

# Using Irish Land Records in your Family History Research

## *Class 1: An Introduction to Griffith's Valuation*

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The loss of the 19th-century Irish census records presents challenges for genealogists who are attempting to put families together and link one generation to another. Genealogists researching this period will need to turn to property and valuation records as a “census substitute”. The most important of these is Griffith's Primary Valuation, published between 1847 and 1864. This often-under-utilized resource by genealogists serves as an entryway to 19th-century ancestral research. If used strictly as a census substitute, one may not realize the information that can be gleaned from it. As one digs deeper, the details can uncover possible family relationships and assist the genealogist in piecing together clues to develop effective research strategies to overcome some of the records destroyed in 1922.

### **Background on Taxation in Ireland and the Valuation of Ireland**

To use these records, it's important to understand the historical context of why they were created. In the early 19th-century, Ireland's property taxes were valued by a local Grand Jury system. The grand jury consisted of nearly two dozen of the largest landholders in the county. Each grand jury had its own unique practice for determining a tax thus causing disproportion in the overall tax system and resentment by landowners and tenants.

The unfairness of these taxes upon the occupiers set in motion a series of land valuation surveys by the British government. To carry out a valuation of this magnitude, all of Ireland needed to be mapped and fixed boundaries set. This was carried out by the Ordnance Survey of Ireland and the Boundary Commission. Sir Richard Griffith, an Irish-born civil engineer and geologist, was appointed Boundary Commissioner in 1824 and Commissioner of Valuation in 1830.

There were three property valuations acts, and each produced its own set of records that genealogists should be aware of. They are:

- The Townland Valuation of 1826
- Tenement Valuation of 1846
- Tenement Valuation of 1852

The printed Griffith's Valuation, 1847 to 1864 is based on the Tenement Valuations of 1846 and 1852. Griffith's Valuation is arranged by county, barony, poor law union, civil parish, and townland.

## **Tithe Applotment Books, 1823–1837**

Occupiers of agricultural lands over one acre had to pay a tithe on one tenth on the produce of their land. This tax went to support the clergy of the Church of Ireland, the Established church. In 1823 Parliament passed the Tithe Composition Act, which required that tithes be paid in cash and no longer paid “in kind” as had been done in the past. To implement this new system, a country-wide survey of all agricultural land was conducted to determine how much tithe each occupier had to pay. These surveys were recorded in what is known as the Tithe Applotment Books. These books are arranged by civil parish and townland.

### **Where will you find them?**

The Tithe Applotment Books are available online at:

- [Nationalarchives.ie](http://Nationalarchives.ie)
  - Republic of Ireland only with some border parishes
- [Public Record Office of Northern Ireland](http://PublicRecordOfficeofNorthernIreland) (PRONI) via their online catalog
- [Familysearch.org](http://Familysearch.org) has same database as National Archives of Ireland
  - Northern Ireland can only be accessed at the FHL Library or affiliate locations
- Originals can be found at:
  - PRONI, Belfast
  - National Archives, Dublin
- Microfilms for all Ireland:
  - National Library of Ireland
  - National Archives of Ireland
  - American Ancestors (currently offsite)
  - Family History Library

### **What will you find in them?**

- Name of occupier
- Name of townland
- Size and quality of area land
- The amount of tithes payable
- Sometimes the landowner is listed

### **Strengths and weaknesses of the Tithes:**

#### **STRENGTHS**

- One of the earliest records representing the poor in Ireland
- May be the only record for parishes where no pre-1850 church registers exist.
- May be only record set to identify an ancestor who left before Great Famine

#### **WEAKNESSES**

- Not every occupier like Griffith’s Valuation
- Does not include cities and towns.
- No standard format – survey varies from county to county, parish to parish.
- Issues with place names

*Note to researchers:* You may discover an ancestor in a particular townland in the tithes and then discover when working with later 19th-century records such as Griffith's Primary Valuation, you are unable to locate the townland or the parish. This is because much of the Tithe Applotment Survey was created before the standardization of place names by the Ordnance Survey in the 1830s. As a possible workaround you can try the following:

- Obtain list of townlands in that civil parish. Use John Grenham's site [www.johngrenham.com](http://www.johngrenham.com) or <https://www.townlands.ie/>
- Note the total acreage recorded in the tithes as well as the surnames of occupiers; can you locate the townland with this information in Griffith's?
- Once you have located the standardized version of the name, use the online place name database [www.logainm.ie](http://www.logainm.ie); a valuable tool for learning more about specific placenames in Ireland. Once you enter the townland name and date, scroll down to find a list of "textual records" which will provide all former spellings and variations of the townland in archival records.
- PlaceNames of Northern Ireland should be used if you have ancestors from the six counties of present-day Northern Ireland:  
<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/9b31e0501b744154b4584b1dce1f859b>

## Understanding Griffith's Valuation

The printed books of Griffith's Valuation summarize the details gathered by the valuers for each holding in every townland and civil parish in Ireland. The information found in each column is as follows:

- |                                          |                                       |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Number and letter of Reference to Map | 5. Areas in Acres, Roods, Perches     |
| 2. Names of Townland and Occupiers       | 6. Rateable Annual Valuation of Land  |
| 3. Names of Immediate Lessors            | 7. Rateable Annual Value of Buildings |
| 4. Description of Tenement               | 8. Total Annual Value                 |

## Who is not in Griffith's Primary Valuation?

While Griffith's Primary Valuation records every occupier of a holding, there are some instances where names will not be listed. These include:

- City dwellers living in "flats" or apartments; Griffith's Valuation only lists "Lodgers" next to occupiers' names
- "Unnamed occupiers" in Griffiths are usually associated with occupations; you will see examples in the printed valuations with terms in the section "Description of Tenement" such as "gardeners", "herd's house", "cottier's house", or "laborers"

## Uncovering your ancestor's socio-economic status

The records created during the valuation can assist family historians with learning more about what life was like in 19th-century Ireland, how our ancestors made a living, and what kind of house they lived in. We may be able to get some answers to these questions by examining the information in columns 6 to 8. Identifying the value of the house and land will give you some idea of your ancestor's living conditions.

- If your ancestor's house was valued at 15s, 10s, 8s, or less:
  - One or two room structure with mud walls with a thatched or turf roof
- If your ancestor was living on less than five acres:
  - They are frequently referred to as a cottier or laborer, a landless person renting and cultivating a small holding; in some situations, the laborer did not pay in cash but by working the landlord's land for a few pence a day
  - Tenancy was "year by year" or sometimes referred to as "tenant at will"; it didn't mean that you could be thrown off the land at whim by the landowner!
- Houses with an annual valuation between £2 and £5:
  - Walls built of stone or brick
  - Thatch roof; some might have a second level or "dormer"
  - Occupiers of lots between five and thirty acres were small or medium farms and usually paid their rent in cash; an occupier considered to be a medium farmer usually had a lease while a small farmer, like the cottier or laborer, rented from "year to year"

## The use of Agnomens in Griffith's

One of the most valuable features in Griffith's Valuation is the use of agnomens or additional names. Family historians will find these names provide helpful clues when trying to ascertain relationships. Agnomens will appear in parentheses next to the name in the occupier column. Some examples of agnomens you will see in Griffith's Valuation:

- "Junior- Senior" – One of the more frequently used agnomens is the use of Junior-Senior. This usually denotes a father-son relationship between two men of the same name in a townland. You will also see this used with women as well. It could mean a mother-daughter relationship or mother-daughter-in-law relationship. These terms are abbreviated as (sen) and (jun) in Griffith's.
- "Junior" – There are cases where you will see Junior used with a name but there is no senior or anyone by the same name in the townland. Why would this be? The most likely explanation is that there are two men (or two women) of the same name in the same household, but Junior is the person responsible for paying the rent thus appearing in the occupier column.
- Another way to distinguish between men of the same name in a townland was to use their father's given name. Griffith's teams of valuers were native born Irishmen and understood traditional naming practices.
- Maiden names of women were frequently used to distinguish between widows of the same name.

- Occupations were used as agnomens as well. Terms such as weaver or forge (a blacksmith) can be found in Griffith's. Physical characteristics were used to distinguish individuals of the same name. You will sometimes come across (red) or (black). This represents hair color. Terms such as (big) and (little), (tall) and (short) were also used. Topographic features such as (road) or (hill) could also be used as agnomens.
- Townland names may be recorded after an occupier's name indicating the occupier holds land in that townland but lives in another.

## Legal Terms Used in Griffith's Valuation

Legal terms used in Griffith's can also be helpful for genealogists in learning more about an ancestor. They can be found in the Occupier or Immediate Lessor columns. Some you may come across are:

**In fee** - appears in the Immediate Lessor column and indicates that the occupier in column two owns the land. If you find the term being used with titled individuals such as the Earl of Antrim or Duke of Manchester, then you should see if estate papers have survived and are available in a repository in Ireland or England. Estate papers can contain information about the tenants of these properties and provide valuable insights into our ancestors' lives.

**Reps of** is an abbreviation for "representatives of". When you see this term in the Occupier or Immediate Lessor column, for example, "Reps of Michael Tobin" it usually means the individual, Michael Tobin, was deceased at the time of the valuation. The representatives on Michael Tobin's behalf are representing his legal interests in the property. These can be family members or an executor of an estate.

Possible other meanings for Reps of:

- The heir to the property is underage.
- The owner was incapacitated in some way mentally.
- The estate may be bankrupt.

Regardless of the meaning, the term suggests that additional research in other records is needed.

## Court of Chancery or In Chancery

If the term "in chancery" or "Court of Chancery" is listed regarding the landlord or, it indicates that this parcel of land or property is under the jurisdiction of the Law Courts. There may be some sort of litigation in process, or the landlord may have died, and the courts are making the decisions. Either way it would indicate that there may be a paper trail. Unfortunately, the Court of Chancery and its records were housed in the Four Courts and many of their records were destroyed in 1922. However, not all is lost. Some extracts of records have survived and can be found in the searchable database, Court of Chancery Bill Books, 1627-1884 on <https://www.findmypast.com/>

**Free** – a term used in rural and urban areas and found in the Immediate Lessor column. Griffith's instructions for the use of this term are "person who holds by right of possession, and recognize no landlord, their tenure shall be free." Usually referred to in layman's terms as a "squatter."

## **Glossary of Terms from the online article, "Is There More in Griffith's Valuation Than Just Names?" by James Reilly, CGRS**

**Occupier** - The individual or corporation who owns, leases or rents a tenement, commonly called a holding, and is financially responsible for the taxes levied on the tenement.

**Tenement** - Under the Act 15 & 16 Vic., c. 63 (Valuation of Rateable Property Act) a tenement is any taxable property (building structure and land) that is held or possessed for any time period (term), whether owned, leased, rented (tenure) for not less than year to year. One person may hold several distinct tenements and several persons may hold one tenement. Instructions to Valuers and Surveyors, 1852.

**Barony** - Historically based on original Gaelic family territory by the Anglo-Norman occupiers. 273 in number, their boundaries can cross county and civil parish lines.

**Civil parish** - Together with the townland the civil parish is a key administrative division of land for the researcher. Based on early medieval monastic and church settlements, its boundaries essentially reflect the area covered by the ecclesiastical parishes of the Protestant Church of Ireland. Roman Catholic parishes are infrequently coterminous with them. "Parish" in research customarily means civil not church parish. Numbering 2,508 (Mitchell, A New Genealogical Atlas of Ireland, 1986), they frequently cross both barony and county borders. Occasionally a civil parish is divided into several separate parts!

**Townland** - Area of land such as family farms or groups of farms. The smallest of the governmental administrative districts, it frequently takes its name from physical characteristics of the area, from ruins of churches and forts, and from clan and family surnames.

**Cottager** - A peasant who occupies a cottage belonging to a farm, sometimes with a plot of land attached, for which the cottager must give or provide labor on the farm, at a fixed rate, when required. In Ireland, a peasant renting and cultivating a small holding under a system called cottier tenure. The main feature of this system was the letting of the land annually in small portions directly to laborers, the rent being fixed not by private agreement but by public competition. (Oxford English Dictionary, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1933)

**Immediate Lessor** - The person or corporation to whom the rent is paid. This may be a landowner or middleman.

**Cottier/laborer** - A peasant renting and cultivating a small holding whose rent was fixed not by private agreement between the cottier/laborer and the landlord but by the landlord conducting a public auction of the holding to the highest bidder.

**Acreage** - Griffith measured land in the Valuation by statute acre, rood and perch; an acre contained 4,840 square yards regardless of its shape; a rood was one-quarter of an acre of 1,210 square yards; a perch was one fortieth of a rood containing thirty square yards.

**Lease** - The term of a lease was frequently twenty-one years (a lease of years). More often its length was set by the number of years remaining in the lives of three named individuals (a lease of lives) agreed upon by the landlord and tenant. Although not required, the three lives usually included the lessee, the lessee's youngest child and a third person. It was not unheard of for the third person to be the reigning monarch or a royal child. The lease remained in force and the rent agreement unchanged until the death of the last-named person.

**Shilling** - In mid-nineteenth century Ireland twelve pence (d) equaled one shilling (s), twenty shillings equaled one pound (£). For example, £10-11s-3d + £2-10s-11d = £13-2s-2d.

**Quality lot** - The parts of a holding distinguished by the quality of the soil for valuation purposes.

## Further Reading

Grenham, John. "What is Griffith's Valuation?" <http://www.askaboutireland.ie/reading-room/history-heritage/irish-genealogy/what-is-griffiths-valuation/>

Paton, Chris. *Tracing Your Irish Ancestors Through Land Records: a Guide for Family Historians*. Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2021.

McGee, Frances. *The Archives of the Valuation of Ireland 1830-1865*. Dublin; Four Courts Press, 2018.

Reilly, James R. "Is There More to Griffith's than Just Names?" <http://www.leitrim-roscommon.com/GRIFFITH/Griffiths.PDF>

Reilly, James R. *Richard Griffith and his Valuations of Ireland: with, An Inventory of the Books of the General Valuation of Rateable Property in Ireland*. Baltimore, Md.: Printed for Clearfield Company by Genealogical Pub. Co., 2000.