

# NEWSLETTER

Tel: 096 31809

[www.northmayogenealogy.com](http://www.northmayogenealogy.com)

Email: [nmhmanager@gmail.com](mailto:nmhmanager@gmail.com)

Email: [northmayo@gmail.com](mailto:northmayo@gmail.com)



Cover image: Shanahan sisters dancing in 1976 following the Irish Dancing Championship (Toronto Star photo archive)



## Irish Dancing

**WE EXPLORE ITS  
UNIQUE HISTORY**

**TRACE YOUR  
ROOTS**

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While the exact roots and origins of early Irish dancing are lost in time, there is evidence to suggest a linkage between early forms of Irish dance and that of modern Irish dance.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century brought the introduction of the Dancing Masters to Ireland. They were talented dance teachers who travelled the country teaching their skills to all classes of people. They taught a variety of dance principles from simple steps required for crossroad dancing to the more complicated French styles, all of which evolved into country set dances, with each locality adding their own characteristics and preferences.

In 1893 the Gaelic League was founded as an organisation to promote and encourage all aspects of Irish culture in Ireland. It organised formal competitions, lessons and rules for Irish dancing, and this further developed into the launch of the Irish Dancing Commission in 1930 to regulate the immensely popular past-time. Irish dancing strongly advanced once it had its own governing body, and over the following decades it spread to the vast Irish diaspora around the world.

There are three main types of Irish dancing routines; social or *céilí* routines, set dance routines and *sean nós* or step routines. In all cases, the style is relatively formal and regimented, with little upper body movement, precise and quick foot movement with a strict number of steps to be completed.

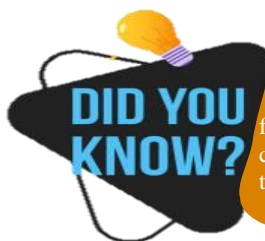
Social or *céilí* routines are the most popular form of Irish dancing. They are performed with a minimum of two and a maximum of sixteen people.

Set dance routines are based on the French quadrille dances, i.e. ‘squares’ of four couples who complete several different figures of the routine which are repeated throughout the song. Among other steps, dancers swap sides and swap partners.

Step routines descend from the old-style *sean nós* dancing, and are what the Irish Dancing Commission has adopted as the flagship Irish dancing style. Each step is danced twice, once with each foot, with arms slightly less rigid than other styles. Percussive sounds are made with the feet to add to the rhythm of the music. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries these dances were frequently performed on top of barrels or tables. Each type of dance falls into one of two categories; soft shoe or hard shoe. Soft shoe dances include reels, slips, light jigs and single jigs; these are all classified by the time signature of the music and the steps taken in each dance. Hard shoe dances include the hornpipe, treble jig, and treble reel. Some of the more popular sets have been given names, like the St. Patrick’s Day set, the King of the Fairies set, or the Three Sea Captains set.

The fascinating nature of Irish dance has historically captured the hearts of many. The spirit and enthusiasm for Irish dance culture is something that remains in Irish communities to this day, may it continue to step strongly into the future.

References:  
[www.claddaghdesign.com](http://www.claddaghdesign.com)  
<https://www.celticsteps.ie>



The Celtic knot featured on most Irish dance costumes (even to this day) represents faith and unity. It famously comprises of one continuous line, with no beginning and no end to also represent eternity.

**HALLOWEEN EVENT!**  
**Booking now open**  
[www.northmayogenealogy.com/events](http://www.northmayogenealogy.com/events)  
**29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> October 2022**

**TICKETS NOW ON SALE**

A brief history of the surname

**FLATLEY**

This surname derives from the Co. Sligo sept, Ó Flaithfhileadh (Ó Flaitle). It was found almost exclusively in Co. Mayo by the end of the last century and is still principally represented in that county in the neighbourhood of Knock.<sup>1</sup>

**Flatley, Ó Flaitle;** earlier form Ó Flaithfhileadh (prince poet). A sept of Uí Fiachrach in Co. Sligo, much confused with Flattery.<sup>2</sup>

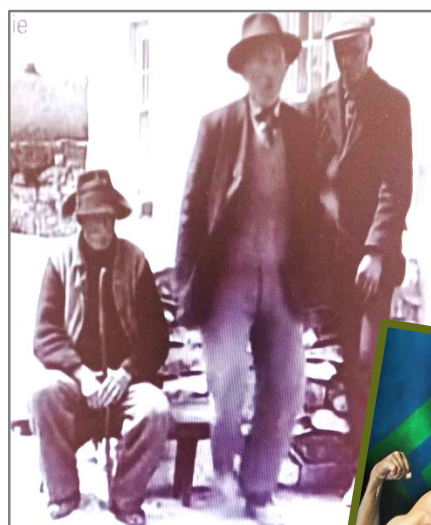
**Flatley, Flattley, O’Flatilly, O’Flaitle;** ‘descendants of Flaithfhile, older form of Ó Flaithfhileadh; the name of a branch of the Uí Fiachrach in Mayo and Sligo, where it is still well known.<sup>3</sup>

Of the 11 Flatley births in Ireland in 1890 – including variants – 1 occurred in Leinster, 0 occurred in Munster, 0 occurred in Ulster, and 10 occurred in Connacht. The surname was principally found in County Mayo.

<sup>1</sup> Extract taken from ‘Irish Family Names’ by Brian De Breffny

<sup>2</sup> Extract taken from ‘The Surnames of Ireland’ by Edward MacLysaght

<sup>3</sup> Extract taken from ‘Irish Names and Surnames’ by Reverend Patrick Woulfe.



**How dancing has changed down through the years!!**

Above: Snapshot from rare video of *sean nós* dancing from 1929.



Right: Michael Flatley in *Lord of the Dance* 1997