



A Beginner's Guide to Family History

Write down everything you know. Family history should always start with yourself. Ask older family members and write down everything they know. Avoid leading questions; for example, instead of asking 'did Mary marry John?', ask 'who did Mary marry?'.

Administrative Divisions: records are documented according to *civil administrative divisions*, as follows.

County: The principal unit of local government.

Barony: The basis for land division and ownership since the 12th century.

Poor Law Union (PLU): Established under the Poor Law Act 1838. The country was divided into 163 PLUs, and each had a workhouse - see www.workhouses.org.uk.

District Electoral Division (DED): PLUs were divided into DEDs, used for compiling census data and for elections.

Civil Parish: There are two types of parish, civil and ecclesiastical. The civil parish is the territorial land division used for the classification of Irish civil records, e.g. Tithe Applotment Books, Griffith's Valuation. A parish consists of a group of townlands. There are two types of ecclesiastical parish, Roman Catholic (RC) and Church of Ireland (COI). Caution - RC and civil parishes may not be coextensive, and occasionally RC parishes were amalgamated. The COI was the Established or State Church and COI parishes generally follow civil parish boundaries.

Townland: The smallest civil division within a county; townland names were standardised in 1851; c. 64,000 townlands in Ireland.

Census records for 1901 & 1911 are available online at census.nationalarchives.ie, together with fragments and substitutes for 1821-1851. Use wildcards when searching census records, e.g. when searching for Thomas Shaughnessy, type 'Shau*' for surname and 'Tho*' for first name. Names are often spelled incorrectly, and first names can be abbreviated, e.g. Thomas is often written 'Thos'.

Civil records of births, marriages and deaths, commencing in 1864, are freely available online together with indexes, at civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie (with restrictions to protect living individuals), or by post from the General Register Office at Convent Road, Roscommon (see 'Apply for Certificates' at welfare.ie). Photocopies of the records (currently €4) are sufficient for research. Indexes to civil records up to 1958 are available on familysearch.org. Both sets of indexes should be consulted as each has information not available from the other.

Church records (baptisms, marriages, and occasionally deaths) are the principal source of information prior to 1864. Microfilm records for most parishes up to 1880 are available free online at registers.nli.ie, and at the National Library of Ireland. Records for many parishes are transcribed (no original images) on the subscription site www.rootsireland.ie (€25 per month). Church marriage records may provide valuable information if the bride and groom were related.

FamilySearch.org is an excellent free site for online records. It has several Irish collections as well as shipping manifests, US census returns (many with free images), and birth, death and marriage records for many US states. Many records have original images which can be viewed by clicking 'view document' on the right side of an individual record page.

To view a list of Irish record collections, click 'Search' on the main search page, then 'Browse all published collections', and then select 'United Kingdom and Ireland', then 'Ireland' on the menu at the left side of the page.

Griffith's Valuation of Ireland was conducted in the 1840s-50s and lists occupiers together with acreage, land and building valuation. It is available for free online at askaboutireland.ie, and at Galway County Library. Revisions to the records (changes in occupiers) are given in the **Cancelled Land Books**, available at the Valuation Office in the Irish Life Centre, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1. The books are arranged by District Electoral Division. The valuation archive records for some counties, including Galway, have now been digitised and the images are available to browse in the Valuation Office.

For research on families in Galway, the website places.galwaylibrary.ie provides a wealth of information on placenames. By searching for a parish name, a list of the townlands in that parish can be viewed, together with the variants in their spelling. Within each townland page, there are links to Griffith's Valuation, 1901 & 1911 Census records, OS maps and the Down Survey.

Wills are available at the National Archives of Ireland (NAI) at Bishop Street, Dublin 8, with summaries online at genealogy.nationalarchives.ie. Will transcripts for 1858-1900 are also available on the same site, and on microfilm at the NAI (District Registries only - excludes Dublin). Original wills from 1900-1974 are also available at the NAI but must be ordered three days in advance of viewing. Wills for the post-1974 period do not need to be ordered in advance.

Irish court records are available at the NAI and on the subscription site findmypast.ie. These record the name and townland name of the complainant and defendant as well

as the details of the offence committed, and thus records for a particular family are easily searchable.

Findmypast offers a free 14 day trial. Those who take up this offer should be aware that you will be charged the subsequent subscription unless you cancel before the end of the free trial.

Tithe Applotment Books: Compiled between 1823 and 1837 to determine the amount payable in tithes (tax) by occupiers of agricultural holdings, owners and tenants, to the COI. They are the most important set of land records before Griffith's Valuation, but are not available for all parishes. The records typically show the names of occupiers, amount of land held and the sums payable. Only the names of those who 'cultivated' land were recorded for tithes; graziers, shopkeepers, occupiers with house only, etc. were omitted. In the absence of census data, these records are the next best in pre-Famine Ireland. The Books are held at the NAI and can be consulted online at genealogy.nationalarchives.ie, at familysearch.org, and also at the County Library, Island House, Galway.

Field & House Books 1830-1844: Contain limited information but some books provide valuable details on living conditions, type of house, farmer or business. The Books may be consulted on microfilm at the NAI and online at genealogy.nationalarchives.ie. House Book records give houses/buildings in townland, together with occupier name and description of dwellings and buildings, but not of land. Field Books record the quality and productivity of the soils but not the names of occupiers.

Perambulation Books 1845-55: Before Griffith's Valuation, surveyors had travelled through the country to conduct valuations of property. The valuations compiled by surveyors in the field after the 'perambulation' of a district were published. The Perambulation Books contain descriptions of land rentals and are helpful, but are not as complete as Griffith's Valuation. They are held in the NAI and are available online at genealogy.nationalarchives.ie.

Valuation Maps: The Valuation Office is the Irish State property valuations agency and holds the valuation maps. The site of a property listed in Griffith's Valuation is marked on the valuation map for any townland. The valuation map for the townland in which the property is located is based on the OS Maps published in 1837. Each farm holding or property listed in Griffith's Valuation was given a reference number and this number was marked on the valuation map. The site of the farm holding in a given townland can be identified by finding the corresponding reference number on the valuation map. For further information see valoff.ie.

Graveyards: Most church registers did not include burials until the early 1900s. Some cemetery inscriptions are available online - for example, the Galway County Council site gccapps.galwaycoco.ie/graveyards/. Many graveyards around the country have been surveyed by FÁS Schemes and by volunteers. County Libraries should be consulted. The findagrave.com online database also has records of almost 18,000 Galway burials submitted by volunteers.

Newspapers: 18th & 19th century national and local papers can hold significant details on our ancestors, such as

obituaries. See 'Newspaper Database' at www.nli.ie. Local titles include: Galway Vindicator, 1841-1899; Tuam Herald, 1837-present; Connacht Tribune, 1909-present. Microfilms of local newspapers are held at County Libraries, and also at the James Hardiman Library, NUI Galway. Many newspaper collections are available on the subscription site irishnewsarchive.com.

Pension Records: Following the introduction of the Old Age Pension in January 1909, it was decided that searches of the 1841 and 1851 census returns could provide suitable proof of an applicant's age. This resulted in the production of *Census Search Forms*, on which applicants stated their parents' names and their residence in March 1841/1851. If the search was successful, the forms often provide the names and ages of every person living in the household at the time of the relevant census. The forms are available at the NAI and online at censussearchforms.nationalarchives.ie.

School Records: The local National School or library may have old roll books, also parish offices or the NAI; they vary in the years recorded, and records may include inspectors' reports.

Emigration: 70 million people around the world have roots in Ireland. It should be noted that there was significant emigration from Ireland before the Famine, i.e. in the 1820s/30s. Lists of Irish immigrants and ships arriving at the traditional destinations such as New York, Boston, Baltimore, New Orleans, Quebec, Botany Bay (Australia), etc. can be searched on a variety of websites. For example, 22 million emigrants were processed through *Ellis Island* from 1892 to 1924 - see ellisland.org. Irish emigrants searching for missing friends often placed advertisements in American newspapers, e.g. Boston Pilot *Missing Friends* column.

Large numbers of emigrants availed of assisted emigration schemes to NSW and Queensland, Australia - see genealogylinks.net. This site includes large sets of data, e.g. the Galway Emigrant Index 1828 to 1866 and later.

Ireland Reaching Out was set up to organise the Irish diaspora worldwide and to connect people of Irish heritage abroad back to the Irish parish of their ancestors. They maintain a forum for genealogy queries, together with other useful information, at irelandXO.com.



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For more information on the Western Family History Association, see our website at wfha.info. New members are always welcome and can join online or at a meeting. Our meetings usually take place on the third Wednesday of January and the second Wednesday of March, May, September and November at 8pm in Lackagh Parish Centre.

The association maintains a library of 300 Books and CDs by eminent authors on genealogy, family history research and heritage, all available for loan to members. See our website for a full list of titles.