

Geography of Ireland



ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS	
Division	Notes
province	Ireland's largest administrative division. Ireland has four provinces: Connacht, Leinster, Munster and Ulster (which encompasses Northern Ireland).
county	This subdivision of a province is the main unit of local government, in use since the 1100s. The Republic of Ireland has 26 counties; Northern Ireland has six.
civil parish	Subdivision of a county. Parishes referred to in government records are civil parishes; note that these aren't the same as Roman Catholic church parishes (see below).
townland	Subdivision of a civil parish or poor law union and the smallest administrative division in Ireland, averaging 200 to 400 acres. View lists of townlands by county and parish at < www.townlands.ie >.
barony	A now-obsolete unit of a county used during the 1600s to 1800s.
poor law union	Poor law unions originated in 1838 as a system for providing for the poor. Each of the 163 poor law unions had a workhouse where paupers could receive relief. They became Ireland's primary county subdivision in 1898.
superintendent registrar's district	Another name for a poor law union.
church parish	A division of a Roman Catholic bishop's diocese. Catholic records were kept by church parish, not civil parish.

COUNTIES OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND	
County	Province
Carlow	Leinster
Cavan	Ulster
Clare	Munster
Cork	Munster
Donegal	Ulster
Dublin	Leinster
Galway	Connacht
Kerry	Munster
Kildare	Leinster
Kilkenny	Leinster
Laois	Leinster
Leitrim	Connacht
Limerick	Munster
Longford	Leinster
Louth	Leinster
Mayo	Connacht
Meath	Leinster
Monaghan	Ulster
Offaly	Leinster
Roscommon	Connacht
Sligo	Connacht
Tipperary	Munster
Waterford	Munster
Westmeath	Leinster
Wexford	Leinster
Wicklow	Leinster

COUNTIES OF NORTHERN IRELAND	
County	Province
Antrim	Ulster
Armagh	Ulster
Down	Ulster
Fermanagh	Ulster
Londonderry	Ulster
Tyrone	Ulster

TIMELINE OF IRISH HISTORY

- 432** St. Patrick travels to Ireland, according to legend
- 795** The first Viking raids on Ireland take place
- 841** The Norse set up permanent encampment at Dublin
- 1171** Irish kings submit to the British King Henry II
- 1315** Edward Bruce arrives in Ireland and rallies many Irish lords against Anglo-Norman rule
- 1607** The Flight of the Irish Earls sees the exile of Ulster's Gaelic aristocracy
- 1609** The Plantation of Ulster colonizes land with people from England and Scottish lowlands
- 1649** Oliver Cromwell's forces massacre Irish townspeople in Drogheda
- 1652** Cromwellian Settlement results in confiscation of Catholics' land
- 1660** The English King William defeats the exiled English King James II at the Battle of the Boyne
- 1691** Penal law bans Catholics from membership in Parliament
- 1737** Boston's Charitable Irish Society holds the first St. Patrick's Day parade in the Thirteen Colonies
- 1740** Weather-related famine results in widespread deaths
- 1759** Sir Arthur Guinness takes over a brewery at St. James' Gate
- 1791** The Society of United Irishmen is formed to fight for political, economic and social rights for all Irish
- 1793** Catholics can vote
- 1801** Great Britain and Ireland unite
- 1816** Potato crop failure contributes to famine and typhus epidemic in the Year Without a Summer
- 1832** Asiatic cholera in Belfast and Dublin spreads throughout Ireland until the following year
- 1845** Potato blight leads to massive crop failure (the Great Potato Famine) and emigration
- 1848** Patrick Kennedy, great-grandfather of President John F. Kennedy, leaves for America
- 1849** The Potato Famine draws to a close
- 1859** The *Irish Times* newspaper is launched in Dublin
- 1887** The Gaelic Athletic Association holds first All-Ireland Hurling Championship
- 1914** The home rule bill becomes a law, but is delayed until the end of World War I
- 1916** Irish Republicans stage Easter Rising for independence from Britain
- 1921** The Anglo-Irish Treaty establishes the Irish Free State from 26 counties; the six counties of Northern Ireland opt out
- 1922** The Irish Civil War begins; the Four Courts Fire in Dublin destroys many 19th-century historical records
- 1923** The Irish Civil War ends; poet William Butler Yeats wins the Nobel prize for literature
- 1937** The constitution abolishes the Irish Free State and establishes Éire
- 1949** Éire becomes the Republic of Ireland
- 1960s** The Troubles begin in Northern Ireland
- 1972** British troops fire on crowd of civil rights protesters on Bloody Sunday; protesters destroy the British embassy three days later
- 1993** The Prime ministers of Great Britain and Ireland sign a declaration promising peace to Northern Ireland
- 1997** Frank McCourt wins the Pulitzer Prize for *Angela's Ashes*
- 1999** Ireland adopts the euro

RECORDS QUICK GUIDE

CENSUS

- **Dates:** 1901 and 1911 (census were taken every 10 years starting in 1821, but earlier years were lost or destroyed)
- **Privacy Restrictions:** Records from 1921 and later are closed to the public.
- **Research Tip:** Access both available censuses for free online at <www.census.nationalarchives.ie>. Look for tax records as substitutes.

CIVIL REGISTRATION (BIRTH, MARRIAGE, DEATH)

- **Dates:** 1864 to present (Protestant marriages date back to 1845)
- **Privacy Restrictions:** none
- **Research Tip:** The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland began keeping separate civil registrations in 1921. Find civil registration indexes online at FamilySearch <www.familysearch.org> and Ancestry.com <www.ancestry.com>.

PARISH REGISTERS

- **Dates:** vary by denomination, but generally stretch back earlier through the 1800s than civil registrations
- **Privacy Restrictions:** none
- **Research Tip:** Check for online records through <www.rootsireland.ie> and <www.findmypast.co.uk> (both fee-based).

TAX RECORDS

- **Dates:** Tithe applotment books cover 1814–1855; Griffith's Valuation of Ireland covers 1847–1864
- **Privacy Restrictions:** none
- **Research Tip:** These two key tax record groups serve as census substitutes for tracing 19th-century Irish ancestors. See the Griffith's Valuation page for more on this record type, and view tithe applotment books at <titheapplotment.books.nationalarchives.ie> and <www.familysearch.org>.

CENSUS OF IRELAND, 1911.
 Two Examples of the mode of filling up the Form are given on the other side.
FORM A.
 RETURN of the MEMBERS of this FAMILY and their VISITING BOARDERS, SERVANTS, &c., who slept or abode in this House on the night of SUNDAY, the end of APRIL, 1911.
 No. of Form B. _____

NAME AND BIRTHDAY	RELIGION	RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE	REVISIONS	AGE AND SEX	MARRIAGE, MARRIAGE IN PROBATION, OR SINGLE	PARTICULARS AS TO MARRIAGE				MARRIAGE BOND	ISSUE LAWS	MARRIAGE BOND	MARRIAGE BOND
						Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife				
John Barry	Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic	1845	65 M	Married	1865	1865	1865	1865	1865	1865	1865	1865
Mary Barry	Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic	1845	62 F	Married	1865	1865	1865	1865	1865	1865	1865	1865
John Barry	Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic	1875	35 M	Single								
Mary Barry	Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic	1875	32 F	Single								
John Barry	Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic	1880	28 M	Single								
Mary Barry	Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic	1880	25 F	Single								
John Barry	Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic	1885	20 M	Single								
Mary Barry	Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic	1885	17 F	Single								
John Barry	Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic	1890	12 M	Single								
Mary Barry	Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic	1890	9 F	Single								

1911 census return, Dublin County

APPLIEMENT of the Amount of Composition of the payable to the Vicars Choral STEPHEN BARRY 2000.

DESCRIPTION	ACRES	PER ACRE	TOTAL	COMPOSITION	COMPOSITION	TOTAL	REMARKS
Amount bought from the Vicars Choral	100	10	1000	1000	1000	1000	
Amount bought from the Vicars Choral	100	10	1000	1000	1000	1000	
Amount bought from the Vicars Choral	100	10	1000	1000	1000	1000	
Amount bought from the Vicars Choral	100	10	1000	1000	1000	1000	
Amount bought from the Vicars Choral	100	10	1000	1000	1000	1000	

1833 tithe applotment book, Cork County

IRISH GENEALOGY TIPS

1 Know the place. Although online databases and digitized records have made Irish research faster and easier, it's helpful to know from where in Ireland your ancestors came before you begin searching them. A county name is good, but if you can discover the name of the townland—the smallest geographic locality in Ireland, similar to an American neighborhood—that's even better. For more information on the administrative divisions of Ireland, go to www.rootsireland.ie/help/help-administrative-divisions-in-ireland.

4 Be aware of name variants. Sometimes the Irish (or US clerks) who recorded their names, dropped an *O'*, *Mc* or *Mac* surname prefix. You might find your ancestor listed in records variously as O'Riordan and Riordan. When you're searching records and indexes, look for the surname both with the prefix and without it. Also check for alternate spellings in an Irish surname dictionary. McGarr in America could be McGirr in Irish records. The surname MacGanly could also be Gantley, but the Gaelic spelling is Mag Sheanlaioich, so a variant English form is Shanly. And Knockton could be Naughten. Two helpful books to help you sort out Irish surnames are Edward MacLysaght's *The Surnames of Ireland* (Irish Academic Press) and Robert E. Matheson's *Special Report on Surnames in Ireland* (on the free Internet Archive www.archive.org) or in print.

2 Thoroughly research American sources. “Start with what you know and move backward in time” is a basic rule of genealogy. Be sure to research every possible record in the United States for your immigrant ancestor, as well as his family members and associates. Records of those relatives and associates might give you that townland name. And when you search Irish records, those details from your ancestor's and other folks' records can be invaluable. There are thousands of Mary Kellys, Joseph O'Briens and Michael Donovans. Knowing as much as you can about your ancestor from American records can help you make a positive ID in Ireland.

5 Watch for misinterpreted answers. Where do you come from? It seems a simple enough question, but to your ancestors, there were many potentially correct answers. They may have responded with the name of their civil parish as a place of origin on civil documents after immigration. But they're just as likely to have recorded the name of their local Church of Ireland parish or Roman Catholic parish when completing ecclesiastical documents (e.g., noting their place of baptism or marriage, rather than their place of abode or origin). If they took the question literally, they may even have stated their Irish port of embarkation. As a result, don't assume that the town of your ancestor's origin given in records is correct.

According to the company Britain's DNA, 34.7 percent of the Irish population carry genes for red hair. About 10 percent actually are redheads.

3 Tap living relatives. Family members might have clues to where your relatives came from in Ireland, as well as other genealogical leads. Don't overlook childless couples or unmarried relatives. In Irish families, almost as many people stayed single as married, and these maiden aunts and bachelor uncles (and even relatives who became nuns and priests) might be the genealogical gatekeepers.

6 Use gazetteers to find parish names. To identify the name of a Roman Catholic parish for a specific location, search a gazetteer using the name of the civil or Church of Ireland parish, which are usually easy to find. For example, the townland of Curragh near Clonakilty is in the civil parish of Kilkerranmore. Searching this parish name in Samuel Lewis's *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* reveals that Kilkerranmore is “in the barony of Ibane and Barryroe, county of Cork, and province of Munster, 2½ miles (S. by E.) from Clonakilty, on the road from Cork to Skibbereen.” The entry goes on to say: “In the R. C. [Roman Catholic] divisions the parish is partly in the union or district of Rosscarbery, partly in Kilmeen, and partly in Rathbarry,” which means that research for Catholic ancestors in this area will need to cover three parishes: Rosscarbery, Kilmeen, and Rathbarry.

GRIFFITH'S VALUATION

Griffith's *Primary Valuation of Ireland* is perhaps one of the most valuable complete sets of records for Irish research. The multi-volume survey records all of Ireland, organized by barony (1847–1851) or townland (1852–1864). Each page documents the name of the property's occupier, the leaser's name, the acreage, the value of the property, and the amount of tax assessed.

FIND GRIFFITH'S VALUATION ONLINE

Ancestry.com <www.ancestry.com>: Links to Griffith's Valuation images, Griffith's Ordnance Survey maps, and modern Ordnance Survey maps

AskAboutIreland.ie <www.askaboutireland.ie/griffith-valuation/index.xml?action=nameSearch>: Links to Griffith's images and modern maps

FindMyPast.com <www.findmypast.com>: Links to Griffith's images and maps

RootsIreland.ie <www.rootsireland.ie>: Free database to Griffith's Valuation (but no images or maps)

The Valuation distinguishes between renters (Townlands & Occupiers) and landowners (Immediate Lessors).

The Valuation uses now-archaic land-measurement units: the acre (4,840 square yards), the rood (a quarter acre, or 1,210 square yards), and the pole (1/40 of a rood, or 30.25 square yards).

50

Parish of Killeedy

Reference to Map	Names		Description of Tenement	Area	Net Annual	
	Townlands & Occupiers	Immediate Lessors			Land	Buildings
	<i>Killeedy North</i>					
6	Thomas Dunlop	Major R. B. Hammett	Lease-yard	0 3 0	0 10 0	
	Major R. B. Hammett	Thomas M. Dunlop	W. and horse garden			0 7
7	Thomas M. Dunlop	For James Dunlop	Land	125 1 7	38 5 0	38 5 0
	Major R. B. Hammett		Land	57 3 32	18 0 0	18 0 0
8	Thomas M. Dunlop		Woods-horse & office			1 5 0
	Major R. B. Hammett	Major R. B. Hammett	House			1 5 0
	Major R. B. Hammett	Thomas M. Dunlop	House			0 4 0
	Major R. B. Hammett	William Macky	W. office & land	1 4		0 4 0
	Vacant		House			
	Vacant		House			
	Major R. B. Hammett	Major R. B. Hammett	W. office & land	20 1 2		
	Thomas M. Dunlop		W. office & land	31 3 2		
			W. office & land	109 2 0		
		Robert Macky	House			
			House			
	Margaret Fitzgerald		House			0 5 0
	Patrick Reddy		W. & garden	1 0 8	0 1 0	0 8 0
	Thomas M. Dunlop		House			0 9 0
			House			0 4 0
12	John Leane	Major R. B. Hammett & Thomas Dunlop	House and land	21 2 24	12 10 0	0 15 0
			<i>Total</i>	655 2 32	412 13 0	21 2 0
						433 15 0

Each entry includes a reference to a map, which can help you visualize the survey.

Griffith's provides rich details, including a brief description of the land and a statement of taxes owed. This entry was assessed as owing one pound and 15 shillings.

TIPS FOR USING GRIFFITH'S VALUATION

SEARCH FOR NAME VARIANTS.

Spelling hasn't always been standardized, so search the Valuation for various forms of your ancestor's names. Be sure to run searches for names like Connell/O'Connell both with and without apostrophes, as this prefix (along with Mc/Mac) were frequently added and dropped.

COMPARE MAPS.

Many websites that feature Griffith's Valuation will allow you to view the maps Griffith created as he surveyed Ireland, and some even allow you to compare these to modern maps. Doing so will let you see where your ancestor lived in today's context.

MAKE AN EXCEPTION FOR URBAN-DWELLERS.

Griffith's Valuation typically only named one head of household. As a result, your ancestor might not be listed in the Valuation if he lived in a tenement with many people, as the Valuation would have only named one person per property.

COMMON IRISH SURNAMES

In 1847, the first big year of Potato Famine emigration, 37,000 Irish arrived in Boston and 52,000 in New York.

What were the most prominent surnames in Ireland when your ancestors immigrated? In 1890, Irish Registrar-General Robert Matheson authored the *Special Report on Surnames in Ireland* detailing the most common names and their origins. It reflected demographics following the Famine era, when so many Irish emigrated. Below are the top 20 most common Irish surnames.

SURNAME	COMMON VARIATIONS	GAELIC SPELLING	MEANING	COUNTIES WHERE MOST COMMON IN 1800S	RANK IN 1800S
BYRNE	O'Byrne	ó Broin	son of Bran, king of Leinster; raven	Carlow, Dublin, Wexford, Wicklow	7
DOYLE	Dougall, MacDougall	ó Dubhghaill	dark foreigner (likely referring to Vikings)	Carlow, Dublin, Wexford, Wicklow	12
DOHERTY	Daugherty, Docharty, Docherty, Dougherty	ó Dochartaigh	son of Dochartach; unlucky	Derry, Donegal	15
GALLAGHER	Galagher, Gallacher, Gallager, Gallaher, Gallaugher	ó Gallchobhair	lover of foreigners	Donegal, Mayo	14
KELLY	Kelley, Kellie, O'Kelly	ó Ceallaigh	bright or red-headed; strife, contention	Galway, Mayo, Roscommon	2
KENNEDY	Kannady, Kenardy, Kennaday, Kenneday, Kenneyday	ó Cinnéide	helmet head, ugly head	Tipperary	16
LYNCH	Linch, Lynch, Lynche, Linskey, Lynskey	ó Loingsigh	mariner	Cavan, Clare, Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Meath	17
MCCARTHY	Carthy, Carty, MacCarthy, MacCarty, McCarty	Mac Carthaigh	son of Carthaigh; loving	Cork, Kerry	13
MOORE	More	ó Mórdha	son of Mórdha; majestic, proud, stately	Antrim, Down, Tyrone	20
MURPHY	Murphie	ó Murchadha, MacMurchadha	sea warrior	Cork, Kilkenny, Wexford	1
MURRAY	MacMurray, McMurray, Moray, Murray, Murrey	ó Muireadhaigh	son of the follower of the Virgin Mary; sea settlement	Cork, Down, Galway, Meath, Roscommon	18
O'BRIEN	Brien	ó Briain	son of Brian (referring to Brian Boru); exalted one, eminence	Clare, Cork, Limerick, Tipperary	6
O'CONNOR	Conner, Conor, Connor, Connors, O'Conner	ó Conchobhair	patron of warriors; lover of hounds	Cork, Kerry, Galway, Wexford	9
O'NEILL	Neill, O'Neile, O'Neal	ó Néill	champion; from Niall of the Nine Hostages	Antrim, Cork, Kilkenny, Tyrone, Wicklow	10
O'REILLY	Reilly	ó Raghailigh	sociable tribe or group	Cavan, Meath	11
O'SULLIVAN	Sullivan	ó Súilleabháin	dark, hawk-eyed	Cork, Kerry, Tipperary	3
QUINN	O'Quinn, MacQuinn	ó Cuinn	wisdom, chief	Galway, Tipperary, Tyrone	19
RYAN	Rian	ó Maoilriaghain	little king	Kilkenny, Limerick, Tipperary	8
SMITH	Smithe, Smythe	Mac Gabhann	son of the smith	Antrim, Cavan, Down, Meath	5
WALSH	Brannagh, Walsh, Walshe, Walch, Welch, Welche, Welsh, Wellish	Breatnach	from Wales	Cork, Galway, Kerry, Kilkenny, Mayo, Wexford	4

Websites

Ancestry.com: Irish Records

<www.ancestry.com/irish>

AskAboutIreland: Griffith's Valuation

<www.askaboutireland.ie/griffith-valuation/index.xml>

Belfast Newsletter Index, 1737–1800

<www.ucs.louisiana.edu/bnl>

Cyndi's List: Ireland and Northern Ireland

<www.cyndislist.com/ireland.htm>

Emerald Ancestors

<www.emeraldancestors.com>

Eneclann

<www.eneclann.ie>

FamilySearch Wiki: Ireland

<www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Ireland_Genealogy>

Fianna Guide to Irish Genealogy

<rootsweb.ancestry.com/~fianna>

Findmypast Ireland

<www.findmypast.ie>

GENUKI: Ireland

<www.genuki.org.uk/big/irl>

Griffith's Valuation, 1848–1864

<www.failteromhat.com/griffiths.php>

Immigrants at Grosse Île Quarantine Station, 1832–1937

<www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/immigration-records/immigrants-grosse-ile-1832-1937/Pages/immigrants-grosse-ile.aspx>

Information Wanted: A Database of Advertisements for Irish Immigrants Published in the Boston Pilot

<dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/UNJU3N>

Ireland Old News

<www.irelandoldnews.com>

The Ireland Story

<www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland>

Ireland's History in Maps

<rootsweb.ancestry.com/~irlkik/ihm>

Irish Genealogy

<www.irishgenealogy.ie>

Irish Genealogy News

<www.irishgenealogynews.com>

Irish History Links

<www.irishhistorylinks.net>

Irish Times Digital Archive

<www.irishtimes.com/archive>

National Archives and Records Administration: Irish Famine Immigrants Search

<aad.archives.gov/aad/fielded-search.jsp?dt=180&>

National Archives of Ireland: 1901 and 1911 censuses

<www.census.nationalarchives.ie>

RootsIreland.ie

<www.rootsireland.ie>

Ulster Historical Foundation

<www.ancestryireland.com>

What's What in Irish Genealogy

<indigo.ie/~gorry>

Books

Army Records for Family Historians

by Simon Fowler and William Spencer (Public Records Office)

Directory of Irish Archives, 3rd edition,

edited by S. Helferty and R. Refaüssé (Irish Academic Press)

The Family Tree Irish Genealogy Guide

by Claire Santry (Family Tree Books)

Finding Your Irish Ancestors:

A Beginner's Guide by David S. Ouimette (Ancestry)

Genealogy at a Glance: Irish Genealogy Research

by Brian Mitchell (Genealogical Publishing Co.)

The Great Famine and the Irish Diaspora in America

edited by Arthur Gribben and Ruth-Ann Harris (University of Massachusetts Press)

A Guide to Irish Parish Registers

by Brian Mitchell (Genealogical Publishing Co.)

The Irish in America: A Guide to the Literature and the Manuscript Collections

by Patrick J. Blessing (Catholic University of America Press)

Irish Christian Names: An A-Z of

First Names by Ronan Coghlan (Johnston and Bacon)

Irish Church Records edited by James G. Ryan (Irish Books & Medi)

The Irish Diaspora: A Primer by Donald Harman Akenson (P.D. Meany Publishers)

In Search of Your British & Irish Roots by Angus Baxter (Genealogical Publishing Co.)

Varieties and Synonyms of Surnames and Christian Names in Ireland by Robert E. Matheson (Genealogical Publishing Co.)

Sources for Irish Genealogy in the Library of the Society of Genealogists, 2nd edition, by Anthony J. Camp (Society of Genealogists)

A New Genealogical Atlas of Ireland by Brian Mitchell (Genealogical Publishing Co.)

The Surnames of Ireland, 6th edition by Edward MacLysaght (Irish Academic Press)

Tracing Your Irish Ancestors,

5th edition by John Grenham (Genealogical Publishing Co.)

Organization and Archives

The Irish Ancestral Research Association <www.tiara.ie>

Irish Genealogical Society International <www.irishgenealogical.org>

General Register Office (Republic of Ireland) <www.groireland.ie>

General Register Office of Northern Ireland <www.nidirect.gov.uk/general-register-office-for-northern-ireland>

National Archives of Ireland <www.nationalarchives.ie>

National Library of Ireland <www.nli.ie>

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland <www.proni.gov.uk>

Registry of Deeds <www.prai.ie>

Representative Church Body Library <www.ireland.anglican.org/about/about-us>