

UNVEILING THE MONUMENT TO KING MAHON

**Letter and address from Conor O'Brien, The O'Brien, 18th Baron Inchiquin and 32nd
direct descendant of Brian Boru.**

Ó Briain
Thomond House
Dromoland Estate
Newmarket on Fergus
Co. Clare

18 April 2014

Dear Jack

I enclose a copy of the address that Moira has so kindly agreed to give on my behalf.

I really do appreciate your allowing me to use part of your notes - in fact a great deal of your notes - and I do hope that I suitably give you the due recognition for this.

If there is anything in this that you would like to change, add or take out please do so and I will not be offended at all. In fact, perhaps you could let us know who will be attending, any dignitaries that need to be mentioned at the beginning of the address.

I would like to say that I would like to help put Mahon's rock on the map so any photographs text and information you can put together after the event I would be pleased to put to Cashel to include on their list of events on the Group website, see below, as well as on our website.

I could not find any reference to any drawings or sculptures of Mahon, but I would be interested in more information about him. I am sure there will be many historians there who would be itching to write the history of Mahon and his descendants.

I wish you well with this event and will as I say visit the site later this year.

With Kind regards

Conor O'Brien

Conor O'Brien



Web Site: www.obrienclan.com
<http://www.brianborumillennium.ie/>

ADDRESS AT THE UNVEILING OF THE PLAQUE TO KING MAHON ON 19TH APRIL 2014.

Faillte roimh, a chairde.

My name is Moira O'Brien and I am a board member of The O'Brien Clan Foundation as well as on the Board of Clans of Ireland and I have been asked by Conor O'Brien, The O'Brien, to give this address today and pass on his sincere apologies for not being able to do so himself.

Distinguished guests, historians, ladies and gentlemen.

Firstly, I need to sincerely thank Jack Lane for the use of his detailed notes on the history behind these events being honoured today, a great deal of which is included in this address and without which I would have not been able to deliver such a detailed address.

As you know, this is a particularly historic year, the Millennium of the Battle of Clontarf and the death of the O'Brien progenitor Árd Rí, Brian Boru at this famous battle. I am sure you historians are well aware that historians are still out on the effects of the battle on Irish history and will I am sure keep you all busy for another 1000 years on discussions and findings.

There is no need to dwell too long on Brian because this event today is about his elder brother Mahon but perhaps it would be good to lay the groundwork on this family, which had risen so quickly in Irish history from relative small beginnings as the Dalcassians, a tribe in Clare, Limerick and Tipperary and it was Brian and Mahon's father who was King of Thomond. Their palace and Fort were at Killaloe on the west shore of Lough Derg. The Fort Beal Boru is still there and the palace was where the Catholic Church in Killaloe now stands. However, the event we are commemorating here today is an event which if it had not happened Brian Boru would probably be but a footnote in our history and the Battle of Clontarf might never have happened. And the course of Irish history might therefore have been very, very different.

So what exactly are we commemorating here today with the unveiling of this monument to King Mahon?

The event happened in 976, 1038 years ago. So this takes us back over a thousand years, back to the Ireland that has been rightly described as the island of saints and scholars. There was nothing like an Irish state or nation as we know it today. Ireland was instead the centre of a distinct civilisation, Gaelic civilisation. This was the era of great centres of learning and art based on monasteries such as Clonmacnoise, Monsaterboice, Clonard, Kells, etc. It is the era that produced the Book of Kells, the Ardagh Chalice and other works of great art, which we know were produced by the few that have survived. It also produced the great historical works in the form of the various Annals and an elaborate and humane legal system in the Brehon Laws.

It was a civilisation that stood out in contrast to the Dark Ages of contemporary Europe. The

contribution that the missionaries from this civilisation made to Europe's progress from that Dark Age is well recorded and acknowledged throughout Europe down to the present day. More honoured in Europe than it is here at the moment, unfortunately.

Robert Schuman, one of the founders of the European Union suggested that one of these missionaries, Columbanus, should be "*the patron saint of all those who now seek to build a united Europe.*"

In the political sense Ireland itself was a patchwork of Kingdoms and Clans with no real political or military unity. The people who led these Clans and Kingdoms were not saints or scholars. They had other imperatives. They had to be military/political leaders and there are never many saints among such people then or now. There simply cannot be and the leaders cannot be blamed for what they had to be in the circumstances of their time.

Like all such people they were naturally in competition with each other for power and privilege and increasing their share of it.

In Munster, Cashel was the seat of power and the competing Clans here that were known collectively as the Eóghanachta. They had come to a modus vivendi, an arrangement, with each other on who should be top dog, or accepted as King of Munster. They had effectively agreed to alternate the Kinship of Munster between themselves. Somewhat like we see with the Lord Mayorship of some towns and cities being alternated among political parties today. A very civilised and sensible approach in the circumstances of the time over a thousand years ago.

A problem arose with the arrival of a new kid on the block – the Dál Cais from Clare. King Mahon was their most powerful leader and he conquered all round him, chiefly against the Danes. This made him entitled to have his turn as King of Munster.

He got his turn in 970 but he would not play the game as the Eóghanachta had learned to play it and expected him to do so. He gave every sign of not giving up the Kingship. Munster was now essentially divided into Thomond in the north under the Dál Cais and Desmond in the south under the Eóghanachta.

The latter looked on Mahon as a usurper and they planned to get rid of him and a conflict ensued. They reckoned they could not cope with him in open battle so they conspired to trick him by setting up 'peace talks' with the Bishop of Cork as mediator for a resolution of their differences. But the Bishop was only a pawn. Mahon was kidnapped at what he thought was just a negotiation and was brought here to be killed. The place was suitable for this as it was far away from Mahon's home turf and located between the strongholds of his two killers. It was also out of the way then as it is now. Maybe it is still a good place to get try to get away with a murder!

But like many crimes there can be unexpected consequences. And this crime was no exception. Mahon had a younger brother who was an unknown quantity at the time, was a bit of a tearaway and not taken very seriously. But he set about avenging his brother's death and succeeded in finally doing so two years later, in 978, at the battle of Bealach Leachta at the confluence of the rivers Sullane and Laney near Macroom. From there he went on to replace his brother as King of Munster and then went on to become High King of Ireland and as they say, the rest is history. This killing here was therefore a turning point in Irish history as it provided Brian Boru with the opportunity to begin his ascent to the High Kingship and it

is most appropriate that it is commemorated in a proper manner.

We know where and how Brian ended his career. But this is where it really began.

How do we know it happened here? Where is the evidence?

Any event that happened such a long time ago can be disputed. But that it happened here has more than the usual amount of evidence to support it.

Firstly, there is the strong local tradition about the rock, which is the centrepiece of the monument. It has been known as Mahon's Rock since time immemorial. In the past, people passing this way, to and from the bog for example, would make the sign of the cross on a stone nearby.

Secondly, there is the documentary evidence: in the *Dublin Annals of Innisfallen*: in *Foras Feasa ar Éireann* by Geoffrey Keating which is one of the most acclaimed and authoritative books on Irish history written around 1633: it is also noted by John O'Donovan in his magnificent production of *The Annals of the Four Masters* (1848): also by William Wenham Seward in *Topographia Hibernica*; and by Charles Vallancey in *Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis* where he also convincingly refutes an alternative theory about the location of the killing.

Also, the fact that Brian Boru avenged the killing just a few miles away would indicate that the deed was indeed done here.

I am delighted that the initiative has been taken to honour Mahon with this monument. It is interesting that there are no statues to King Brian in Ireland and I have asked the Mayor of Ennis and the Mayor of Tipperary to consider putting up a statue to Brian Boru when the new bridge across the Shannon at Killaloe is built and the old bridge probably turned into a walkway. With certain funds available for this type of engineering project in the funding it would be an ideal opportunity to Honour Mahon's younger brother and perhaps in due course a statue to Mahon could be erected

There has apparently been a lot of work and dedication by many people to ensure that this unique monument has been erected. I am sure that someone else will thank them for the work they have done.

Finally, I have a suggestion that may help to put this historic rock on the map; the 4 groups that are heavily involved with the Battle of Clontarf Millennium Commemoration this year and the death of Brian Boru are:

Killaloe/Ballina

Cashel

Clontarf

Armagh

They have a website that has all the events that are taking place throughout Ireland this year many of which will be continued on an annual basis for Tourism and I am sure that Cashel would be prepared to allow notification of your unveiling to be included on their page. I will definitely put this up on our Clan website as an event of significant importance to Ireland's

history in the 10th century.

Moira O'Brien is a photographer and will I am sure will take pictures of the unveiling and I will send these to Cashel and The O'Brien Clan website.

I wish you well with your celebrations today and again very much regret that I cannot attend myself but I do promise when this Millennium Festival has quietened down that I will visit the site.

I thank you all for this distinct honour to commemorate Brian Boru's worthy elder brother Mahon, a man of obvious great stature and presence, which was so cruelly cut off when he was in his prime.

I also thank Moira O'Brien for agreeing to deliver this to you all today.

ÓBriain