

Beginners Guide to Irish Ancestry

Tracing

Many people are discouraged from any attempt to trace Irish forbears because they imagine or have been told that it is impossible.

All family history research, no matter where based, starts with parents, grandparents etc. So even before you look at any Irish source:-
Gather as much information as you can about names, dates and places from older members of your family. If you have a family photograph collection put names to faces whilst your elders are still around. You will be able at this stage to draw up a simple family tree.

Check civil registration, parish registers for births/baptisms, marriages and deaths/burials. Even having obtained a certificate, it is often worthwhile to look at the parish registers, if possible, especially if the family were Catholics. Additional information may be recorded, e.g. a marriage entry may show both parents' names and place of residence, perhaps in Ireland. Check the cemetery for grave inscriptions, or burial records; other previously unknown members of the family may be buried in the same grave. Remember that the office staff may not have time to deal with your enquiry immediately and there may be a fee payable.

Check newspapers if birth/marriage/death announcements were a family practice. A sudden death or accident may carry a report about the inquest.

Check census returns 1841 – 1901 for the town/village where your people lived. You may be lucky enough to find the county/town/parish in Ireland where they came from – not just

Ireland which is often all that many of us know about our Irish ancestors' place of origin. Remember also, like many immigrants, the Irish tended to live in the same districts as their friends and relatives from the same part of Ireland. If you have no address to start with, look for the Irish parts of a town. Use any finding aid such as a census surname index if one has been published. It will cut down time and effort.

Keep in mind the variant spellings of a surname, and try to imagine how an Irish person would pronounce the surname. Researching sideways into brothers/sisters of ancestors may reveal information not found in the direct line.

Town directories may be useful, especially if your ancestor was in business.

If an ancestor was in the Police, Army or Post Office service, check these records. They often list place of birth, family details and employment history. Parish magazines, parish and other local histories may list names. A student may have deposited with the local library or record office a thesis on the history of the Irish in a local town or parish.

Keep all family stories at the back of your mind. Many of the details may prove to be incorrect, but there will be some truth there.

In short, you will start your Irish family history researches in exactly the same way as for British ancestry. This list does not aim to be a comprehensive one, but gives a few pointers as to where to begin, even before you look at the Irish records.

Other protestant or non-conformist congregations in Ireland eg: Methodist, Presbyterian or Quaker, also kept their own records, though the first two often used the Church of Ireland for family ceremonies. For

information about these congregations in Ireland and their records, see John Grenham's book *Tracing Your Irish Ancestors*. His book also has information on Quaker records which are deposited in the library of the Society of Friends in Dublin and Lisburn.

Any book on tracing Irish Ancestry, including John Grenham's noted above, will give research information about church records including Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland records. Before the start of civil registration for all in 1864, virtually the only direct sources of family information for the vast majority of the population are the local parish records. However, because of the disadvantages suffered by the Catholic Church from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, record-keeping was understandably difficult, and very few registers survive from before the latter half of the eighteenth century. Roman Catholic registers consist mostly of baptismal and marriage records. The keeping of burial records was much less thorough than in the Church of Ireland, with fewer than half the parishes in the country having a register of burials before 1900, even where they do exist, these records are generally intermittent and patchy.

Microfilm copies up to 1880 are kept in Dublin, and many may be searched at a family history centre of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Mormons.

Irish Ancestry Group

Branch Information

The group was established in July 1996 and is one of the branches of the Lancashire Family History & Heraldry Society. The group meets six times a year on a Saturday afternoon at the society's Resource Centre, 2 The Straits, Oswaldtwistle, BB5 3LU.

Information about meeting dates, times and programme can be found on the society's website; www.lffhs.org.uk under the branch tab (Irish Ancestry).

It is also available in the journal "Lancashire" published quarterly by the society; copies can be obtained by applying to the society's Resource Centre address listed above.

The group has a growing reference library of research aids for tracing Irish ancestry. The majority covers Southern Ireland, with some journal and reference books for Northern Ireland. The resource centre is equipped with computers with Internet access together with helpful volunteers to assist with your research.

The library is always available at meetings or at other times by arrangement. Unfortunately, we cannot carry out research for members but will willingly give advice and guidance. All LFHHS members are automatically entitled to be part of the group and attend meetings.

Lancashire Family History & Heraldry Society

Formed in 1973 as the Rossendale Society for Genealogy and Heraldry (Lancashire), the Society now has thirteen branches in Lancashire, together with one in London where members meet regularly. The society also has a worldwide community of family historians with roots in Lancashire. Please check out the benefits of membership for yourself by visiting the society's website.

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