Researching your Irish Ancestry Online & at Minimal Cost

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Here is a brief overview of various resources (most of them free and online) that will help direct your research into your Irish family tree. This is also available as a blog with comprehensive hyperlinks at http://ggi2013.blogspot.co.uk/p/finding-your-irish-ancestors-online.html

Origins, Meaning, & Early History (1200-1600)
Ireland adopted fixed surnames earlier than the rest of Europe. A good place to start searching for background information on your surname and its origins is Wikipedia. There will be links to other websites, references, and sources such as Clan websites that will usually have a detailed history of your surname, it's meaning, and where it originated.

Specific websites that may prove useful include:
• The Irish Ancestors website hosted by the Irish Times. You can search for your own surname here - http://www.irishtimes.com/ancestor/surname. It will give you some brief information about your surname. Be sure to explore the links in the menu bar on the left.
• Clans of Ireland website (http://www.clansofireland.ie/baile) - this is an independent organisation established in 1989 with the purpose of creating and maintaining a Register of Irish Clans. The Patron is Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland. The website has a Register of Clans with contact details and links to websites of individual clans.

Many books have been written on Irish surnames, their origins, and their pedigrees over the past 150 years or so. Some are available online via Google books, including:
• Irish Pedigrees: Origin and Stem of the Irish Nation by John O'Hart
• The Irish And Anglo-Irish Landed Gentry, When Cromwell Came to Ireland , b y John O'Hart
• The Irish Book of Arms: Genealogy and Heraldry from the Earliest Times, by Michael C. O'Laughlin
• The Book of Irish Families: Great & Small, by Michael C. O'Laughlin

Other respected sources for Irish surname history may be available via your local library:
• The Surnames of Ireland, by Edward MacLysaght (1957, reprinted 1989)
• Irish Names and Surnames, by Patrick Woulfe (1906, reprinted 2010)

End of the Gaelic Clans (1600-1700)
The 1600's were a tumultuous time in Irish history marked by the Catholic Rebellion of 1641 and the subsequent conquest of Ireland by Oliver Cromwell. The old Gaelic clans were finally brought under the control of the English. Many people lost their land during this time, others fled Ireland and went into exile, some sold themselves as indentured servants, and others were sent as slaves to the Caribbean and the new American Colonies.

There are two excellent websites (both run by Trinity College, Dublin) that help tell the story of your family's surname during this time. You can check if anyone with your surname appeared in the depositions relating to the 1641 Rebellion (http://1641.tcd.ie/index.php), and details of any

transfer in land ownership is beautifully described on The Down Survey of Ireland (http://downsurvey.tcd.ie/landowners.php#mc=51.917059,-8.835485&z=9). This will help tell you where your family held land, the name of the local area, and it's location in both historical and present day maps. Another useful free online source is the 1659 census, which nicely compliments the other two sources (http://clanmaclochlainn.com/1659cen.htm).

The Silent Century (1700-1800)
The 1700's represents a large genealogical gap for Ireland - it is the "silent century". There are much fewer records available for this period than there are for the 1800's and 1900's. Many Irish people can trace their family tree back to 1800 but no further. This is the typical place where many ancestral lines end in a Brick Wall. However, resources that can prove helpful for performing a general search for your family name and it's location include:
• The Irish Ancestors website (mentioned above). A surname search will generate surname distribution maps based on Griffith's Valuation from the mid-1800's.
• The Forbears website gives you surname distribution maps based on the 1911 census (http://forebears.co.uk/surnames)
• The IrishOrigenes website provides surname distribution maps based on farmers in the 1911 census (http://www.irishorigenes.com/surnames-database)

You can find additional 18th century records at the following websites:
• PRONI (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland - http://www.proni.gov.uk/index/family_history/family_history_more_sources/family_history_18th_century_sources.htm)
• Registry of Deeds (1708 onwards) - the LDS has these on microfilm (http://www.irishtimes.com/ancestor/browse/records/deeds/index2.htm#Deeds)
• Census substitutes are described on the Irish Ancestors website - 1500-1600 records (www.irishtimes.com/ancestor/browse/records/census/seven.htm) and 1700-1800 records (www.irishtimes.com/ancestor/browse/records/census/eight.htm)

You will find a useful list of other useful resources on the Irish Ancestors website and in the free Google Books version of John Grenham's Tracing your Irish Ancestors (3rd edition, 2006).

Tracing Irish Ancestors who emigrated (1800-1865)
Many Irish emigrated during the 1800's and all that is recorded for their previous address in their new country is "Ireland".

For those who emigrated to the US, their earliest emigration records may be found on Passenger Lists and Ships' Manifests. The Irish Emigrant Database (http://www.dunbrody.com/get-involved/irish-emigration-database/) is a useful way of identifying records that may be found on some of the Passenger List websites (some free of charge) including https://www.ellisisland.org, http://www.theshipslist.com/ships/passengerlists/, and http://www.cyndislist.com/ships

The Journal of the American-Irish Historical Society includes passenger lists, research articles, and other useful sources. Volumes 1–22 (through 1922) are available online for free - http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000505088

The Famine Irish Passenger Record Data File 1846–1851 has 604,596 persons who arrived in the Port of New York between 1846 and 1851 - http://aad.archives.gov/aad/fielded-search.jsp?dt=180&tf=F&cat=GP44&bc=sl

Irish American newspapers can often be very useful in determining an Irish immigrant's town of birth - http://www.genealogybank.com/gbnk/newspapers.

The Emigrant Savings Bank, established in 1850 by members of the Irish Emigrant Society, in researching Irish ancestors. The records of the New York Emigrant Savings Bank are available on Ancestry.com, cover the period of 1850–1880 and may provide the town of origin in Ireland, as well as names of parents, siblings, spouses and children.

Modern History (1865-1940)
If you want to look for a specific person, the various resources available include the following:

Births, Marriages, & Deaths
- Civil Registration Records (1845 onwards for non-Catholics, 1865 onwards for everyone) - www.familysearch.org offers a free search of the indexes - but to obtain certificates, you need to visit your local LDS centre[1] where they have some of the certificates[2] on microfilm (free), which you can photograph on the screen or photocopy for a small fee; or write to the General Registry Office (GRO) in Co. Roscommon, Ireland, using this form (http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/xinha/popups/dropbox) and purchase photocopies of the certificates for 4 euro each.
- The IGI (International Genealogical Index) is another potential and complementary source of birth and church records. It sometimes has additional records not included on the main LDS familysearch website - https://familysearch.org/search/collection/igi
- Church Records (about 1800 onwards) – www.Rootsireland.ie offers a free index search but pay-per-view for transcriptions of the actual records at 5 euro each) and www.IrishGenealogy.ie has a free index search, free transcriptions of records, & free scanned images of records). You can learn a lot from fiddling around with different search options.

Census records (& Census substitutes)
- 1901 census - http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/search
- 1911 census - http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/search
- Griffiths Primary Valuation (mid 1800's) - http://www.askaboutireland.ie/griffith-valuation
- Cancelled Books of subsequent valuations (from the mid-1800's to the mid-1900's). You will need to visit the Valuation Office in Dublin in order to consult them (in colour) or order the black and white version on microfiche via your local LDS Family Research centre.
- Directories (early 1800's onwards) - these are a useful census substitute. They only record the head of the family but can be used sequentially to provide an approximate date of death of an individual or to track the change in land ownership within the family (e.g. from father to son) or outside of the family. Various directories are freely available online (see the Irish Ancestors Website). The National Library of Ireland (NLI) has some directories but the Dublin City Library and Archive (DCLA) has a more complete set.
- Tithe Applotement Books – these are free and cover the period 1823-1837 approximately - http://www.nationalarchives.ie/genealogy1/genealogy-records/introduction

Newspapers & Books
- Always try a Google Books search for your ancestors - you never know what has been written about them in the past! Many books are available in the entirety, others only partially.
- Newspapers often have birth, marriage and death notices and may also contain fabulous information about ancestors who have ended up in the public eye, usually for all the wrong reasons. Websites of Irish relevance include www.irishnewsarchive.com, www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk, the Irish Times digital archive (http://www.irishtimes.com/search), and some English newspapers such as The Times (http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/archive) - some may be accessible from your local LDS centre or your local library or via your local library's website from the comfort of your own home. The search is usually free, articles are usually pay-per-view.

Burial records
- Glasnevin cemetery (Dublin's main cemetery) - an invaluable resource for anyone whose Catholic ancestors lived in Dublin. It has over 1 million records. Make sure to tick the box for all people in the grave and to order the actual register entry itself as this contains additional information.
- Many international websites have burial records for Irish graveyards, but coverage is by no means comprehensive. Explore the following:
  www.historicgraves.ie, www.findagrave.com, www.deceasedonline.com, www.billiongraves.com, www.discovereverafter.com, www.interment.net, and various other smaller websites (Google them).

DNA testing & your surname
Sometimes a DNA test is the tool that will help you break down a brick wall. To check if anyone with your surname has already been DNA-tested, and to see if there is a DNA project associated with your surname, go to www.familytreedna.com and enter your surname (and its variants) in the box below "Search Your Last Name" (on the right side of the home page). Be sure to click on any links that come up to explore further.

IrishOrigenes (http://www.irishorigenes.com) is a company that attempts to pinpoint the ancestral homeland of your direct male line (your father's father's father's line) by analysing your Y-DNA matches and relating the surnames of matches to known surname distributions of these family names. Prices are available on the website. This method is reckoned to have an 80% success rate in identifying your genetic homeland.

1) LDS stands for Latter Day Saints, an abbreviation of The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, otherwise known as the Mormons. They have created a huge genealogical resource, particularly for Irish records, and as well as running the free genealogical website www.familysearch.org, they also have many Family History Centres throughout the world where you can order and view microfilmed records.
2) The following gives a summary of the Irish BMD records that are available via your local LDS centre. Any records that fall outside of these years will have to be ordered via the GRO at 4 euro per record.
- Birth certificates - 1864-1881, 1900-1913, and most of 1930, 1931, 1932, 1939
- Marriage certificates
  o   Church of Ireland - 1845, 1847, 1848, 1850, 1854, 1856, 1857, 1859
  o   all religions - 1864-1870
- Death certificates - 1864-1870