



Researching Irish Ancestors: *an introduction to the sources* *and the archives*

Ulster Historical Foundation

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Interest in researching Irish ancestors has never been greater. Given Ireland's history of emigration, it is hardly surprising to find that around the world tens of millions of people have a family connection with the island. Much of this interest comes from Britain, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. What follows is a very basic introduction to researching Irish ancestors. It highlights what the major sources are and where they can be found. Prior to 1922 Ireland was under one jurisdiction and so where we refer to *Ireland* we mean the entire island. Where we are referring specifically to Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland we will try to make this clear.

Some background information

Exploding a myth

A popular misconception about researching Irish ancestors is that it is a fruitless exercise because so many records were destroyed. There is no denying that the loss of so many records in the destruction of the Public Record Office, Dublin, in 1922 was a catastrophe as far as historical and genealogical research is concerned. Three main categories of record were destroyed in 1922:

- Virtually all census returns, 1821–51
- The registers from over 1,000 Church of Ireland parishes
- Virtually all original wills probated before 1900

Many other records, including records relating to government and the courts, were also lost. However, *not* destroyed in 1922 were the registers from some 600 Church of Ireland parishes as well as church records for all the other denominations in Ireland. Neither were official records of births, deaths and marriages destroyed. Since 1922 the work of archivists to gather records of historical importance has resulted in a vast amount of material being made available for the genealogical researcher to peruse.

Getting started

As is the case anywhere, the best way for someone to begin researching their Irish ancestry is within

their own family. In nearly every family there is at least one member with an encyclopaedic knowledge of who married who and how many children they had and where they lived etc., etc. Collect as much information as possible on names, dates and places relating to your family; write it down and begin to plot out the skeleton of a family tree. Occasionally wrong information may be given, yet it is surprising just how often an elderly person's reminiscences prove to be an accurate recollection of the facts. A family Bible is another possible source of information on your ancestors. Gathering this information before you visit the archives can save a great deal of time. Once you find out what you do know you will then be aware of the gaps and will have a clearer idea of what you should be looking for.

The internet

The internet has transformed genealogy around the world and Ireland is no exception. To list all the websites that deal with Irish genealogy would be impossible as they seem to be increasing almost by the day. A website providing a fairly comprehensive listing of internet sites relating to Irish genealogy is www.cyndislist.com/uk/irl.

Some websites focus on a particular county or district and contain extensive lists of digitised sources, while others concentrate on a particular family. Many of the genealogical centres affiliated to the Irish Family History Foundation have made

their records available on a subscription basis at www.rootsireland.ie.

Administrative divisions

The following are the main units of administration in Ireland:

Barony

A unit used in Ireland between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries for administrative (census, taxation, and legal) purposes. Often drawn on pre-existing Gaelic divisions, baronies consisted of large groupings of townlands within a county. The 1891 census was the last to use the barony as an administrative unit.

County

There are 32 counties in Ireland, six of which are now in Northern Ireland. The county system as a form of territorial division was introduced into Ireland shortly after the Norman Conquest in the late twelfth century. The creation of counties or shires was gradual, however, and the present arrangement of county boundaries was not finalised in Ulster until the early seventeenth century.

Parish

This territorial division refers to both civil and ecclesiastical units. Civil parishes largely follow the pattern that was established in medieval times. Ecclesiastical parishes do not always coincide with civil parish boundaries, however. Following the Reformation in the sixteenth century, the Church of Ireland more or less maintained the pre-Reformation arrangement. Church of Ireland parishes are, therefore, largely coterminous with civil parishes. When the Catholic Church began its institutional re-emergence in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it constructed a new network of parishes which did not necessarily follow the civil parish network.

Poor Law Union

Under the Irish Poor Law Act of 1838 commissioners were empowered to “unite so many townlands as they think fit to be a union for the relief of the destitute poor”. A Union was a group of parishes usually centred on a market town, where a workhouse might be built, with parishes and townlands as subdivisions. Rates, land based taxes, were collected within these areas

for maintenance of the poor. They were named after a large town. The same districts later became used as General Register Districts.

Province

Provinces are composed of groups of counties. There are four provinces in Ireland: Ulster in the north, Leinster in the east, Munster in the south, and Connacht (Connaught) in the west.

Townland

This is the smallest administrative territorial unit in Ireland, varying in size from a single acre to over 7,000 acres. Originating in the older Gaelic dispensation, townlands were used as the basis of leases in the estate system, and subsequently to assess valuations and tithes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They survive as important markers of local identity.

The archives

A listing of the principal archives in the island of Ireland will be found at the end. The most important in the Republic of Ireland are the National Archives of Ireland, the National Library of Ireland and the General Register Office. An indispensable book is *Guide to Irish Libraries, Archives and Genealogical Centres* by Robert K. O'Neill (3rd edition, 2013) which provides contact details, as well as summary information on collections held by the main archives in Ireland. The abbreviations used in this article for the main archives are:

GROI – General Register Office of Ireland

GRONI – General Register Office of Northern Ireland

NAI – National Archives of Ireland

NLI – National Library of Ireland

PRONI – Public Record Office of Northern Ireland

Civil registration

Civil registers of births, marriages and deaths provide basic family history information. However, their usefulness for the genealogist will depend on the period being researched. Civil or state registration of all births, deaths and marriages began in Ireland on 1 January 1864. Non-Catholic marriages, including those conducted in a government registry office, were required in law to be registered from 1 April 1845. Civil registration

followed the administrative divisions created by the Poor Law Act of 1838. Under this act the country had been divided into over 130 Poor Law Unions. The Poor Law Unions were subdivided into dispensary districts, each with its own medical officer. Under civil registration the area covered by a Poor Law Union was used as the basis of each superintendent registrar's district, while the dispensary districts corresponded to the registrar's districts. In some cases the medical officer also served as the registrar. In overall charge of registration was the Registrar General in Dublin. Certified copies of all registers compiled locally were sent to his office and, from these, master indexes covering the whole of Ireland were produced.

Birth certificates

Birth certificates record the date and place of birth of the child. Normally the name of the child is also given, but in some cases only the sex is given, i.e. the child had not been given a name by the time the birth was registered. The name and residence of the father is given. Usually this will be the same as the place of birth of the child, but in some cases it will show that the father was working abroad or in another part of Ireland when the child was born. The father's occupation is also given. The mother's maiden name is provided as well as her first name. Finally, the name and address of the informant is given, together with his or her qualification to sign. This will usually be the father or mother or someone present at the birth, such as a midwife or even the child's grandmother.

Marriage certificates

Civil records of marriage normally give fuller information than birth and death certificates, and are the most useful of civil records. Information on the individuals getting married includes their name, age, status, and occupation. The names and occupations of their fathers are also given. The church, the officiating minister and the witnesses to the ceremony are named. In most cases the exact age of the parties is not given, and the entry will simply read 'full age' (i.e. over 21) or 'minor' (i.e. under 21). If the father of one of the parties was no longer living, this may be indicated in the marriage certificate by the word 'deceased' or by leaving the space blank, but in many cases it is not.

Death certificates

Civil records of death in Ireland are rather uninformative in comparison to other countries. The name of the deceased is given together with the date, place and cause of death, marital status, the age at death, and occupation. The name and address of the informant is also given. Usually this is the person present at the time of the death; this may be a close family member.

The indexes

Indexes to civil marriages 1845–63 are handwritten, but thereafter all indexes are printed. From 1864 to 1877 indexes for births, marriages and deaths consist of a single yearly volume covering the whole of Ireland. From 1878 the annual indexes are arranged on a quarterly basis. In each index the surnames will be arranged alphabetically, followed by the first names. The name of the superintendent registrar's district is also given, followed by the volume number and page number of the master copies of the registers in Dublin. In the indexes to deaths the age of the deceased will be provided.

These civil registration indexes are now available online through www.familysearch.org from 1845 to 1922 for all of Ireland and up to 1958 for the Republic of Ireland. They are also available on the government website www.irishgenealogy.ie. This website contains the names of both bride and groom on marriage entries from 1882 and the mother's maiden name and the child's date of birth from 1900.

The General Register of Ireland (www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/General-Register-Office.aspx)

The administrative headquarters of the General Register Office in the Republic of Ireland is now in Roscommon, but there is a research facility open to members of the public in Werburgh Street in Dublin. The GROI holds master copies of births, death and marriages for all of Ireland up to 1921 and thereafter for the Republic of Ireland only.

General Register Office of Northern Ireland (www.nidirect.gov.uk/gro)

The General Register Office of Northern Ireland in Belfast holds the original birth and death registers recorded by the local district registrars for

Northern Ireland from 1864. Marriage registers for Northern Ireland are also available from 1845 for non-Catholic marriages and from 1864 for all marriages.

GRONI has now made historic records (births over 100 years, marriages over 75 years, deaths over 50 years) available online at <https://geni.nidirect.gov.uk/> for a fee.

Church records

Prior to the commencement of civil registration the main sources of family history information are church registers.

Denominations

The single largest denomination in Ireland is the Roman Catholic Church. Following the Reformation in Ireland the Catholic Church went through a lengthy period when its activities were severely curtailed. The Penal Laws were a series of enactments of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries designed to remove the rights of Catholics to public office and to careers in certain professions. In spite of the Penal Laws, Catholic priests and bishops operated freely in most areas. During the eighteenth century the Catholic Church was able to set up diocesan and parochial structures. It is important for family historians to bear in mind that Roman Catholic parishes generally do not conform to civil parishes. Many Catholic parishes have more than one church. Sometimes only one register was kept for the entire parish, but at other times each church had its own registers.

The Church of Ireland is the largest Protestant denomination on the island of Ireland. Until 1870 it was the established or state church and enjoyed various privileges in consequence of this. The Church of Ireland was required to keep proper records of baptisms, marriages and burials from 1634, but very few registers survive from the seventeenth century. In general, however, the records of the Church of Ireland start much earlier than those of other Protestant denominations and of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church of Ireland is organised into parishes which in general conform to civil parishes. In 1922 over 1,000 Church of Ireland registers were lost in Dublin in the destruction of the Public Record Office of Ireland.

Presbyterianism came to Ireland from Scotland in the early seventeenth century. It did not become an organised denomination until the second half of the seventeenth century, however. The distribution of Presbyterian churches in Ulster is generally a reflection of the pattern of Scottish settlement in the province. As well as the main Presbyterian Church in Ireland there are two smaller historic denominations, the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

Methodism emerged in Ireland in the eighteenth century as a result of John Wesley's many visits to the island. To begin with the majority of Methodists belonged to the Established Church and they remained members of their own local churches. Therefore they continued to go to the parish church for the administration of marriages, burials and baptisms. In 1816 a split developed between the Primitive Wesleyan Methodists, who retained their links with the Established Church, and the Wesleyan Methodists, who allowed their ministers to administer baptisms.

The information found in church records can be categorised as follows:

Baptismal registers

The basic information provided in a baptismal register is the name of the child, the name of the father and the date of baptism. The mother's name will often be given as will a specific location. The occupation of the father and the date of birth of the child may also be provided. Roman Catholic registers will normally give the names of the sponsors of the child.

Marriage registers

Prior to the standardisation of marriage registers after 1845 for non-Catholics and 1864 for Catholics, these will give in their simplest form the date of the marriage and the names of the bride and groom. The residence and the name of the father of each party are often provided. The names of the witnesses may also be given.

Burial registers

Burial registers can be fairly uninformative, with the name of the deceased, the date of burial and occasionally the occupation and age at death given. The deaths of children will usually include

the name of the father, while the burial of a wife may include her husband's name. Many Catholic 'burial' registers are actually registers recording payments made at the funeral of the deceased.

Vestry minute books

Vestry minute books record the deliberations of the parish vestry and will be found, where they survive, with the Church of Ireland records for a particular parish. The role of the vestry included the upkeep of the Church of Ireland church, the maintenance of roads in the parish and the care of the destitute and abandoned children. The money to pay for these things was raised through a cess or tax on the land in the parish. Vestry minute books are a rich source of information on life in a parish in bygone times. Occasionally they will include a list of the names of the parishioners drawn up for taxation purposes.

Most surviving church records for Northern Ireland prior to c. 1880 are available in PRONI, usually on microfilm, but sometimes as originals or photocopies. Some registers are still in local custody. Generally these post-date the introduction of civil registration and it is usually not necessary to check these if the details of the birth or marriage are available elsewhere. See the comprehensive *Guide to Church Records* which can be downloaded from the PRONI website www.proni.gov.uk/guide_to_church_records.pdf

The National Library of Ireland has microfilms of pre-1880 Roman Catholic registers for the majority of parishes in Ireland, these are now available online: www.nli.ie however you do need to know the parish as they are not indexed.

If you do not know the parish or area, then it would be best to begin with the subscription-based website www.rootsireland.ie which has transcribed over 80% of all pre-1900 Roman Catholic records for 30 of the 32 counties in Ireland as well as many Church of Ireland and Presbyterian records. The government website www.irishgenealogy.ie has transcribed and digitised records for Churches in Counties Cork, Carlow and Kerry as well as Dublin City.

The Representative Church Body Library in Dublin holds the original registers of many

Church of Ireland parishes. www.library.ireland.anglican.org/

The National Archives of Ireland holds Church of Ireland registers on microfilm: www.nationalarchives.ie/PDF/CofIMicrofilms.pdf

Finally the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland holds some original Presbyterian Church registers not available elsewhere: www.presbyterianhistoryireland.com/

Gravestone inscriptions and burial records

The value of gravestone inscriptions for ancestral research has long been recognised. The discovery of a single gravestone may provide more information on the history of a family than could otherwise be gleaned from hours of searching through documentary sources. A visit to the graveyard in which your ancestors are buried is, therefore, an essential part of compiling your family tree. Discovering the graveyard in which your ancestors are buried is not necessarily straightforward. They may be buried in the graveyard adjoining the church to which your family belongs. Alternatively they may be buried in a graveyard no longer in use or adjoining another church. Burial registers kept by a church are one way of finding the place of burial, but as was explained above, these have limitations and do not survive for every graveyard. In many of the older graveyards it is not unusual to find all denominations buried.

The information recorded on a gravestone varies considerably. Some gravestones will record the dates of death of several generations of one family. Others may simply record the family surname. In most graveyards there will be at least one gravestone that has an overseas connection, recording the name of a family member who had died abroad. Ages of death on gravestones should be treated with some caution as they are often guesses or have been rounded up. Nonetheless they provide a basis for working out the year of birth which can be useful when it comes to looking for a birth certificate or record of baptism.

The Ulster Historical Foundation has over the recordings of over 50,000 gravestones in Northern Ireland. These are available on its website: www.ancestryireland.com/family-records/gravestone-inscriptions/. Another useful resource is the Foundation's *History from Headstones*

website: www.historyfromheadstones.com which includes a series of maps showing the location of graveyards in Northern Ireland.

Census records

The first census was held in Ireland in 1821 and thereafter every ten years until 1911. Unfortunately, the earliest census that survives in its entirety for the whole of Ireland is the 1901 census. Census returns 1821–51 were almost entirely lost in 1922 in the destruction of the Public Record Office in Dublin. Census returns 1861–91 were completely destroyed by government order in the early twentieth century.

1901 census

On 31 March 1901, a census was taken of the whole island of Ireland. The original returns are deposited at the National Archives in Dublin; microfilm copies of the returns for Northern Ireland are available at PRONI under reference MIC/354 but are also now available for free through the National Archives of Ireland's website www.census.nationalarchives.ie. The information in the census is listed under the following headings: name; relationship to the head of the household; religion; literacy; occupation; age; marital status; county of birth (or country if born outside Ireland); and ability to speak English or Irish. Every town, village and townland is represented and those inhabitants who were at home on 31 March 1901 are listed.

1911 census

The 1911 census was taken on 1 April of that year and contains additional information including the number of years a wife was married, the number of children born and the number still living. Microfilms of the original census returns can be viewed at the National Archives in Dublin. Again this census is also now available for free through the National Archives of Ireland's website www.census.nationalarchives.ie

Old age pension claims

It is worth checking the old age pension search forms, as they contain extracts from the 1841 and 1851 censuses, the originals of which were almost completely destroyed. The old age pension was introduced on 1 January 1909 for those over seventy years of age. For many born before 1864, when the state registration of births began in

Ireland, it was necessary to pay for a search to be made of the 1841 and 1851 censuses in order to prove their entitlement to the pension. The forms submitted by the claimants include such information as the names of parents, location at the time of the 1841 or 1851 census, and age at the time of the claim and during the relevant census year. Individual application forms completed by or on behalf of the applicant are known as 'green forms'. The census search forms are now accessible via the website of the NAI: <http://censussearchforms.nationalarchives.ie/search/cs/home.jsp>.

Another form of evidence related to the old age pension returns are 'form 37s', which were submitted by local pensions offices. These include the applicant's name, stated age, parents' names and address at the time of the census. Details of the search were added to the form, and each claim was bound according to barony in a series of volumes that are now deposited in PRONI. Josephine Masterson has published two volumes based on surviving old age pension claims.

The Ulster Covenant, 1912

Prime Minister H.H. Asquith introduced the Third Home Rule Bill to the House of Commons on 11 April 1912. It provided for a parliament in Dublin with limited powers, and it met with strong oppositions from Ulster Unionists who saw it as the first step to Irish independence. On 'Ulster Day', 28 September 1912, the Ulster Covenant was signed by 237,368 men and 234,046 women who pledged themselves to use 'all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland'. The Ulster Covenant Signatories of 1912 are an invaluable, if underused, genealogical resource and has been included here because it acts as an early twentieth-century census substitute. Obviously it will be of more interest to those with ancestors of a Unionist persuasion. This source is more than simply a list of names and includes street addresses, townlands, etc. The signatures have been indexed and digitised by PRONI and a searchable database is available on its website www.proni.gov.uk

Republic of Ireland's Military Census, 1922

A census of the National Forces of the Republic of Ireland was taken at midnight on the night of the 12/13 November 1922. This census is now

available online at <http://census.militaryarchives.ie>. Information includes name, age, marital status, religion and home address of the individual as well as their rank and corps, the date and place of their attestation and the name and address of their next of kin.

Records relating to the occupation of land

Tithe Applotment Books, 1823–38

In 1823 the Composition Act was passed which stipulated that henceforth all tithes due to the Established Church, the Church of Ireland, were to be paid in money rather than in kind as they previously could have been. This necessitated a complete valuation of all tithable land in Ireland, the results of which are contained in manuscript form in the tithe applotment books arranged by parish. The tithe applotment books contain the name of the tithe-payer, the size of his farm and the amount of tithe he paid.

Copies of these for Northern Ireland are available in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland and for the Republic of Ireland in the National Archives of Ireland. The National Archives has recently digitised their tithe applotment books which are now available through www.genealogy.nationalarchives.ie/

The Primary or Griffith's Valuation, 1848–64

The 1848–64 valuation gives a complete list of occupiers of land, tenements and houses. This Primary Valuation of Ireland, better known as Griffith's Valuation after the Commissioner of Valuation, Sir Richard Griffith, is arranged by county, within counties by Poor Law Union division, and within Unions by parish. It includes the following information: the name of the townland; the name of the householder or leaseholder; the name of the person from whom the property was leased; a description of the property; its acreage; and finally the valuation of the land and buildings.

Griffith's Valuation is of particular interest to anyone wishing to trace their family tree, due to the fact that so little of the nineteenth century census returns has survived. It is available in manuscript form at PRONI (VAL/2B). A bound and printed summary version is available on the shelves of the Public Search Room, PRONI, and at major libraries. These volumes are arranged by

Poor Law Union within counties, and then into parishes and townlands. There is an index at the front of each volume which enables searchers to identify the page or pages in which a specific townland may be found. The Householders' Index can be used as a guide to the surnames listed in the Griffith's Valuation. The valuer's annotated set of Ordnance Survey maps showing the location of every property is available at PRONI (VAL/2A). These enable a researcher to identify the exact location of the house in which an ancestor may have lived. An index to Griffith's Valuation for all of Ireland is available on CD-ROM from Irish World in Coalisland, County Tyrone. Griffith's Valuation is now available for free online (with accompanying maps) at www.askaboutireland.ie

Valuation revision books, from c. 1864

The manuscript valuation books were updated on a regular basis. The so-called 'cancelled books' consist of manuscript notebooks kept by the valuation office and updated to take account of changes in tenure. When a change of occupancy occurred, the name of the lessee or householder was crossed off and the new owner's name written above it, while the year was noted on the right-hand side of the page. Different-coloured ink was often used to differentiate between years with a key at the start of each book to indicate which colour went with each year.

The years in which changes in occupancy took place help to establish significant dates in family history, such as dates of death, sale or emigration. On rare occasions there can even be a comment to the effect that a family had emigrated or that an individual had died. Changes in the valuation of buildings can indicate when a new house was built or when the existing one was abandoned. Valuation revision books for Northern Ireland are now available online at www.proni.gov.uk.

Books for the Republic of Ireland are only available in the Valuation Office in Lower Abbey Street, Dublin, although these are being digitised and will be made available in the office (Counties Kerry, Mayo & Tipperary and Dublin City are already accessible digitally in the Valuation Office).

Landed estate records

Until the early part of the twentieth century, most of the land in Ireland was possessed by landowners whose estates ranged in size from 1,000 acres or less to, in some cases, over 100,000.

Nearly all of the farmers in Ireland were tenants on such estates. The records generated by the management of landed estates are a major source of genealogical information. The best collection of Irish estate papers is housed in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. A two-volume *Guide to Landed Estate Papers*, covering the six counties of Northern Ireland, is available for consultation in the Public Search Room. It is arranged by county with the estate collections listed alphabetically according to the name of the landowning family. A brief synopsis of what is available is provided for each estate collection along with reference numbers. PRONI also holds estate collections from other counties in Ireland, notably Donegal and Monaghan. For several of the larger estates there are excellent records. In the Republic of Ireland the best collection of estate papers is in the National Library. The catalogues of many of the estate collections can be downloaded as PDFs from its website www.nli.ie

Some categories of estate papers are more useful to genealogists than others. Title deeds are concerned with the legal ownership of an estate, and are generally of limited value to genealogists. The same can be said of mortgages. Wills and marriage settlements usually refer only to the members of the landowner's family. However, rentals, leases, lease books, maps and correspondence can all be extremely useful to those searching for their ancestors within landed estate records.

Early sources

The further one goes back in time the more difficult it becomes to discover precise details about family history. Sources specific to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are rarely more than lists of names, sometimes arranged by townland and parish. They will usually not provide information on family relationships, and because they almost always give the name of the head of the household nearly all of the names will be those of men. Occasionally two men with the same name will be found in the one townland and may be distinguished with the words, 'senior' and 'junior', in which case it is reasonable to infer that they are father and son. At the same time, despite their limitations sources from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are useful if they can be used to demonstrate that a particular name occurred in

a parish or townland at a certain date. The principal sources from this period are listed below:

Hearth money rolls, 1660s

In the 1660s the government introduced a tax on hearths as a means of raising revenue. The returns, arranged by parish and usually with townland locations, list the names of all householders paying this tax and survive for half the counties in Ireland with coverage most complete in Ulster (in full or in part for all counties except Down). Surviving hearth money rolls will be found in PRONI. A searchable database of names from this source is available at:

www.ancestryireland.com/scotsinulster

The 'census of Protestant householders', 1740

What has generally been termed a 'census of Protestant householders' was compiled in 1740. The returns were made by the collectors of the hearth money and it has, therefore, been suggested that this 'census' is actually a hearth money roll and for some areas includes Catholics as well. It is no more than a list of names arranged by county, barony and parish and, reflecting its supervision by the inspector responsible for collecting hearth money, it is occasionally divided into 'walks'. Some parishes are also divided into townlands. The original records of this survey were destroyed in Dublin in 1922, but a volume containing transcripts of the original returns is available in PRONI. A searchable database of names from this source is available at:

www.ancestryireland.com/scotsinulster

The religious census of 1766

In March and April 1766, Church of Ireland rectors were instructed by the government to compile complete returns of all householders in their respective parishes, showing their religion, as between Church of Ireland (Episcopalian), Roman Catholic (termed 'Papists' in the returns) and Presbyterians (or Dissenters), and giving an account of any Roman Catholic clergy active in their area. Some of the more diligent rectors listed every townland and every household, but many drew up only numerical totals of the population. All the original returns were destroyed in the Public Record Office in 1922, but extensive transcripts survive. Bound volumes of these transcripts can be found at PRONI as well as

online under their Name Search database www.proni.gov.uk

Petition of Protestant Dissenters, 1775

The Petition of Protestant Dissenters is a list of names of Dissenters on either a parish or a congregational basis which were submitted to the government in October and November 1775. Most of them relate to the province of Ulster. A bound volume containing a typescript of the petitions can be found in PRONI as well as online under their Name Search database www.proni.gov.uk

The Flaxgrowers' List, 1796

In 1796 as part of a government initiative to encourage the linen industry in Ireland, free spinning wheels or looms were granted to farmers who planted a certain acreage of their holdings with flax. The names of over 56,000 recipients of these awards have survived in printed form arranged by county and parish. A photocopy of the original volume is available at PRONI (reference T3419). A searchable database of names from this source is available on www.ancestryireland.com/scotsinulster

Wills and testamentary papers

Prior to 1858 the Church of Ireland was responsible for administering all testamentary affairs. Ecclesiastical or Consistorial Courts in each diocese were responsible for granting probate and conferring on the executors the power to administer the estate. Unfortunately, nearly all original wills probated before 1858 were destroyed in Dublin in 1922. However, indexes to these destroyed wills do exist and are available on the shelves of the Search Rooms at PRONI and the National Archives in Dublin. These are useful, for although the will cannot now be produced, the index contains the name and residence of the testator and the date that the will was either made or probated. Occasionally the testator's occupation is given. Because the Church of Ireland was responsible for administering wills, the indexes are arranged by diocese, not by county. Despite the loss of virtually all pre-1858 wills, there are numerous abstracts, extracts and duplicate copies of the originals. In PRONI alone there are some 13,000 of these deriving from a wide variety of sources including landed estate papers, solicitors'

collections, and the papers of private genealogists. There is a typed index to surviving testamentary papers in the Public Search Room of PRONI. This index is now available under their Name Search database www.proni.gov.uk

The testamentary authority of the Church of Ireland was abolished by the Probate Act of 1857. Testamentary matters were brought under civil jurisdiction and exercised through District Probate Registries and a Principal Registry in Dublin. The wills of wealthier members of society tended to be probated at the Principal Registry. The district registries retained transcripts of the wills that they proved and of the administrations intestate that they granted before the annual transfer of the original records (20 or more years old) to the Public Record Office of Ireland in Dublin. The original wills were destroyed in Dublin in 1922 but the transcript copies in will books survived. These are now on deposit in PRONI and the National Archives. Bound annual indexes called 'calendars' are available at PRONI and the National Archives. These calendars are of value to genealogists since they provide the name, address, occupation and date of death of the testator as well as the names, addresses and occupations of the individual or individuals to whom probate was granted, the value of estate and the place and date of probate. Each calendar covers a single year and the entries are in alphabetical order. The Ulster Historical Foundation has an index to the calendars covering the period 1858–1900 on its website (www.ancestryireland.com). This index gives the date of death and county of residence.

PRONI has in its custody all wills for the districts of Belfast and Londonderry from 1900 to, at present 2004, and Armagh from 1900 until it closed in 1921. After 1900 the original wills and their associated papers are available filed in a separate envelope for each testator. If the person did not make a will there may be letters of administration that give the name, residence and occupation of the deceased as well as the name and address of the person or persons appointed to administer the estate.

The will indexes and summaries (totalling 400,000 entries) from 1858–1965 are currently available online at www.proni.gov.uk. This website also has scanned images from the copy will books of wills from 1858 until around 1900.

School records

A state-run system of education was established in Ireland in 1831. Prior to this (and for some time after it) there were several different organisations and institutions providing education in Ireland. These included the Capel Street Association for Discourtenancing Vice, the Kildare Street Society, the London Hibernian Society as well as the different churches. From 1831 National Schools were built with the aid of the Commissioners of National Education and local trustees. Between 1832 and 1870 about 2,500 national schools were established in Ulster. The records of over 1,500 schools in Northern Ireland are held at PRONI. Of particular interest are the enrolment registers. These record the full name of the pupil, his or her date of birth (or age at entry), religion, father's address and occupation (but unfortunately not his name), details of attendance and academic progress and the name of the school previously attended. A space is also provided in the registers for general comments, which might tell where the children went to work after leaving school or if they emigrated. Some registers have an index at the front that can greatly ease searching. As they include the age of pupils, school registers can be cross-referenced with other records such as baptismal records or birth certificates.

Election records

Election records come in various forms. Registers of freeholders list the names and addresses of individuals entitled to vote at parliamentary elections. Poll books (often in printed form before the Ballot Act of 1872) list the names of voters and the candidates they voted for. Until the late nineteenth century the qualification for voting was generally linked to the tenure of land, and only a small minority of men had the right to vote. In Ireland, from 1727 to 1793, only Protestant men with a 40-shilling freehold had the right to vote. Between 1793 and 1829 both Protestants and Roman Catholics with 40-shilling freeholds had votes, although a Catholic still could not become a member of parliament. The 40-shilling freehold was property worth 40 shillings a year above the rent, and either owned outright or leased during the lives of named individuals. Many important and indeed prominent people had no vote because they leased their property on the wrong terms. Surviving electoral records are available at PRONI and most of them have been digitised and are

available as a database on its website www.proni.gov.uk

Board of Guardians records

The new English system of Poor Law administration was applied to Ireland in 1838. Destitute poor who were previously granted relief at parish level were to be accommodated in new workhouses, where conditions were to be as unpleasant as was consistent with health. Ireland was divided into 137 Poor Law Unions. These ignored traditional divisions, such as the county, barony and parish, and were centred on a market town where a workhouse was built. The management of the workhouses was the responsibility of the Boards of Guardians. In the minute books kept by the Guardians are details of the day-to-day running of the workhouse, including information on many of the inmates and those employed in the workhouse as teachers, nurses, chaplains, etc. Indoor registers provides the names of those who were admitted to the workhouses. The information recorded also includes the townland, age, spouse's name and religion of each inmate. Outdoor relief registers include similar information to the indoor registers, but concern those who received assistance without going into the workhouse. Vaccination registers are another useful source among the Board of Guardians records. Surviving Board of Guardians records for Northern Ireland are deposited at PRONI under reference BG. Access to some of these records can be a problem, as there is a 100-year closure rule on all documents in the Boards of Guardians papers.

Printed sources

Ordnance Survey memoirs

Ordnance Survey memoirs provide a great deal of background information on the character and habits of the people who lived in Ireland during the early part of the nineteenth century. The memoirs were written descriptions intended to accompany the original Ordnance Survey maps, containing information that could not be fitted on to them. They are a unique source for the history of the northern half of Ireland before the Great Famine, as they document the landscape and situation, buildings and antiquities, land-holdings and population, employment and livelihoods of the parishes. The surveyors recorded the habits of the people, their food, drink, dress and customs.

Details of ruined churches, prehistoric monuments and standing stones were also included. The Ordnance Survey memoirs were published in 40 volumes by the Institute of Irish Studies at The Queen's University of Belfast, with an additional index volume covering the entire series. These volumes are available through the Ulster Historical Foundation's online bookstore:

www.booksireland.org.uk

Street directories

Street directories contain a great deal of information on the gentry, the professional classes, merchants, etc. They include information on even the smallest of market towns and ports in Ireland. Beginning with a description of the town and surrounding countryside, the names and addresses of the local butchers, pawnbrokers, blacksmiths and coach-builders are given, as well as the various places of worship, with the names of the local ministers, etc., and the location of local schools. Street directories can therefore be useful if you wish to find out which church or school your ancestor attended. The names and addresses of the local members of parliament, magistrates, Poor Law Guardians and town commissioners are also included in many street directories. In fact the only classes that are excluded from all directories are the small tenant farmers, landless labourers and servants.

There is a good collection of street directories in Belfast Central Library, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, and the Linen Hall Library. PRONI has digitised all its pre-1900 street directories and they are available through its website www.proni.gov.uk.

Newspapers

Newspapers are an important source of family history information. The major drawback with using them is usually the lack of an index of names. Of particular interest to genealogists are birth, death and marriage notices. In many cases a newspaper notice may be the only record of one of these events if it took place prior to civil registration and if a church record has not survived. For a full list of newspapers printed in Ireland with dates of publication and availability visit the following website: www.nli.ie/en/catalogues-and-databases-printed-newspapers.aspx

Useful books

Numerous books on Irish genealogy have been written. Probably the best general guide is John Grenham's *Tracing your Irish Ancestors* (2006); the fourth edition of which was published in 2012. Another useful guide is *Tracing Irish Ancestors* by MacConghail and Gorry (1997).

Other volumes deal more closely with a specific area, period or theme. Maxwell's *Tracing your ancestors in Northern Ireland* (1997) is primarily concerned with records in PRONI. He is also the author of two county guides: *Researching Armagh Ancestors* (2000) & *Researching Down Ancestors* (2004). For County Derry/Londonderry there is Bill Macafee's CD-Rom: *Researching Derry & Londonderry Ancestors: a practical guide for the family and local historian* (2010). Guides for counties Clare, Cork, Donegal, Dublin, Galway, Kerry, Limerick, Mayo, Roscommon, Sligo and Westmeath have been published by Flyleaf Press. Dr Maxwell has more recently published two additional guides: *Tracing Your Northern Irish Ancestors: A Guide for Family Historians*; and *How to Trace Your Irish Ancestors: An Essential Guide to Researching and Documenting the Family Histories of Ireland's People*.

William Roulston's *Researching Scots-Irish Ancestors: the essential genealogical guide to early modern Ulster, 1600–1800* (2005), also by the Ulster Historical Foundation, provides a comprehensive overview of sources for studying family history in the 17th and 18th centuries, including a summary listing of sources for virtually every parish in Ulster. An indispensable book is *Irish Libraries, Museums, Archives and Genealogical Centres: A Visitors' Guide* by Robert K. O'Neill (3rd edition, 2013) which provides contact details and summary information on collections in main archives in Ireland.

Useful books on Irish surnames include Edward MacLysaght's *The Surnames of Ireland* (1957, Irish Academic Press, numerous reprints), considered to be the standard reference work on this subject. Although dated but still of value, is Rev. Patrick Woulfe's *Sloinne Gaedheal is Gall ((Irish Names and Surnames)*, 1923, reprinted 2014). For surnames in the province of Ulster, researchers should check Bell's *Surnames of Ulster* (The Blackstaff Press, 1988, several reprints). Given the preponderance of Scottish names in Ulster, George F. Black's *Surnames of Scotland* (1st edition 1946, several reprints) can be helpful.

Useful addresses

ULSTER HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

Corn Exchange, 31 Gordon Street
Belfast, BT1 2LG
Email: enquiry@uhf.org.uk
Website: www.ancestryireland.com

GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE OF IRELAND

(administrative headquarters)
Convent Road,
Roscommon
Website: www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/General-Register-Office.aspx

(public research room)
Werburgh Street,
Dublin 2.

GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND

Oxford House
49/55 Chichester Street
Belfast, BT1 4HL
Email: gro.nisra@dfpni.gov.uk
Website: www.nidirect.gov.uk/gro

LINEN HALL LIBRARY

17 Donegall Square North
Belfast, BT1 5GD
Website: www.linenhall.com

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND

2 Titanic Boulevard,
Belfast, BT3 9HQ
Email: proni@dcalni.gov.uk
Website: www.proni.gov.uk

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF IRELAND

Bishop Street
Dublin 8
Email: mail@nationalarchives.ie
Website: www.nationalarchives.ie

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND

Kildare Street
Dublin 2
Email: info@nli.ie
Website: www.nli.ie

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF HERALD/GENEALOGICAL OFFICE

2–3 Kildare Street
Dublin 2, Ireland
Website: www.nli.ie

IRISH FAMILY HISTORY FOUNDATION

Karel Kiely, Secretary
c/o Riverbank, Main St.
Newbridge, Co. Kildare, Ireland
E-mail: enquiries@rootsireland.ie
Website: www.rootsireland.ie

VALUATION OFFICE

Irish Life Centre
Abbey Street Lower, Dublin 1
Email: info@valoff.ie
Website: www.valoff.ie

REGISTRY OF DEEDS

Henrietta Street
Dublin 1, Ireland
Website: www.prai.ie/

MELLON CENTRE FOR MIGRATION STUDIES

Ulster-American Folk Park
2 Mellon Road, Castletown
Omagh, Co. Tyrone, BT78 5QY
Website: www.qub.ac.uk/cms

THE MILITARY ARCHIVES

Cathal Brugha Barracks, Rathmines
Dublin 6, Ireland
Telephone: +353 (0)1 804 6457
Website: www.militaryarchives.ie/home

THE REPRESENTATIVE BODY OF THE CHURCH OF IRELAND

The Library, 14 Braemor Park,
Rathgar, Dublin 6
Website: www.ireland.anglican.org

PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

26 College Green,
Belfast BT7 1LN
www.presbyterianhistoryireland.com

CATHOLIC CHURCH IN IRELAND

36 Lower Lesson Street, Dublin 2, Ireland.
www.catholicireland.net

Other useful website addresses

www.historyfromheadstones.com

Map of graveyards in NI with case-studies.

www.sinton-family-trees.com/

Gravestone inscriptions for areas of County Armagh-Quakers and other denominations

www.rootsireland.ie

Website for the Irish Family History Foundation (IFHF) county centres in Ireland, detailing over 20 million civil and church records as well as passenger lists. Subscription based website.

www.ancestryireland.com

IFHF centre for Counties Antrim and Down, with over 2 million church and civil records & 50,000 gravestone inscriptions for all of NI. Free index search, charge for full inscriptions

www.census.nationalarchives.ie

1911 and 1901 census online for whole of Ireland

www.proni.gov.uk/index/search_the_archives/ulster_covenant.htm

Ulster Covenant online through PRONI's website

www.proni.gov.uk/index/search_the_archives/ecatalogue.htm

PRONI's e-catalogue to search for specific churches, schools, personal names etc

www.presbyterianhistoryireland.com

Presbyterian Historical Society's site listing church registers only available in their library

www.lenmonwylie.co.uk

Certain street directories online

www.proni.gov.uk/index/search_the_archives/street_directories.htm

Certain street directories online through PRONI's website (pre-1900)

www.ucs.louisiana.edu/bnl/

Belfast Newsletter index, 1737–1800

www.familysearch.org

Website detailing a limited amount of church records and the index to civil births, marriages and deaths in Ireland, 1845–1958

www.nifhs.org/resources/

North of Ireland Family History Society's website detailing publications on gravestone inscriptions and birth, marriage and death notices from local newspapers

www.nidirect.gov.uk/gro

General Register Office, Northern Ireland

www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/General-Register-Office.aspx

General Register Office, Ireland

www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk

Civil records, 1855–2006, church and census records for Scotland

www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates

General Register Office, England and Wales

www.findmypast.co.uk/

1901 Census online for England and Wales
1911 Census online for England and Wales
Irish Prison Registers, 1790–1924

www.freebmd.org.uk

Free birth, marriage and death index for England and Wales

www.findmypast.com

Census, civil and church records.

www.askaboutireland.ie/griffith-valuation/

Griffith's Valuation, 1848–64 available free online

www.proni.gov.uk/index/search_the_archives/will_calendars/

Wills calendar summaries available through PRONI's website, 1858–1965

www.ulsterancestry.com/ua-free-pages.php

Free pages of assorted information e.g. 1851 Census, Co. Antrim & Markethill Yeomanry

www.failteromhat.com

1796 Flax list & Hearthmoney Rolls

www.cwgc.org/

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

www.irishtimes.com/ancestor/browse/counties/ulster/

List of records and resources available for Ulster Counties (from John Grenham's 'Tracing your Irish Ancestors')

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/

National Archives, London (Irish soldiers were part of the British Army so many records held there)

www.ancestryireland.com/scotsinulster/

Hearthmoney Rolls, Muster Rolls, Protestant Householders, Flaxgrowers' List

www.workhouses.org.uk

Information on workhouses in Ireland and the United Kingdom

www.proni.gov.uk/index/search_the_archives/freeholders_records

Searchable freeholders registers available through PRONI's website

www.irish-genealogy-toolkit.com

Useful pages on how to organise your information and on key records

www.irishgenealogynews.com/

Excellent blog by Claire Santry detailing new records, events & publications on Irish genealogy.

www.cyndislist.com/uk/irl

Comprehensive list of genealogical sites on the internet (covers every country although this link is for Ireland)

www.sistersofmercy.ie

Sisters of Mercy
Catherine McAuley Centre, 23 Herbert Street,
Dublin 2 (Note: strictly postal enquiries only)

www.irishmethodist.org

Methodist Church in Ireland
1 Fountainville Avenue, Belfast BT9 6AN

www.libertyellisfoundation.org

American Family Immigration History Center

www.immigrantships.net

Immigrant Ships Transcribers Guild

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

The National Archives
Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU.

www.ballymoneyancestry.com

Ballymoney ancestry

www.dippam.ac.uk/eppi

Enhanced British Parliamentary papers on Ireland (EPPI)

www.eneclann.ie

Eneclann

www.college-of-arms.gov.uk

College of Arms (for England, Wales & Northern Ireland)

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/hmc.htm

Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts

www.rootsweb.com/~nirwgw

Northern Ireland GenWeb

www.catholic-hierarchy.org

Catholic Hierarchy

www.placenamesni.org

Northern Ireland Placename Project

www.thecore.com/seanruad/

Irish Placename website

www.dippam.ac.uk

Centre for Migration Studies database including British Parliamentary Papers

www.irelandoldnews.com

Ireland Old News

www.irishtimes.com/ancestor/

Irish ancestors (Irish Times)

www.familyhistory.ie

Genealogical Society of Ireland

www.dfpni.gov.uk/land-property-services-lps

Land and Property Services Northern Ireland

www.nidirect.gov.uk/osni

Ordnance Survey maps (Northern Ireland)

www.st-andrews.ac.uk/history/ssne
Scotland, Scandinavia & Northern European
biographical database, 1580–1707

www.coastguardsofyesteryear.org
Coastguards of yesteryear

www.censusfinder.com/irish-census-records2.htm
Miscellaneous census material

http://books.google.com/advanced_book_search
Google Books

<http://sources.nli.ie/>
The National Library of Ireland has a very detailed
database of records

<http://registers.nli.ie/>
Roman Catholic parish registers, up to 1880

<http://1641.tcd.ie/>
Fully searchable digital edition of the 1641
Depositions at Trinity College Dublin Library,
comprising transcripts and images of all 8,000
depositions & examinations.

www.jstor.org/journal/collhibe
Collectanea Hibernica (1958–2006)

www.archiviumhibernicum.ie
Archivium Hibernicum

www.igp-web.com/tipperary/popish.htm
Popish inhabitants in the barony of Ikerrin, 1750
(extracted from *The Irish Genealogist*, volume 4,
pages 578–83.

www.1718migration.org.uk/
The 1718 migration: The Scots-Irish Journey to
the New World

www.landedestates.ie
Searchable, online database of all Landed Estates
in Connacht and Munster

<http://gale.cengage.co.uk/state-papers-online-15091714.aspx>

Please note: State Papers Online, 1509–1714 is
available for trial and purchase by institutions. It is
not available at this stage for individual purchase
or subscription.

www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie
The Bureau of Military History (1913–1921)

<http://irishdeedsindex.net/index.html>
Registry of Deeds online index project

<http://opac.oireachtas.ie/liberty/libraryHome.do>
Historical documents available from the Houses
of the Oireachtas, including The *Dublin Gazette*

<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>
The National Archives database including,
Records of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury.

<http://catalogue.nrscotland.gov.uk/>
Contains the fully searchable details of records
listed in the electronic catalogue of the National
Records of Scotland.

Online gravestone inscriptions
www.ancestryireland.com/family-records/gravestone-inscriptions/
(over 50,000 NI inscriptions free index, charge for
details)

www.belfastcity.gov.uk/community/burialrecords/
(360,000 free records, charge for scanned image)

www.thebraid.com/genealogy (free, Ballymena
area, Co. Antrim)

www.ballymoneyancestry.com (free,
Ballymoney area, Co. Antrim)

www.glasnevintrust.ie/genealogy/
(1.5 million Dublin records, free index search,
charge for details)

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Web: www.ancestryireland.com www.historyfromheadstones.com www.booksireland.org.uk