

Session 5: Making the Leap: Organizing Your Irish Research

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When we think of organizing our genealogical research, we think of compiling family charts and group sheets, maintaining research logs, and entering all our data into a genealogy software program. When approaching Irish research for the first time, organizing also includes arming yourselves with as much information as possible before jumping into the records. There's a learning curve to the Irish genealogical research process and taking a step back to identify the records needed, understand what they contain and how to use them effectively will better prepare you for the research journey ahead.

Our objectives

1. Outlining your research goals.
2. Understanding the link between the history of Ireland and its records.
3. Examining some "go-to" published and online resources.
4. Taking a closer look at records held in local county libraries and archives.

Three Major Religions of Ireland

Anglo-Irish

- Professional and landed class
- Members of the Church of Ireland
 - Church records organized by parish. Boundaries conform to Civil Parish
- Historically opposed to Home Rule and Irish independence

The Church of Ireland (COI) was the Established Church of the country until 1869. Its records start earlier than the Catholic or Presbyterian church records. Unfortunately, the Four Courts Fire in 1922 destroyed nearly half of their records, however there are transcripts of some of the destroyed parishes. Also, some COI churches did not deposit their records in the Four Courts, Dublin. Many of the County Heritage Centers have indexed Church of Ireland records on <https://www.rootsireland.ie/>

Tip – Use surviving COI vestry books to look for information on the poor in the area!

Roman Catholics

- Descend from Gaelic clans and Sept system
- Subjected to penal laws because of the English plantation of Ireland

Due to the events of the 17th and 18th centuries, most Roman Catholic records begin in the 1820s and 1830s although some in the poorer areas of the West of Ireland (Donegal, Mayo, etc.) start later. There are some Irish customs and traditions related to births, marriages, and deaths researchers should be aware of:

- The bride married in the parish where she was baptized
- First child (children) baptized in mother's parish
- Burial sometimes occurs outside the area where they lived; tap into local knowledge to find out where the burials are or try the website, *Ireland Reaching Out* <https://irelandxo.com/> to contact local volunteers in your ancestor's parish



- Poor and landless peoples did not usually erect headstones for their dead

Presbyterians

- Dissenters – refusal to follow Church of Ireland rites
- Subject to same penal laws as Catholics

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland was established by Scots during the plantation of Ulster in the 17th century with the majority settling in the counties of Antrim and Down. Many Presbyterian church records do not begin until the 1820s and 1830s. It was illegal until 1782 for a Presbyterian clergyman to perform marriages. Unlike Civil Parish and Roman Catholic parishes there are no set parish boundaries. Brian Mitchell's book the *New Genealogical Atlas of Ireland* does have Presbyterian parish maps which can be helpful when working with Presbyterian church records.

Tip – Look for your early Presbyterian ancestors in Church of Ireland records!

Naming patterns and variations

You will find when searching in Irish records that you must dispel the notion that your O'Reilly family always spelled their name O-R-E-I-L-L-Y. You will soon discover that the surname in Irish records could be spelled many ways: Riley, Riely, etc. and frequently without the O. Therefore, keep an open mind when searching. Most Irish record databases will search for surname variants except for the National Archives of Ireland genealogy website. When searching their databases, you will have to use variant spellings of your ancestor's surname.

The practice of naming children after grandparents, parents, and other family members was quite prevalent in Ireland from the 18th century to about the middle of the 20th century. Knowing the naming practices can be especially helpful for your family history research when you know the first-born son is named after the paternal grandfather. This practice was not limited to Roman Catholics and was used by other denominations.

Helpful online tools for surname and given name variants:

- Irish Ancestors Surname database provides surname variants, a surname distribution map, and the ability to cross reference a second surname to identify specific parishes where the two surnames occur, <https://www.johngrenham.com/>
- Given names also have variants and nicknames frequently used in official records. Many Roman Catholic records used Latin form of given names. A very helpful tool is Dennis Hogan's online spreadsheet, *Given Name Alternatives in Irish Research*, www.dennisahogan.com.

Create a list of “Go-to” online and published sources

It will be helpful to create a toolkit for yourself of published and online sources that will become your “go-to” sources when searching for your Irish ancestors. Here are some that I recommend:

- Grenham, John. *Tracing Your Irish Ancestors: The Complete Guide*. 5th ed. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, Ltd., 2019.
- Daly, Marie E. *The Genealogist's Handbook for Irish Research*. Boston, Mass.: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2016.
- Milner, Paul. Paul's detailed and informative handout on Irish immigration to North America can be found online at http://broadcast.lds.org/elearning/fhd/community/en/community/paul_milner/irish_migration_to_na-2011.pdf
- Mitchell, Brian. *A New Genealogical Atlas of Ireland*. 2nd ed. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co. Inc., 2002.
- Roulston, William. *Researching Scots Irish Ancestors: The Essential Genealogical Guide to Early Modern Ulster, 1600-1800*. 2nd ed. Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2019.
- “How to” research guides” for various counties in the Republic of Ireland, published by Flyleaf Press.
- Ask About Ireland is a free website whereby Ireland's public libraries and local archives and museums offer local history, and cultural information through the digitization of unique and unusual material from their local studies collections. <https://www.askaboutireland.ie/>
- Irish Ancestors is a helpful website for parish maps and identifying available records by county, so you know where to find them, and the time period covered. There are also many chapters from his book that can be found on this site <https://www.johngrenham.com/>
- The Irish Genealogy Toolkit is a very user-friendly website owned by Claire Santry who offers a free online guide to Irish family history research. <https://www.irish-genealogy-toolkit.com/>
- Irish Townlands, is an open street map project mapping of the townlands of Ireland, <https://www.townlands.ie/>
- Documenting Ireland: Parliament, People and Migration, is an online (free) virtual archive of documents and sources relating to the history of Ireland and its migration experience from the 18th to late 20th centuries, <http://www.dippam.ac.uk/>
- Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) Whether your ancestors left in 1750 or 1920, the website for the official archive of Northern Ireland should be one of your first stops of your online journey when exploring resources for your Ulster ancestors. It has several online databases including pre-1840 Freeholders lists, wills, and some 18th century census substitutes, as well as online guides to much of their collection, <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/proni>.
- Registry of Deeds Online Index Project Ireland is an ongoing project by volunteers to index all the names that appear in the memorial books (abstracts of land transactions, other deeds, wills and marriage settlements) <https://irishdeedsindex.net/index.php>

Mining the records of local county archives and libraries

Prior to the digitization of so many Irish records, local county archives and libraries took a backseat to the major repositories in Dublin and Belfast – but no more! Many local records are not online and Irish genealogists seeking to dig deeper should explore the resources of these repositories.

Records they may have:

- Records of the Poor Law (Workhouse records). These records may contain:
 - Indoor relief registers.
 - Infirmary and hospital records.
 - Death registers (pre-date 1864).
 - Board of Guardian minutes and correspondence.
- Small family estate records.
- Grand Jury records (some date back to 18thc.).
- Family and local history materials.

“Catch-All” records

Sometimes the traditional sources, such as church records, fail to provide the information we are looking for so we must turn to other records that have captured large segments of the Irish population. Here are a few to consider:

- Valuation Office Records, more commonly known as Griffith’s Valuation, is a property tax survey carried out in the mid-19th century and published between 1847-1864. It documents about 80% of the population. The Valuation Office records include the Valuation notebooks from 1830-1856, and the printed Griffith’s Primary Valuation, 1847-1864, as well as the subsequent cancellation books. With these records, family historians can trace an ancestor’s property well into the 20th century. A complete set with the original maps can be found at <https://www.findmypast.com/>
- Petty Sessions court records, 1827-1924 The Petty sessions courts handled lesser offenses such as drunkenness, domestic disputes, and other offenses. Believe it or not you may find your Irish ancestors in some of these records! The Irish was brought before the courts for the slightest infractions. Once hidden away at the National Archives of Ireland, they are now online at <https://www.findmypast.com/>
- Dog Licenses were introduced into Irish law in 1865. Many Irish of all classes had dogs. Various breeds were used for hunting, farming, or as guard dogs. These records provide name, address, county, year dog licenses were issued, and, of course, a description of the dog <https://www.findmypast.com/>

Conclusion

Arming yourself with the tools and information you need and doing as much work on this side of the Atlantic will pay off in the long run. Don’t be disappointed if you can’t trace your James O’Brien all the way back to Brian Boru! Just remember that Irish genealogical research holds the possibility of being able to stand on the land or walk through the doorway where your ancestor once lived. It can’t get any better than that!