

RESEARCHING YOUR IRISH ROOTS

BRIEF HISTORY

For genealogists, the key fact in Irish research is the destruction of the Public Record Office (PRO)¹ during the Irish Civil War in 1922. For the majority of Irish researchers, the greatest loss was that of the 1821 through 1851 census records. Many of the Church of Ireland parish registers were also lost. For legal reasons, these were considered to be government records and were deposited in the PRO. No Roman Catholic records were held in the PRO. An effort was made to supplement the records that had survived. Genealogists were asked to contribute copies of any research notes that they had. Records of government agencies that had not been in the PRO in 1922 were accessioned. Lawyers, estate agents, and individuals were encouraged to present any materials that they had to the PRO. These are the materials that we use today.

IMPORTANT TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Search every record source available in the U.S. You cannot successfully find any records in Ireland without knowing the names of the parents of your ancestor, the names and approximate birth dates of some siblings, and at least a county of origin.
- Follow every family member that you can find – someone left the information that you need to make your Irish connection: census records, gravestones, naturalizations, military pension files, wills, deeds, city directories, church records, town histories, and obituaries.
- You must be flexible in spelling of surnames² and places³. Remember that your ancestor didn't write down his or her own name in official records; they spoke it aloud to the record keeper. The same caveat applies to place names: County Cary is a common place of origin.
- Learn about administrative districts. Administrative districts in Ireland are not hierarchical, and they regularly overlap. Church records are held in the names of a religious parish.⁴ Civil Registration records are recorded by Poor Law Union.⁵ Census records are listed by District Electoral District (see Handran). Land records are by Barony and Poor Law Union.

BASIC SOURCES

Birth, Marriage, Death Records

Civil Registration, government records of birth, marriage and death, begin in Ireland in 1864. Records for Church of Ireland marriages **only** begin in 1845. Birth records include: date and place of birth; name; sex; names and residences of both parents; name of informant. Marriage records include: date and place of marriage; names, residences, occupations and age of groom and bride; name and occupation of fathers; witnesses. Death records include: date and place of death; age; cause of death; and informant. Most of the indexes through 1958 have been entered in the FamilySearch.org (LDS) database. Many birth records from 1864 to 1875 have

¹ Now known as the National Archives of Ireland.

² See MacLysaght and Matheson (reference list) for alternate spellings of surnames.

³ See the *General Alphabetical Index to Townlands* and Handran (reference list) for official spellings of places.

⁴ See Mitchell, *A Guide to Irish Parish Registers*, for a guide by county to religious parish names and the dates that records begin. Note that there is a distinction in Ireland between a Civil Parish and a religious parish.

⁵ See the *General Alphabetical Index to Townlands* and Handran.

been entered in detail. Most birth and marriage records have been microfilmed and may be rented from LDS. The Irish Family History Foundation (IFHF) has indexed records through 1900.

Church records commonly begin in the early-to-mid-nineteenth century, although records in cities may begin much earlier. Baptismal records generally include: the date of baptism; the name of the child; the names of both parents (including the mother's maiden name); and the baptismal sponsors. Catholic records usually include the townland where the family lived. Marriage records include: the date and place of marriage; the names of the groom and bride; and the names of the witnesses. Burial records are found in Church of Ireland records, but are very rare for Roman Catholics. Most Roman Catholic records have been indexed by the IFHF.

Census Records

The 1821, 1831, 1841 and 1851 census records were lost in the fire in 1922. The 1861, 1871, 1881 and 1891 census records were destroyed. Records for 1901 and 1911 have been digitized and indexed (free at The National Archives of Ireland). There is currently discussion concerning releasing the 1926 census. Make sure you look at all relevant pages; there are at least three.

Land and Property

Important: before 1900, 99% of land in Ireland was owned by a small number of people. Everyone else leased, from one-quarter of an acre to thousands of acres. Records, therefore, are different from the U.S. We need to focus on tax records (Tithe Applotment, Griffith's Valuation) and estate records (business records of large properties). The tax record series, known as Griffith's Valuation, begins about 1850 and continues to the present day. It includes: the name of the occupier, the name of the lessor (the person from whom the land is rented), a description of the property, its size and value, and a detailed map which shows its location.

VISITING IRELAND

Traveling in Ireland is expensive, especially in Dublin. Always do as much research as possible in local and online records before you go to Ireland. However, the time will come when you must take advantage of the records that are only available in Ireland. In Dublin, a word of warning, most hotels have very noisy public bars. Be prepared for that eventuality especially on weekends (Thursday through Sunday, minimum). Repositories in **Dublin** include: the National Library of Ireland (Roman Catholic Church registers and newspapers), the National Archives, the Valuation Office, the General Registrar Office, the Registry of Deeds, and the Representative Church Body Library (Church of Ireland records). Remember that before 1922, all records for Ireland were held in Dublin. Repositories in **Belfast** (for Northern Ireland) include: the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (church records, land records, estate records, and more), and the General Registrar Office of Northern Ireland. Every county has a County Library with a Local History reading room. There have been efforts to collect everything with local history information, including records of the Poor Law Unions (workhouses), maps, estate papers, local government records, and the Irish Folklore Commission records. You should consult them.

In the end, the thing that you want to do is to visit the place where your ancestors lived. The good news is that it can be done. With all the losses in Irish records, it is still possible to identify the exact location where your family lived and to go there and see it. It is worthwhile.

IRISH RESEARCH REFERENCE LIST

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PRINCIPAL WEBSITES FOR IRISH GENEALOGY RESEARCH

Ancestry: www.ancestry.com (subscription website)

Has an index to Griffith's Valuation on its World Explorer database (based on the CD issued by Donegal Heritage World) and an index to the Tithe Applotment Books for all of Ireland.

Ask About Ireland: www.askaboutireland.ie

This website was designed to assist Irish schoolchildren with research projects. It does include an index to Griffith's Valuation and a link to Valuation maps of a later period than Griffith's.

Family Search: www.familysearch.org

LDS website has searchable birth records from roughly 1864-1880; indexes to many of the civil records. Microfilms may be rented of church and civil records, and land and property records.

Find My Past: www.findmypast.ie

Website with detailed information on Prison Registers, Court of Petty Sessions Records, Landed Estate Court Records, directories, Marriage License Bonds, Wills and Administrations.

Irish Ancestors: www.irishtimes.com/ancestor (charges for some services)

An online version of the reference material found in John Grenham's *Tracing Your Irish Ancestors*. It provides a detailed profile of what you need for further research.

Irish Family History Foundation: www.irish-roots.ie (charges for record retrieval)

Focuses primarily on church records, but does have additional information for some counties.

Irish Genealogy Ltd.: www.irishgenealogy.ie

This website includes church records for parishes in Carlow, Cork, Dublin and Kerry.

Irish Origins: www.irishorigins.com (Subscription website)

Includes definitive version of Griffith's Primary Valuation of Ireland records and the Valuation Maps for the Republic, Irish Will index (1484-1858), the 1851 Dublin City Census, and more.

National Archives of Ireland: www.nationalarchives.ie

Website with information on collections and the 1901 and 1911 census records (index and images).

The National Library of Ireland: www.nli.ie

Website with information on their collections, including a detailed list of Catholic Parish Registers and an index to Hayes' *Manuscript Sources*.

The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland: www.pronic.gov.uk

Website with information on collections and links to databases with an emphasis on Ulster information: Ulster Covenant, Freeholders Records, Will Calendars, and Guides to Collections.