

The early Dennistons of Tyrone.

Introduction.

The earliest references to the Dennistons in Tyrone occur in the 1660's and they occur in the area around Strabane. There are a number of early sources available for this area. These include:

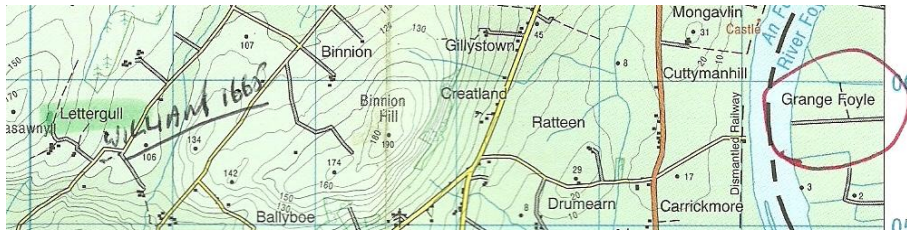
Muster Roll 1630 Strabane.

Muster Rolls, Donagheady & Leckpatrick Parishes 1631.

There are no Denniston's or variants listed on these.

This is useful as it indicates that the Dennistons who appeared here in the latter part of the 1600's most likely came from nearby Donegal.

The area where some of the Dennistons in Donegal settled in the early 1600's is less than two miles from where the Dennistons of Tyrone settled.



This indicates the closeness of both Denniston families.

The Dennistons of Tyrone are first recorded in Donagheady Parish in 1662.

The following sources were also reviewed with no results.

Hearth Money Roll, Parish of Ardstraw - 1666

Hearth Money Roll Parish of Dromore – 1666

Subsidy Roll Barony of Dunganon 1666.

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The earliest recorded Denniston's in Tyrone.

Poll book for the parish of Donagheady 1662.

Amongst the list the names of those liable for the poll tax are.

Denniston John and wife, yeoman, Gortmeslane

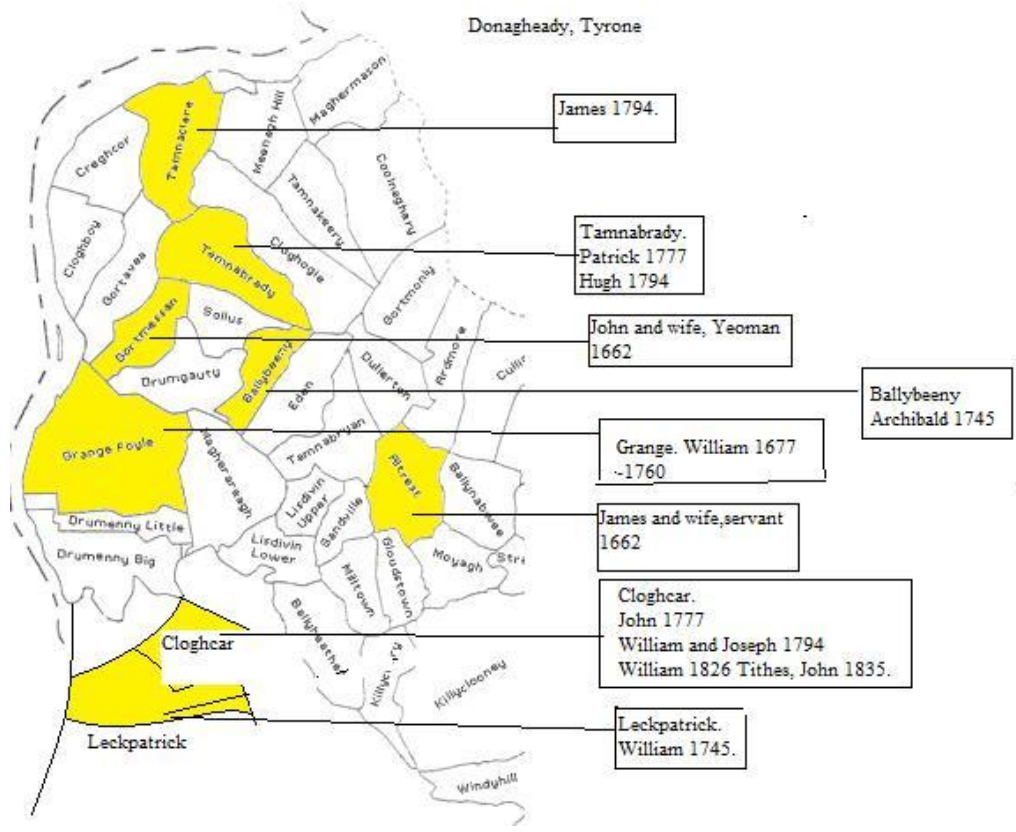
Daneston James and wife, servant, Altrasne

(The modern form of the townland names are Gortmessan and Altrest)

The occupations listed are gentry, yeoman, farmer, servant, labourer etc.

Gentry paid 4 shillings, yeoman and farmers paid 2 shillings, servants and labourers paid 1 shilling. The tax was double for those married. There appears to have been instances where the young children of gentry and yeomen were classified as servants to avoid the higher tax rates.

The following maps document where these Denniston's lived.



The area is little over 12 square miles (3.5 x 3.5).

These are the townlands in question and it can be seen that they are little more than an average farm today.

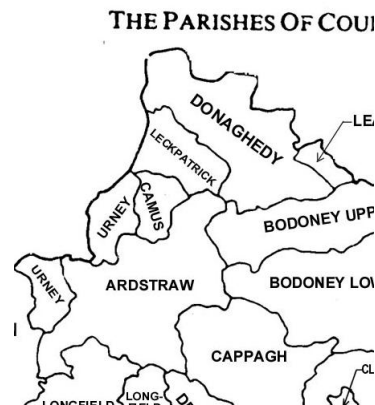
Altrest	255 acres
Ballybeeny	140 acres
Gortmessan	175 acres
Grange Foyle	593 acres
Tamnabradu	322 acres
Tamnaclare	315 acres
Cloghcor	213 acres
Leckpatrick	551 acres

The farms in the area tended to be small about 30/40 acres. The landowner was Hamilton, the Earl of Abercorn. This was the same landlord as in Donegal.



This is the area on 1/2 inch to mile map.

The area is about 6 miles north of Strabane.



The townlands are in two different parishes, Donaghedy and Leckpatrick.

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Church Records.

These are the available church records for the area.

Donaghedy Church of Ireland.

Baptisms, 1697-1723, 1753-65, 1818-9, 1826-74;
marriages, 1697-1726, 1754-64, 1826-44; marriage
licences, 1817, 1829-53; burials, 1698-1726, 1754-7,
1826-89; vestry minutes, 1697-1723, 1754-1919;
accounts, 1829-1922, confirmation lists, 1872-98

1st Donaghedy Presbyterian Church

Baptisms, 1875-1932; stipend books 1804-1860,
1867-1914

2nd Donaghedy Presbyterian Church

Baptisms, 1838-1976; marriages 1838-1926;
communicants' roll book, 1865-1937

It can be seen that the Presbyterian Church records are of little use for the early period and that many of these early Denniston's were Presbyterian.

However amongst them were some who were in the Church of Ireland. These records are among the earliest of any church in Ulster. The earliest vestry book containing details of local administration in the parish begins in 1697. The minister was Rev. Andrew Hamilton who died in 1753, having been rector of Donaghedy for over sixty years.

Vestry Book 1698-1723

3 April 1711 **William Dennistoun** Sidesman in place of John McKintyre
16 April 1711 William Dennistoun **Grange** to replace John McKintyre as sidesman
22 April 1712 William Dennistoun Signed
16 April 1723 William Dennistoun Grange overseer of the highways

A sidesman in the Church is responsible for greeting members of the congregation, overseeing seating arrangements, and for taking the collection.

This William Denniston of Grange was obviously in the Church of Ireland but the strange thing is that there is no record of any Denniston birth, death or marriage in the Donaghedy Church of Ireland records. The church was some distance away (about 8 miles) but if he was a “sidesman” this distance was obviously not a problem for him.

William Denniston of Grange will be discussed separately.

Early Presbyterian records.

Tee got the following Denniston information from the **Bready Presbyterian session and committee books**. Brady was the area the Dennistons lived in.

21 May 1796 – Agnes [Lewis] alias Deniston mentioned.
The committee in 1806 included Hugh Denniston
11 Dec. 1813 – Hugh Deniston a candidate for the position of elder
12 March 1814 – Hugh Denison to employ a man to quarry stones for work on the church
17 June 1831 – Ann Deniston was a member of the Tamnabrine society
Tee is a descendant of the above Hugh
Unfortunately these are of little help for the early period.

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William Denniston of Grange.

The most prominent early Denniston was William Denniston who is buried in Grange Foyle graveyard.

William Denniston (1677-1760)..

Grange Foyle in Tyrone is **two miles** from Lettergull in Donegal and on a river crossing below Strabane.

We have seen that William was a “sidesman” in 1711, overseer of the highways in 1723 etc.

Grange or Grange Foyle was the adjoining townland to Gortmessan where John and his wife were recorded in the Poll tax of 1662. John and his wife would have had many children between 1662 and 1677 when William was born. It is the closeness to where John lived that indicates that he is the father of William.

Grange graveyard

DENNISTON HERE LYETH THE BODY OF WILLIAM DENNISTON WHO DIED THE ... DAY OF OCTBR 1760 AGED 83 YEARS.



This 1830/40 map indicates that Grange graveyard was almost part of Grange House.

In addition to a well prepared gravestone that has survived the years he also had a prerogative will.

1760 ,, land, gent.
William, Grange, co. Tyrone,
gent. Tyrone, co. Kildare.

William, Grange, Tyrone 1760.

This means that William had property in more than one diocese. This part of Tyrone is in the Diocese of Clogher. My assumption would be that William also had property across the Foyle River in Co Donegal. I have not discovered any abstract of this will.

Lord Hamilton, Baron of Strabane and also of Dunalong in Tyrone who inherited the Stewart lands (Lettergull etc in Donegal) through marriage was the land lord here..

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Other early Records.

Muster roll, 1745

Arch Deniston Bellybeny 1Musket bad

Mr Wirling Bellybeny 1 flintlock good 1 flintlock bad

Wm Deniston Leckpatrick 1 gun good

The Muster Roll was for all males aged 16 to 60. William of Grange would have been 68 in 1745 and he is thus not the William of Leckpatrick. Archibald of Bellybeny (Ballybeeny) is an interesting connection by name to the Donegal Dennistons which will be discussed later. I have included Mr Wirling of Ballybeeny as I have come across some correspondence regarding a dispute between Mr Wirling and Archibald Denniston in the Hamilton papers. It concerned a dispute about land and recent improvements made by Archibald and the unwillingness of Mr Whirling to allow access to these improved lands. This was about 1740 and I have not been able to locate my notes.

What it does indicate is that Archibald was relatively young in 1740 as elderly men do not normally make major improvements to their lands.

I would estimate a date of birth for Archibald of 1705/10.

Ballybeeny is a tiny distance from Grange and Leckpatrick is also a short distance away.

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Trinity College Dublin.

“The Rev. John Denniston (or Dennistoun) was the son of James Denniston and was born in Co. Tyrone. He entered Trinity College, Dublin, as sizar, at the age of 19, on May 26, 1733”

He was educated by Mr Ballintine in Strabane.

The Rev. Denniston ended up in Mevagh parish in the North West of Donegal in the 1750's with a large estate.

The Rev John was born in 1714 and died in /before 1795 when his will was proved. He was the son of James Denniston. In many families at this era it was the 3rd son who entered the ministry.

Allowing for a number of children before John I would estimate that James married about 1700/05 and was born about **1675/80**.

I would not consider that James was the James who was mentioned in the Poll Book of 1662. This James would have been born about 1635/40 but he could potentially be the father of James born about 1675/80.

There is little doubt that while James is described as of Tyrone in the Trinity entry that the connection is strongly Donegal. Unfortunately there is no early information about him that I was able to locate.

With so little information about James in Tyrone I considered he may have left the area and I checked the following.

James Deniston, Maghera Co Derry. Prerogative will dated 1739.

By being listed in the Prerogative Wills James had to have property in at least two Dioceses. This could allow for James having land /property in Donegal/Tyrone and Derry. In the Religious census of 1740 the Widow Denison is listed in Maghera and no further information..

However I ruled him out as the father of the Rev John because in **Bertham's abstracts** of his will he only mentions sons **Bellingham, James and Abraham** and a daughter **Elizabeth**.

With William of Grange having a will and the Rev John having a will in 1795 I had expected to locate a will or death for his father James.

It is possible that he left the area or even Ireland in the period c1740 along with the many Ulster Scots or that he died young without making a will. However there are strong indications published c1820 that James is the son of Robert Denniston of the Derry address 1698. This is dealt with separately.

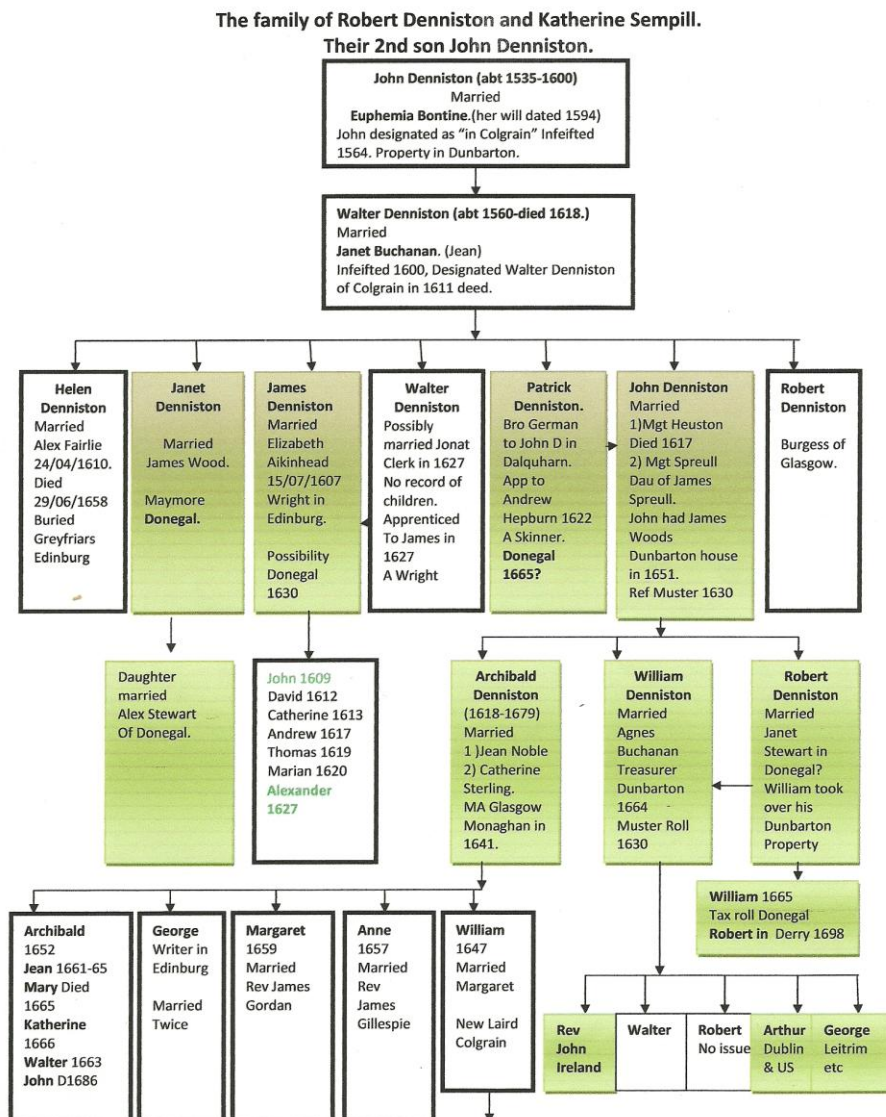
A search of the following sources (Clogher diocesan administration bonds, 1660-1858 and Clogher diocesan wills, 1661-1858) only reveal

Margaret Dennison, Moy, Co Tyrone will dated 1760.

Moy is in the east of Co Tyrone near Dungannon where other Dennistons are recorded about this time.

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Before proceeding to late 1700's records for the Denniston's in Tyrone I will go back to a section of the Donegal families of the early 1600's.



Robert Denniston (son of John) married Janet Stewart about 1630 in Donegal (near Raphoe). A William and Patrick Denniston had lands within 2 miles of Roberts land in Donegal in 1665. These lands were also only two miles from Grange in Co Tyrone. Based on Gaelic/Scottish naming traditions you would expect Robert to have named a son John after his father. In addition Robert had an Uncle James also in Donegal, brothers Archibald and William.

Compare these names to the early Dennistons in Co Tyrone which are.

John Poll Book 1662

James Poll Book 1662

Followed by William (1677-1760)

Archibald born abt 1710 in 1745 Muster Roll

William 1745 Muster Roll.

Patrick 1777 in Tamnabradly etc

The Christian names as well as the closeness of both locations are a significant indicator of origins.

The destruction in 1922 of so many of our early church and legal records means that all we have to rely on is location. If we have records showing people being in or near a specific location we have to assume some family connection. These assumptions are easier to back up when dealing with a relatively rare surname such as Dennison/Denniston in a rural setting. What they will not give is the connection to many sons etc who had to leave the area. It may also miss a nephew who inherits an Uncles property etc. But it can be taken with some certainty that it excludes the possibility of a stranger with the same name coming into such a remote rural area. This reasoning cannot be used in the larger urban areas.

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The following information has also being used in preparing the family tree for these Dennistons.

Maps of the estate, 1777

William Deniston [Denniston] Ballybeeney Donelong 1777 Abercorn estate maps (D/623/D/1/16)

Patrick Deniston [Denniston] Tamnabradly Donelong 1777 Abercorn estate maps (D/623/D/1/16)

John Denniston Cloughcor Cloghogall 1777 Abercorn estate maps (D/623/D/1/16)

Rentals 1787

Cloughcor : Middle: William Denniston Joseph Denniston

Rent books of the estate, 1794-1809

Donelong Tavanabraidy Hugh Denniston 1794-1809
 Donelong Tavanaclair James Denniston 1794-1809
 Cloghagal Cloughcor William Denniston 1794-1809
 Cloghagal Cloughcor Joseph Denniston 1794-1809

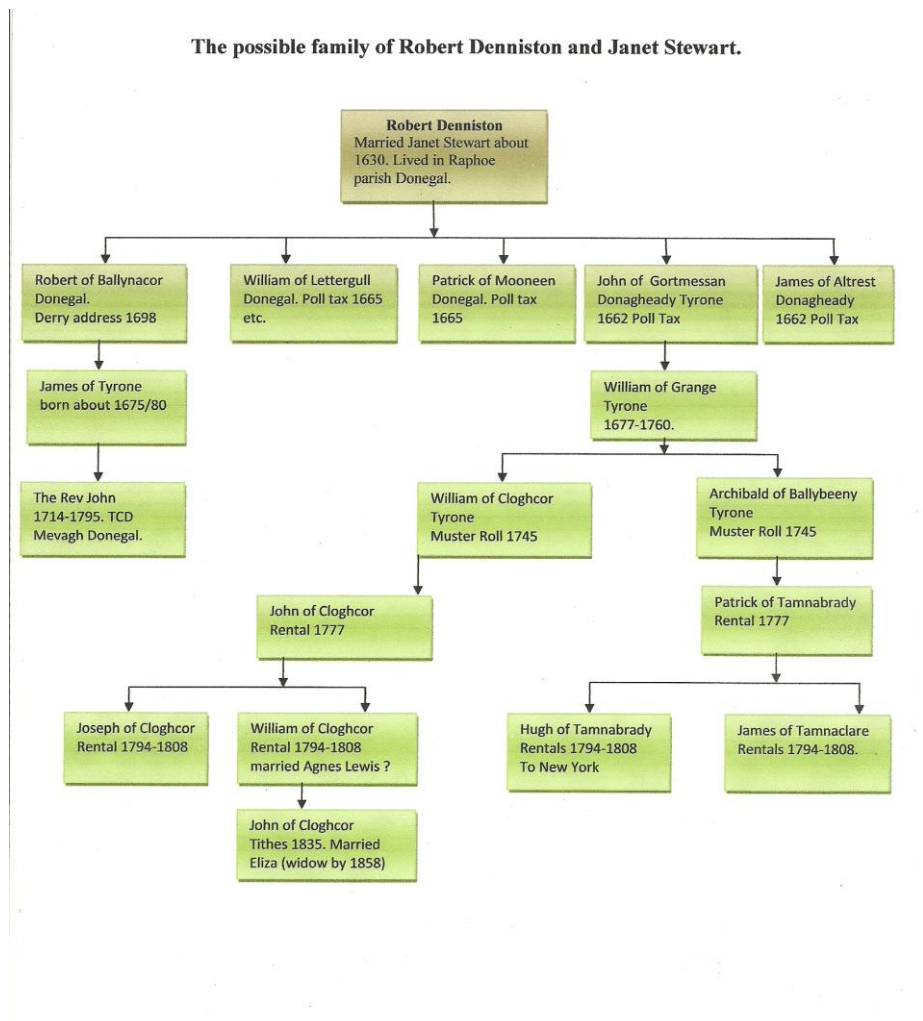
Leases issued in 1835

John Denniston Cloghcor Cloghogall 1835 Abercorn lease D/623/B/12/99

Tithes

Wm Denniston Cloghcor Leckpatrick Tithe applotment book 1826
 William Denniston & James Lewis

This is the family tree as I have prepared it from available records.



The early Dennistons of Tyrone.

William of Grange may have had no children and if so the connection would be through James of Altrest. However the naming of William of Cloghcor 1745 indicates a son of William of Grange.

Other Dennison Records in Tyrone not connected to the above are.

1) **The will** of Margaret Dennison of Moy Co Tyrone 1760.

Moy is a town near Dungannon and there are no apparent Dennison links to it.

I have no idea who Margaret is the widow of, and that is assuming she was married.

2) Religious census

a) Artrea Parish 1766

James Dennison, Established Church.

Artrea parish is partially in Tyrone and partially in Co Derry.

This James would appear to be the son James mentioned in the will of James Denniston of Maghera, Co Derry in 1739. (Ref page 6)

There were no Dennistons here in 1829 Tithes records.

b) Kildress Parish 1766

John Denison. Townland Tamnaskeeney, Protestant.

There are no later records of Denisons in this parish.

This is near Cookstown on the east of Tyrone.

3) Births.

04 Feb 1770 Donaghmore, Tyrone, Ireland

Mary Dennison

Father: Henry Dennison

Mother: Sarah

Extracted birth or christening record for the locality listed in the record

This is the earliest church record of a Denniston/Dennison in Tyrone.

Again I have found no connection to Henry Dennison of Donaghmore parish, which is about 5 miles north of Dungannon.