

Irish Baby Names - Surviving A Turbulent History

The Irish are traditionally seen as a romantic people, full of fun, life and a love of the spoken word. Nowhere is this reflected more than in Irish baby names which are undergoing a major revival after many years of disuse.

As any Irish-American will tell you - often at great length(!) - the Irish have a troubled and turbulent history and their use of names for their children has always reflected this. Irish names have several different origins, all significantly influenced by the historical events that have taken place.

Ireland was converted to Christianity by Saint Patrick and this explains why "Patrick (actually a Latin name, meaning "Nobleman") is the archetypal Irish name and also why there has always been an ongoing preference for Christian, Hebrew and Aramaic names. The names of the 12 Apostles of Christ have always been extremely very popular.

The Norse invasion and further Cromwellian colonisation in the Twelfth century and seventeenth centuries generated even further variety in baby names, introducing many new names including lots of Anglo names such as Robert (meaning "Famous") and Richard ("Brave and strong") which were originally of Germanic Saxon origin.

The late 1800 to early 1900 period saw a Gaelic revival, which resulted in a return to fashion of many of the names such as Shane (Irish Gaelic form of James. "The supplanter") which were Gaelic versions of other - often biblical - names and names such as Niall ("The Champion"), which were drawn from the rich history of myths, legends and folklore of the Gaelic culture.

In modern times, the influence of media influences, such as television and the Internet and the modern drive to look for more unique, unusual names has meant that previously unused names such as Kyle ("From the narrow strait") and Ethan ("Firm, strong") are becoming very popular in Ireland.

Traditional Gaelic names such as Niamh ("Beautiful, bright") and Cian ("Ancient") are also becoming very popular again, not just in Ireland but also among the vast Irish-American population and also in other areas of the world. But how did these names fall from grace in the first place? Essentially they were legislated away. Ironically, given the long history of violent struggle between the English Protestant and the Catholic churches, it was a combination of these two that resulted in the disappearance of Gaelic names.

The Penal Laws passed by the Protestant Parliament of Ireland, regulated the status of Roman Catholics through most of the eighteenth century. These punitive laws, as well as forbidding use of the Irish language, also forbade the use of Irish names. But Canon Law also played a major part - for very many years the Catholic Church in Ireland would not perform a baptism unless the name chosen was that of a saint or, in the case of a girl, was a version of Mary. These constraints led to a very narrow range of names being used. As a result, every Irish family has a long history of Mary's (Hebrew meaning "Bitter, as in a bitterly wanted child". Latin meaning "The star of the sea") and John (God is gracious), Michael ("Who is like God") and Patrick.

During those times, the Irish engaged in small, subtle rebellions, by naming their children as decreed, but in day to day life using Irish versions of the names, versions which suited Irish pronunciation. This was sometimes a translation, but more often a form of the name more comfortable for a native Irish speaker. Thus Thomas ("A twin") became Tom?s. With the girls, Mary was extended by having lots of different forms such as Maire, Maureen, Maura, Molly. It also became popular to turn Mary into a double name, meaning that a single family might include Mary-Kate, Mary-Pat and Mary-Jo. Strangely, even boys were often given Mary as a second or third name!!

In these unregulated, individualistic times, the vogue for the traditional and often very beautiful Gaelic based Irish baby names is stronger than ever and is catered for by the wealth of Internet sites containing lists of Irish names.

You don't have to be Irish to give your baby an Irish name. Many of these beautiful-sounding names, with strong, spiritual meanings, are applicable to peoples of all races. So if you are looking for a name for a new baby, it may be worth delving into the world of Irish baby names.

Source: <http://www.articlecircle.com>

About the Author

Michael Barrows' website has great advice for choosing baby names, baby name lists and lots of great baby resources. Get your free ebook packed with baby tips for new parents, visit <http://www.all-about-baby-names.com>