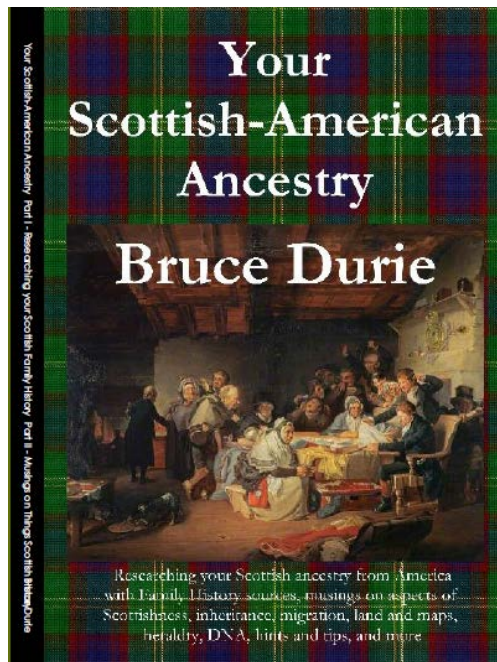


# Why the Scots and Irish (Welsh, Bretons, Picts etc.) are NOT 'Celtic'!

SATURDAY 9:00-10:15

Bruce Durie

The following two pages are taken from:  
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# We Are Not Celtic!

Terribly sorry, but the term “Celtic” – as applied to the original people of Ireland, Scotland, the Isle of Man, Wales, Cornwall and Brittany – is a 300-year-old mistake.

## The supposed “Celtic invasion” of Ireland ca. 500 BC

- This is all based on one document, the *Leabhar Gabhála*, or Book of Invasions, which describes how the *Fir Bolg* were defeated by the *Túatha Dé Danann* then the coming of the Sons of Míl (the Gaels, or Milesian Celts).
- It was first written down in the 7th Century AD by monastic scribes and “perfected” in the 12th Century AD – in other words, some 1,700 years after the supposed events took place.

## The Celts

“Celtic” was a real culture and language-group (but NOT a single ethnic group) which flourished in continental Europe for about 1,000 years from 500 BC to 500 AD – roughly coincident with the Roman Empire. It possibly originated around the source of the River Danube, in the Black Forest. The Greeks called them *Keltoi*, and the Romans *Celtici*.

## Early inhabitants of Ireland

There is now good evidence that the modern-day Irish and the Gaelic Scots are genetically the same as remains found of a Neolithic woman (3343–3020 BC) from an Irish megalithic site near Ballynahatty, Co. Down, and three Bronze Age individuals (2026–1534 BC) found behind a pub(!) on Rathlin Island, Co. Antrim. They all have substantial Steppe genetic heritage, including the Y-DNA haplogroup R1b1a2a1a2c (M529). This suggests a substantial influx of early farmers to Ireland some 2,800 to 1,500 years before the Celtic culture got going.

Also, there is no evidence of European Celtic-type burial sites in Ireland or the west of Scotland.

## So... why “Celtic”?

It’s all down to the work of one Welshman – Edward Lhuyd or Lloyd (1660–1709), antiquarian, philologist, and Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford from 1690. He decided the Celts described by Graeco-Roman writers were the same as the pre-Roman peoples of France, Great Britain and Ireland. He was right about France, wrong otherwise.



*Edward Lhuyd*

Therefore, he said, Irish and old British were Celtic languages, and their descendants were:

- Brythonic or “P-Celtic” – Breton, Cornish and Welsh;
- Goidelic or “Q-Celtic” – Irish, Manx and Scottish Gaelic.

These peoples were therefore called “modern Celts” and attempts were made to link their distinctive cultures to those of the real Celtic peoples. This came with a desire to create a separate identity from the English (and their associations with the Anglo-Saxons, the Romans and then the Norman-French). Continental Celtic languages are no longer extant, so it’s hard to check the linguistic claims.

However, the Greeks distinguished between *Keltoi* and *Pretannoi* or *Britanni*. The Romans did not consider inhabitants of Britain as “Celts”, and they would know!

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, there was a “Celtic Revival” which became ethnic nationalism, based on a sense of deep political and social malaise. This can be seen in the Irish Home Rule Movement (resulting in the Irish Free State in 1922), the Welsh Nationalist movement, the early days of Scottish Nationalism, Cornish Indigenous and Breton Nationalist movements. It gave rise to the idea of the “Celtic nations” and “Celtic culture”, built mainly on complete inventions such as solo step dancing (introduced from Europe) and the first *céilí* in Ireland (organized by the Gaelic League in 1894). It also fitted with the fashion for the Scottish Highlands.

High-status artefacts previously catalogued as “Celtic” (e.g., a single torc found at Knock, Co. Roscommon, dated 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC) are probably later copies of imported items.

## Summary

- There is no direct evidence for a mass presence of continental Celtic people in Ireland, despite much wishful thinking.
- Organisers of Celtic Festivals, players of the Celtic harp, and various sports teams, will all have to find new names.
- Scots, Irish, Welsh etc. need a new way to describe ourselves – Britanno- Hibernic, perhaps?

Cassidy, L. M. et al. *Neolithic and Bronze Age migration to Ireland and establishment of the insular Atlantic genome*. PNAS 2016, vol. 113, no. 2 (January 12), 368–373  
[www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1518445113](http://www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1518445113)