

Mayo Heritage

Newsletter

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YouTube



The
North Mayo
Heritage
Centre

We profile the late
Princess Grace of Monaco

Grace Kelly

to coincide with Prince Albert's
visit to her old homestead

Brief history of the
KELLY SURNAME

Is it time to trace your Irish roots?

If you are interested in professional help to
research your family history or curious
about your ancestry, why not contact us.

All research can be done remotely.

Perhaps we can help you!

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Cover image: Poster shot of Princess Grace (image from Pixabay) and bottom
right Princess Grace blessing herself at the statue of St. Patrick at the foot of
Croagh Patrick during her visit in 1961 (Image from Croagh Patrick, an
Ancient Mountain Pilgrimage – 1991, Harry Hughes)



Princess Grace and her Mayo roots

Long before Harry and Meghan, another American actress wed a European Prince and became a worldwide icon. Actress Grace Patricia Kelly became Princess of Monaco by marrying Prince Rainier III in April 1956. Her acting skills secured her Oscar-winning roles and she starred opposite leading men of the time. Following her marriage however, her acting career came to an end in order to perform her royal duties.

Despite being born into an affluent and influential prominent Catholic family in Philadelphia in 1929 she never forgot her Irish roots. Her father John B. Kelly was born to Irish immigrants while her mother was of German ancestry.

Grace Kelly's paternal grandfather, John Henry Kelly, who emigrated to Philadelphia c.1887, was a native of the townland of Drimurla, Kilmaclasser, Co. Mayo, a townland located approximately three miles from Newport. John Kelly with an address at 3665 Medval Avenue, Philadelphia died in 1917 aged 67. His death record confirms that he was born in Ireland on 29-Jul-1852, the son of John Kelly and Honora McLoughlin. He is buried in Westminster Cemetery. Grace's granduncle, Patrick Kelly, a schoolteacher, remained in Co. Mayo after his brother John emigrated to Philadelphia.

In 1961 Princess Grace of Monaco and her husband, Prince Rainier, visited her ancestral home in Drimurla from where her grandfather John Henry Kelly emigrated over a century ago. Inside the three-roomed cottage she stood beneath the same roof which had sheltered her ancestors. Over the door hung a photo of Princess Grace and Prince Rainier with the inscription "This place is preserved as the birthplace of John H. Kelly, grandfather of Princess Grace Kelly-Rainier of Monaco".

The royal couple were welcomed by and enjoyed chatting to Mrs. Ellen Mulchrone who then owned the cottage and the accompanying 20 acres of land. They were treated to Irish treats such as griddle cakes and Irish fruit cake.

Their visit allowed them to meet with nine second cousins, one of whom, Tony Kelly, of Coguala, Westport presented the couple with a casket of Connemara marble containing a scroll signed by her relatives. She met with Mrs. Maria Moran who recounted how her father and John H. Kelly had worked together as masons.

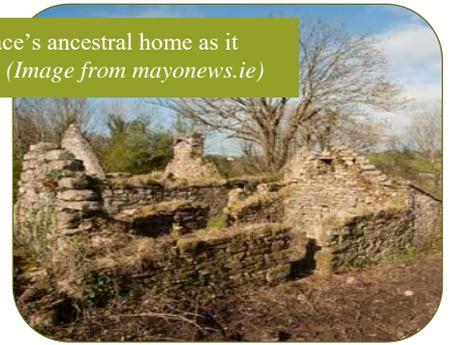
On her departure from Newport, a visibly emotional Princess Grace spoke of the wonderful hospitality of the people and expressed her delight at being able to make the visit to her ancestral home.

Such was her connection with the area that following her visit she sent Mrs. Mulchrone a Christmas card each year and subsequently bought the cottage and land from her in 1976.

Princess Grace secured planning permission to build a 2,000 sq. ft. house on the site in 1978. Construction never began on the house.

Grace was killed in a car crash in 1982. The local residents of Drimurla sent a wreath of wild flowers, picked from the fields around the village, to Monaco for her funeral. She is buried in the Monaco cathedral.

Princess Grace's ancestral home as it stands today (Image from mayonews.ie)



Brief history of the KELLY SURNAME

Together Kelly and O'Kelly are the second most common surname in Ireland. As may be supposed in the case of such a common name, all the Kelly families do not descend from one ancestor but derive from a number of Ó Ceallaigh septs which were located in various parts of Ireland.

The most prominent of these septs held sway in what is now Co. Galway, another belonged to Co. Meath, others were located in Co. Leix, Co. Derry, Co. Antrim, Co. Wicklow and Co. Sligo. Some descendants of Ó Caollaidhe septs in Co. Kilkenny and Co. Clare also took the surname Kelly rather Queally or Kealy.

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

Prince Rainier died in 2005 and their three children, Princess Caroline, Prince Albert and Princess Stephanie inherited the property. Hopes to restore the homestead faded over time and the cottage has since become derelict. Prince Albert visited in 2011 and locals have eagerly awaited this return visit.

References:

The Irish Press, 16-June-1961

Croagh Patrick, An Ancient Mountain Pilgrimage

Theirishtimes.com

The mayonews.ie

Did you know?

The meeting of Grace Kelly and Prince Rainier took place during the publicity blitz for the film 'To Catch a Thief'.



Princess Grace (pictured right) being welcomed to her ancestral home in 1961 by the then owner Mrs. Ellen Mulchrone (image from *The Irish Press, 16-June-1961*)

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Details coming soon!

