

## **ORIGINS OF IRISH WORDS IN ENGLISH EXPRESSION**

**BANSHEE** – In Irish tradition, a female spirit believed to foretell a death in the family by appearing to a family member or by wailing outside their house – hence the term “scream like a banshee.”

**BLARNEY** - Blarney has come to mean nonsense or smooth flattering talk in almost any language. Tradition says that if you pay a visit to Blarney Castle in County Cork and kiss the Blarney stone that you will receive the gift of eloquence and powers of persuasion, a true master of the “gift of gab.” It is ironic that an English queen is credited with the origin of the word. It seems that Dermot McCarthy, who ruled Blarney Castle during the reign of Elizabeth I, put up a series of eloquent excuses to prevent his surrender to the Queen. They were so plausible and frequent that the frustrated Elizabeth coined the now well-known term when she proclaimed the latest excuse as “more Blarney talk!”

**BOG** – Waterlogged and spongy ground whose soil consists mainly of decayed vegetable matter. The word also refers to an area of such ground, such as a marsh or swamp and, as a verb, “to be bogged down,” meaning to be hindered, slowed or impeded, as if in a bog.

**BOYCOTT** - Charles Parnell was a 19th century politician who advocated land reform in support of Irish tenant farmers. He and his supporters planned to shun any landlord (or estate agent) who refused to comply. Charles Boycott, the English estate agent for the Earl of Erne in County Mayo, was the first unlucky recipient of the treatment. When he refused to lower rents, he found that he and his family were completely isolated in their community. No household servants or farm laborers would work for them, no shopkeepers would provide them with service and their mail delivery ceased. His surname became synonymous with group action to withhold support or patronage in protest of the organization's actions.

**HOOLIGAN** – A young ruffian or hoodlum. Generally thought to derive from an Irish family, the Houlihanes, some of whom, justly or unjustly, became associated in the common mind with rowdy, violent behavior.

**POTLUCK** - In modern times a “potluck” supper is an evening without a planned menu. All, or at least most, of those attending bring the food of their choice for everyone to share. The expression comes from days when Irish women would make dinner in a single pot. If it was stew, it contained whatever they were lucky enough to have on hand that day.

**TAKE THE CAKE** - On summer evenings, it was customary for the rural people to meet at a crossroads and enjoy dancing to the music of local musicians. Someone would bring a cake along that was treated grandly, displayed on a white linen cloth on top of a milk churn. After dancing for several hours, a couple was chosen as the winners. It could be that they danced the longest, or the best, or that they were honored for announcing an engagement. Regardless, they were the ones who could “take the cake,” which of course they shared with others in the party.

**WHISKEY** – A liquor distilled from barley, rye, corn or other grain and typically containing 40 to 50% alcohol by volume. From *whiskybae*, derived in turn from Gaelic *uisgebeatha*, meaning the water of life.