



Beginning Irish Research

- Jenny Joyce

Land Divisions

There are 4 provinces, 32 counties (6 of them in Northern Ireland), 331 Baronies, 64,000 townlands as well as civil parishes, Church of Ireland parishes, and Roman Catholic Parishes. Of these, finding the townland is the pot of gold we are all searching for.

Best places to find them are *A New Genealogical Atlas of Ireland* by Brian Mitchell, *General alphabetical index to townlands and towns, parishes and baronies of Ireland* (<https://archive.org/details/op1248631-1001/mode/2up>), Irish Townlands website (<https://www.townlands.ie/>), *Townland Index and Database 1851* (<https://www.swilson.info/townlands.php>) and the *IreAtlas Townland Database* (<https://thecore.com/seanruad>).

Civil Registration (birth, marriage and death certificates)

Civil Registration began quite late in Ireland. Non-Catholic marriages were recorded from 1845, but it wasn't until 1864 that Catholic marriages and all births and deaths were recorded.

The good news is that none of these records were affected by the 1922 fire, because none of them were kept in the Public Records Office. The General Register Office (GRO) in Dublin (<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/af7893-general-register-office/>) holds records for all 32 counties until 1921. After that point it only holds records for the Republic of Ireland. The General Register Office of Northern Ireland (GRONI) (<https://geni.nidirect.gov.uk/>) holds records for the six counties of Northern Ireland from 1921, and has digitised versions of the earlier records.

Indexes for all the records held by the GRO are available online for free at <https://www.irishgenealogy.ie/>, and images for births 1864-1922, non-Catholic marriages 1845-1947, catholic marriages 1864-1947 and deaths 1871-1972 are available for download for free from the same site. There will be further additions to the available records in the future.

To obtain records for events outside these dates, apply to the GRO for copies at https://www.irishgenealogy.ie/images/content/www.genealogy.ie_form.pdf. Note that there are charges for these.

GRONI (<https://geni.nidirect.gov.uk/>) has online access to their indexes and images of births over 100 years old, marriages over 75 years old and death records over 50 years old. Viewing the indexes is on a pay-per-view basis, and you can then purchase a copy of a certificate.

FamilySearch also has microfilms of some of the civil registration records, but they have not yet been fully digitized.

Parish Registers

The appendix to *Tracing your Irish Ancestors* by John Grenham lists each catholic parish, the dates of its registers, and where they can be found. Those filmed by the National Library of Ireland are now available online for free at <https://registers.nli.ie/>. Indexed versions of these are available on *FamilySearch*, *Findmypast* and *Ancestry*. Those on *FamilySearch* and *Findmypast* are free to search and view.

Transcripts for some parish are available with a subscription on *RootsIreland* (<https://www.rootsireland.ie/>). The free website *Irish Genealogy.ie* (<https://www.irishgenealogy.ie/en/>) has many free Catholic records for Dublin, Cavan, Kerry and Cork, but there are some gaps. For help with the Latin in catholic registers see <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/latin-terminology-church-registers>.

The Church of Ireland was the established church until 1871, which meant their records were considered state records. From 1876 they were required to deposit them in the Public Record Office in Dublin for safekeeping unless they had good storage facilities to retain the records. 637 parishes didn't deposit records. Further, some ministers made copies of their records before sending the originals to Dublin. Thus, many Church of Ireland records remain, even though the records sent to Dublin were destroyed in 1922 in the fire in the Public Record Office. Some records for Dublin, Kerry and Carlow at *Irishgenealogy.ie* (<https://www.irishgenealogy.ie/en/>). The Anglican Record Project (<https://www.ireland.anglican.org/about/rcb-library/online-parish-records>) has transcriptions of a small number of parishes. *FamilySearch* has some registers, and *RootsIreland* also has some (<https://www.rootsireland.ie/>). Otherwise the records are not online and are held by the local clergy, the National Archives of Ireland, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, or the Representative Church Body Library.

PRONI holds microfilms of Methodist registers, and local chapels hold the rest. *RootsIreland* (<https://www.rootsireland.ie/>) has some Methodist transcripts. Quaker records can be found on *Findmypast*. Jewish records are on *The Irish Jewish Family History Database* (<https://www.irishjewishroots.com/>).

PRONI has a list of the parish records they hold, but (https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Guide_to_church_records.pdf). Their holdings are only available onsite at PRONI.

Censuses

Censuses in Ireland commenced in 1821, and unlike in England, Scotland and Wales, they listed all the members of each household from the beginning. Unfortunately, few census records survive before 1901. The records for 1861 and 1871 were destroyed by order of the government, and those for 1881 and 1891 were pulped in 1918, probably owing to paper shortages during the First World War. Those from

1821, 1831, 1841 and 1851 were lost in the fire in 1922. The 1921 census did not take place owing to the Irish War of Independence, and the 1926 census is not due to be released until 2027.

This leaves the censuses of 1901 and 1911 as the only complete censuses, which are available for free at <https://census.nationalarchives.ie/>. These censuses have a couple of fields not found on English returns: each person's religion, and what language they speak. In addition to the Household Return (form A), make sure you look at the House and Building Return (Form B1), which gives details about the house in which they live, and the Return of Out-Offices and Farm-Steadings (Form B2), which gives details of any other buildings on the property.

Even though the censuses 1821-1891 were destroyed, some fragments or transcriptions have survived. One source of transcriptions was generated by people applying for the old age pension, who were born before civil registration started. In order to provide proof of their age, searches could be requested of the 1841 and 1851 censuses. Images of the results are available on *FamilySearch* and *Findmypast*. Another source is the work of antiquarians and genealogists that took place before the fire. Many of these are available on *Findmypast*. Details of the surviving fragments for 1821-1851 can be found at <https://census.nationalarchives.ie/help/pre1901.html>.

Griffith's Valuation (Primary Valuation)

This land survey was designed for tax, not genealogists, but it is still very useful. It was undertaken between 1847 and 1864 and is what is called a "census substitute". While it only names the head of the household, it still puts a family in a place at a time. And it also shows the size of landholding. This includes tenant farmers, as well as the large landlords, but omits the very poorest who were living in makeshift hovels, and also omits adult males who were not householders (e.g. servants).

It is free to view on *Ask About Ireland* (<https://www.askaboutireland.ie/griffith-valuation/>) and it is also on *Findmypast*. The entries are cross referenced to maps which allow you to identify all the houses and land held/occupied by each individual. I find the associated maps on *Ask About Ireland* better than those on *Findmypast*, because in most cases they are clearer, and also can be compared to a modern map with a slider on the top right of the screen. *Findmypast* only have transcripts of the records, not images of the original books or the maps, for the six counties of Northern Ireland.

Valuation Revision / Cancelled Land Books

Over time land changed hands. These changes are marked in books, with different coloured writing representing different years. Those for the Republic of Ireland can only be inspected in person at the Valuation Office in Dublin, but those for Northern Ireland have been digitised and are available online at <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/searching-valuation-revision-books>.

Tithe Applotment

The Tithe was a charged levied in rural areas to support the Church of Ireland Clergy. Like Griffith's Valuation it only lists the head of the household and only included certain types of agricultural land, but its value is that it took place 1823-1837, which gives a snapshot from before Griffith's Valuation took place. It can be viewed on The National Archives' genealogy website (<https://genealogy.nationalarchives.ie/>).

Wills

Wills before 1858 were proved by Church Courts, and those after 1858 by a Probate Registry.

Tragically, many wills were lost in the fire in the Public Record Office in 1922. All the originals of wills before 1900 were destroyed, and only those after 1904 survive for wills proved at the Principal Registry in Dublin. Fortunately, there are some substitutes available.

The will registers, which contain details of the testator, his/her date of death, and sometimes the executors for post-1858 wills are available on The National Archives' genealogy website (<https://genealogy.nationalarchives.ie/>) and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland has made details from the will calendars for the District Probate Registries of Armagh, Belfast and Londonderry covering the period 1858 to 1965 searchable online at https://apps.prONI.gov.uk/WillsCalendar_IE/WillsSearch.aspx. Some of the subscription websites also have copies.

For wills proved before 1858, there are will calendars and other records on microfilm in The National Archives, and details known wills are available via their Name Search at <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/search-archives-online/name-search>. A small number of these have copies or transcripts of the wills available if copies were made before the fire.

Findmypast has several collections of information gathered by professionals before the fire. "Betham's Abstracts" are particularly useful, as they contain a summary of the will beneficiaries for a selection of wills. Some of the deeds recorded at the Registry of Deeds also contain information derived from early wills, but accessing the Registry of Deeds is a complicated process, and is beyond the scope of this presentation. Some of the wills recorded in the Deeds up until 1832 have been published in three volumes, which are available at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City and selected other libraries. Note that these are only wills mentioned in deeds, not all the wills executed during the period.

Newspapers

All sorts of people can turn up in newspapers, not just the famous or well off. It's always worth having a look for your relatives in the Irish Newspapers.

There are several websites containing historical Irish newspapers:

- *The British Newspaper Archive* (<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>)
- *Findmypast*
- *Irish News Archives* (<https://www.irishnewsarchive.com/>)
- The Gale group (<https://www.gale.com/intl>), which includes many groups of British newspapers such as The Times digital archive and the British Library newspapers. Many libraries have subscriptions to this.
- *ProQuest* (<https://www.proquest.com/>) is another subscription site you may be able to access from a library.

Although many of these require a subscription, a society or library may have one, and make the newspapers available to their patrons.

Other Useful websites

Note that this list is not comprehensive, it is just some websites that I think are helpful with resources available online.

- National Archives of Ireland <https://www.nationalarchives.ie/>.

- National Archives of Ireland Genealogy site <https://genealogy.nationalarchives.ie/>.
- Public Record Office of Northern Ireland <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/public-record-office-northern-ireland-proni>.
- National Library of Ireland <https://www.nli.ie/>. Online copies of Catholic parish registers at <https://registers.nli.ie/>.
- General Register Office (Republic of Ireland) Order official birth death or marriage certificates here.
- General Register Office of Northern Ireland. Only place to order birth death or marriage certificates for Northern Ireland.
- Findmypast Irish Records <https://search.findmypast.ie/search-ireland-records>.
- Ancestry <https://www.ancestry.com>.
- FamilySearch <https://www.familysearch.org/>.
- Cavan Library History collection online <https://www.cavanlibrary.ie/cavan-history/>.
- Clare County Library Genealogy <https://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/genealogy/genealog.htm>.
- Cork Archives <https://corkarchives.ie/>. Lots of valuable records online.
- Limerick Archives <https://www.limerick.ie/archives>.
- Wexford County Archive digital collection <https://wexfordcountyarchive.com/our-collections/digital-collections/>.
- Wicklow County Archives <https://heritage.wicklowheritage.org/topics/wicklow-county-archives-service/wicklow-county-archives>. Online collections and useful links.
- Military Archives <https://www.militaryarchives.ie/>
- Register of Deeds Index Project <https://irishdeedsindex.net/>.
- Ireland Reaching Out <https://www.irelandxo.com/>.
- Representative Church Body Library <https://www.ireland.anglican.org/about/rcb-library>. Church of Ireland. Transcripts of a small number of parish registers.
- Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland <https://presbyterianhistoryireland.com/>.
- Ireland Genealogy Projects Website <https://www.igp-web.com/>.
- Ulster Historical Foundation <https://ulsterhistoricalfoundation.com/>.
- GenUKI Irish pages <https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/irl>.
- Irish Ancestors (John Grenham's website) <https://www.johngrenham.com/>.