

North Mayo Heritage Centre

NEWSLETTER

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Tel: 096 31809

www.northmayogenealogy.com

Email: nmhmanager@gmail.com

Email: northmayo@gmail.com



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The
North Mayo
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We profile

Turlough O'Carolan the blind composer

Cover image: Bronze monument of composer
Turlough O'Carolan in Mohill, Co. Leitrim
(Image from leitrimexperience.ie)

The North Mayo Heritage Centre is dedicated to preserving and promoting the rich heritage of the region

TURLOUGH O'CAROLAN

From humble beginnings to being featured on Irish currency



Did you know?

Guinness trademarked the harp symbol in 1862



Born in Nobber, Co. Meath in 1670, Turlough O'Carolan and his family later moved to Co. Roscommon where his father worked for the MacDermot Roe family as a blacksmith.

Mrs. MacDermot Roe took an interest in the young Turlough O'Carolan, and supported his education. Despite being blinded by smallpox at the age of eighteen, O'Carolan secured an apprenticeship with a harper, named MacDermot Roe. O'Carolan trained until he was twenty-one, after which time he began travelling as a harper throughout the country providing entertainment to the wealthy.

He was often an honoured guest in the homes of the wealthy and his compositions would generally reflect the family and/or the occasion that was being celebrated, such as a wedding or a funeral.

He wrote poems, sang songs and played music like other harpers of his generation, but was most celebrated for his remarkable talents as a composer.

It is believed that O'Carolan composed over 200 Irish tunes that are still played today by well-known musicians such as Planxty, the Chieftains and the Dubliners. Most of these were not written down during his lifetime. They were collected and published during the 18th and 19th century.



O'Carolan's resting place
(Image from findagrave.com)

During his lifetime, he fathered seven children with his wife, Mary Maguire. They lived near Mohill, Co. Leitrim where a bronze monument of him was unveiled by President Hillery in 1986. Turlough O'Carolan died in 1738, and is buried in the McDermot Roe family crypt Co. Roscommon.

The Gaelic Revival of the 19th century sought to resurrect the shared heritage of the Irish people through the celebration of mythology, literature, language and music. The vibrations of harp strings were the heartbeat of this cultural resuscitation.

Less than a dozen Irish harps survive from the medieval (pre-1700) period. The oldest one, on which the official emblem of Ireland is based, is the Trinity College Harp.

It is also known as the Brian Boru or O'Neill Harp, and is on display in the Long Room of Trinity College, Dublin.

Ireland is distinctive in that it is the only country to have a musical instrument as its national symbol. When the Irish Free State was born in 1922, the harp was taken as the emblem of this newfound independence. The image of the harp is now used on coins, passports, official seals and documents, as well as the seal of the President of Ireland.

Turlough O'Carolan and his harp was featured on the £50 note which was in circulation from 1976 to 1993.

References:
O'Sullivan, Donal 1958,
Carolan: The Life Times and Music of an Irish Harper
www.irish-genealogy.com
www.museum.ie
www.irishcentral.com

Brief history of the surname CAROLAN/CARLIN (Ó Cearbhalláin)

O'Carowlane, Carolan, Carrolan: 'descendants of Cearbhallán' (diminutive of Cearbhall); a well-known Ulster surname; formerly common in Donegal, Tyrone, Monaghan and Cavan; also in Meath. There are probably several distinct families of the name. To be distinguished from Ó Coirealláin.¹

Carolan/Carlin: Descendants of both the Ó Cairealláin sept, whose seat was in the parish of Clondermot, barony of Tikeeran, Co. Derry, and of the Ó Cearbhalláin sept from Co. Cavan and Co. Monaghan, have adopted the surname Carolan. The heaviest distribution of this surname today outside of the capital is in western Co. Cavan around Kingscourt and Bailieborough in Clonkee barony and in the adjacent regions of Co. Meath, Co. Monaghan and Co. Louth. Occasionally found in use with the original prefix O.²

(O) Carolan Ó Cairealláin. Of Clondermot, Co. Derry; also Ó Cearbhalláin in south Ulster and Meath. Both these surnames are derived from obsolete personal names.³

Of the 47 *Carolan* births registered in Ireland in 1890, including all variants, 19 occurred in Leinster, 1 was in Munster, 13 occurred in Ulster, while 14 were in Connacht. The surname was principally found in Mayo and Cavan.

Of the of the 20 *Carlin* births in Ireland, 3 occurred in Leinster, 0 in Munster, 15 occurred in Ulster and 2 occurred in Connacht. The name was principally found in Tyrone and Londonderry.

¹ Extract taken from 'Irish Names and Surnames' by Rev. Patrick Woulfe

² Extract taken from 'Irish Family Names' by Brian De Breffny

³ Extract taken from 'The Surnames of Ireland' by Edward MacLysaght

PICK OF THE WEEK

Music of Mayo CD

by various artists

Launched in 2018, this double CD features music and song, past and present from the Mayo region. This recording was formed during Autumn and Winter 2017.

Available from Reception and from North Mayo Heritage Centre ebay bookstore

€20
(+postage)



Featuring Emer Mayock, Joe Carey, Paddy Joe Tighe, Sheamus Heneghan, Tom Doherty and many more.