry (Y-DNA) of Crowe descendants shows that they belong to the Irish Type III haplogroup (genetic cluster) originating in the same geographical area encompassed by the kingdom of Thomond. Early findings indicate that people with these genetic characteristics can be traced back to the first millennium, possibly around 450 AD. My Family Tree DNA analysis shows that I belong to this group (L-226).

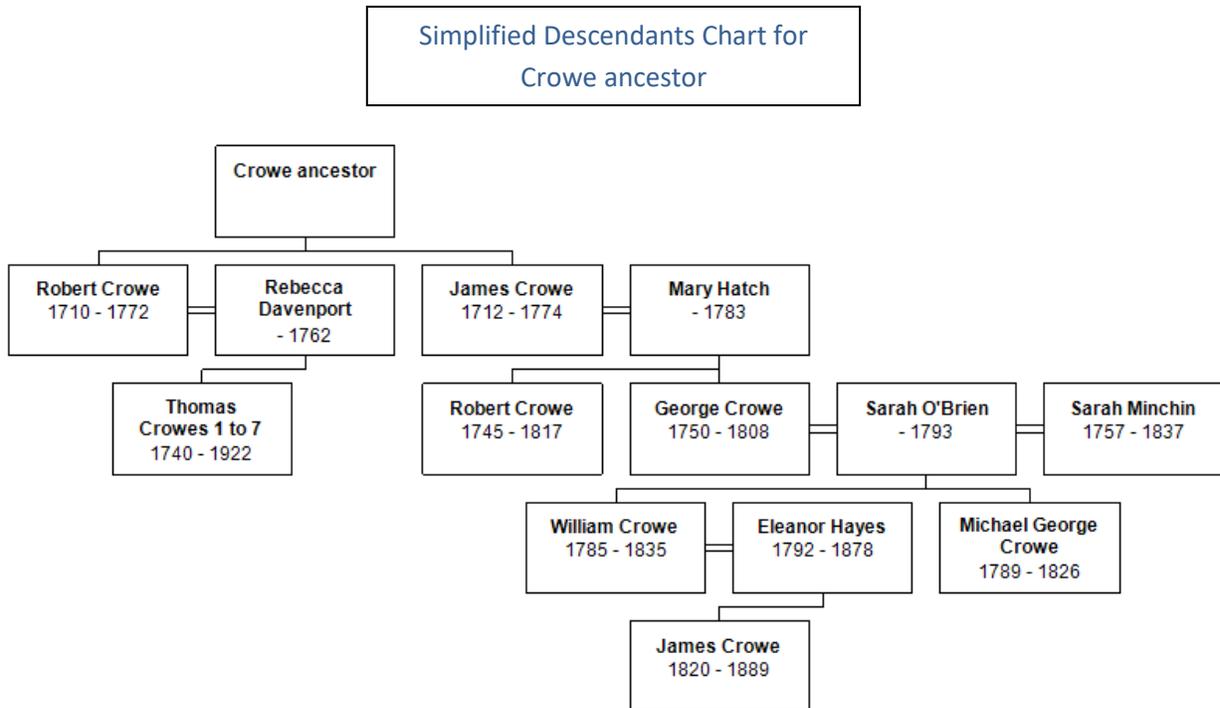
The Mac Conchradha are believed to have been part of the Dalcassian tribe (the Dál gCais) descended from Cormac Cas who is said to have lived in the 3rd century. It is hoped that ongoing DNA research will throw more light on the origins and evolution of the Dalcassians. The best known figure in this lineage is Brian Bóruma (family of O’Brien) who was king of Munster and later of all Ireland around the turn of the first millennium. Subsequently the territory controlled by the O’Brien dynasty contracted to the kingdom of Thomond.

The homeland of the Mac Enchroes in recorded history was about 14 km west of Ennis, in and around what is today the parish of Inagh. The Mac Enchroes of Inagh appear in accounts of battles in Thomond in the 14th century. In one instance they are referred to as ‘the warlike Mac Concroes’.

With the introduction of English law and custom in the mid-seventeenth century, the lands of many Mac Enchroe families were confiscated and granted to settler families from England and elsewhere – mainly Protestants, and all loyal to the English Crown. Consequently the Mac Enchroe clan’s home territory around Inagh ceased to exist as a cultural and legal entity.

Just a few of the Mac Enchroes, now styled as Crowes, adapted to the new political reality and came through the confiscations relatively unscathed. One is a James Crowe who, in 1668, was granted 679 acres for 99 years by Murrough O’Brien, 1st Earl of Inchiquin, and William, Lord O’Brien of Burren for a yearly rent of £11 6s 4d. This James Crowe might well be the ancestor of a James Crowe in the 1700s mentioned below. Further research into this is ongoing.

Looking at more recent times, research has been undertaken on two branches of Protestant Crowe families who were prominent in County Clare in the 18th and 19th centuries. It is only with commencement of baptism, marriage and burial records by the Church of Ireland in Ennis in the early 1700s that it is possible to identify the genealogical connections among family members.



One of these branches descends from Robert Crowe (c.1710-c.1772), a successful Ennis merchant and active participant in local government of the town. A memorial stone for him and his family is located today in the refurbished section of the Ennis Friary (often referred to as Ennis Abbey). The descendants of Robert and his wife Rebecca Davenport (-1762) were gentry in County Clare through to the end of the 19th century. The inheriting son in each of the following seven generations was named Thomas.

The other branch of the Crowe gentry descends from Robert's younger brother James Crowe (c.1712-1774). He qualified as an attorney in 1733 years after successfully completing a legal apprenticeship. Soon after, James Crowe relocated to Dublin where he married Mary Hatch (d. after 1783) and established a successful legal practice. He retained his connection with County Clare with the purchase of Dromconora House, a country residence north of Ennis which he visited from time to time, usually in summer. They had six children, only three of home survived to adulthood. James Crowe, his daughter and his son-in-law are buried in St Kevin's Old Churchyard in Dublin, now a public park.

Like his father, James's eldest son Robert (1745-1817) became a lawyer. He attended Oriel College, Oxford, and completed his legal training through Middle Temple, one of the four Inns of Court in London. After James's death, Robert and two partners embarked on business ventures in England. However, their efforts were unsuccessful and ended in bankruptcy. Robert ultimately managed to become solvent again but the process took many years. For a short time he was a Member of the Irish

Parliament, immediately before the Act of Union was passed in 1800 dissolving the Irish legislature in favour of representation at Westminster.

Robert's younger brother George Crowe (1850-1808) was also a lawyer. He married firstly Sarah O'Brien (d.1793) and subsequently Sarah Minchin (c.1757-1837). For reasons that are not entirely clear, he too became embroiled in Robert's financial problems. He died in a duel with a Minchin in 1808 on College Green outside of Trinity College Dublin.

George's eldest son from the first marriage, William Crowe (1785-1835), enlisted in the 73rd Regiment of Foot in 1813 and came to Australia with his wife Eleanor Hayes (c.1792-1878) and other family members. Their second-born child, James Crowe (1820-1889), established a grazing property at Gobarralong, New South Wales, from whom today there are many descendants. The back-story of William Crowe and family coming to Australia, and the history of William's brother Michael George Crowe (1789-1826) and his descendants is covered in the article titled [Here and There](#).