



Beginner's Guide to Family History

Heritage Week 2014 – Saturday 23rd August, Lackagh Parish Centre

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: family history records are documented according to *civil administrative divisions*, as follows.

County: The principal unit of local government; derived from the shire system in England.

Barony: The basis for land division and ownership first introduced in the 12th century by Henry II and the Norman barons. If a barony spans two counties, it is known as a half-barony.

Poor Law Union: Established under the Poor Law Act 1838 for the administration of distress relief. The country was divided into 163 PLUs, and each had a workhouse – see www.workhouses.org.uk.

District Electoral Divisions: A sub-division of the PLU. DEDs were used for compiling census data and for elections of local and national representatives; 3751 DEDs in the country.

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). RC parish boundaries rarely conform to the civil parish even if they have the same name. Caution – 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; only placenames were used pre-1851; 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. For example 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, for example, Thomas is often written 'Thos'.

Civil records of births, deaths and marriages, commencing in 1864, are available by post from the General Register Office at Convent Road, Roscommon (see 'Apply for Certificates' at www.groireland.ie). Note that photocopies of the records (currently €4) are sufficient for research. Indexes to civil records up to 1958 are available on familysearch.org.

Church records (baptisms and marriages) are the principal source of information prior to 1864. Records for most parishes are available on microfilm at the National Library of Ireland (see www.nli.ie). Records for many parishes are transcribed (no original images) on the pay site www.rootsireland.ie. Record transcriptions are also available from Galway Family History Society West Ltd. and East Galway Family History Society Co. Ltd. Church marriage records often provide valuable information if the bride and groom were related.

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

Of particular interest on the FamilySearch site are the Irish Civil Registration Indexes, 1845-1958 and birth record transcriptions for 1864-1881. A list of Irish record collections can be viewed by clicking 'Browse All Published Collections' on the main search page, and then selecting '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 heads of households with acreage, land and building valuation. It is available at Galway County Library and for free online at www.askaboutireland.ie. Revisions to the records (changes in occupiers) can be viewed 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.

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 available on microfilm at the NAI (District Registries only). Original wills from 1900-1974 are also available 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.

A month's subscription is available for €14.95. Again, those availing of this should go to the page entitled 'Personal Details' which can be found under 'My Account', and untick the 'Auto-renew my subscription' box followed by 'Update details'; if you do not do this your subscription will renew automatically and you will be charged for subsequent months.

WFHA Library: 300 Books and CDs published by eminent authors on genealogy, family history research and heritage, are available for loan to members, see www.wfha.info for a full list of titles.

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 not available for all parishes. The records 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, 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 at the County Library, Island House, Galway. Available online at www.nationalarchives.ie and www.familysearch.org.

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 at the NAI.

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.

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 www.valoff.ie.

Graveyards: Church registers did not include burials until the early 1900s. Some graveyards have been digitised, e.g. Galway County Council, see www.galway.ie/en/services/heritage/graveyards. Many graveyards around the country have been surveyed by FÁS Schemes and by volunteers. County Libraries should be consulted.

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.

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.

Emigrants – Ireland Reaching Out:

www.irelandXO.com – set up for organising the Irish Diaspora worldwide, to connect people of Irish heritage abroad back to the Irish parish of their ancestors.

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 www.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 www.genealogylinks.net. This site includes large sets of data, e.g. the Galway Emigrant Index 1828 to 1866 and later.

Disclaimer: The WFHA does not endorse any external websites referred to in this guide.

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For more information on the Western Family History Association, see our website at www.wfha.info. Contact: info@wfha.info.

New members are always welcome.

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Prepared by Paul Greaney & Sean Flanagan.

