



A Green Room  
Genealogy  
Primer

# IRISH FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH

by Mike Collins & Jayne McGarvey

Irish Surnames, Placenames, naming patterns, timelines and much more.

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# Introduction.

You are very welcome to “Irish Family History Research – A Green Room Genealogy Primer”. This guide has been written by Mike Collins (author of A Letter from Ireland) with contributions from Jayne McGarvey (genealogist in The Green Room) and aims to give you an introduction/refresher on just some of the key elements of Irish Family History Research – many of which you will not find on generic ancestry research sites.

We start with an overview of Irish surnames – their evolution and history – and where your Irish surnames may fit in. We also have a look at “Irish Naming Patterns” – a very useful pattern that helps us to make educated guesses when faced with ancestry “brick walls”.

Irish placenames are then examined – typical names of places in Ireland and how they got that name.

Jayne then takes us through “3 Steps to Tracing Your Ancestry back to Ireland” – giving some very useful structure and “watch outs” as you approach your Irish ancestry research.

Finally, we take an example of a simple Irish ancestry timeline – and illustrate the typical questions that such a timeline will offer you when structured properly.

We do hope you enjoy. Please feel free to forward this primer guide to your friends and family if they think they will find it useful.

Mike Collins & Jayne McGarvey.

# **The Evolution of Irish Surnames - and where your Irish Surname fits.**

When we look at Irish surnames today, it's easy to get confused when we see names that appear to have several different spellings, some look very English or Scottish - how could they be Irish you ask - while other names appear to randomly have an "O" or "Mac" in front of them.

## **Before We Begin - Main Points on Irish Surnames.**

In order to understand the origin and place of your own surname in Ireland, it is important to understand three major points:

- Ireland has one of the oldest surname systems in the world. Surnames are first recorded in use from the 900s. However, these surnames originated at a time when Irish Gaelic was our primary language across the island of Ireland. As a result - many of the Irish surnames that we see today are the later "anglicisations" of these earlier Irish language surnames.
- At the end of the last ice-age about 10,000 years ago, Ireland was unpopulated. Since then, many settlers/traders/mercenaries/refugees /invaders/planters have come to our shores. While they brought their own culture and names with them, the majority were assimilated into the Irish Gaelic culture and language as they settled down and intermarried with those who went before them.

- Following emigration outside the island of Ireland (mostly from the late 1700s) many Irish surnames had their spelling and pronunciation further modified.

One further point to bear in mind is that while you may believe your family Irish surname underwent change ONLY after migration - this may be incorrect. Many “O”s and “Macs” were already removed from Irish surnames BEFORE migration - and were in general use in Ireland in this “O-less” and “Mac-less” form.

Also, there can be specific Irish regional differences in spelling to what is often the same surname. An example? Well, the surname Keogh was typically spelled in that manner across much of Counties Limerick and Tipperary. However, is more often spelled Kehoe in the south-east of the island. So, the spelling of your Irish surname after immigration can give clues as to a more exact location in Ireland.

Bearing these three ideas in mind, the following is an outline of the main periods and “waves” of settlers that arrived on the shores of Ireland in more modern times. I hope it will give you a clearer idea of the origins and development of your own Irish surname - and where your Irish Surname fits into this timeline:

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## **920 AD-1200 AD: Irish Gaelic Surnames.**

The first recorded Irish surname is O’Clery (Ó Cléirigh) in what is now modern County Galway about 920 AD. Although the creation of surnames in Ireland may have begun at an early time, it slowly continued for the next three hundred years or so. By the end of the eleventh century the main families of Ireland (those whom

had their genealogies recorded) had acquired many of the surnames we know today.

These names were constructed using either an “Ó” (short for Ua – “descendent of”) or a “Mac” (“son of”) followed by a personal name of an illustrious ancestor. The surnames of Ireland’s ruling families can typically be tracked down to one single individual e.g. the O’Neills of the Northern Uí Neill in Ulster take their surname from one of their kings – Niall Mac Aoidh (Niall son of Aodh) who died in 917 AD.

Let’s take a trip around the nine early Gaelic kingdoms of Ireland and look at the surnames associated with each. By the way, I have used the “anglicised” versions of the original Irish Gaelic surname so it would be more recognisable to you.

## **The Kingdom of Connaught.**

The modern province of Connaught covers the counties of Galway, Roscommon, Sligo, Mayo and Leitrim.

By the 1100s, the King of Connaught was “Turlough O’Connor” and his kin were from the “Síol Muireadaigh” tribe. Turlough and his kin had taken on the surname O’Connor from this Gr, Gr, Gr Grandfather – “Conchobar mac Taidg Mór” (Conor son of Tadhg senior) who had died in 882.

Beside the O’Connors - the other leading families of Connaught at this time held the Irish surnames:

*Boland, Breen, Brennan, Brien, Cabill, Canavan, Cannon, Carney, Carney, Carroll, Clancy, Clery, Coffey, Coleman, Collins, Conlon, Conneely, Connelly, Conroy, Conway, Coogan, Coolihan, Cosgrave, Coyne, Crowley, Cunneen, Curran, Devlin, Dolan, Donlan, Donohoe, Dowd, Downey, Duggan, Egan, Fahy, Fallon, Fannon, Feeney, Finn, Finnegan, Flannery, Gaffney, Garry, Gaughan, Glavin, Glynn, Hanley, Henaghan, Horan, Hughes, Hynes, Keane, Kelly, Kenny, Keogh, Kilkelly, Lavin, Lynch, Madden, Mannion/Manning, McDermott, McDonagh, McGann, McGlynn, McHale, McManus, Molloy, Moran, Morris, Mullally, Mullan, Murphy, Murray, O'Malley, O'Dea, O'Donnell, O'Gara, O'Hara, Quigley, Ratigan, Shaughnessy, Sheehan, Tarpy, Tierney and McHugh.*

These were the main surnames of the area - other Gaelic surnames are in the area but not included above.

## **The Kingdom of Tuadh Mumhan (North Munster or “Thomond”).**

Tuadh Mumhan (nowadays known as Thomond and covering the north Munster counties of Clare, Limerick, North Tipperary and North Kerry) became a separate Kingdom within the province of Mumhan (Munster) as the powerful tribe of the Dál gCais rose to power. The most famous member of this tribe was Brian Boru who became the first High King of Ireland in real terms (there were many previous claims to this title but all were disputed).

His family, the O'Briens (descendants of Brian) were the ruling family of Tuadh Mumhan by the 1000s. Other leading families that came out of this area (many of them migrated to other parts of the country in future centuries) include:

*Abern, Bannon, Boland, Buckley, Cahill, Carroll, Clancy, Collins, Conway, Corcoran, Curry, Cusack, Dinan, Dooley, Drennan, Dwyer, Fennessy, Flaherty, Flanagan, Flannery, Fogarty, Galvin, Gilroy, Gleeson, Grady, Halloran, Hannon, Hayes, Heffernan, Hehir, Hickey, Hogan, Honan, Houlihan, Hurley, Kearney, Kelleher, Kennedy, Kiehy, Loughlin, Madigan, Maher, Malone, Maloney, McConside, McDonnell, McEnery, McGann, McGrath, McInerney, McMabon, McNamara, Meagher, Melody, Mulcahy, Naughten, Nestor, O'Connor, O'Dea, O'Donovan, O'Meara, O'Neill, Quirke, Reddan, Regan, Reidy, Ryan, Sexton, Shannon and Sheehan.*

These were the main surnames of the area - other Gaelic surnames are in the area but not included above.

## **The Kingdom of Deise Mumhan (South Munster or “Desmond”).**

The Kingdom of Deise Mumhan (Desmond/South Munster) covered the modern counties of Cork, South Kerry, Waterford, South Tipperary and parts of Limerick.

It was ruled by the McCarthys. The Kingdom was created in the 1100s - when the McCarthys ruled all of Munster - with the rise of the Dal gCais to the north and the division of the province in a northern part (ruled by the O'Briens) and this southern part (ruled by the McCarthys).

Other leading families that came out of this area (many of them migrated to other parts of the country in future centuries) include:

*Brosnan, Buckley, Cagney, Cahill, Callaghan, Canty, Carey, Coffey, Coffey/Cowbig, Collins, Connell, Connolly, Cotter, Coughlan, Cronin, Crowley, Cuddihy, Cullinane, Dennehy, Dillon,*

*Dineen, Doheny, Donegan, Donoghue, Dorgan, Downey, Driscoll, Duggan, Dullea, Dwane, Falvey, Field, Flynn, Foley, Foran, Forde, Garvey, Green, Griffin, Harrington, Hayes, Healey, Hennessy, Hurley, Kennedy, Leaby, Lebane/Lyons, Madden, Mannix, McAuliffe, McGilycuddy, Meehan, Moriarty, Mullane/Mullins, Murphy, Murray, Noonan, O'Connell, O'Dea, O'Driscoll, O'Hea, O'Keeffe, O'Leary, O'Mahony, O'Neill, O'Shea, O'Sullivan, Phelan, Quill, Riordan, Scanlan, Sheehan, Tracy and Twomey.*

These were the main surnames of the area - other Gaelic surnames are in the area but not included above.

## **The Kingdom of Laighin (Leinster).**

The Kingdom of Laigin (or Leinster – but it was significantly smaller than the current province of Leinster) – was ruled over by the Sil Fálchán tribe of the Uí Cheinnselaig (descendants of Kinsella). It covered what are now the counties of Wexford, Carlow, Kildare, Kilkenny, Wicklow and parts of Laois. Diarmait Mac Murchada (McMurrough and later Murphy) was the King of Leinster in the mid 1100s. However, Diarmait was deposed as King and this act played a pivotal part in triggering the invasion of the Anglo-Normans in 1169AD when he invited the Cambro-Norman knights of South Wales to assist him in regaining his throne in exchange for land in his Kingdom.

His family, the McMurrough/Kinsellas were the ruling family of Laighin in the 1100s. Other leading families that came out of this area (many of them migrated to other parts of the country in future centuries) include:

*Breen, Brennan, Carey, Carroll, Cosgrave, Coveney, Cullen, Dempsey, Devoy, Doran, Dowling, Duff, FitzDermot, Fitzpatrick, Gorman, Hayden, Kavanagh, Kelly/Kealy, Larkin, Lawler,*

*McDonnell/McDonald, McKeogh, Moore, Murphy, Nolan, O'Byrne, O'Carroll, O'Neill, O'Toole, Phelan, Rafter, Ryan and Tracy.*

These were the main surnames of the area - other Gaelic surnames are in the area but not included above.

## **The Kingdom of Midhe (Meath).**

Midhe (covering the modern counties of Meath and Westmeath ) held the ancient capital – Tara. However, by the 1000s the effective capital had become the city of Dublin. The main tribe and family of this area by the 1100s were the Mac Laughlins of the Clann Cholmáin tribe. Other leading families included:

*Breen, Brien, Buckley, Carney, Casey, Connolly, Conway, Curry, Daly, Devine, Dooley, Fox, Gaffney, Hart, Hennessy, Higgins, Keally, Keary, McAuley, McCoughlan, McDonnell, McGee, McGeoghegan, McGlynn, Molloy, Mulholland, O'Brennan, O'Carroll, O'Donoghue, O'Farrell, O'Hea, O'Houlihan, Quinlan, Regan, Roman and Scully.*

These were the main surnames of the area - other Gaelic surnames are in the area but not included above.

## **The Kingdom of Breifne (Breffny).**

The Gaelic kingdom of Breifne covered the modern counties of Leitrim, Cavan and parts of Sligo. The Kings of Breifne in the 1100s were the O'Rourkes and other leading families included:

*Bannon, Boylan, Brady, Breen, Carolan, Carroll, Cassidy, Connolly, Corcoran, Corrigan, Farrelly, Finnegan, Gaffney, Heany, Kenny, Maguire, McCabe, McClancy, McDonnell, McElroy, McEnroe, McGovern, McGowan, McManus, McMurray, McShanly, McSharry, Muldoon, Roddy and Tiernan. The second leading family of the area were O'Reilly.*

These were the main surnames of the area - other Irish surnames are in the area but not included above.

## **The Kingdom of Airghialla (Oriel).**

Airghialla (later also known as Oriel in English and covering Counties Armagh, Louth and Monaghan) was really a federation of smaller kingdoms rather than a kin group.

The kingship rotated among the various tribes and in the 1100s was held by Donnchadh Ua Cearbail (O'Carroll). Other leading families of the Airghialla included:

*Callan, Casey, Cosgrave, Creehan, Crehan, Crilly, Cullen, Fagan, Finn, Flanagan, Garvey, Gillespie, Hanlon, Hare, Hayes, Hughes, Keelaghan, Keenan, Loy, Lynn, McArdle, McCann, McConville, McDonnell, McMabon, McMurphy, McNally, Quaid/Wade, Rogan, Scanlan, Sherry and Traynor.*

These were the main surnames of the area - other Gaelic surnames are in the area but not included above.

## **The Kingdom of Northern Ui Neill.**

The Northern Ui Neill (not to be confused with the surname O'Neill) was a kin group who were descended from Niall of the Nine Hostages – legend was that his sons Eoghan, Conall and Enda moved into modern county Donegal in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

From these individuals came the tribes of Cenél Eóghain and Cenél Conaill who established themselves as lords in northwestern Ulster.

Over time, the Cenél Eóghain gained prominence and they expanded into what are modern counties Derry and Tyrone. By the 1100s, the leading family of the Cenél Eóghain, were the Mac Lochlainn (McLoughlin) – but they ruled the Northern Ui Neill alongside the O'Donnells and O'Dohertys of the Cenél Conaill. Other leading family names were:

*Begley, Bradley, Breslin, Boyle, Cannon, Carolan, Carroll, Cole, Colgan, Cooney, Corr, Coyle, Crean, Donnelly, Doohan, Duffy, Fannon, Farren, Faulkner, Ferry, Flanagan, Friel, Gallagher, Gartland, Gildea, Gilmartin, Gormley, Hagan, Hamill, Harkin, Hegarty, Hoban, Hunt, Kane, Kearney, Kehy, Lavery, Lunney, Madden, McBride, McCaffrey, McCann, McCluskey, McCready, McCusker, McDaid, McGarvey, McGee, McGhynn, McGonigle, McGrath, McGuigan, McIlboyle, McMurphy, McNamee, McRory, McSweeny, Mellon, Moy, Muldorey, Mullen, Mulligan, O'Neill, Peyton, Quinn, Roddy, Scully, Toland/Tolan and Ward.*

These were the main surnames of the area - other Gaelic surnames are in the area but not included above.

## **The Kingdom of Ulaidh (Ulster).**

Ulaidh (from which modern Ulster gets its name) occupied only modern counties Antrim and Down). Their main ruling tribe were the Dál Fiatach who were based in Downpatrick (which gives County Down its name). The King of Ulaid in the 1100a was Cú Ulad mac Conchobair Chisenaig Mac Duinn Sléibe (there's a mouthful) and his family were later known in English as McDunleavy or Dunleavy. Other leading families included:

*Coulter, Flattery, Greene, Haughey, Hughes/Hayes, Kenny, Lavery, Long, Magennis, McAteer, McCarroll, McCartan, McConnell/McDonnell, McKenna, McIlmurray, McNiece, Miller, O'Flynn and Rooney.*

These were the main surnames of the area - other Gaelic surnames are in the area but not included above.

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## **795 AD: Irish Viking Surnames.**

The first recorded Viking raid on Ireland was at Lambay Island in 795AD - near to where Dublin City stands today. Over the following decades, they established “Longphorts” in Ireland as bases to support their raiding. These camps eventually led to the founding of the cities of Dublin, Waterford, Cork, Limerick and Wexford.

Initially, the native Gaels fought back but over time fought alongside Gaelic Chieftains as part of their mercenary armies and navy. The native Gaels traded and intermarried with the “settling Vikings” in the main cities around our coast. These city dwellers were later labelled as “Hiberno-Norse”.

The Irish Gaelic surnames are structured as either “son of a given name” (Mac) or “descendant of a given name (O). Many of the given names of Norse/Viking origin worked their way into a number of surnames that we consider Irish today. These include:

- McAuliffe – “son of Olaf”.
- O'Rourke/Groarke – “descendent/son of Ruarc”

- McCotter – “son of Otir”
- McManus – “son of Magnus”
- McGettrick – “son of Sitric”
- McIver – “son of Ivor”
- O’Loughlin/McLoughlin – “son of Lochlann”

Other Irish surnames that have similar roots in a given Norse name include:

*Arthur, Bligh, Boland, Broder, Broderick, Harold, McBirney, O’Beirne, O’Gobery/ Godfrey, O’Henrick, O’Hever, Reynolds, Sugrue, Sweetman, Toner, Tormey and many more.*

Then, we have the general descriptive name for a person of Danish origin:

“Dubhghaill” – meaning “dark foreigner” and which was anglicised as “Doyle” and sometimes “McDowell”.

## **1200 AD: Irish Norman Surnames.**

In October, 1066 AD – the forces of William, Duke of Normandy, were ready to invade England and take what he considered to be his rightful place on the throne of England. They met the English army at Hastings on the 14th of October and after a full day of fighting, William had won the crown of the King of England. A hierarchy of just ten thousand Norman knights went on to replace the aristocracy of England – with “William the Conqueror” at their head.

Five generations later, the descendants and vassals of this aristocracy formed the main part of the invasion of Ireland from Wales in 1170 AD. The Normans brought their

fighting, farming and feudal technology with them and shaped much of what we see around us in the Irish landscape and politics to this day.

Norman naming conventions were typically the same as many Irish and English naming conventions – only using the French language:

- “Son of” – “Fils de” in French – became “Fitz” e.g. Fitz Gerald
- Of/From – “de”, “du” or “de la” in French – e.g. de Bari – became “de Barra” and eventually “Barry”.
- A nickname/profession – “le” in French – e.g. le Gros (the fat one). Another famous Irish role name was FitzWalter “le Boteler” which assumed the surname of Butler in Ireland.

The Norman-derived surnames found in Ireland today include:

*Archdeacon/Cody, Aylward, Barber, Barrett, Barron, Barry, Bermingham, Blake, Bluitt, Bonds, Bourke, Brannagh, Brett, Brew, Britt, Britton, Brown, Browne, Bryan, Burke, Butler, Campion, Cantillon, Cantwell, Carew, Caviston, Chambers, Clare, Codd, Cody, Cogan, Colfer, Comerford, Condon, Cooney, Courcey, Crosbie, Crozier, Cullen, Cumiskey, Cusack, D’Arcy, Dalton, Darcy, Day, Dillon, Eddery, Fagan, Fanning, Field, Fitzgerald, Fitzgibbon, Fitzhenry, Fitzsimmons, Fitzsimons, Fitzstephens, Fleming, Flemming, Francis, French, Furlong, Garland/Gartland, Gibbons, Grace, Griffin, Griffith, Hackett, Hays/Hayes, Hussey, Jordan, Joyce, Keating, Lacey, Lawless, Liston, Logan, Lovett, Lucey, Lynch, Lyons, Marshall, Martin, McQuillan, Molyneux, Morris, Morrissey, Nagle/Nangle, Nugent, Plunkett, Power/Powers, Prendergast, Prior, Punch, Purcell, Redmond, Rice, Roach/Roche, Roberts, Rochford, Russell, Savage, Sinnott, Wade, Wall, Walsh/Welsh, White, Wolfe, Wyse, Stapleton, Stephens, Talbot and Tyrrell.*

There is a whole other class of Norman surnames that formed as they splintered off from the main family - assuming the patronymic title of a new family head. An

example of this are the McAndrews of County Mayo - who were a later branch of the Norman Barretts.

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## **1200 AD - 1550 AD: Early English Surnames in Ireland.**

When the Norman lords were awarded lands across the new “colony” of Ireland, many established walled towns to protect the soldiers and workers that they imported from their estates in England and Wales.

An example of one of these early walled towns was Athenry in what is now County Galway - founded by the Norman lord Meyler de Bermingham - and built about 1240 AD to protect the inhabitants from the local Gaelic clans.

Many of these early settlers brought in by the Normans were craftsmen or farmers. They carried surnames that reflected the trade of their ancestors back in England e.g. Cooper or Carpenter or locative surnames such as Wickham or Fullam. They arrived as Roman Catholic and these early settlers are often differentiated from later English and Scottish settlers as they typically fully assimilated into the Irish Gaelic culture, language and religion.

*Ambrose, Archer, Ashe, Austin, Beckett, Blackburn, Carter, Coll, Cooper, Devenish, Dollard, Dobbin, Fitton, Flint, Foyle, Frizzell, Fullam, Furlong, Galwey, Gaskin, Glanville, Gough, Hall, Hamlin, Harpur, Hughes, Jermyn, Kennefick, Kent, Landy, Leeper, Liston, Mason, Mansell, Martell, Morton, Nead, Nesbitt, Newman, Noble, Norman, Palmer, Parker, Porter,*

*Preston, Pratt, Prout, St. John, Sheppard, Shorthall, Sinnott, Stack, Stanley, Sutton, Taaffe, Terry, Wade, Walton, Wells, Wickham and Whitty.*

Are all examples of this type of surname found in Ireland.

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## **1250 AD -1550 AD: Irish Galloglass Surnames.**

The term “Gallowglass” comes from the Irish “Gallóglaiġh” which translates from the Irish as “young foreign warrior”. This was the name given to Norse-Scottish mercenaries who appeared on Irish shores for the first time in the 1200s. They came from the part of Scotland that was once the Kingdom of the Dal Riada – a kingdom that spread between the north of Ireland and the islands and mainland of the west of Scotland.

As Scots, they were Gaelic sharing a common culture and language with the Irish. But since they had intermarried with the Norse settlers in Scotland, the Irish called them Gall Gaeil (“foreign Gaels”). Many of the families in this area had become effective warriors, developing superior fighting methods and technology to that of the Irish of the time.

The first recorded of Gallowglass arrival in Ireland was in 1259, when the King of Connacht was provided with one hundred and sixty of these soldiers. They were provided with land and received supplies from the local lordships.

Some of these Gallowglass families were on the losing side of the Scottish wars of independence at the time and this meant the complete loss of their lands. When they were offered alternative lands in Ireland in return for service, many decided to migrate

as a full family group. The first of these clans were the McSweeneys, who settled in Donegal. These were followed by MacDonnells/McDonalds into Antrim and the McCabes in what is now County Cavan.

By 1512, there were about 60 Galloglass groups around the country under various Irish chieftains and settled over time to intermarry with the native Irish.

Although some of these surnames originated in Scotland, many are now considered as Irish as they are Scottish. The surnames include:

*McCabe, McCallion/McCallan, McColl/McColley, McConnell, McCoy, McCrory/Rogers, McDonnell, McDowell, McGill, Gallogly/English, McGirr/Short, McGreal, McNeill, McSheehy, McSorley and McSweeney/McSwiney.*

Are all examples of this type of surname found in Ireland.

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## **1550 AD -1700 AD: English and Scottish Planter Surnames in Ireland.**

From the time of Henry VIII – the English administration took an active interest in making Ireland a more “civilised” place. One of their strategies was to transplant large numbers of Scottish lowlanders and English border natives (with their protestant culture and farming methods) into areas of good land in Ireland - displacing the Gaelic lordships of the region as well as punishing them for resistance and non-compliance with English law and customs.

These “Plantations” of parts of Ireland started in the 1550s and lasted until 1714. The plantations occurred in:

- 1556 AD: The newly established Queens and King’s County (what is now Laois and Offaly).
- 1586 AD onwards: Parts of Munster.
- 1606 AD onwards: Ulster - the counties of Cavan, Coleraine (now mostly Derry), Armagh, Donegal, Tyrone, Fermanagh. The counties of Antrim and Down had already been heavily populated with Protestant farmers via privately sponsored placements.

Ireland took in between 150,000 and 250,000 English and Scottish immigrants during these plantation periods (the population of Ireland in 1700 was about 1 million). They arrived as adventurers, tenants, people seeking a better life/escaping religious persecution or as payment for military service. Most remained distinctly apart from the Gaelic Irish – maintaining their own protestant religion and culture.

Some of these planters came from the highlands of Scotland - and so many surnames share a lineage with Irish Gaelic Surnames (e.g. the use of Mac in both Scottish highland and Irish surname systems). However, the majority of planters came from the Scottish lowlands, the Scottish/English borders area as well as the rest of England - where the surnames had a different structure to Irish Gaelic surnames. With the vast majority of Gaelic surnames, the person’s lineage is to the forefront (MacCarthy = son of Carthaigh OR O’Carroll = of the Carrolls).

English and Scottish lowland surnames tend to be mostly occupational (Smith, Cooper, Wright etc.) or related to a geographical feature or place (Churchill, Harland, Hall, Windsor, Wood etc.). Patronymic surnames typically had a “son” at the end (e.g. Thomson or Johnson) or “s” in the case of Welsh e.g. Davies. Personal characteristic-related surnames were in their original form e.g. Armstrong.

One of the easiest rule-of-thumb methods to figure out the impact of these plantations on the population of Ireland is to examine the 1901 census on the basis of religion. The assumption being that the descendants of the Irish population prior to the plantations remained Roman Catholic up to 1901. The majority of the Protestant population in 1901 were descendants of the planter families:

- Total individuals in 1901 census: 4,429,782
- Total Roman Catholics in 1901 census: 3,251,414
- Approximate Protestant total in 1901 census: 957,835 (made up of Church of Ireland - 499,082, Presbyterian - 400,987, Methodist - 57,766)

If we look through the surname listings of these Irish Protestant names in the 1901 census - we see the most numerous surnames as follows - mirroring the main family surnames that arrived in Ireland starting with the earliest plantations in the early 1700s:

*Abbott, Abraham, Acheson, Adair, Adams, Agnew, Alexander, Allen, Anderson, Andrews, Armstrong, Arnold, Atkinson, Bailey, Baird, Barber/Barbour, Barr, Bates, Bateson, Baxter, Beacom, Beattie, Beckett, Beggs, Bell, Best, Black, Blackburn, Blair, Bond, Bowes, Boyd, Brown, Buchanan, Burns, Burton*

*Caldwell, Calvert, Campbell, Carson, Clarke, Cochrane, Cole, Cooke, Cowan, Craig, Crangle, Cranford, Crozier, Cunningham, Dale, Davidson, Davis, Dawson, Dickson, Dinsmore, Dunbar, Duncan, Dunlop, Edwards, Elliott, Fanning/Fenning, Faulkner, Ferguson, Finlay, Fisher, Foot, Foster, Fulton, Gibson, Gilmore, Gilroy, Glenn, Goodwin, Gordon, Graham, Grant, Gray, Greer, Hall, Hamill, Hamilton, Hanna, Hanthorne, Harper, Harris, Harrison, Harvey, Henderson, Henry, Hetherington, Hicks, Hill, Houston, Hughes, Hunter, Hutchinson, Irvine*

*Irwin, Jamison, Johnson, Johnston, Jones, Kennedy, Kerr, Kirk, Kirkpatrick, Knox, Leeper, Letson, Little, Logan, Madden, Magill, Marshall, Martin, Masterson, Matthews, Maxwell, McAllister, McBride, McClelland, McClements, McClure, McConnell, McCready, McCrum, McCurdy, McCusker, McDonald, McKee, McKendry, McKinney, McShane, Millar, Mills, Mitchell, Moffitt, Montgomery, Moore, Morris, Morrison, Morrow, Moy, Murray*

*Nelson, Nixon, Oliver, Orr, Paisley, Parker, Patterson, Platt, Pollock, Porter, Rea, Reid, Robinson, Ross, Russell, Scott, Shaw, Simpson, Smith, Stevenson, Stewart, Stirling, Sturgeon, Taggart, Taylor, Thomson, Thompson, Todd, Trimble, Walker, Wallace, Watson, White, Whiteford, Williamson, Wilson, Woods, Wright, Young.*

The above is a selection of the most numerous “planter” surnames found across the island of Ireland.

Here is a link to the 1901 census for the island of Ireland: <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/>

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## **1660 AD: Irish Surnames associated with Cromwellian Soldiers.**

Following the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland, as many as 10,000 English soldiers were paid with a grant of land in Ireland. Some soldiers took up the offer - while many sold them on to people with the means to accumulate them into larger estates. A number of surnames were established in Ireland by this group (mainly outside Ulster) at this time - and are prominent to this day. Also, bear in mind that many of these individuals arrived in Ireland as single men into estates surrounded by Gaelic

Roman Catholics. Over time, many intermarried with the locals. Surnames associated with these “Cromwellian adventurers” include:

*Barker, Barrington, Blackwell, Bowen, Charleton, Clibborn, Coney, Davenport, Drake, Duke, Eyre, Fetherston, Filgate, Fleetwood, Greenaway, Hosford, Ivory, Jeffords, Lett, Lyng, Nead, Ogle, Pallin, Partridge, Penn, Perry, Pilkington, Poe, Rogers, Sadlier, Sampson, Slater, Smithwick, Starr, Tuttle, Tutty, Upton, Windsor and Woodcock.*

This is just a sample. Many of these surnames were also introduced from England/Scotland into Ulster as part of the Ulster plantation through the 1600s and 1700s. Those Ulster planter families tended to arrive as intact families - often maintaining their original culture and religion down to the current day.

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## **1550 AD - 1700 AD: Anglicisation of Irish Surnames.**

Somewhere between the mid 1500s and early 1600s, most of Ireland’s Gaelic surnames were translated into an English equivalent - usually by an English-speaking clerk who wrote the Irish he heard into the equivalent phonetic English. The Irish-speaking holder of the name went on to use his Irish surname on a daily basis, but occasionally had the need to use his equivalent anglicised surname.

One example of this was the “O’Fuarain” surname which was found in the east of County Cork and into west County Waterford. If an English clerk heard this surname - he would probably make it out as “Oh-Foor-an”. As a result, this name became phonetically anglicised as “O’Foran” - and eventually “Foran” - across many parts of east Cork and County Waterford. However, another English clerk heard the same Irish Gaelic “O’Fuarain” and decided that “Ford” was the nearest

word that made sense to him. And so we have a smattering of Ford(e)s throughout Cork - with both Ford and Foran coming from the same Irish Gaelic surname “O’Fuarain”.

So, when you look at a surname map of Ireland today - and see the Ford surname sprinkled all about - it starts to make sense why many of these Fords are completely unconnected, they just happened to assume an English-sounding name through quasi-translation of phonetic guesswork.

There are many other surnames like this in Ireland - “Coffey” and “Cunningham” are two others that spring to mind - all standing for a pool of Irish Gaelic surnames underneath that are completely unconnected.

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## **1685 AD to 1720 AD: Palatine and Huguenot Surnames.**

The “Palatines” and “Huguenots” were Protestant refugees from Germany and France, respectively - who were exiled through the 1600s and 1700s to parts of Europe where their Protestant beliefs would fit with locally held beliefs of the host country. The newly ascendant Protestant landlords of Ireland saw the weaving skills of the Huguenots and the farming skill of the Palatines (as well as the work ethic of both groups) as a desirable addition to their newly establishing towns and estates.

## **The Palatine Surnames in Ireland.**

Over the course of the 17th century, a population of German Protestant farmers and winegrowers established themselves in the Rhineland Palatine to the southwest of Germany. However, it was a volatile area in which to live by the early 18th century. The Roman Catholic armies of France frequently used the area as a battlefield, and felt justified in burning the crops of these Protestant natives and generally making their lives miserable. This, combined with a series of bad harvests, led a group of about 13,000 “Palatines” to head up the River Rhine to Amsterdam, and seek refuge in countries where they could freely practice their Protestant faith and simple way of life.

About 3,000 of these refugees further travelled to the colonies of New York and the Carolinas – but the group also caught the attention of a number of landlords in Ireland who were looking to increase the population of Protestant settlers on their land. And so, another 3,000 of the refugees made their way to a number of Irish estates across Counties Carlow, Tipperary, Wexford, Kerry and Limerick in the early 1700s.

The most successful colony was that in County Limerick. By 1720, the Palatines across Ireland consisted of about 180 families, and over 100 of these were in Limerick. Throughout the rest of the 18th century, the families intermarried among themselves and with other Protestant settlers – establishing further settlements in the area.

However, by the late 1700s, many of their lease agreements had expired – and the local families were subject to untenable rent increases. This factor, combined with weather-related crop failures and cholera outbreaks – encouraged a number of Palatine families to try their luck in the newly-established lands and townships of north America.

However, many Palatine families stayed in the area – and remain to this day. You can still find the following Palatine surnames (often German in origin but localised over time) in Ireland:

*Baker, Bowen, Cave, Cripps, Crouse, Crowe, Delmege, Fizzell, Hartwick, Heck, Kiel, Laurence, Lodwick, Meyer, Modler, Paul, Ross, Ruttle, Shier, Singer, Stroud, Switzer, Teskey, Wolf and Young.*

Are all examples of this type of surname found in Ireland. For more on Palatine surnames see: <http://www.irishpalatines.org/index.html>

## **The Huguenot Surnames in Ireland.**

Up to 1685, the Edict of Nantes guaranteed the Calvinist Huguenots the freedom of religious expression in their native France. However, when that Edict was suspended the main body of Huguenots left France for the last time, heading to countries with a Protestant tradition. Approximately 5,000 French Huguenots came to live in Ireland, mostly from the countryside around the city of La Rochelle on the west coast of France.

Unlike the farmers from the German Palatine, the Huguenots went to established Irish cities and the newly growing towns around the country. Large Huguenot

settlements were established in Portarlington in Queen's County (Laois), Youghal in County Cork, Lisburn in County Armagh, Castleblayney in County Monaghan, Carlow, Kilkenny as well as the cities of Dublin, Cork and Waterford. Once there, their skills supported the growth of a textile industry. Over time, the families were fully absorbed into Irish society.

However, many Huguenot families remain in specific pockets of Ireland to this day. The following is a selection of Huguenot surnames (French in origin but localised over time) in Ireland:

*Besnard, Blanc, Borough, Busse, Camelin, Champ, Champagné, Chaigneau, Cromelin, Delacour, D'Olier, Des Voeux, Gardie, Godsell, Hardy, Lalande, Lavit/Lafitte, L'Estrange, Le Fanu, Le Nauze, Lefroy, Malet, Maturin, Micheau, Perdrian, Perrier, Pick, Pilot, Perrin, Quarry, Saurin, Trench and Vignoles.*

Are all examples of this type of surname found in Ireland. For more on Huguenot surnames see: <http://huguenotsinireland.com/>

# Irish Naming Patterns.

Do Irish naming patterns work for you? Have you ever reached a stumbling block in your ancestry research? In this letter will discuss a built in set of clues left by many of our Irish ancestors, hidden in the pattern of how they named their children.

One of the most frequent questions I hear each week is a version of the following:

*“My ancestor came to my country in the 1800s – but I have no idea where they came from in Ireland, or the names of their parents in Ireland. Is there some way I can find this information?”*

How about you? Do you have a situation like this? Well, today – let’s have a look at a very useful way of going back a little further in time on your Irish family tree. We are going to chat about “Irish Naming Patterns”.

Like to add your Irish surname to our list? Just sign up for your free weekly Letter from Ireland by clicking [here](#). – and we’ll let you know how to join in the fun.

Let me start off by formally introducing myself:

- My name is Michael Collins. I am the eldest son in my family and named after my Grandfather – also Michael Collins.
- My Father’s name is John Collins – he is an eldest son and named after his Grandfather – also John Collins.
- My father, John Collins has three siblings:
  - Patrick (second eldest son) – named after his paternal grandfather.

- Michael (third eldest son) – named after his father.
- Kathleen (eldest daughter) – named after her maternal grandmother.

Now, why am I sharing these random facts about my family? Well, there is a useful pattern hidden in the above naming of children. The “Irish Naming Pattern” is a real system of child-naming that was in use in Ireland for hundreds of years – and often continued to be used in the Irish immigrant’s new country for a couple of generations. I have found it to be in strong use in Ireland right up to the 1960s.

The naming pattern is as follows:

- 1st son was named after the father’s father
- 2nd son was named after the mother’s father
- 3rd son was named after the father
- 4th son was named after the father’s eldest brother
- 1st daughter was named after the mother’s mother
- 2nd daughter was named after the father’s mother
- 3rd daughter was named after the mother
- 4th daughter was named after the mother’s eldest sister

So, if this system holds true in your family, it can be very useful in taking an educated guess as to the names of your unknown Irish ancestors. When someone asks me a question in The Green Room about how to trace unknown Irish ancestors, I often ask them to share the names of already known children – from eldest to youngest. Let’s take a simple example:

Patrick and Kathleen O’Mara emigrated to Australia in the mid 1800s. The names of their parents – who stayed in Ireland – are unknown. They had the following children after emigrating to Australia, from eldest to youngest:

- Michael
- Mary
- John
- Patrick
- Bridget

If this family used the traditional Irish naming pattern, then we can guess the following:

- Michael is the name of Patrick O'Mara's father.
- Mary is the name of Kathleen O'Mara's mother.
- John is the name of Kathleen O'Mara's father.

One fact that confirms that they most likely used Irish naming patterns is the fact that the third son is called Patrick – the same as his father.

Bridget is the name of Patrick O'Mara's mother.

Now, naming patterns were not always used – or the pattern may fall apart as you approach the younger children – but they are surprisingly accurate across both religions and regions in Ireland – and very useful when taking educated guesses for further research when tracing your Irish family back to Ireland.

How about you? Do the Irish naming patterns hold up as true in your Irish family tree?

# Irish Placenames - An Overview:

Are researching your Irish Ancestry? One of the “brick walls” I see people coming up against is understanding Irish placenames – especially when the spelling seems to vary so widely. In this article – we’ll look at the 7 main component parts of Irish placenames - and finally give you some more letters and stories to enjoy, all about placenames in Ireland.



Just this week, I received a request from Helen Wyse (always listen to someone with Wyse as a surname!). Helen said:

I am very curious about the naming conventions used for townlands, baronies, villages etc. which seem to be repeated over and over again. So many places are prefixed or suffixed in such a way that it makes me wonder what they mean and if the meanings are useful to us in our search for ancestors. These are two examples: KILL as in Killaloe and LANE in Ballyvolane. Do Kill, lane and Bally have a geographical significance or a descriptive significance? Are they Gaelic words?

Here is a list of some of the prefixes that I frequently see in place names:

- Kill, Droum/Drum, Rath, Balli/Bally, Cool, Gort, Mull, Doon, Knock, Ross, Knock, Castle, Glen

This is a list of some of the suffixes that I frequently see:

- Banno/Banno, Beg/Begg, Boy, More, Nagh, Nane, Reagh, More, Creagh.

Thanks for giving us a direction with your question this morning, Helen. You bring up something that I hear a lot of from readers – especially when you are trying to understand, or heaven forbid – pronounce – a townland that your ancestor originated in.

So, I decided NOT to look up lots of reference books – but give you an answer off the top of my head. So, forgive me in advance if some of this reply sounds a little opinionated – but you can also check with the “official” sources later.

## **Irish Placenames: Cows, Hills, Rocks, Forts, Churches, Woods, Towns, River Mouths – Big and Small.**

It's worth giving a little bit of context before we go on. Remember that most Irish placenames (especially townlands) have been in place for many hundreds – if not thousands – of years. Most were named when Irish was the everyday language.



Before the arrival of the Normans in the early 1200s, Ireland was a land of many “Little Kingdoms”. The tribal boundaries of these little kingdoms were constantly under pressure from ambitious neighbours. These boundaries, and the agreements that held them in place, were often orally agreed and witnessed. Prominent landmarks like hilltops, rivers, forts – and so on – were used to provide reference points. It was a time well before the maps we know today.

Across Ireland, there was no single authority or administration – no single law system. The Brehons (judges) administered a type of local law – dealing with areas like the division of land across generations, and the often resulting disputes. While there were no maps, almost every visual feature in a kingdom, townland or field had a name. There were often up to 1000 identifiable features inside a single townland.

As time went on, the Normans arrived. They used the existing names and naming systems for many of the towns, castles and baronies they put into place. Even later still, English became more widely used across the island – and instead of translating from Irish to English, many of these placenames were “phonetically” anglicised – sometimes – well, sometimes, atrociously!

So, ready for some prime examples of common words in Irish placenames?



**COWS:** The cow was at the centre of the Irish farming economy for probably thousands of years. The Irish for Cow is “Bó” – pronounced “Boe” – and guess what we call roads in Irish? “Cow-ways” or “Bóthair” (small roads are often called “Boreens”). This comes across in many placenames such as Boherbue (Boherbwee).

**HILLS:** Ireland has a fairly low tree line, and the tops of many of our hills and mountains are visible. The Irish for hill is “Cnoc” – pronounced Canuck – which you will often see in placenames as “Knock” – such as Knock, Knockroe, Knocknaheeny and so on.

**FORTS:** Forts were often built on small hills with good visibility all around, or in other prominent places. The Irish for fort is “Dún” – pronounced “Doon” – and this is contained in the names of plenty of Irish towns and areas, such as

Dungannon, Dungarvan, Downpatrick and so on. Smaller forts were called Rath or Lios.



**ROCKS:** These were often rocky outcrops in the middle of pasture or a bog even. Ideal for meetings or building a fort upon. The Irish for Rock is “Carraig” – pronounced “Carrig” – and you will find this in many placenames such as Carrick-on-Shannon, Carrickmacross, Carrigaline, Carrickfergus. By the way – a rocky fort was called a Caishel – pronounced “Cashel” – sound familiar?

**CHURCHES AND WOODS:** Ireland had a monastic and saint tradition from about the 400s. The Irish word “Cill” – pronounced Kill – meant church. Places like Kildare, Killarney, Kilkenny all got their names from an association with a saint and their church.

I also mention Wood here – as the Irish for Wood is “Coill” – very close to “Cill”, but usually pronounced more like “Kwill”. This also appears in many of our placenames – often with a Kil or Cil at the beginning, making it hard to know if it were named after a church or wood. Examples are Kilduff, Kylebrack, Clonakilty, Kilgarrif and so on.

**TOWNS AND RIVER MOUTHS:** I suppose the most recognisable Irish placenames are those starting with “Bally”. “Baile” is the Irish for town or home – pronounced Balya – and appears in many of our townlands (called Baile in Irish also), villages and town names. Names such as Ballymena, Ballinlough and so on.

Also, the Irish for mouth is “Béal” – pronounced Bale – and this also features in many town and city names that are located at the “mouth” of a river. Names such as Belfast, Ballydehob and Ballina.



**BIG AND SMALL:** Where you have big hills, big fields, big rocks – you also have small ones. The Irish for small is “Beag” – pronounced “be-yug”, and the Irish for

big is “Mór” – pronounced “Moor”. These words often spring up as “Beg” and “More” in many placenames. Places like Killybegs, Beginish, Ardmore, Lismore and so on.

And there are so many more placename words – but those ones above are the ones I see most often! Don’t even get me started on colours – Red (Roe), Black (Duff), Grey (Reagh), Yellow (Bue/Boy), Green (Glass), Brown (Dunn).

Let’s finish off with a little link back to Irish surnames. You see, you often see an original Irish tribal name spring up within a place name. Just this week, I was travelling through the north Cork village of Castlelyons.

Castlelyons is “Caisleán Ó Liatháin” in Irish and is named after the Gaelic tribe who were prominent in this area up to the 1200s. This was one of the “little kingdoms” I mentioned earlier – the tribe was called the Uí Liatháin, and held this area until the arrival of the Norman Barry family.

One of the leading families took the surname O Liathain – which later became anglicised as “Lyons“. So, the Barrys drove the Lyons away – but there is still room for both of their teas on my shelf (sorry, I couldn’t resist!).

If you travel around Irish land today, you often see the word “Ua” or “Uí” included in the placenames on signposts – this is a good indicator that you are driving near an old Irish tribal territory.

I think I better stop there, Helen and everyone else – before I go on too long! I hope that helps as a primer to Irish place names and why it is useful to understand a little more of their origin as you bring your Irish ancestry to life!

# 3 Steps to Tracing Your Irish Ancestry Back to Ireland

Tracing your Irish Ancestry back to Ireland can feel like quite a daunting task. Here, we see a 3 -Step process that you can use to structure your search.



Do you ever wonder where your ancestors came from in Ireland? Maybe you already know the county? If you already know the specific house in the specific village or townland, then you're one of the lucky ones.

Many people of Irish ancestry often come across no more than record or gravestone that simply states "Born in Ireland". Some older members of your family might add "the story goes that our family came from County Cork originally" – or something like that!

This guide is primarily aimed at someone who is beginning to trace their Irish ancestors back to Ireland. However, even if you have started that journey, I think you'll find useful reminders and suggestions in each of the steps below.

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## **STEP 1. Trace back to your first-known Irish Immigrant in your country.**

This is all about getting your KNOWN FACTS together – which come in the following four flavours:

- **NAMES:** First names, middle names, surnames, maiden names, nicknames. Names of parents, siblings, children, aunts, uncles, neighbours, sponsors for baptisms and marriages.
- **DATES:** Dates of birth, dates of baptism, dates of marriage, dates of immigration, dates of death.
- **PLACES:** Places in your country (outside Ireland): point of immigration, early addresses, places of work. Places in Ireland: Point of emigration, last place of work (and occupation), place of residence (townland/village/town), place of court appearance (for some!), place of birth.
- **RELIGION AND OCCUPATION:** What was the assumed religion of your ancestor on immigration? Were they Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian, Methodist or other? This can have a big bearing on how to later search for Irish records. What was the occupation of your ancestor on immigration?

Where can you find these facts? There are two primary sources:

**SOURCE 1. LIVING RELATIVES:** In Ireland, if you want to find out something – you ask someone who knows already. The original Irish Google! This might sound a bit obvious, but through the centuries, we have placed a lot of emphasis on the oral tradition.

So, after you have jotted down the facts that you know – and you want to go back a step, say find the maiden name for your grandmother – it's a good idea to ask someone who is alive already. And follow THAT question up with a “what do you remember about her?”. You can then corroborate the memories you uncover with records at a later date. It is also useful to ask for photographs (often showing a date and place) as well as private correspondence.

**SOURCE 2. RECORDS:** Records in the country of immigration and records in Ireland.

- Obituaries in papers.
- Civil records: Births, marriages and deaths.
- Census records.
- Immigration and passenger lists.
- Naturalisation records.
- Military and military pension records.
- Passport applications.
- Church records.
- Local newspaper articles and histories.
- Gravestone and burial records.
- Transportation records for convicts (Australia).

## **MORE ABOUT RECORDS.**

How do you gain access to these records? Presuming you have uncovered some records in your extended family possession, I think it's a good idea to take the following approach – starting with number 1 and seeing how far you get:

1. **GO TO YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY.** Local libraries are often your gateway to local knowledge AND the online world – staffed by librarians who have been asked the same kind of questions many times. Libraries also often have access to memberships of online ancestry sites.
2. **SIGN UP FOR A PAID, OR FREE, ANCESTRY SITE.** These sites typically do 3 things for you.

They give you a place to “plant and grow” your family tree records.

They help you to connect with other amateur genealogists – maybe even potential cousins – and compare notes.

They give you search-access to many of the records mentioned above. Remember, your local library can often give you free (sometimes limited) access to these services.

The big Ancestry sites include:

- **FREE SITES:** [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org) This is a free-to-use genealogical record site run by the Church of the Latter Day Saints. It allows you to build a family tree and search through a wide range of worldwide civil records, church records, census data and other record types.

- PAID SITES: [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com), [myheritage.com](https://www.myheritage.com) and [findmypast.com](https://www.findmypast.com) While ancestry.com is the largest of these sites – each offers a somewhat different experience in terms of user interface, speciality in certain types of records, price points and so on.

A lot of local libraries offer free access to most of the services offered by one or more of these ancestry sites. Many of our readers have found membership of (or a visit to) their local historical/genealogy society a wonderful way to connect with like-minded people in their localities.

Alternatively, you can access your local records more directly e.g. go to your local census site online, check out online grave records sites and so on. As your search progresses, you will probably go directly to the source site for records more often anyway.

**ENGAGE THE SERVICES OF A GENEALOGIST.** This won't be for everyone – but there are professionals out there who can accelerate your search by carrying out some, or all, of the research on your behalf. However, be aware that having something disproven can be just as valuable as something proven – but you may feel disappointed and wish you did not know!

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## **WHAT YOU SHOULD IDEALLY END UP WITH AT THE END OF STEP 1.**

The aim of your preparatory research in this step, is to find as many facts that will differentiate your ancestor from someone else of the same name.

So, let's say you have worked your way back to your earliest arriving Irish ancestor. Ideally, you will uncover their:

- Full name.
- Approximate date of birth.
- Parents names.
- Place of birth.
- Name of spouse.
- Date and country of marriage.
- Names of children.
- Date and Country of birth of children.
- Names of siblings.

Be sure to differentiate between the facts you have evidence for – and the “facts” that are guesses!

However, even just some of these facts may be enough to start working with Irish records in Step 2.

A note of caution: you will come across many “guesses” presented as facts on ancestry sites such as [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) . This does not mean they are useless – you just need to have a little due diligence, especially as you start to gather facts from others.

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## **STEP 2. Use online Irish Records to Discover more about your Ancestor.**

Now for what can be a tricky bit! Here are the important dates and facts you need to know before looking at Irish records:

The first full Irish census record, still surviving, is for 1901. Earlier censuses were fully, or partially, destroyed in a fire in 1922. However, there are a number of “census substitutes” that you can use to trace the location of an ancestor on a particular date prior to 1901.

It is difficult to find a BMD record in Ireland from before the early 1800s.

Civil registration commenced for non-catholic marriages in 1845. Registration for all births, marriages and deaths commenced in January, 1864.

RC Church records were recorded and maintained by local parishes. Some parishes started to record in the early 1800s – and some not until as late as the 1860s. The quality of handwriting and spelling (as well as use of Latin in places) in these records can vary greatly. Over the years, many of these records have been transcribed onto more legible online records. However, the quality of these transcriptions vary – so check with the original record whenever possible.

### **THE PRIMARY ONLINE SOURCES FOR IRISH RECORDS ARE:**

- Census Records: [census.nationalarchives.ie](https://census.nationalarchives.ie) You can search the 1901 and 1911 census, as well as earlier census fragments. Although your ancestor may have left Ireland before 1901, you are likely to find their descendant family members living in their original homeland.

- Civil Records and Church Records (Births, Marriages, Deaths). These are available in a number of sources:
- Civil records of BMD can be found on [Irishgenealogy.ie](http://Irishgenealogy.ie) – there you can search civil records – and see images of the record register for the whole of the island of Ireland from 1864. The images are being updated all the time, see the website for images currently available.
- Church Records have been transcribed in a number of places. These include:
  - [Rootsireland.ie](http://Rootsireland.ie) (a paid access site): Contains church records and part civil records for the majority of the island of Ireland.
  - [Irishgenealogy.ie](http://Irishgenealogy.ie) (a free government-sponsored site): Contains searchable church records for Counties Kerry, much of County Cork (west and northwest), Dublin city and County Carlow. Note: The Civil records have had a large number of images attached to them (as of Sept 2016). This allows you to look at the original registers for many BMDs in Ireland.
  - The National Library of Ireland: For Catholic registrations only, [registers.nli.ie](http://registers.nli.ie) allows you to examine the original record online. However, you need to know the parish in which your ancestor was recorded.
- Property Tax Registers: Given the lack of census material in 19th century Ireland, we are fortunate to have two classes of property tax registers available online. They are:
  - Griffith's Valuation: This is available to access freely at [AskaboutIreland.ie](http://AskaboutIreland.ie) – it provides you with a listing off all tenants across Ireland in the period 1850 – 1860. Remember that the majority of the population of Ireland were tenanted farmers that this time. You can focus in on your ancestor's homeland, sometimes their

house, neighbours – and get an insight into life and land divisions of the time.

- Tithe Applotments: This survey of Irish landholders for the period 1823 to 1837 gives you an insight into who lived where at this time. It is less comprehensive than Griffith's Valuation, but allows you to travel back to a time before the onset of the Irish famine. The entries for parishes in the 26 counties of the Republic of Ireland [can be freely accessed at the National Archives here](#). The entries for the parishes of the 6 counties of Northern Ireland are held in book form at [PRONI \(Public Record Office of Northern Ireland\)](#).
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## **WHAT YOU SHOULD IDEALLY END UP WITH AT THE END OF STEP 2.**

Right – it might take you a while, and you might need some assistance with interpreting the information and connections you uncover in the Irish records. However, the following would be the ideal things that you would uncover at the end of Step 2:

- The relations of your immigrant ancestor in the 1901 and 1911 census.
- Irish church and/or civil BMD records for your ancestor and their family.
- The house and land that your ancestor's family lived in Ireland from Griffith's Valuation of the 1850s.
- The church they worshipped in, the school they went to.

All of these things would be ideal, indeed! It may take you days, weeks, months or years. However – it's important to remember that new records and connections are being made available all the time on many of the above sites. What is not available today, may be available tomorrow.

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## **STEP 3. Visit Ireland and walk in the footsteps of your Ancestor.**

Now, I realise that a trip to Ireland may be outside your means, or motivation, at the moment – however, once you have uncovered the likely homeland of your Irish ancestor – it can be a wonderful experience to connect with the area through visiting. This might involve connecting with possible cousins, visiting the ruins of their cottage, walking the land they once farmed, the church they were baptised in, the school they attended.

This sensory immersion can give you a wonderful insight into the life and times of your ancestor – a feeling of connection that no record can provide!

Well, I hope you enjoyed that overview of how to Trace your ancestors back to Ireland. If you have a question or comment on the approach that we suggest, please do leave it below. However, I'm afraid to say that we do not have the resources to answer specific questions related to an Irish ancestor – [that's why we created The Green Room](#) – to give you that help in a friendly and affordable manner.

Many thanks to Jayne McGarvey, one of our Green Room-based Genealogists, for her assistance in compiling the above.

# Creating A Simple Irish Ancestry Timeline.

Sometimes, the best way to break down an ancestry brick wall is to go back to basics. In this letter, we construct a simple Irish Ancestry timeline that throws up many questions that need to be answered as we make progress in tracking the Irish family of one of our readers.



When our genealogists in the Green Room (hi Jayne and Pam!) are asked a question in the forum, they ALWAYS start with the basics to make sure nothing is missed out. They normally receive a few paragraphs of information but ALWAYS convert it to a basic timeline. They are not worried about insulting Granny!

The following reader letter gives an example of this “back to basics Irish ancestry timeline” – I do hope you find it useful!

## **Back to Basics with a Simple Irish Ancestry**

### **Timeline.**

Some of our readers are very fortunate – their Irish ancestors left Ireland quite recently and they know quite a lot about them as a result. Some have even been able to gain Irish citizenship through an Irish-born grandparent.

Such is the case with our reader story today. His Irish grandmother arrived in the USA in the early 1900s – and he know a lot about her life in the USA. However, when he reaches back to Ireland the information available is limited and he would like to know more about the life and times of his ancestors who remained in Ireland.

So, in this letter, William Badzmierowski will share his ancestral story – and we'll build a simple Irish ancestry timeline from what he provides – and then attempt to construct questions that will help us fill the gaps between the known events and dates. How does that sound?

Over to you, William:

William: My name is William Francis Badzmierowski. I live in St. Petersburg, Florida, USA. I am a dual citizen of the Irish Republic and the USA. This is due to the fact that my Grandmother – Bridget Theresa O'Mahony Gifford – was born in Ireland and I was approved for Irish Citizenship by Descent in 2016. I have been tracing my Irish family history for approximately 10 years.

Mike: Nice to meet you William! Great that you managed to get that dual citizenship – a lot of people in our readership wish for more recent Irish ancestors to achieve the same. Good for you!

William: My grandmother – Bridget Theresa O'Mahony Gifford – was born in County Cork and emigrated to Boston in 1905. Her parents were Denis O'Mahony and Catherine Lehane O'Mahony.

- Denis O'Mahony was born abt.1857 in Little Island in County Cork, – and died about 1946 in Cork.
- Catherine Lehane O'Mahony was born on 29 May, 1859 and died abt. 1939 in Carrigtohill, Cork. They were married 4/2/1883 in Carrigtohill, Cork
- Their daughter Bridget Theresa – was born on 9 March, 1887 at Lying Inn Hospital in Cork. She died 2 February 1967 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA.

Mike: Very interesting. Have you ever heard of Grace Gifford? There is a famous Irish song called “Grace” – based on the final hours of Grace Gifford and her new husband, James Plunkett.

Mahony/O'Mahony is a surname found in quantity across Munster – especially in County Cork where they were a major family presence. Both Mahony and Lehane (often anglicised as “Lyons”) are found in quantity in the places in east County Cork that you mention.

The “Lying In” Hospital was a small maternity hospital that later became the “Erinville maternity hospital” – which still stands today.

William: My grandmother's baptism certificate states that at the time of her baptism (at the present Carrigtohill Parish) her parents lived at Fota Island. Carrigtohill Parish records indicate that my great grandmother was also baptized there and that she and my great grandfather were married there.

Mike: It's worthwhile getting our bearings here with placenames and land divisions:

- Carrigtohill is a GARRISON/MARKET TOWN to the east of Cork City. It is also BOTH a ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH and a CIVIL PARISH.
- Fota Island is to the south of Carrigtohill town. It was an estate owned by the Barrymores – the main line of Norman Barrys who arrived in Cork in the 1100s. It is also a TOWNLAND.

William: I am not sure what occupations my great-grandparents held in Cork, but current relatives in Cork seem to suggest that they both may have been in service at Fota House. Other than this, I don't know much about my great grandparents. I do have extensive information about my maternal grandmother – their daughter.

Mike: I had a look at their marriage cert – and your great-grandparents were both listed as “labourers” at the time. We'll have a look at this – and more about the life of your great-grandparents a little further in this letter.

By the way, have you ever been to Ireland?

William: I have been to both the Irish Republic and to Northern Ireland numerous times over the past 35 years.

Mike: Good for you! It sounds like you had ample opportunity to walk the places that your Irish ancestors both lived and worked. Did you know that the Fota estate and house are both open to the public? The estate as a wildlife park – and the house has also been beautifully restored and conserved.

William: I simply know very little about my great grandparents and any information is deeply appreciated. I am especially interested in how they spent their lives with my maternal grandmother during her early years. I also can't seem to verify whether or not they had any other children other than my maternal grandmother.

## **Questions from an Irish Ancestry Timeline.**

Mike: Right. When you work with a genealogist (including Jayne and Pam), one of the first things they will do is establish a timeline of known facts – and then look to generate interesting questions that relate to the gaps between the years.

Let's take an example. Here is a timeline version of the information you provided:

- 1857 (about): Denis Mahony born in County Cork, Ireland.
- 1859: Catherine born in County Cork, Ireland.
- 1883: Denis and Catherine married in County Cork, Ireland.
- 1887: Bridget born in County Cork, Ireland.
- 1905: Bridget emigrates to Boston, Mass. USA
- 1939: Catherine dies in Cork, Ireland
- 1946: Denis dies in Cork, Ireland
- 1967: Bridget dies in Cambridge, Mass. USA

I had a look at a number of the records related to the events that you mention above – and one of the biggest mysteries is tracking the whereabouts of Denis Mahony at any particular time.

So, here is the timeline again – but I have now included many of the questions that can be further explored in detail in the Green Room with one of our genealogists – so you you can generate a wider appreciation of the life and times of your Mahony/Lenhane ancestors:

- 1857 (about): Denis Mahony born in County Cork, Ireland.
  - Question: Where precisely was Denis born? Who were his parents (father was also a Denis)? Who were his siblings?
  - 1859: Catherine born in County Cork, Ireland.
  - Question: Where precisely was Catherine born? Who were her parents (father was a John)? Who were her siblings?
- 1883: Denis and Catherine married in County Cork, Ireland.
  - Question: Where precisely was each living at the time of their marriage?
  - Question: Who were the witnesses to the wedding? Friends? Family?
  - Question: What was their precise occupation at the time of their wedding?
  - Question: What children – if any – did they have between 1883 and 1887?
  - Question: Where did the family live between 1883 and 1887?
- 1887: Bridget born in County Cork, Ireland.
  - Question: Who were the sponsors to the baptism? Friends? Neighbours?
  - Question: Where were the family in the 1901 census? I saw the record and Denis was not in the house on the night – where was he?

- 1905: Bridget emigrates to Boston, Mass. USA
  - Question: Precisely where and when did Bridget leave Ireland?
  - Question: Who travelled with her?
  - Question: Who sponsored her?
  - Question: Who did she travel to?
  - Question: Who were her neighbours when she first arrived in the US?
  - Question: Was she ever joined later by friends, family, neighbours from home?
  - Question: Was there ever any correspondence between Bridget and people back in Ireland?
  - Question: Where is the family in the 1901 census?
  - 1939: Catherine dies in Cork, Ireland
  - Question: I saw this death record – but Catherine is listed as a widow – did Denis pre-decease her?
- 1946: Denis dies in Cork, Ireland
  - Question: Where is the record for this? See point above.
- 1967: Bridget dies in Cambridge, Mass. USA

From the above – it becomes a lot easier to work on one question at a time as well as generating follow-on questions. Over time (literally!) – a clear picture starts to emerge of the life and times, work and movements of your Mahony/Lehane ancestry in County Cork.

So, William – I will place the above into the Green Room and you can get to work on the timeline and questions under the supervision of our Ireland-based genealogist, Jayne McGarvey.

How does that sound to you?

Thank you very much for sharing part of the story of your Irish ancestors from County Cork – I think it will be fascinating to see more parts of this story start to emerge.

How about you – our other readers? Is it time for you to go back to basics for one of your Irish ancestors, establish a simple ancestry timeline for one of them – and start to formulate the questions that will help to “fill the gaps” between the events that you already know. Or, am I trying to “teach Granny to suck eggs”?

Slán for this week,

Mike & Carina.

## What to Do Next.

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