

Finding Your Ancestors in Ireland

Paul Milner, 1548 Parkside Drive, Park Ridge IL 60068

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OUTLINE

1. Identify what you know about your family
2. Select one ancestor or a couple and decide what you want to learn
3. Select a record to search
4. Find and search the record
5. Evaluate and use the information
6. Repeat the process with another record or ancestor

Background Information

1. Search records outside Ireland for a name and place of origin in Ireland
 - Obituaries
 - Monumental Inscriptions
 - Funeral Cards
 - Death certificates
 - Family Bibles
 - "Missing Friends"
 - Biographies, Local Histories
 - U.S. & British Military Records

2. Land Divisions

In Irish research the division of land can be one of the greatest pitfalls in knowing what records to search and where. There are many ways that the land is divided along political and religious boundaries.

Province

Four provinces: Connaught, Leinster, Munster and Ulster. Northern Ireland includes all of Ulster except the three counties of Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan.

Diocese

A large collection of parishes presided over by a bishop. The Catholic and Church of Ireland Diocese are not synonymous and they do not conform to county boundaries. Many records of all denominations are organized by the Church of Ireland diocese.

County

Ireland has 32 counties introduced by the British in the Middle Ages to provide a uniform political administrative system. Each county is made up of many civil parishes. In 1921 Northern Ireland was

formed from six of the counties in Ulster. Two counties also changed their names back to the Gaelic: Kings County became County Offaly and Queens County became County Leix.

Poor Law Union

These were the districts in which people were taxed and made responsible for the poor in the area. There were 163 poor law unions by 1850. These unions ignored county boundaries for they were usually centered around a market town where the union poor house was located. In 1898 the poor law union was adopted as the basic administration unit for Ireland and the townlands were arranged within these unions.

Barony

There are 331 baronies in Ireland based on the Celtic clan holdings. Their boundaries cross county and civil parish boundaries. Their significance decreased after the reorganization of local government in the late 1800's. However, they were widely used for land surveys and organization of legal documents. A barony can be determined by using the 1851, 1871 or 1901 townland indexes.

Electoral Division

Electoral divisions are important for using land records in the Valuation Offices of Dublin and Belfast. To identify the Electoral Division for a particular townland check the 1871 and 1901 townland indexes. Both indexes should be examined as there were changes made.

General Registrar's District

District used for the civil registration of births, marriages and death, based on Poor Law Unions.

Civil Parish

There are about 2,500 civil parishes in Ireland each containing about 25 to 30 townlands. They were used by the British for governmental control and administration. Their boundaries sometimes cross over the county and barony borders.

Ecclesiastical Parish

Church of Ireland: The names and borders of the Church of Ireland parishes are often synonymous with

those of the civil parishes because the Church of Ireland was the Established Church until 1871. In areas where membership is low a Church of Ireland parish may consist of multiple civil parishes. The reverse is true in areas where membership is high.

Roman Catholic Church: Roman Catholic parishes differ from the civil and Church of Ireland parish systems. However, to locate the correct Catholic parish it is often necessary to know the civil parish.

Townland

There are approximately 64,000 townlands in Ireland averaging 340 acres but they can be as small as 10 acres. For a rural family this will be the closest idea of an "address." Townlands were firmly established as an administrative unit in the 17th Century. Townland indexes were published with the 1851, 1871 and 1901 censuses. Warning: the townland names were not standardized until the Ordnance Survey Maps were created in the 1830s and 1840s.

Town and City

A town is different from a townland in that it actually has a town or a city. The town will have a government or corporation and for Protestant families this can be important since admission to the corporation was often through lineage.

RECORDS

Civil Registration

- Began 1 April 1845 with the registration of non-Catholic marriages.
- Began 1 January 1864 with the registration of all births marriages and deaths

Birth certificates typically record: child's name, sex, date of birth and birthplace; the parents' names including the mother's maiden name, father's occupation; informant's signature, residence and qualification which is often relationship to the child.

Marriage certificates typically record: marriage date, place and denomination for church marriages; the names of the bride and groom, their ages, occupations, marital statuses, and residences at the time of marriage; the names and occupations of their fathers and often whether the fathers were deceased; and the signatures of the bride, groom, and witnesses.

Death certificates typically record the name, occupation, age at death and marital status of the deceased; duration of the illness; date, place and cause of death; and signature, qualification and place of residence of the informant.

Taxation

Three major sources of tax records which are essential for nineteenth and twentieth century research.

- Tithe Applotment
- Griffiths Primary Valuation
- Valuation Books

The Householders Index, technically called *An Index of Surnames of Householders in Griffith's Primary Valuation and Tithe Applotment Book*, provides a surname index by county for all 32 counties, directing you to the barony in which the surname occurs. An index to Griffiths with images and maps is online at www.askaboutireland.ie/griffith-valuation/index.xml

Church Records

- Roman Catholic - church of the majority of the population
- Church of Ireland - the established church until 1871
- Presbyterian Church, third largest, mostly confined to Ulster.
- Baptists
- Huguenots
- Methodists
- Quakers

Census Records

- Taken every 10 years starting in 1821.
- 1821 - 1851 mostly destroyed in the 1922 fire at the Public Record Office in Dublin, fragments survive.
- 1861-1891 destroyed by the government after the statistics were compiled, fragments survive.
- 1901 and 1911 available with index and images online at www.nationalarchives.ie

Census Substitutes

- 1659 Sir William Petty's census
- 1740 Religious census
- 1766 Religious census - online at www.ancestry.com
- 1796 Spinning wheel premium entitlement
- Tithe Applotment

- Griffiths Primary Valuation -
- Old Age Pension Records, started 1908
- Ulster Covenant 1912 <www.proni.gov.uk>

Estate records

The majority of the people in Ireland did not own land but rather rented their land or home. To find information about a renter or leaseholder the estate records of the landowner need to be examined.

Cemetery Records

- Until the emancipation of Catholics in 1829 many Catholics buried in Church of Ireland cemeteries.
- Until the Burial Act of 1868 common for other denominations to be buried in church of Ireland cemeteries.

Wills

The majority of people in Ireland, Catholic and Protestant, were too poor to leave such a document. If the person was affluent then a search should be made.

- After 1858
 - District Registries
- Pre 1858
 - Church of Ireland Dioceses
 - most wills destroyed
 - Many copies, indexes and abstracts made

See: Index to Irish Wills 1484-1858 on CD-ROM from Eneclann for modern inventory.

Irish Research Centres

A network of research centres is continually being developed across Ireland to assist genealogical researchers. These centres vary from the very basic to large growing databases of indexed materials. For Updates and access to indexes see www.irish-roots.net.

Online Sites

For gateway sites check out Cyndis List at www.cyndislist.com and GENUKI at www.genuki.org.uk. There is a growing amount of information and databases provided by the national archives and libraries. Check out: National Archives www.nationalarchives.ie; National Library www.nli.ie; Public Record Office of Northern Ireland www.proni.gov.uk. Plus there is the new www.FindMyPast.ie. Don't forget search engines.

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