Introduction in Irish Genealogy

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Heraldry and Genealogy Society of Canberra in association with

ACT Heritage Library

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About me

- Doing genealogy for over 30 years
- Reddan is an Irish name from county Clare
- President and webmaster of HAGSOC for the past 6 years
- Maintain several genealogical websites with a focus on Irish
- Created and maintains the Registry of Deeds Index Project Ireland. The main database has over 320,000 records
- A fellow of the Irish Genealogical Research Society since 2007

Where do you start?

- We always start with what we know and work back from there
- Why do you think your ancestors were Irish?
- When and how did your Irish ancestors get to Australia?
- Convict, Assisted or free?
- What is the location in Ireland that they were connected to?
- Paddy Murphy from Ireland is not much help.

Historical context for Ireland

- After the rebellion 1641 Cromwell subdued the country in 1649
- Thereafter there was a climate of suppression of Catholics
- There was the transplantation to Connaught granting of land to protestant soldiers for pay
- The Glorious Revolution ousted James II and put William and Mary on the throne
- The Ascendency enacted a number of laws (Called the Penal laws) that restricted employment and land tenure of Catholics
- These started to be weakened in the 1780s but were not removed completely intil the mid 1800s

Administration of Ireland

- Prior to the union in 1801 Ireland had its own parliament
- After the Union, Ireland was part of the United Kingdom
- The civil administration control gradually moved to London with some of the records
- In 1921, 26 counties of Ireland became the Irish Free State (later the Republic of Ireland)
- The counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry (now widely known as Derry), and Tyrone in the province of Ulster became Northern Ireland part of the UK

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Where did they come from?

- Your research will be easier if you have a precise location
- There are a number of places to look for this information
  - Convict indents
  - Immigration papers
  - Australian civil registration records
    - Death certificates
    - Marriage certificates
    - Birth certificates
  - Cemetery inscriptions
  - Newspapers and obituaries
  - House names and family traditions

Land divisions in Ireland

- 4 provinces (Leinster, Munster, Connaught and Ulster)
- 32 counties
- 331 baronies
- 2,508 civil parishes
- 62,205 townlands
- Townlands names are not unique even within a county
- Most small holdings were only part of a townland

Townland names

- Spelling can vary
- There are some databases which can help to find the standard name
- Irish Genealogical Research Society 1901 database – wild card searches
- Look at maps – Open Street Maps Ireland

When did they arrive?

- If you do not know start with death certificates as the often have the number of years in the colony
- Immigration indexes
- Newspapers (Trove)
- Trawl through ships' passenger lists

Names

- Spelling can vary
- Low literacy means names were often recorded by someone unfamiliar with Irish names and accents
- O Mc Mac prefixes were coming and going
- Some names are concentrated in particular areas of Ireland

Civil registration

- Civil registration in Ireland started late but follows the English model with less data than registrations in Australian or Scotland

- Registration of Protestant marriages began in 1845

- Civil registrations of BDMs became general practice in 1864

- Irish civil registration districts and post-1898 registration districts are based on Poor Law Unions

- The indexes are now available online with ability to download copies of extracts from the registers for some events

Parish or church records

- Before civil registration life events were recorded by churches
- Church of Ireland clergy were supposed to maintain registers of births, marriages and burials.
- Catholic clergy generally maintained registers of births and marriages
- Church of Ireland clergy were notoriously lax in their administrative duties. Registers were also often considered personal property
- The penal laws meant Catholic registers started late

Catholic records

- In the larger towns there are some Catholic records from the mid 1700s
- Many parishes have no records earlier than 1820s
- Registers tend to be held in local custody. Most parish registers have been microfilmed and made available on the internet through the National Library of Ireland
- Need to understand a little Latin
- Handwriting can be bad
- Some bleeding smudges etc that make the records more difficult to read

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Catholic records (cont)

- Tracing Your Irish Ancestors: The Complete Guide by John Grenham

- Catholic parishes must be distinguished from Church of Ireland parishes as they vary both in size and in name

- Irish Catholic Directory contains addresses of parishes

- Catholics often were baptised married and buried in Church of Ireland rites

- Some indexes available on-line eg RootsIreland

Church of Ireland records

- Until the disestablishment Church of Ireland registers are considered government records

- However, 1,006 Church of Ireland parish registers were destroyed in the Four Courts fire in 1922

- 637 survived because they were not lodged

- Some records were transcribed before 1922 and have been published

- Extant registers are held – Local custody – Representative Church Body Library (RCBL) – National Archives – Public Record Office Northern Ireland (PRONI)

Church of Ireland records (cont)

- Many registers are far from perfect
- The Vestry Minutes are another source of information
- The parishioners attending a Vestry meeting signed the minute book
- The RCBL and IRGS websites have: A Colour-coded Resource of What Survives; Where it is; & with Additional Information of Copies, Transcripts and Online Indexes
- The Representative Church Body has introduced the Anglican record project which is progressively making Church of Ireland registers available online
- IrishGenealogy.ie a free government website has a collection of CoI, Catholic and Presbyterian registers

Presbyterian Records

- Presbyterian parish registers are held locally and most have been filmed and are in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)

- *A Guide to Irish Parish Registers, and in Irish Records: Sources for Family & Local History* by James Ryan

Quaker and other dissenters

- Registers for all Quaker records have been microfilmed but few other Protestant records

- Some of the Quaker records are available through FindMyPast

Census and census substitutes

- Only fragments of the ten yearly censuses for 1821 through 1891 are extant

- The 1901 and 1911 censuses are on-line at the National Archives of Ireland fully searchable with downloadable images

- When the age pension was introduced in the early 1900s, people put in requests for searches of the then existing censuses to prove their age. The returns of these searches exist and available through FindMyPast

- Many other administrative records provide census substitutes

Census substitutes

- Voter lists

- Freehold claims

- Dog licences

- Advertisements for donations, rewards, subscriptions, appeals etc

- Cess payees

- Land and land tax records are also a census substitute

Land tenure in Ireland

- The penal laws tried to limit the tenure of Catholics
- In Ireland there were generally several levels of landlord
- The freehold or land in fee is the top landlord usually a member of the ascendency
- The next level down was also generally a protestant
- The actual farmers on small holding generally were tenants at will or leased their land from year to year
- This system was generally unwound through the incumbered estates and the conversion of lease hold to freehold in the 1900s

Land records

- There are two classes of land records useful for family research:
  - Taxation related
    - Griffith valuations
    - Tithe applotment
  - Transaction related
    - The Registry of Deeds
    - The Land Registration Authority

Griffith Valuation

- Properly known as Primary Valuation of Tenements
- Poor Law Unions were established for poor relief by the Poor Relief Act in 1838 and landowners and tenants alike were to support the workhouses within these Poor Law Unions
- Griffith's survey was conducted between 1848 and 1864
- A fully searchable database of this valuation with free access to digital images of the original sources and maps is online on the AskAboutIreland website
- Ancestry and FindMyPast have indexes and images of the Griffith Valuations

Tithe Applotment Books 1823-1838

- Tithes were a tax levied at the CoI parish level to support the parish.
- This included upkeep of the parish church
- They were also applied to municipal functions if the parish was not in a corporate town
- Tithes were due from both protestant and Catholic tenants
- They were levied at a per acre rate sometimes taking into account the quality of the land
- The National Archives has a searchable database of tithe applotments on-line
- See also Tithe Defaulters – FindMyPast

Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland 1835-38

- These memoirs were carried out in conjunction with the Ordnance Survey Mapping program

- They provide a wonderful snapshot of places with lots of details about the people living there and their occupations and behaviours

- Unfortunately, they were completed only for the province of Ulster, omitting the cities of Belfast and Armagh and parts of Tyrone

- The whole volumes plus index of the Ordnance Survey Memoirs have been published

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Registry of Deeds

- The registry was originally set up to enforce the penal laws
- Although the legislation said all transactions were to be registered only a proportion actually were
- In the earlier period only relatively well off appear as parties
- As it was a way of guaranteeing tenure many modest business people registered their deeds
- Leases mortgages and settlements. Marriage settlements are particularly rich in family information
- See the Registry of Deeds Index Project Ireland

Other places to look

- Military records National Archives at Kew (some on-line)
  - Muster books
  - Army and Navy lists
  - Returns of officers WO25
- Civil service records
  - Some at Kew
  - Some in Dublin

Newspapers

- Before the early 1900s BDM entries appearing in newspapers were restricted to the more wealthy strata of society

- Insolvencies and bankruptcies lists

- Voter, freeholder and other lists of people

- Advertisements
  - Merchants
  - Deserting apprentices
  - Deserting wives
  - Land for sale

Newspapers on-line

- Irish Newspaper Archive

- British Newspaper Archive
  - This has lots of Irish newspapers
  - Also many articles of Irish interest appear in English and Scottish newspapers

- Trove
  - Lots of Australian newspapers
  - Obituaries often give some details of origns in Ireland

Wills, Administrations and Probate

- Almost all prerogative and diocesan wills, administrations and probate grants were destroyed in the Four Courts Fire in 1922

- Indexes survive

- Many copies and abstracts made before the destruction survive

- The Land Commission records hold a large number of 19th century will copies, but these are not currently open to the public. There is a card index at the National Library of Ireland.

- Memorials of wills registered at the Registry of Deeds were not destroyed

Education and occupations

- Alumni Dublenses
- Kings Inns Admission papers
- Royal Colleges of Surgeons and Physicians
- School registers
- Guilds

Societies

- HAGSOC – Join the society an come to the Irish Special Interest group

- Irish Genealogical Research Society

- Local historical and family history societies

- Also see the local history sections in the local libraries

- Many Irish genealogical journals from family history societies have articles on how to trace Irish ancestors and how to access the records. They also have some family histories

Conclusions

- Irish family history research has some challenges
- It does not mean that you should give up
- Even if you can find limited information about you ancestors in Ireland you can enrich this with local history of the area they lived in
- May the luck of the Irish go with you!

Resources

- https://familyhistoryact.org.au/index.php/databases/irish-intro
- The above page has a copy of the slides on this presentation and links to various sites mentioned in the talk
- https://nickreddan.net/talks
  this page has the slides of this talk.