



GEN-FIND RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.

Notes on Eire & Northern Ireland Records and Searching Them

Unlike some other U.K. states, Irish research can be very difficult for periods prior to civil registration. Primarily because a large portion of, if not all, records normally accessed by genealogists in their search have been destroyed in full or in part at some time in the past, either voluntarily or otherwise. To compound the problems, with the split in governments between Eire resulted in further search Remember, however that before this is the prime period that most records for.

For general enquiries, it is depth research program without your ancestor when researching arranged by town, parish, District, or Poor Law Union and in a multitude of regional ever-increasing number are now Archives of Ireland, the National Record Office of Northern

circumstances we have a indexes that, at minimum, of the family name and; at best, a pioneer ancestor might be located. This is always the first priority - to locate the family - and these index searches are covered by the minimum advance retainer we request. Your chances at success are much better, however, if you know a town name or parish or county by which to isolate the search more effectively.

If you do know a place-name, you'll receive some research along with added research suggestions based on information you've supplied. In this case, the minimum retainer covers evaluation of your information, a preliminary research plan, implementation of some initial research strategies along with a follow-up evaluation of



Figure 1 - Map of the United Kingdom

and Northern Ireland in 1922 has problems for the Irish enthusiast. 1922 only one Ireland existed and researchers are seeking genealogical

almost impossible to institute an in-knowing an Irish place-name for in Ireland. Most records are barony, county, Registration the vast majority of these are housed archives and libraries, though an being consolidated in the National Library of Ireland and the Public Ireland. In some minor

few limited county and state-wide will provide us with a distribution

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those research results in our Report. Before conducting any research in Ireland, however, it is always best to first attempt to exhaust all known possibilities of locating an Irish place-name from where your ancestors may have come, from within historical records dealing with other later personal life events and places.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

“The first known settlement in Ireland began around 8000 BC, when hunter-gatherers arrived from continental Europe, probably via a land bridge. Few archaeological traces remain of this group, but their descendants and later Neolithic arrivals, particularly from the Iberian Peninsula, were responsible for major Neolithic sites such as Newgrange. On the arrival of Saint Patrick and other Christian missionaries in the early to mid-5th century AD, Christianity began to subsume the indigenous Celtic religion, a process that was completed by the year AD 600.

From around AD 800, more than a century of Viking invasions brought havoc upon the monastic culture and on the island's various regional dynasties, yet both of these institutions proved strong enough to survive and assimilate the invaders. The coming of Cambro-Norman mercenaries under Richard de Clare, 2nd Earl of Pembroke, nicknamed *Strongbow*, in 1169 marked the beginning of more than 700 years of direct English, and, later, British involvement in Ireland. In 1177, Prince John Lackland was made Lord of Ireland by his father Henry II of England at the Council of Oxford.

The Crown did not begin an attempt to assert full control of the island until after Henry VIII's repudiation of papal authority over the Church in England and subsequent *English Reformation*, which failed in Ireland. Questions over the loyalty of Irish vassals provided the initial impetus for a series of Irish military campaigns between



Figure 2 - Patchwork of Early Irish Kingdoms (1014 AD)



Figure 3 - Irish Land under Norman Control (1300 AD)

1534 and 1691. This period was also marked by a Crown policy of plantation which

led to the arrival of thousands of English and Scottish Protestant settlers, and the consequent displacement of the pre-plantation Catholic landholders. As the military and political defeat of Gaelic Ireland became more pronounced in the early seventeenth century, the role of religion as a new divisive element in Ireland became more pronounced. From this period on, sectarian conflict became a recurrent theme in Irish history.

The overthrow, in 1613, of the Catholic majority in the Irish Parliament was realized principally through the creation of numerous new boroughs, all of which were dominated by the new settlers. By the end of the seventeenth century, recusant Roman Catholics, as adherents to the old religion were now termed, representing some 85% of Ireland's population, were then banned from the Irish Parliament. Political power rested entirely in the hands of an Anglican minority, while Catholics and members of dissenting Protestant denominations suffered severe political and economic privations at the hands of the

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Penal Laws. The Irish Parliament was abolished in 1801 in the wake of the republican United Irishmen Rebellion and Ireland became an integral part of a new United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland under the *Act of Union*. Although promised a repeal of the *Test Act*, Catholics were not granted full rights until Catholic Emancipation was attained in throughout the new UK in 1829. This was followed by the first *Reform Bill* in 1832, a principal condition of which was the removal of the poorer British and Irish freeholders from the franchise.

The Irish Parliamentary Party strove from the 1880s to attain Home Rule self-government through the parliamentary constitutional movement eventually winning the *Home Rule Act* 1914, though it was suspended on the outbreak of World War I. The *Easter Rising* staged by Irish Republicans two years later brought physical force republicanism back to the forefront of Irish politics.

In 1922, after the *Irish War of Independence* and the *Anglo-Irish Treaty*, the larger part of Ireland seceded from the United Kingdom to become the independent Irish Free State; and after the 1937 constitution, Ireland (Eire). The six northeastern counties (slightly modified), known as Northern Ireland, remained within the United Kingdom. The *Irish Civil War* followed soon after the *War of Independence*. The history of Northern Ireland has since been dominated by sporadic (mainly Catholic) Nationalists and conflict erupted into the uneasy peace thirty years

More recently, the *Belfast* of 10 April 1998 brought - on sharing to Northern Ireland, control of limited areas of sharing Executive and the between January and May 2007, following breakdowns involving outstanding issues, paramilitary weapons, British army bases. In new Unionist and (Nationalist) their dominant positions to the (Nationalist) Sinn Féin IRA announced the end of its armed campaign and on 25 September 2005 international weapons inspectors supervised the full disarmament of the PIRA. Eventually, devolution was restored in April 2007.



Figure 2 - Political Map of Ireland

sectarian conflict between (mainly Protestant) Unionists. This *Troubles* in the late 1960s, until an

Agreement ("*Good Friday Agreement*") 2 December 1999 - a degree of power giving both Unionists and Nationalists government. However, both the power-elected Assembly were suspended 2000, and from October 2002 until April in trust between the political parties including "decommissioning" of policing reform and the removal of elections in 2003, the moderate Ulster Social Democrat and Labour parties lost more hard-line Democratic Unionist and parties. On 28 July 2005, the Provisional IRA announced the end of its armed campaign and on 25 September 2005 international weapons inspectors supervised the full disarmament of the PIRA. Eventually, devolution was restored in April 2007.

Ireland's economy has evolved greatly, becoming more diverse and sophisticated than ever before by integrating itself into the global economy. By the beginning of the 1990s Ireland had transformed itself into a modern industrial economy and generated substantial national income that benefited the entire nation. Although dependence on agriculture still remained high, Ireland's industrial economy produced sophisticated goods that rivalled international competition. Ireland's international economic boom of the 1990s led to its being called the "Celtic Tiger."

The Catholic Church, which once exercised an enormous amount of power, found its influence on socio-political issues in Ireland much reduced. Irish bishops were no longer able to advise and influence the public on how to exercise their political rights. Modern Ireland's detachment of the Church from ordinary life can be explained by the increasing disinterest in Church doctrine by younger generations and the questionable morality of the Church's

representatives. As a result, many in the Irish public began to question the credibility and effectiveness of the Catholic Church.”¹

MAJOR RESOURCE COLLECTIONS:

For Ireland, the major resource collections focus around four major sources, though many more records exist which are not covered in this document. A good first step would be to consult one of the GENUKI online websites regarding the region, where a large part of the material included here was extracted from. Also, it will be good to consult this site for listings of archives and libraries in the regions for access to these sources.

Sadly, **census records** are not a good resource for conducting effective research into Ireland as virtually all 19th century census returns have been destroyed, voluntarily or thru war, but the Irish censuses for 1901 and 1911 have survived intact and may be examined at The National Archives of Ireland (NAI) in Dublin or at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) in Belfast. In addition, they are now all indexed & digitized and can be examined online thru most pay-per-view sites. There has been a census every ten years since 1821 to the present, with the exception of a 1931 enumeration for Northern Ireland and a 1941 census due to War; though only a handful of incomplete returns have survived for this period to 1901. A further 1926 Irish Free State census was taken though not yet available publicly. A very large percentage of these early census records for Ireland have either been lost or destroyed. Nominal returns for the period 1821-1851 do survive, however, only in limited part for various regions throughout the country and some of these are only aggregate totals. The 1861-1891 census enumerations were studied for statistical and demographic information upon compilation and then were subsequently destroyed by government order. Thus, the 1901 census is the first fully comprehensive census to survive with the 1911 census, currently, being the last available enumeration for public access. For most of the returns you will find detail elements listed such as: name, relation to the head of the household, gender and age, occupation, religion, birthplace, marital status and residence.

The information recorded on individuals has tended to increase with each census with the enumerations taken on the following dates:

28 May 1821	Fragments of this population census for small parts of counties Armagh, Cavan, Fermanagh, Galway, Meath and Offaly (then called King's County) are available at the NAI in Dublin
30 May 1831	Most of the returns (or copies made in 1834) survive for Co. Derry. These are available at the NAI, at PRONI in Belfast and the Genealogical Centre in Derry
6 Jun 1841	Original returns to survive are those for parts of Killesandra, Co. Cavan. These are in the NAI. There are also a number of transcripts of the originals, mostly for locations in the south of Cos. Kilkenny and Monaghan, but also for a few isolated households in Cos. Cork, Fermanagh and Waterford. All are available at the NAI
30 Mar 1851	Most of the surviving fragments are for Co. Antrim and the single townland of Clonee, Co. Fermanagh. These are available at PRONI and at the NAI. In addition, PRONI holds some population census returns for parts of what is now Northern Ireland. The NAI holds extracts for some parts of Co. Monaghan and lists of heads of households for Dublin City and one ward in Belfast. The

¹ 'History of Ireland' in *Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Ireland>, extracted on 6th February 2012.

	Genealogical Office (GO) holds extracts of this population census for some Co. Kilkenny parishes.
7 Apr 1861	Surviving census record for 1861 is a transcription for one parish – Enniscorthy in County Wexford – and even that is for Roman Catholic families only
2 Apr 1871	All that survives of the 1871 Irish census records are transcriptions for the County Meath parishes of Drumcondra and Loughbraclen
3 Apr 1881	When it came round to the Irish census of 1881 and 1891, the potential value of keeping the original returns had, perhaps, been recognised and they were retained after they had been analysed. Sadly, a later decision to pulp them as waste paper was taken during the First World War and none of the originals survive. Neither do any transcriptions for these years. In other words, there are absolutely no records available for either the 1881 or the 1891 Irish census.
5 Apr 1891	Destroyed
31 Mar 1901	Now available to the public, digitally and indexed
2 Apr 1911	Now available to the public, digitally and indexed

Only the census records over 100 years old are available to the public. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Library™ and the Family History Centers™ have access to all available census records (1841-1911) on microfilm, plus some street and surname indexes for large communities. All of the census enumerations for the noted period are now available online at a host of different sites, but particularly thru The NAI in Dublin.

For the most part, however, these returns, in themselves, are not comprehensive enough or complete enough to be of any significant help to researchers. As a result, you may be required to investigate three forms of census substitutes (though there are many others that date back to 1630) that do exist: Old Age Pensioner's Claims, Tithe Applotment Books (1823-1838), and Griffith's Primary Valuation (1848-1964) and Later Land Valuations (to the present). Remember as well that there were many small local census enumerations (of sorts) taken over the past several hundred years and many of these still survive in small parts and these have been microfilmed for the most part. The majority of these, as well as other census substitutes are generally available through the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Library™ and the Family History Centers™.

Church records (or 'Old Parish Records') have been collected for many centuries in Ireland though these have not been consistently maintained, nor have many survived prior to 1800. Church records include records of births or christenings, marriages, and sometimes deaths or burials. These records were kept in what is known as 'the Parish Registers'. In 1876, a law was passed requiring that the Church of Ireland parish registers be sent to the Public Record Office in Dublin for safekeeping. This law was amended in 1878 to allow parishes with good storage facilities to retain their records, so not all parish records were sent to Dublin, and others were copied before being sent. Thus, many Church of Ireland records remain, even though the records sent to Dublin were destroyed in 1922 when the Public Record Office burned.

"After the coming of the Reformation to Ireland in the sixteenth century, the parish structures of the Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland diverged. In general, the Church of Ireland retained the older medieval parochial divisions, which were also used for administrative purposes by the secular authorities. Thus civil parishes, the basic geographical units in early censuses, tax records and land surveys, are almost identical to Church of Ireland parishes.

The Catholic Church, on the other hand, weakened by the confiscation of its assets and the restrictions on its clergy, had to create larger and less convenient parishes. In some ways, however, this weakness produced more flexibility, allowing parishes to be centered on new, growing population centres, and, in the nineteenth century, permitting the creation of new parishes to accommodate this growth in population. The differences in the parish structures of the two churches are reflected in their records. Even allowing for the fact those members of the Church of Ireland were almost always a small minority of the total population, the records of each parish are proportionally less extensive than Catholic records, covering a smaller area, and are thus relatively easy to search in detail.

Catholic records, by contrast, cover the majority of the population and a much larger geographical area, and as a result can be very time-consuming to search in detail. The creation of new Catholic parishes in the nineteenth century can also mean that the registers relevant to a particular area may be split between two parishes. Both Catholic and Church of Ireland parishes are organized on the diocesan basis first laid out in the Synod of Kells in the Middle Ages, and remain almost identical, although the Catholic system has amalgamated some of the small medieval dioceses.

Before the start of civil registration for all in 1864, virtually the only direct sources of family information for the vast majority of the population are the local parish records. However, because of the disadvantages suffered by the Catholic Church from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, record-keeping was understandably difficult, and very few registers survive from before the latter half of the eighteenth century. The earliest Catholic Church parish records in the country appear to be the fragments for Waterford and Galway cities, dating from the 1680s, and for Wexford town, dating from 1671. Generally speaking, early records tend to come from the more prosperous and Anglicized areas, in particular the towns and cities of the eastern half of the island. In the poorest and most densely populated rural parishes of the West and North, those which saw most emigration, the parish registers very often do not start until the mid or late nineteenth century. However, the majority of Catholic registers begin in the first decades of the nineteenth century, and even in poor areas, records were often kept from an earlier date.

The only way to be sure of the extent of surviving records is to check the individual parish. The National Library catalogue, available at the counter in the main reading room, is the only printed, comprehensive, country-wide account of Catholic registers, and records in detail the period covered by each set of registers, including gaps, up to 1880.

Records of the Established Church, the **Church of Ireland**, generally start much earlier than those of the Catholic Church. From as early as 1634, local parishes were required to keep records of christenings and burials in registers supplied by the church authorities. As a result, a significant number, especially of urban parishes, have registers dating from the mid seventeenth century. The majority, however, start in the years between 1770 and 1820; the only country-wide listing of all Church of Ireland parish records which gives full details of dates is the National Archives catalogue, copies of which are also to be found at the National Library.

The contents of the Established Church registers will vary, however normally you will find the following elements:

Christening or Baptism:	Name of child; date & place of event; father's full name; mother's given name.
Marriage or Proclamation:	Names of bride & groom; date & place of marriage and/or proclamation; marital status; witnesses.
Burials:	Name of deceased; date & place of burial of deceased.

In general, **Presbyterian** registers start much later than those of the Church of Ireland, and early records of Presbyterian baptisms, marriages and deaths are often to be found in the registers of the local Church of Ireland parish. There are exceptions, however; in areas which had a strong Presbyterian population from an early date, particularly in the north east, some registers date from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The only published listing remains that included in Margaret Falley's *Irish and Scotch Irish Ancestral Research*, (repr. Genealogical Publishing Co., 1988). This, however, gives a very incomplete and out of date picture of the extent and location of the records.

For the six counties of Northern Ireland, and many of the adjoining counties, the *Guide to Church Records: Public Record Office of Northern Ireland*, (PRONI, 1994) provides a good guide to the dates of surviving registers. The copy of the list held in the Office itself includes a listing of Registers in Local Custody which covers all of Ireland, but is much less comprehensive for the south than for the north.

Despite the hostility of many of the clergy of the Church of Ireland, the **Methodist** movement remained unequivocally a part of the Established Church from the date of its beginnings in 1747, when John Wesley first came to Ireland, until 1816, when the movement split. Between 1747 and 1816, therefore, records of Methodist baptisms, marriages and burials will be found in the registers of the Church of Ireland.

The split in 1816 took place over the question of the authority of Methodist ministers to administer sacraments, and resulted in the Primitive Methodists remaining within the Church of Ireland, and the Wesleyan Methodists authorising their ministers to perform baptisms and communions.² The split continued until 1878, when the Primitive Methodists united with the Wesleyan Methodists, outside the Church of Ireland. What this means is that the earliest surviving registers which are specifically Methodist date from 1815-16, and relate only to the Wesleyan Methodists. The information recorded in these is identical to that given in the Church of Ireland registers.

There are a number of problems in locating Methodist records which are specific to that Church. First, the origins of Methodism, as a movement rather than a Church, gave its members a great deal of latitude in their attitude to Church membership, so that records of the baptisms, marriages and burials of Methodists may also be found in Quaker and Presbyterian registers, as well as the registers of the Church of Ireland. In addition, the ministers of the church were preachers on a circuit, rather than administrators of a particular area, and were moved frequently from one circuit to another. Quite often, the records moved with them. For the nine historic counties of Ulster, the PRONI has produced a county by county listing of the surviving registers, their dates and locations, appended to their Parish Register Index.

No such listing exists for the rest of the country. Pettigrew and Oulton's *Dublin Almanac and General Register of Ireland* of 1835 and subsequent years, provides a list of Methodist preachers and their stations, which will give an indication of the relevant localities. The next step is to identify the closest surviving Methodist centre, and enquire about surviving records. Many of the local county heritage centres also hold indexed copies of surviving Methodist records.

From the time of their first arrival in Ireland in the seventeenth century, The Society of Friends, or **Quakers**, kept rational and systematic records of the births, marriages and deaths of all of their members, and in most cases these continue without a break up to the present. Parish registers as such were not kept. Each of the local weekly meetings

² In theory at least, up to 1844 only marriages carried out by a minister of the Church of Ireland were legally valid.

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reported any births, marriages or deaths to a larger Monthly Meeting, which then entered them in a register. Monthly Meetings were held in the following areas: Antrim, Ballyhagan, Carlow, Cootehill, Cork, Dublin, Edenderry, Grange, Lisburn, Limerick, Lurgan, Moate, Mountmellick, Richhill, Tipperary, Waterford, Wexford, and Wicklow. For all but Antrim and Cootehill registers have survived from an early date.

The entries for births, marriages and deaths do not themselves contain information other than the names and addresses of the immediate parties involved, but the centralisation of the records, and the self-contained nature of the Quaker community, make it a relatively simple matter to establish family connections; many of the local records are given in the form of family lists, in any case.

The first reference to **Jews** in Ireland comes from the *Annals of Inishfallen* in 1077, which records that in a visit to the High King at Limerick "five Jews came over the sea and they were sent back again". It is believed that they were merchants from Rouen in France.

Apart from a small number who came to Ireland in the 12th and 13th centuries, the next Jews to arrive came from the Iberian Peninsula, following the Spanish and Portuguese expulsions at the end of the 15th and beginning of the 16th centuries. There are references to Sephardic Jews living in Ireland, in records dating back to the late 1600s. Cork and Dublin had cemeteries in the early 1700s and a community existed in Dublin from the 1660s. The Belfast community was formed in 1864.

The rise of anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe in the late 19th century brought an influx of Jews to Ireland. They formed small communities in Derry, Lurgan, Limerick, Cork and Waterford, and greatly expanded the existing community in Dublin. The newcomers settled mostly in the Camden Street and Portobello areas where The Irish Jewish Museum is located today. The whole area was affectionately known as "Little Jerusalem" and the main Jewish shopping area was in Lower Clanbrassil Street, where in fact most of the shops were Jewish owned.

The expansion of Dublin city from 1946 onwards resulted in the movement of the Jewish population to the outer suburbs, causing a sharp decline of the Jewish population of the Dolphins Barn and South Circular Road areas. Consequently many of the existing prayer rooms and small Synagogues closed. The Walworth Road Synagogue, founded in 1917, was saved from destruction, renovated and restored. The building now is the Irish Jewish Museum, which was opened by Irish-born President Chaim Herzog of Israel in June 1985, during his State visit to Ireland. The Jewish population of Ireland numbered less than 2,000 persons in 1995.

So, before 1864, Church Registers may be the only source for baptisms and marriages however little on deaths or burials will be found. Prior to 1864 all this information may be found in what are termed the Old Parish Registers. These were compiled & kept by the Minister of the Church or by the Session Clerk, and tend to vary in content and accuracy over the centuries since first initiated. Unfortunately, these are neither complete nor comprehensive though for the Church of Ireland they begin as early as 1619 and for the Roman Catholic Church from about 1800. They seldom contain non-Episcopalian entries though non-Episcopalian subjects were often recorded in these records because of various forms of religious persecution since their inception. Finding local church registers in Ireland is not always a straight-forward task: A)



Figure 3 - Cliffs of Moher, Co. Claire, Ireland

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religious affiliation must be determined, B) then the name of the respective parish as well as possibly the name of the local parish church the family may have attended, C) next whether the church still exists, and D) where its registers are now located. Most likely the Registers will have been microfilmed, at least up to the turn of the 20th century. If not, the Registers may still remain at the original church, they may have been lost, or they may have been sent to another local church or to a church archives.

In the case of Roman Catholic Church records, the registers are in the following locations: in local custody, in local heritage centres, with the appropriate church diocese, at PRONI, at the National Library of Ireland (NLI), and with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Library™.

In the case of Church of Ireland records, the registers are in the following locations: in local custody, in local heritage centres, with the appropriate church diocese, at PRONI, at the NAI, at the NLI, at the Representative Church Body in Dublin, and with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Library™.

In the case of Methodist Church records, the registers are in the following locations: in local custody, in local heritage centres, with the appropriate Methodist Church centre, at PRONI, or at the National Archives of Ireland.

In the case of Presbyterian Church records, the registers are in three main locations: in local custody, at PRONI or at the Presbyterian Historical Society at Belfast.

Regarding Quaker records, there are two main repositories for records: the libraries of the Society of Friends in Dublin and Lisburn. The LDS Library in Salt Lake City has microfilm copies of the records of the Dublin Friends' library. As well as the usual church records, these also hold considerable collections of letters, wills, family papers, as well as detailed accounts of the discrimination suffered by the Quakers in their early years.

The largest collection of Irish Jewish family records is maintained by Stuart Rosenblatt, whose website is www.irishjewishroots.com. You can find out more about the Irish Jewish community at www.jewishireland.org.³

It takes some historical research to reach a likely objective. In some cases the records we want may only be at a distant archive. In other cases, it is our policy to encourage the client to correspond directly with a church if we can find an address. Whether we search the church records or supply the client with an address, we believe that a token bank draft or cheque should be given as a donation to the church as a goodwill gesture, the amount to be in proportion to the time spent or number of requests made.

Also of great importance are the **civil vital records registrations**. The General Register Office (GROB) for Northern Ireland (Belfast) and the General Register Office (GROD) for Ireland (Dublin) are responsible for the civil (compulsory state) registration of births, marriages and deaths in the two states. It maintains the historic records and produces certified copies on request. Marriage certificates are very useful as they give the names of the bride's and groom's fathers. Death certificates are less useful as they only list the name of the person present at death, whose relationship to the deceased is often not stated. Birth certificates give the names of the parents (including the

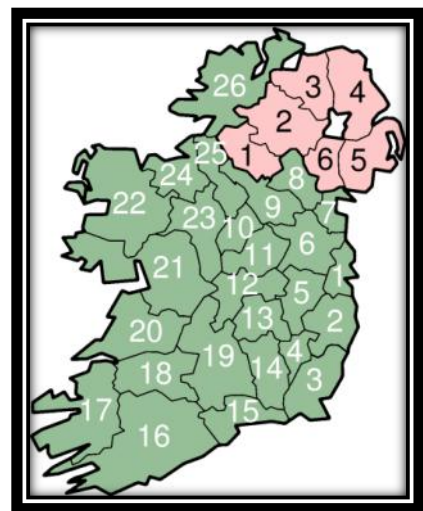


Figure 4 - Counties of Ireland

³ 'Irish Ancestors' in *IrishTimes.com* <<http://www.irishtimes.com/ancestor>> extracted on the 6th February 2012.

mother's maiden name).

The registration by the state of vital events, births, marriages and deaths, has come to be a necessary part of modern government, and in time these records of course also become essential genealogical sources. While civil registration commenced in England in 1837, it was not until 1844 that steps were taken to introduce a measure of registration in Ireland. The *Civil Registration Act of 1844* determined that there should be official registration of all non-Catholic marriages only, so that the majority Catholic element of the population was not included. The 1844 Act provided for the appointment of a Registrar General, and registration of marriages began on 1 April 1845. For those with non-Catholic ancestors therefore, these civil records of marriage from 1845 are of the greatest importance.

Roman Catholic fears concerning state interference with that Church's religious marriage ceremonies lay at the heart of the failure to achieve a full measure of civil registration in 1844. However, over time there developed a widespread acceptance of the value of registration, and in 1863 a further Act was passed providing for general registration in Ireland. People of all religions, Catholic as well as Protestant and others, now had to register vital events under the Act, which took effect from 1 January 1864.

Civil registration developed as an element of the rudimentary nineteenth-century Poor Law or public health system, and indeed this is the historical reason why the Department of Health continues today to oversee the process and keep custody of the older archives. Counties were divided into *Poor Law Unions*, usually based on a larger town, and it was found convenient to use these administrative divisions as *Registration Districts* for purposes of civil registration. It should be noted that Poor Law Unions/Registration Districts could occasionally cross county boundaries. Each Registration District was under the supervision of a Superintendent Registrar, and the General Register Office in Dublin, directed by the Registrar General, oversaw the whole process of registration of births, marriages and deaths and prepared master indexes. One of the most active of Registrars General was Sir Robert E Matheson, who issued between 1890 and 1901 reports on Irish surnames and their variations which are still of value today, and which have been republished by the Genealogical Publishing Company under the title *Surnames in Ireland*.

In the earlier years of registration, it is likely that significant numbers of births, marriages and deaths were not recorded, but by 1880 it can be taken that the system of registration was reasonably comprehensive, though omissions continued to occur. For all ancestors who were born, married or died after 1864, it should therefore be the genealogist's aim to secure copies of the registrations of these vital events, and transfer the information therein to pedigree and family group sheets.

Birth Certificates

In Ireland civil registration of births commenced on 1st January 1864.

Birth certificates provide:

- date and place of birth
- forename(s)
- sex
- forename(s), surname and dwelling place of father
- forename(s), surname and maiden surname of mother
- rank or profession of father
- signature, qualification and residence of informant
- when registered

- signature of registrar
- baptismal name, if added after registration of birth, and date.

Marriage Certificates

In Ireland civil registration of marriages commenced on 1st April 1845, with Roman Catholic marriages commencing later on 1st January 1864. Pre-1922 records are available from local district council offices and records from 1st January 1922 are available from the General Register Office.

Marriage certificates provide:

- date of marriage
- forenames and surnames of bride and groom
- ages (it is common for the age column to state merely “full age” i.e. over 21)
- marital condition (i.e. bachelor, widow, etc.)
- rank or professions
- residence(s) at time of marriage
- fathers’ forenames and surnames (in many cases it will be noted if the father is deceased)
- ranks or professions of fathers
- church in which the marriage was performed
- names of two witnesses (commonly family members which may provide clues to family linkages)
- name of clergyman.

Death Certificates

In Ireland civil registration of deaths commenced on 1st January 1864.

Death certificates provide:

- date and place of death
- forename(s) and surname
- sex
- marital condition (i.e. married, etc.)
- age last birthday
- rank, profession or occupation
- certified cause of death and duration of illness
- signature, qualification and residence of informant
- when event registered.

These GRO offices also hold the following other civil vital records:

- Registers of Births at Sea of children, one of whose parents was Irish, from 1 January 1864 to 31 December 1921, and of children, one of whose parents was born in the Republic of Ireland, from 1922 onwards.

- Registers of Deaths at Sea of Irish-born persons, from 1 January 1864 to 31 December 1921, and of persons born in the Republic of Ireland from 1922 onwards.
- Registers of Births of children of Irish parents, certified by British Consuls abroad, from 1 January 1864 to 31 December 1921.
- Registers of Deaths of Irish-born persons, certified by British Consuls abroad from 1 January 1864 to 31 December 1921.
- Registers of Marriages celebrated in Dublin by Rev J G F Schulze, Minister of the German Protestant Church, Poolbeg Street, Dublin, from 1806 to 1837.
- Registers under the Births, Deaths and Marriages (Army) Act 1879.
- Registers of Adopted Children, consisting of legal adoptions in the Republic of Ireland on or after 10 July 1953.
- Registers of Births and Deaths under the Defence (Amendment, Number 2) Act 1960.
- Registers of Certain Births and Deaths occurring outside the State (The Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1972, Section 4).
- Registers of Certain Lourdes Marriages (Marriages Act 1972, Section 2).
- Registers of Stillbirths in the Republic of Ireland from 1 January 1995 (certified copies available to parents only).

The indices for the general B/M/D registers are arranged in alphabetical order, and include the following information - Surname, Christian name, name of the registration district (also known as the 'Superintendent Registrar's District') in which the birth, marriage or death took place, volume and page number of the register in which the entry is recorded. Up to the end of 1877 the indices were arranged alphabetically, by year. From 1878 onwards each year was divided into quarters, January-March, April-June, July-September and October-December. The surnames for each quarter are listed alphabetically. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Library™ and the Family History Centers™ have also access to all of the indexes from 1845-1958 plus some of the registration certificates.

An alternative (and cheaper) method of obtaining information is via the local District Register Offices. It is possible to obtain copies of certificates by applying directly to the Superintendent Registrar of the centre where the birth or death was registered in Ireland, without having to pay the extra search fee which the GRO levies for their search. Please examine the following website for contact details on these local registrars <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Find_a_Service/bdm/Find_your_Civil_Registration_Office/Civil%20Registrars.html>.

Probate records have always been an extremely important source of genealogical information on the property-owning classes, in Ireland as elsewhere. They provide a clear picture of a family at a particular point in time, and

can often supply enough details of a much larger network of relationships – cousins, nephews, in-laws and others - to produce quite a substantial family tree.

The minimum information to be found in a will is:

- the name, address and occupation of the testator;
- the names of the beneficiaries;
- the name(s) of the executor(s);
- the names of the witnesses;
- the date the will was made;
- the date of probate of the will.

“Specific properties are usually, though not always, mentioned. The two dates, that of the will itself and of its probate, give a period during which the testator died. Up to the nineteenth century, most wills were made close to the date of death, and witnesses were normally related to the person making the will. As well as the minimum information, of course, many wills also contain much more, including at times addresses and occupations of beneficiaries, witnesses and executors, and details of family relationships, quarrels as well as affection.

Before 1857, the Church of Ireland, as the Established Church, had charge of all testamentary affairs. *Consistorial Courts* in each diocese were responsible for granting probate, that is, legally authenticating a will and conferring on the executors the power to administer the estate. The Courts also had the power to issue letters of administration to the next of kin or the main creditor on the estates of those who died intestate.

Each Court was responsible for wills and administrations in its own diocese. However, when the estate included property worth more than £5 in another diocese, responsibility for the will or administration passed to the Prerogative Court, under the authority of the Archbishop of Armagh.

The wills and administration records of the Consistorial Courts were held locally in each diocese up to the abolition of the testamentary authority of the Church of Ireland in 1857. After that date, the Public Record Office began the slow process of collecting the original records, and transcribing them into Will and Grant Books. The Office then indexed the wills and Administration Bonds, the sureties which the administrators had to produce as a guarantee that the estate would be properly administered. None of the Consistorial Courts had records of all of the wills or administrations they had dealt with. Very little earlier than the seventeenth century emerged, and the majority of the Courts appear to have had serious gaps before the mid eighteenth century.

The entire original wills and administrations in the Public Record Office were destroyed in 1922, along with almost all of the Will and Grant Books into which they had been transcribed. The only exceptions are the Will Books for Down (1850-1858) and Connor (1818-20, 1853-58), and the Grant Books for Cashel (1840-45), Derry and Raphoe (1818-21), and Ossory (1848-58).

The indexes to wills and administration bonds were not destroyed, although a number were badly damaged. These are available in the reading room of the National Archives of Ireland at Dublin. The wills indexes are alphabetical, and normally give the testator's address and the year of probate, as well as occasionally specifying his occupation. The Administration Bonds indexes are not fully alphabetical, being arranged year by year under the initial letter of

the surname of the deceased person. They give the year of the bond, the full name and usually the address of the deceased, and sometimes his occupation. Some of the wills indexes have been published.

An estate was dealt with by the *Prerogative Court*, rather than a Consistorial Court, if it covered property worth more than £5 in a second diocese. In general, then, Prerogative wills and administrations tend to cover the wealthier classes, merchants with dealings in more than one area, and those who lived close to diocesan borders. Up to 1816, the Prerogative Court was not housed in a single place, with hearings generally held in the residence of the presiding judge. From 1816 on, the King's Inns building in Henrietta St. at Dublin provided a permanent home. For this reason, the records of the Court before 1816 cannot be taken as complete.

After 1857, all of these records were transferred to the Public Record Office, where the original wills and grants of administration were transcribed into Prerogative Will and Grant Books, and indexed. The indexes survived 1922, but the entire original wills and grants, and almost all of the Will and Grant Books were, sadly, destroyed.

The loss of the original Prerogative wills is mitigated to a large extent by the project carried out in the early decades of the nineteenth century by Sir William Betham, Ulster King of Arms. As well as preparing the first index of testators, up to 1810, he also made abstracts of the family information contained in almost all of the wills before 1800.

The original notebooks in which he recorded the information are now in the NAI, and the GO has his Sketch Pedigrees based on these abstracts and including later additions and amendments. The PRONI has a copy of the GO series, without the additions and amendments, made by a successor of Betham's, Sir John Burke.

Betham also made a large number of abstracts from Prerogative Grants up to 1802. The original notebooks for these are also in the NAI. The GO transcript copy (GO 257-260) is fully alphabetical, unlike the notebooks.

The first index to Prerogative wills, up to 1810, was published in 1897 by Sir Arthur Vicars, Burke's successor as Ulster King of Arms, and can be used as a guide to Betham's abstracts and Sketch Pedigrees with the proviso that wills from the decade 1800 - 1810 is not covered by Betham. The manuscript index for the period from 1811 to 1857 is in the NAI reading room. As with the consistorial administration bonds indexes, the Prerogative Grants indexes are not fully alphabetical being arranged year by year under the initial letter of the surname of the deceased person.

The *Probate Act of 1857* did away with the testamentary authority of the Church of Ireland. Instead of the Consistorial Courts and the Prerogative Court, power to grant probate and issue letters of administration was vested in a Principal Registry in Dublin, and eleven District Registries. Rules similar to those governing the geographical jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical courts applied, with the Principal Registry taking the place of the Prerogative Court, as well as covering Dublin and a large area around it.

Transcripts of the wills proved and administrations granted were made in the District Registries, and the originals forwarded to the Principal Registry. Almost all of the records of the Principal Registry were destroyed in 1922. The Will Book transcripts made by the District Registries survived, however. The records of those Districts covering areas now in the Republic - Ballina, Cavan, Cork, Kilkenny, Limerick, Mullingar, Tuam and Waterford - are in the NAI. For districts now in Northern Ireland - Armagh, Belfast and Londonderry - the Will Books are in PRONI.

From 1858 a new system of indexing and organizing wills and administrations was devised. A printed, alphabetically ordered "*Calendar of Wills and Administrations*" was produced for every year, and copies of all of these have survived. For each will or administration, these record:

- the name, address and occupation of the deceased person;

- the place and date of death;
- the value of the estate;
- the name and address of the person or persons to whom probate or administration was granted.

In many cases, the relationship of the executor is also specified. This means that, despite the loss of so much original post-1857 testamentary material, some information at least is available on all wills or administrations from this period. Very often, much that is of genealogical value can be gleaned from the Calendars, including such information as exact dates of death, places of residence, and indications of economic status. A consolidated index covers the period between 1858 and 1877, making it unnecessary to search each yearly Calendar. The Calendars are on open access in the NAI reading room and PRONI.

As well as the original Consistorial and Prerogative wills and grants, and the transcripts made of them in the Will and Grant Books, a wide number of other sources exist, particularly for material before 1857. The most important of these is the collection of the NAI itself, gathered after 1922 in an attempt to replace some at least of what had been lost. As well as original wills from private legal records and individual families, this ever-expanding collection also includes pre-1922 researchers' abstracts and transcripts. It is covered by a card index in the reading room, which also gives details of those wills and grants in the surviving pre-1857 Will and Grant Books. Separate card indexes cover the Thrift, Jennings and Crossley collections of abstracts, and the records of Charitable Donations and Bequests. The PRONI has made similar efforts, and the copies it holds are indexed in the Pre-1858 Wills Index, part of the Subject Index in their Public Search Room.

The Inland Revenue in London kept a series of annual *Indexes to Irish Will Registers* and *Indexes to Irish Administration Registers* from 1828 to 1879, which are now in the NAI. These give the name and address of both the deceased and the executor or administrator. As well as the Indexes, the Archives also hold a set of the actual Inland Revenue Irish Will Registers and Irish Administration Registers for the years 1828 - 1839, complete apart from the Wills Register covering January to June 1834. The Will Registers are not exact transcripts of the original wills, but supply a good deal of detailed information, including the precise date of death, the principal beneficiaries and legacies, and a brief inventory of the estate. The Administration Registers are less informative, but still include details of the date of death, the administrator and the estate.

Under the provisions of the *Land Purchase Acts*, which subsidized the purchase of smallholdings by the tenants who occupied them, it was necessary for those wishing to sell to produce evidence of their ownership to the Irish Land Commission. As a result, over 10,000 wills were deposited with the Commission, the majority from the nineteenth century, but many earlier. The NLI holds a card index to the testators. The original documents are currently in the process of being transferred to the NAI.

The registration of wills was normally carried out because of a legal problem anticipated by the executor(s) in the provisions - almost certainly the exclusion of parties who would feel they had some rights over the estate. Because of this, wills at the Will Registry cannot be taken as providing a complete picture of the family. Abstracts of all wills registered from 1708, the date of foundation of the Registry, to 1832, were published in three volumes by the Irish Manuscripts Commission between 1954 and 1986. These are available on open shelves at the NLI and NAI. Although the abstracts record and index all the persons named, testators, beneficiaries and witnesses, they do not show the original provisions of the wills. These can be found in the original memorials in the Registry.

Most of the will abstracts held by the Genealogical Office (GO) are covered by the Office's own index (GO Ms 429), which was published in *Analecta Hibernica*, No. 17, 1949 (NL Ir 941 a 10). The manuscript index has since been added to, but is still not entirely comprehensive, excluding all of the Betham material, and many of the collections relating to individual families.

There are many other collections of will abstracts and transcripts in such public repositories as the NLI, the Representative Church Body Library, The Royal Irish Academy, PRONI and Trinity College Library. There are no separate indexes to these testamentary collections.”⁴

Besides the above-noted source records, all other records, that are available to the public will be accessed by your researcher as best and as quickly as possible. The basic and most important of these, though certainly not all, are a **myriad of other sources for Irish research:**

- 1). Census Substitutes
- 2). Landed Estate Records
- 3). Deed Records (1708-Present)
- 4). Marriage Licenses (1629-1864)
- 5). Apprenticeship Records
- 6). Cemetery Records/Headstone Transcriptions
- 7). Local Directories, Atlases, & Histories
- 8). Military Records
- 9). Some Newspaper Collections & Manuscript Material

Information concerning Ireland preferred known to start a search:

A). Approximate Date of Emigration

B). After 1864 —

- Name of Subject

- Name of Subject's Parents or Children (or both, if known)

- Approximate Date of Birth, Marriage or Death of either Subject, Parents or Children

C). Prior to 1864 —

- Information as above, but a place-name is necessary for the Census Substitute - or at least a name of a county in Ireland

⁴ 'Irish Ancestors' in *IrishTimes.com* <<http://www.irishtimes.com/ancestor>> extracted on the 6th February 2012.

SUMMATION:

Obtaining pre-1864 information in Ireland remains, for the most part, a very difficult exercise and often provides unsatisfactory results. Ireland, like other parts of the U.K., has over history had a great collection of documents but sadly both Irelands have not well taken care of these historical records of their common people. However, some basic research into pre-1864 documents should be taken as a matter of course in any regard, if for no other reason than to assess how successful a search of this kind may prove to be for you. Certainly, anything prior to 1776 will be very difficult to reach unless your ancestor was wealthy or of some prominent family. Much of your success in any genealogical research will depend upon how prolific your ancestors were in documenting their existence from locality to locality and Ireland is, certainly, a prime candidate for this assumption.

GEN-FIND would be happy to work with you privately on your custom search needs of these and other records in simplifying your project objectives. Please contact us today to further discuss those interests!

GEN-FIND RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.

#101 – 5170 Dunster Road, Suite #521

Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada V9T 6M4

