This presentation will examine Ireland’s Land Records and their importance for researchers. The records will vary depending upon the time period you are researching. In the process we will examine their strengths and weaknesses, plus how to access the originals and indexes. Do not view Irish land records through the eyes of American land research.

CROMWELLIAN LAND SETTLEMENT

Cromwellian land settlement derived from three statutes:
- 1642 Reduction of the Rebels
- 1652 Act for Settling Ireland
- 1653 Act for Satisfaction

Civil Survey

First of the major enquiries undertaken by the Cromwellian government in Ireland. After the Confederacy Wars Cromwellians confiscated land of the Irish and Anglo-Norman families this was to be used to pay the soldiers land in lieu of money, and to pay the London adventurers who had funded the war. The Courts of Survey, beginning in 1654, were to record the possessions of land owners, the tenures and titles of their estates. The survey provides the names of property owners of 1640, description of land, acreage (estimated by jurors), quantity of profitable and unprofitable land, plus value.

Down Survey

Supervised by William Petty, performed between 1654 and 1659. Designed to redistribute the land confiscated under the Cromwellian land settlement. The ground was surveyed and plotted as parish maps, later redrawn at a smaller scale by barony. Each map shows the forfeited land in the parishes. Land classified as Protestant land was not measured or surveyed. The collected maps form “Hiberniae Regnum”, a set of which survived at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris.

The Down Survey Baronial maps cover all of Ireland, except Counties Galway, Roscommon, and Mayo (Barony of Tyrawley is covered). Copies of some of the parish maps are in the Reeves collection in the National Library of Ireland. There are also some maps and tracings superimposed on the six inch to one mile Ordnance Survey maps in the Quit Rent Office.

Books of Survey and Distribution

The Restoration of Charles II in June 1660 added complexity to the redistribution process. A new Act of Settlement was passed in 1662, creating the Court of Claims 1662-1663. Over 500 decrees of Innocence were issued by this court

The 1665 Act of Explanation modified the earlier act. The Commissioners for the Court of Claims 1666-69 issued over 1800 certificates documenting the claims and location of land.

The books also contain 500 grants of land issued by the Commission of Grace, 1684-1688.

Approximately a million acres of estates were forfeited as a result of a 1688 Act. Thirteen trustees were empowered to sell this land by 1703, resulting in 666 deeds of sale. The sales are noted in the Books of Survey and Distribution, plus are recorded in “Books of Postings and Sales of the Forfeited Estates and other estates in Ireland 1702-03”.

The first columns in the Books are the same as in the Down Survey, while additional columns show whether land was subdivided as a result of confiscation, and identifies the landowners in 1700.

The Books of Survey and Distribution were to establish an official record of landowners and their estates. This was used to impose the Quit Rent payable yearly under the Acts of Settlement and Explanation.

1659 Census

Arranged by county, barony, parish, townland listing numbers of English and Scots, and Irish, naming the major landholders in the area. There are no census returns for Cavan, Galway, Mayo, Tyrone, Wicklow, or four baronies in Cork, or nine baronies in Meath. The census has been published.

Hearth Money Rolls

Created by the Hearth Money Act of 1662, with subsequent amending legislation. Provide names of householders on a county, parish and townland basis. Originals destroyed but some transcripts survive for 1662 through 1669.


REGISTRY OF DEEDS

Beginning in 1708, to the present, land transactions were registered in the Registry of Deeds in Dublin. Recording was optional, not mandatory, thus many deeds were not recorded. You will find deeds of sale, lease arrangements, marriage settlements, and wills. The deeds record the name if the granter (seller), the grantee (buyer), description of the lands subject to contract. Prior to the relaxation of the penal laws in 1778 very few deeds were registered by Catholics.

There are two indices: surname and land. The surname index provides the surname and christian name of the sellers, the surname of the buyers, but does not include the county or townland identify until after 1832. The land index is arranged by county or city and by time period, and groups of townlands by first letter, gives the surnames of the parties and a reference number. After 1828 the counties are divided by barony. Watch for phonetic spelling of townland names, which were not standardized until the creation of the Ordnance Survey maps in the 1820's. The records and indexes until 1929 are available on film through the FHL. The Registry of Deeds on Henrietta Street, Dublin has records to the present. New Registry of Deed rules came into effect on 1 May 2008.

TITHE APPLOTMENT BOOKS

Prior to 1823 Tithes were paid directly to the Established Church (Church of Ireland) in kind. In 1823 the Tithe Applotment Act stipulated that all tithes were to be paid in money, not produce. Between 1823 and 1827 land held in each civil parish was valued. The valuation was based on the average price of wheat and oats in the parish during the seven years preceding 1 November 1821. The result was a complete valuation of all tithable land in Ireland.

The records record the occupiers of tithable
land, not the householders. Omitted are landless laborers, weavers, and urban dwellers. In 1838 the tithe payment was reduced by 25%, transferred from the tenant to the land owner. The Tithes were abolished in 1869.

The Tithe Books provide the names of the payers (occupiers), the area of land held and the amount of tithes to be paid, usually arranged alphabetically by townland, parish and county.

Problems to be aware of: some land was so poor in quality that tithes could not be levied; some areas were tithe free, usually because it was already owned by the Church; later division and renaming of townlands; transfer of townlands to another parish or to another county.

**TITHE DEFAULTERS**

During 1830 and 1831 increasing numbers of people refused to pay the tithes. The government established the Clergy Relief Fund 1831 whereby the clergy could claim for arrears for that one year only. The government, not the clergy, had the responsibility for collecting the arrears.

For a clergyman to get assistance under the Act, he had to swear an affidavit explaining what methods he had used to collect the arrears. He also included: a listing of names; description; places of abode of the persons, occupiers of the land within his parish, or names of representatives if the person was deceased; amount of tithe due and how much in arrears. The affidavit and lists were sent to Dublin Castle for a decision on whether relief was to be granted.

There are 1,061 pages of names of defaulters, identifying 29,027 names in 232 parishes. The lists were compiled in June, July and August of 1832. Published on CD-ROM by Eneclann, See McCormac. The same data set is online at www.findmypast.ie and www.irishorigins.com.

**VALUATION RECORDS**

**First Valuation**

The 1826 Valuation Act arose because of the need for an equitable method for assessing the cess and rates. The 4500 field books are compiled by parish, describing each townland in the parish, the quality of the land, and its valuations. The focus is on agricultural land it also includes details on houses over £3, raised in 1838 to £5 by which time most of Ulster had been surveyed. In rural areas this caught generally only the major landowner, but caught many urban dweller. The records are organized by parish within baronies, not by the name of the town.

**Primary Valuation (Griffith’s)**

Between 1840 and 1864 the people who paid taxes to the Irish government are recorded in Griffith's Primary Valuations Lists. The records DO NOT provide a listing of all householders, rather only those who paid taxes. Some workers are not listed because they were living in company owned, or estate owned housing. The lists do provide the names of land owners, lessors, lessees, and renters. The burden of the taxes fell on the poor and thus they provide a listing for a large percentage of the population for which other records are scarce. These tax records provide the names of the heads of household, where they resided, usually a description of their property, and the amount of tax paid.

Access has changed radically with free access to original images, modern and survey maps with boundaries marked at www.askaboutireland.ie

Access through subscription services to index with images are available through www.findmypast.com and www.irishorigins.com. A free transcript can be found at www.failteromhat.com.
Older access methods can be helpful if you are not finding what you are looking for.

A useful surname index is the Index to Surnames of Householders in Griffith's Primary Valuation and the Tithe Applotment Books, commonly called the Householders Index. Search the wiki at www.familysearch.org for Ireland Householders Index.

Family Tree Maker’s Family Archives. Index to Griffith’s Valuation of Ireland, 1848-1864. CD #188.

This CD-ROM allows you to search by name, county, parish, location, comments which may include agnomens. There can be ambiguity with how place is being used on this CD-ROM. You need to access the originals for description of the property, acreage, value, taxes, etc. There are known errors of omission on this CD-ROM. See


LISTS OF LAND OWNERS

Use these lists to identify the major landowners in a given location. Many of these volumes are available online at www.archive.org. Then search for the estate and family records of that landowner which may not be in Ireland.


To search online catalogs for English and Wales use Access to Archives at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ a2a or in Scotland use the Scottish Archive Network at www.scan.org.uk

ESTATE RECORDS

Estate records can vary greatly. They can consist of: rentals - giving names of tenants with rent; tenancy returns - lists of evicted tenants or notices to quit, mode of tenancy, observations, petitions and proposals from tenants; descriptions - surveys, evaluations, maps often with names of tenants; accounts - for the desmesne, farm, estate, household, private, wages, bills or receipts; legal papers - deeds, leases, wills; correspondence - to or from agents, landlords, tenants, stewards, advisors; diaries and memoranda - desmesne, farms, estates, personal; famine related - lists of emigrants; poor law unions, workhouses, rates, relief work and relief committees.

There is a growing interest in estate records. Examine the county listings in books by Grenham, Roulston and Ryan.


INCUMBERED ESTATES COURT

The Incumbered Estates Acts were passed in 1848-1850. The court established in 1849 was designed to free the market in land and to oversee the sale of insolvent and heavily indebted estates. In the early years the sales
were of land already in trouble before the famine. The estates auctioned off are in the so-called O’Brien Rentals at the National Archives, named after Murrough John O’Brien, who served on the Irish Land Commission, 1892 to 1914. Each rental usually provides information on the size of the lot being sold, the annual rent payable by the tenant, the annual head rent and the tithe, the names of the tenants and the townlands in which they reside, as well as leasing arrangements. Some rentals provide illustrations of the estate mansion and its surroundings.


**IRISH LAND COMMISSION**

The Land Commission established in 1881 had a major effect on the Irish landscape and land ownership. Initially established to fix judicial rents the Acts of 1885 and 1903 gave the Land Commission government funds to help tenants purchase land from their landlords. The Commission operated until 1923 when a system of compulsory acquisition was introduced. The land purchasers can often be identified by “LPA” in the Griffith’s Valuation Revision lists. A topographical index is arranged by county, barony and landowner. A names index arranged alphabetically by the name of the owner, identifies the barony in which the property is located and an estate number, which will lead you a summary description of the estate documents.

**CONGESTED DISTRICTS BOARD**

Created by the 1891 Land Act to assist tenants in congested districts covering all of Counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Mayo, Galway, and Kerry as well as portions of Counties Clare and Cork (Land Act of 1909). 750,000 acres were distributed to relieve congestion operating until dissolution under the Act of 1923. The records are primarily focused on the tenants not the original landowner. The Board had to be satisfied that the tenant was capable of repaying the advances made through a system of annuities.

The records have been cataloged on the basis of estates within baronies. Supporting records include: inspectors reports; abstract of title; surveyors report; schedule of tenancies; minutes of proceedings (20 vols); baseline reports of local inspectors.

**LAND REGISTRY**

The 1891 Registration of Title Act made the registration of title for all land bought under the Land Purchase Acts compulsory. In effect all land purchased after 1891 is recorded in the Land Registry. The title or ownership is registered, the deed is filed in the Registry, and all relevant details are entered on folios which form the registers. Once recorded in the Land Registry you will no longer find information on that piece of land in the Register of Deeds.

**WEBSITES**

[http://eppi.dippam.ac.uk/](http://eppi.dippam.ac.uk/) provides a searchable database of the Enhanced British Parliamentary Papers on Ireland, 1801-1922. Much can be found here relating to land records.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**
