



# Irish Research: Getting Started

Craig L. Foster, AG®

British Research Specialist - Family History Library  
fostercl@familysearch.org

## Introduction

The objective of this course is to teach the basic things you need to know to do Irish research. This begins first with understanding Irish jurisdictions then the primary records you will use.

## Jurisdictions

- Ireland was one country until 1922 – then divided into the Republic of Ireland (southern) and Northern Ireland - Antrim, Down, Armagh, Fermanagh, Tyrone, and Derry [Londonderry]
- Large cities – may contain several parishes
- Civil Registration districts = Poor Law Unions
- Organized from largest to smallest: country, province, county, barony, civil parish, townland/town

## Understanding Parishes

There are two types of parishes in Ireland: civil and ecclesiastical

- Civil parishes – typically share same names and boundaries as ecclesiastical parishes of Church of Ireland (Anglican Church) – had own diocese
- Parishes of Roman Catholic church - only ecclesiastical, often have different names and boundaries than civil parishes in the area and more than one name – had own diocese

The goal is to arrive at the name of the townland in which ancestors lived. Two important websites are: <https://www.townlands.ie/> and [www.thecore.com/seanruad](http://www.thecore.com/seanruad).

## Civil Registration

Births, marriages and deaths registered in registration districts that followed poor law union boundaries. Watch for the word “Union” with a place-name.

- April 1, 1845 -- Registration of non-Catholic marriages began
- January 1, 1864 -- Civil Registration of all births and deaths and Catholic marriages began

## **Information on Irish Birth, Marriage and Death Certificates**

**Birth:** Birth date and birth place, Child's name and sex, Father's name, occupation and location, Mother's name including maiden name, Informant information, Registrar's name.

**Marriage:** Bride's and groom's names and their ages, Marital condition, occupations and residences, Date and place of marriage (religion), Names and occupations of both fathers, Signatures/marks of bride and groom, Two witnesses.

**Death:** Name and sex of deceased, Age and occupation of deceased, Date, place and cause of death, Name, description and residence of informant.

## **Locating the records**

- [www.irishgenealogy.ie](http://www.irishgenealogy.ie) – Index and images to births (1864-1916), index to marriages (1845-1941) and images (1870-1941) and index to deaths (1864-1966) and images (1878-1966). The images for earlier marriages and deaths are constantly being added.
- [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) - Indexes 1845-1958 without linked images. The FHL has marriage records on microfilm from 1845-1870 and death records on microfilm from 1864-1870 however these have not been digitized as of May 2018.
- [www.rootsireland.ie](http://www.rootsireland.ie) – subscription website - indexes and transcriptions for some counties
- All registers available in Ireland - Office of Registrar General for Republic, [www.groireland.ie](http://www.groireland.ie); General Register Office for Northern Ireland, [www.groni.gov.uk](http://www.groni.gov.uk).

## **Things to Remember**

- The name of the townland is typically included in civil registration records

Never trust the birth date. As many as one third of parents “adjusted” **the** birth day to avoid paying a late registration fee.

- “Mac,” “Mc” and “O” may be dropped off the surname. Search with/without and try interchanging them
- Estimated that about 15% of events, mostly births, not registered in early years

## **Church Records**

### **Roman Catholic**

Except for the province of Ulster, about 90% belonged to the Roman Catholic church. Their records were not lost in the 1922 fire. More were lost through careless record keepers or were not kept at all. On average, Catholic parish registers begin in 1820 and they may be in Latin. Information includes:

**Baptisms:** Child's name, father's name, mother's maiden name, sponsors (godparents) date of baptism (usually baptized as soon as possible after birth)

**Marriages:** Name of groom, name of bride, witnesses (often related to bride/groom) date of marriage

**Burials:** Registers kept by only about 20% of parishes until 1880. Typically, only give - Name of deceased and date of burial.

### **Locating Roman Catholic records**

- National Library of Ireland ([www.nli.ie](http://www.nli.ie)) – holds virtually all RC parish registers pre-1880. These have all been digitized and are available for free
- John Grenham ([www.johngrenham.com](http://www.johngrenham.com)) also has Roman Catholic parish maps and links to the NLI digitized parish registers
- Ancestry.com and FindMyPast.com have indexes to those digitized records
- [www.rootsireland.ie](http://www.rootsireland.ie) (subscription) has transcriptions which go to at least 1899.

### **Church of Ireland**

The Church of Ireland is Anglican and was the established church from 1536 to 1871. About 12% of Irish belonged to it. Many of their records were destroyed in the Four Courts fire in 1922 (by province: Connaught 61%, Leinster 50%, Munster 61%, Ulster 37%). Search Church of Ireland records even if your ancestor was Roman Catholic because it was the legally recognized church and many Catholics are baptized, married and buried there. Information includes:

**Baptisms:** Child's name, father's name, mother's name (but not maiden), date of baptism, (from 1820s onwards) date of birth, occupation of father, and "abode"

**Marriages:** Names of groom and bride, marriage date, and from 1820s onwards - addresses of parties, names and addresses of witnesses

**Burials:** Name of deceased, date of burial

### **Locating Church of Ireland records**

Very few were microfilmed by FamilySearch but check for your parish of interest

- Representative Church Body Library ([www.ireland.anglican.org/library](http://www.ireland.anglican.org/library)) - has originals and links to those who will research for a fee
- A list of surviving records can be found at:  
<https://www.ireland.anglican.org/news/7250/church-of-ireland-parish-record>
- PRONI ([www.proni.gov.uk](http://www.proni.gov.uk)) - holds many copies for Northern Ireland
- Many are still held locally in the parish church.

### **Presbyterian**

Scottish Presbyterians began migrating to Ulster in 1605. Earliest registers date to the 1690's but the average start date is 1819. Their records were not destroyed in the 1922 fire. Virtually all Presbyterians lived in six counties in Northern Ireland (Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone). Information is like what was kept in Church of Ireland records. Like the Catholics, few burial records were kept, check the local Church of Ireland burial grounds.

### **Locating Presbyterian Church records**

- FamilySearch has a few copies or transcripts on microfilm or digitized.
- The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland aka PRONI ([www.proni.gov.uk](http://www.proni.gov.uk)) also has an extensive collection.
- The Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland ([www.presbyterianhistoryireland.com](http://www.presbyterianhistoryireland.com)) has congregational histories and records. Click on "Collections" to begin your search.

- The Ulster Historical Foundation is a website ([www.ancestryireland.com](http://www.ancestryireland.com)) with a few free records and about 1.8 million pay-per-records, including tombstone inscriptions.

## **Census Records**

- Only 1901 and 1911 survive in their entirety. Both are online at [www.nationalarchives.ie](http://www.nationalarchives.ie) (indexes and images). Remember to check all four census schedules (Schedules A, N, B1 and B2).
- There are some census fragments available for the 1821, 1831, 1841 and 1851 Censuses. The rest were destroyed in the Four Courts fire. Make sure an ancestor in a census fragment is in the exact right place at the right time.
- The 1861, 1871, 1881 and 1891 Censuses were destroyed by government order.

## **Census Substitutes**

### **Griffith's Valuation**

Griffith's Valuation tax was assessed from 1848 to 1864 beginning with the counties in the south and finishing in the north. Information includes:

Contains heads of households only – occupiers and immediate lessors. It is estimated to contain 80-90% of all heads of households. This can also be used to determine the names of estate holders who may have estate records with land lease information.

### ***Locating Griffith's Valuation Records***

- AskAboutIreland.ie ([www.askaboutireland.ie](http://www.askaboutireland.ie)) has a complete index, images of published valuation pages and maps to make it possible to find the exact land an ancestor farmed.
- Also check Valuation Lists (aka Cancel or Revision Books) – 1850's to 20th century; lists occupiers kept subsequent to Primary Valuation. May trace a tenement from generation to generation. Earlier Field Books, Tenure Books, House Books and Quarto Books may also be valuable. Check the FamilySearch Wiki for "Ireland Taxation" for more information.

### **Tithe Appointment**

- The tithe was a land-based tax exacted from rural Ireland between 1823 and 1837. It did not apply to inhabitants of the cities or larger towns. The tithe was used to support the Church of Ireland in rural areas. Information includes the name of the head of the household and the value of the property. Approximately 40% of heads of household are represented.
- The Irish National Archives ([www.nationalarchives.ie](http://www.nationalarchives.ie)) and FamilySearch have indexes and images (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1804886>).