

# In search of Sperrins Ancestors

A practical guide and sourcebook



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*Abbreviations*

CI	Church of Ireland
DED	District Electoral Division
GRO	General Register Office
LC	Local Custody
M	Methodist
NAI	National Archives of Ireland
NLI	National Library of Ireland
P	Presbyterian
PRONI	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
RC	Roman Catholic
UHF	Ulster Historical Foundation

All references, unless otherwise stated, are for documents held by PRONI.



## *Introduction*

Every year the island of Ireland receives thousands of overseas visitors. A very high proportion of those who come do so because their ancestors once lived here. Some are merely interested in the land of their forebears as a relaxing and enjoyable holiday destination. Many visitors, however, travel to Ireland with the express purpose of finding out more about their family history. Of these some will know very little about where their ancestors actually came from – perhaps a county or at best a parish. Others will arrive equipped with a large collection of information that will have allowed them to pinpoint the very townland where their ancestor once lived.

For many people who visit Ireland in search of their ancestors great importance is attached to finding the family homestead or burial place. This book will show you how to go about finding these places. It offers practical advice on the range of sources that are available for family history research, where to find these sources and how to use them. The vast majority of records for the Sperrins area are held by the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI).

The best way for someone to begin researching the history of their family is within their own family. In nearly every family there is at least one member with an encyclopaedic knowledge of who married who and how many children they had and where they lived etc., etc. Collect as much

information as possible on names, dates and places relating to your family; write it down and begin to plot out the skeleton of a family tree. A family Bible is another possible source of information on your ancestors. Gathering this information before you visit the archives can save a great deal of time.

### *The Sperrins in history*

People have been living in the Sperrins for at least 5,500 years. The Sperrins is one of the richest areas in Ireland for prehistoric archaeological remains. The area is particularly noted for its stone circles, the most important group of which is at Beaghmore. There are many other megalithic monuments, a large number of which represent burial sites. The most important include the court tomb at Creggandevesty and the wedge tomb at Loughmacrory. These monuments were constructed by early farmers, but as the bog began to advance so the land became unproductive and the farmers moved away to more fertile areas. The uplands of the Sperrins became virtually uninhabited and what settlement there was in the area was almost exclusively confined to the river valleys such as the Glenelly, Owenkillew, Owenreagh, Ballinderry and Moyola. Here in the first millennium AD the more substantial farmers lived in circular raths or ringforts, some of which still survive.

It will probably never be known when Christianity was brought to the Sperrins, but its influence over the last 1,500 or so years is to be seen in every locality. St Patrick is associated with a number of sites in the Sperrins, including Bodoney. Parishes began to be formed from the twelfth century, each of which had its own parish church. Some ecclesiastical sites were of some importance. For instance there were once cathedrals at Ardstraw and Maghera. A number of these early sites are still in use; others will have been abandoned (see section of Graveyards for more information). A few monasteries were also founded, including Dungiven priory and Corick abbey.

By the late middle ages the dominant people group in the area – and far beyond it – were the Ui Neill, the chief clan of which was the O’Neills. Other clans were subordinate to the O’Neills, including the O’Cahans, O’Hagans and O’Donnellys. Gaelic power in Ulster collapsed at the beginning of the seventeenth century following the surrender of Hugh O’Neill, Earl of Tyrone, to the Crown in 1603 at the end of the Nine Years War. In 1607 he, along with the Earl of Tyrconnell and nearly 100 others, departed from Ireland in which became known as the ‘Flight of the Earls’. Following

this the Crown embarked on a policy of plantation. Land confiscated from Irish chieftains was granted to planters from England and Scotland. Lands in the barony of Strabane were allocated to Scottish grantees, while in Omagh barony it was English grantees who benefitted. Most of what became in 1613 County Londonderry was granted to merchant companies in London. In this way the Drapers' Company of London acquired an estate mainly concentrated in the parishes of Ballinascreen and Desertlynn, while the Skinners' Company acquired lands in Cumber and Dungiven parishes.

Although large numbers of planters came to Ulster in the seventeenth century relatively few of them settled in the mountainous regions of the Sperrins. There was small settlement at Gortin where the Hamiltons built a castle. Although the new landowners were initially only supposed to have British tenants, the reality was that in most areas farms were leased to Irishmen. In fact one Irishman, Patrick Groome O'Devin, was entrusted with managing the entire estate of the Hamiltons in the parishes of Donagheady and Bodoney in 1615. The hearth money rolls (explained below) show that by the 1660s the population of the Sperrins was overwhelmingly Irish rather than settler. We see some evidence that this was beginning to change, if only ever so slightly, by the end of the seventeenth century.

In 1693 Bishop William King noted that before the troubles of 1689-91 most of the inhabitants of Ballinascreen parish had been Catholics, but since then some Protestant families had settled there. A 'very decent chapel' had been built in that part of the parish where most of the Protestants lived. In Bishop King's opinion it would 'serve very well until the mountain part of the parish be planted'. In 1706-7 a new Church of Ireland church was built at Gortin for the parish of Bodoney. Examining when and where Church of Ireland and Presbyterian churches were built serves as a good guide to the distribution of Protestant settlement in the Sperrins (see below under Church Records).

The new landlords sought to develop their estates by founding towns and taking out patents for fairs and markets. The patent for a market and fair at Gortin was initially granted in 1613 to Sir William Stewart. A second patent was taken out in 1752 by Claude Hamilton. In 1802 John McEvoy, when referring to the Sperrins, commented that the 'village of Gortin may be considered the capital of this immense region'. Claude Hamilton also took out a patent for a Friday market and four annual fairs for Frederickstown, now Greencastle, in 1770.

In 1751 James Lowry was granted a patent for a Tuesday market and two annual fairs at Pomeroy and attempted to develop the town. However, in the 1830s it was described as 'bleak and miserable in the extreme ... all very bad and dirty. ... The town is not likely soon to improve as the tenements are mostly held under perpetuity leases by a very poor class of people'. In the early nineteenth century Mountfield was developed by Sir William McMahon. It was described in the 1830s as having been almost rebuilt in the last six or seven years: 'it consists of twelve houses, all of which are slated and of equal size. There is but one side to the village, fields being opposite to all the houses. It is a neat little place and generally kept clean'.

In addition to trying to develop towns landlords also encouraged their tenants to turn waste ground into agriculturally profitable land. The northern and western part of Kildress parish was described in the 1830s as a 'large tract of wild mountain, with nothing but a few miserable cabins and small patches of cultivated ground to relieve it ... In the wild part of this parish the landlords, in order to get good houses on their estates, give the uncultivated land rent free for 3 years, provided they build a good stone house of such dimensions that may be agreed upon'. The evidence of the efforts of farmers throughout the Sperrins to reclaim land is there for all to see. Increasing population pressure from the late eighteenth century was also pushing farmers on to higher and previously barren ground.

Prior to the first census of 1821 we can only guess at the population in the Sperrins. However, from then on census returns provide us with a picture of the changing population in the Sperrins. The following table shows population figures for selected parishes in the Sperrins.

*Table 1. Population figures for selected parishes in the Sperrins*

<b>Parish</b>	<b>1821</b>	<b>1831</b>	<b>1841</b>	<b>1851</b>	<b>1861</b>	<b>1871</b>	<b>1881</b>	<b>1891</b>
Bodoney Lower	5647	7024	7784	7412	7000	6449	6110	5461
Bodoney Upper	4239	5715	5822	5319	5242	5064	4700	4012
Kildress	5693	7063	8192	6841	7037	6515	5552	4782
Pomeroy	6412	7183	8547	7044	7170	6234	5231	4330
Termonmaguirk	7032	10307	12098	10043	10168	9023	8279	6988

Most parishes peaked in 1841, but thereafter the population declined, with the sharpest drop between 1841 and 1851, the decade of the Great Famine. At the same time, the Famine did not effect every area in the same way and in some parishes there was relatively little population change between 1841 and 1851. In the parish of Bodoney Upper, for example, the population dropped by only 77 in that decade. However, from the middle of the nineteenth century something of a culture of emigration had developed with a significant decline in population across the Sperrins region as thousands of people left to find a new life in Belfast, Britain or overseas.

When one considers the fact that the population of the main towns in the Sperrins was considerably lower than it is now, the depopulation of rural areas is made even sharper. Strabane, for example, had a population of 4,714 in 1841 while in the same year Omagh's population was 2,947 and Cookstown's 3,006. All three now have a population in excess of 10,000 people. The population of a number of the smaller villages has dwindled. Gortin had 410 inhabitants in 1841 and 226 in 1991, while Sixmilecross had a population of 355 in 1841 and 264 in 1991. At the same time, other small towns and villages have substantially increased since the early nineteenth century such as Carrickmore, Dungiven, Plumbridge and Pomeroy. The fall in population over the last 160 years is seen even more dramatically at townland level. The number of people living in Owenreagh near Draperstown fell from 180 in 1841 to 91 in 1901 and 26 in 1991. The population of Lower Gallan near Newtown Stewart fell from 163 in 1841 to 50 in 1901 to 5 in 1991.

The depopulation of rural areas is seen most evocatively in the ruined cottages and farmsteads that dot the countryside – places that were once a hive of activity, but which have now been left to nature. In recent times many of the older traditional style of houses have been modernised or replaced by new dwellings. The number of thatched houses in the Sperrins is now very small. Despite these changes a vibrant community survives and there have been attempts to preserve traditions and the older way of doing things. There have also been efforts to promote the Sperrins as a popular tourist destination by promoting its scenery and its rich archaeological and historical heritage and not least a renowned warmth and hospitality towards visitors from its inhabitants. In this way the Sperrins is attracting tourists, many of whose ancestors once lived and worked in its hills and valleys.



## *How to find a birth, death or marriage certificate*

Registers of births, marriages and deaths provide basic family history information. However, their usefulness for the genealogist will depend on the period being researched. Civil or state registration of all births, deaths and marriages began in Ireland on 1 January 1864. Non-Catholic marriages, including those conducted in a government registry office, were required in law to be registered from 1 April 1845.

Civil registration followed the administrative divisions created by the Poor Law Act of 1838. The country was divided into Poor Law Unions. The Poor Law Unions were subdivided into dispensary districts, each with its own medical officer. Under civil registration the area covered by a Poor Law Union was used as the basis of each superintendent registrar's district, while the dispensary districts corresponded to the registrar's districts. In some cases the medical officer also served as the registrar. In overall charge of registration was the Registrar General in Dublin. Certified copies of all registers compiled locally were sent to his office and, from these, indexes covering the whole of Ireland were produced.

### *Birth certificates*

Birth certificates record the date and place of birth of the child. Normally the name of the child is also given, but in some cases only the sex is given, i.e.

the child had not been given a name by the time the birth was registered. The name and residence of the father is given. Usually this will be the same as the place of birth of the child, but in some cases it will show that the father was working abroad or in another part of Ireland when the child was born. The father's occupation is also given. The mother's maiden name is provided as well as her first name. Finally, the name and address of the informant is given, together with his or her qualification to sign. This will usually be the father or mother or someone present at the birth, such as a midwife or even the child's grandmother.

### *Marriage certificates*

Civil records of marriage normally give fuller information than birth and death certificates, and are the most useful of civil records. Information on the individuals getting married includes their name, age, status, and occupation. The names and occupations of their fathers are also given. The church, the officiating minister and the witnesses to the ceremony are named. In most cases the exact age of the parties is not given, and the entry will simply read 'full age' (i.e. over 21) or 'minor' (i.e. under 21). If the father of one of the parties was no longer living, this may be indicated in the marriage certificate by the word 'deceased' or by leaving the space blank, but in many cases it is not.

### *Death certificates*

Civil records of death in Ireland are rather uninformative in comparison to other countries. The name of the deceased is given together with the date, place and cause of death, marital status, the age at death, and occupation. The name and address of the informant is also given. Usually this is the person present at the time of the death; this may be a close family member.

### *The indexes*

Indexes to civil marriages 1845–63 are hand-written, but thereafter all indexes are printed. From 1864 to 1877 indexes for births, marriages and deaths consist of a single yearly volume covering the whole of Ireland. From 1878 the annual indexes are arranged on a quarterly basis. In each index the surnames will be arranged alphabetically, followed by the first names. The name of the superintendent registrar's district is also given, followed by the

volume number and page number of the master copies of the registers in Dublin. In the indexes to deaths the age of the deceased will be provided. When using the indexes it is important to bear in mind possible variations of the name being researched. In the birth indexes an unnamed child will appear as 'male' or 'female' after the surname.

### *General Register Office, Belfast and District Registrars' offices*

The General Register Office (GRO) in Belfast holds the original birth and death registers recorded by the local district registrars for Northern Ireland from 1864. Marriage registers for Northern Ireland are available from 1922. The following computerised indexes to the civil registers are available:

*birth indexes – 1864 onwards*

*death indexes – 1864 onwards*

*marriage indexes – 1845 onwards.*

Only the indexes are available for public inspection, not the registers themselves. Visits to the GRO to view the indexes have to be arranged in advance. An index search costs £9 for a period not exceeding four hours. This includes four verifications of items found in the indexes, with the option of further verifications at £2 each. An assisted search service is also provided. This can be a much quicker method of extracting information from the civil registers, especially if a specific location is known, but costs £21 per hour. A full certified copy of a birth, death or marriage certificate costs £10.

The General Register Office is located at Oxford House, 49–55 Chichester Street, Belfast, BT1 4HL. Applications for certificates can be made in person, by post, by telephone (028 9025 2000) or online ([www.groni.gov.uk](http://www.groni.gov.uk)). Searches will be made in the year quoted plus the two years either side unless a wider search is requested. A further fee will be required for each extra five years searched. Personal applications are processed within three working days; postal or telephone applications are processed within eight working days. The GRO also holds adopted children registers from 1931 and marine registers of births and deaths on ships at sea from 1922.

Although indexes to civil marriage registers are available at the GRO from 1845, the original registers are located at the District Registrars' offices of local councils. Applications for marriage certificates can be made directly to them or through the GRO in Belfast.

## *Church of Latter-Day Saints*

From 1948 the Church of Latter-Day Saints (LDS), or Mormons, began micro-filming documentary material in Ireland. The most important resource acquired at that time was the registers of births, deaths and marriages as well as the indexes to these records held in the Registrar General's Office in Dublin. The Mormons were not able to complete the filming of all registers before work was suspended. The LDS collection of microfilms of civil registers and indexes is as follows:

*birth indexes 1864–1959*

*birth registers 1864 to first quarter 1880; 1900–13*

*marriage indexes 1845–1959*

*marriage registers 1845–70*

*death indexes 1864–1959*

*death registers 1864–70.*

These can be consulted at their Family History Centre, 401 Hollywood Road, Belfast. Telephone 028 9076 9839 for opening times.

The Mormons have indexed many of the two million reels of micro-film that they hold, and these indexes have been made available as the International Genealogical Index (IGI). This index is arranged both by county and by surname and is available in many libraries and record offices and also on the Internet. Access to the IGI is free of charge, as is the viewing of films held in Mormon Family History Centres. A microfiche version of the IGI is available at PRONI under reference MF/1/6/C. While there are doubts about the veracity of some of the information contained in the IGI, it can occasionally provide information of relevance.



## *Church records*

Prior to the commencement of civil registration the main sources of family history information are church registers. PRONI has a vast collection of microfilms and photostat copies of church records, as well as some original material, relating to nearly all denominations in the Sperrins area. Family historians should consult the Guide to Church Records published by the Ulster Historical Foundation in 1994. This lists, parish by parish, all the church records held by PRONI. Copies of the Guide are available in the Public Search Room and Microfilm Reading Room in PRONI. Before looking at the range of material that can be found in church records, it would be useful to summarise the background to the four main denominations that can be found in the Sperrins.

### *The Church of Ireland*

In 1536 Henry VIII was declared 'the only supreme head in earth of the whole church in Ireland', marking the formal beginning of the Reformation in Ireland. The Reformation, however, had little impact in Ulster and it was not until the early seventeenth century that Protestantism was established here. From the start the new reformed church was closely aligned with the settler society brought about by the influx of planters from England and Scotland. In many cases the site of the pre-Reformation was taken over and the existing church either repaired or rebuilt. In other instances a new church was built close to where most of the settlers lived.

Parishes where there were few settlers tended not to have a Protestant place of worship. In the parish of Killelagh, near Maghera, the pre-Reformation church was in ruins in 1622. The minister, Oliver Mather, was ‘not resident, but sometimes (as once in 3 weeks) he resorteth to ye church where no man come at him – the whole parish consisting of Irish recusants [those who refused to conform to the Protestant church]’. Gradually over time as the numbers of Protestants increased churches were built where previously there had been none.

In 1784 a new Church of Ireland church was built on the site of the pre-Reformation parish church near Plumbridge following the division of Badoney into Upper and Lower. The new church served Upper Badoney, while the church at Gortin became Lower Badoney parish church. A small church at Greenan was built about 1860. In 1787 a new Church of Ireland church was built in Carrickmore, the old parish church having been in ruins for over sixty years.

The Church of Ireland was required to keep proper records of baptisms, marriages and burials from 1634, but very few registers survive from the seventeenth century. In general, however, the records of the Church of Ireland start much earlier than those of other Protestant denominations and of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church of Ireland is organised into parishes which in general conform to civil parishes. In 1922 over 1,000 Church of Ireland registers were lost in Dublin in the destruction of the Public Record Office of Ireland. A number of Church of Ireland churches from the Sperrins area lost their early records in this way including Upper Bodoney and Clogherney. Surviving Church of Ireland registers in PRONI are listed under MIC/1 and CR/1.

### *The Roman Catholic Church*

Following the Reformation in Ireland in the late sixteenth century the Roman Catholic Church went through a lengthy period when its activities were severely curtailed. The Penal Laws were a series of enactments of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries designed to remove the rights of Catholics to public office and to careers in certain professions. In spite of the Penal Laws, Catholic priests and bishops operated freely in most areas. During the eighteenth century the Catholic Church was able to set up diocesan and parochial structures. From the beginning of the nineteenth century many new churches were built. These either replaced earlier, less substantial buildings or were built where previously there had been no church. New

churches were built at Lissan (1803), Straw (1809 – replacing one of 1753), Cranagh (1815), Dunnamore (1828), Moneyneany (1832), Loughmacrory (1833), Carrickmore (1846) and elsewhere. A number of these churches have since been rebuilt. According to the Ordnance Survey memoir for the parish of Kildress the Catholic church in the townland of Killeenan was over 150 years old. It is rather unlikely that the church was quite this old, but it could certainly have been about 100 years old.

It is important for family historians to bear in mind that Roman Catholic parishes generally do not conform to civil parishes. The Guide to Church Records provides the names of the civil parishes, or parts of them, included in each Catholic parish. Most Roman Catholic parishes have more than one church. Sometimes only one register was kept for the entire parish, but at other times each church had its own registers. PRONI has microfilm copies for Roman Catholic churches listed under MIC/1D. In addition there are some copies under CR/2. Few Roman Catholic registers pre-date 1800 with most not beginning until the 1820s or later. In addition they will often be written in Latin and at times are almost illegible.

### *The Presbyterian Church*

Presbyterianism came to Ireland from Scotland with the first plantation of Ulster during the early seventeenth century. It did not become an organised denomination until the second half of the seventeenth century, however. The distribution of Presbyterian churches in the Sperrins reflects the pattern of Scottish settlement in the area. Presbyterian registers are available on microfilm in PRONI under MIC/1P. An indispensable guide to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is the History of Congregations published by the Presbyterian Historical Society in 1982. It provides brief sketches of each of the congregations, mainly focussing on the succession of ministers. It is particularly useful in determining when a particular congregation came into being. A Supplement of additions, emendations and corrections with an index was published in association with the Ulster Historical Foundation in 1996.

The years before the Great Famine were a period of expansion for the Presbyterian Church with many congregations established in the Sperrins at such places as Orritor (1824), Douglas Bridge (1831), Donemana (Dunnamanagh) (1833), Draperstown (1835), Dungiven (1835), Leckpatrick (1836), Gortin (1842), Claggan (1846). One former Presbyterian church in the

Sperrins with an interesting history was that at Crockatanty. Early in the 1850s the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland kept a Scripture Reader in the area and occasionally services were held at Crockatanty. A church was built and it came under the care of the Mission Board of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. A Mr Lawry brought over a number of shepherds from Scotland to look after his extensive flock of sheep. These shepherds and their families attended the church. The congregation was later united to Gortin, but dwindling numbers eventually resulted in its closure. The church building is now a ruin. There is a marriage register for Crockatanty covering the period 1876-1924 in PRONI (MIC/1P/254).

### *The Methodist Church*

There are relatively few Methodist churches in the Sperrins area. To begin with the majority of Methodists belonged to the Established Church and they remained members of their own local churches. Therefore they continued to go to the parish church for the administration of marriages, burials and baptisms. In 1816 a split developed between the Primitive Wesleyan Methodists, who retained their links with the Established Church, and the Wesleyan Methodists, who allowed their ministers to administer baptisms. The majority of Methodist baptism and marriage registers do not begin until the 1830s and 1845 respectively. There are very few Methodist burial registers, because Methodist churches rarely had their own burial grounds. However, an important record is a large volume of baptismal entries for Methodist churches throughout Ireland deriving from the administrative records of the Methodist Church in Ireland (MIC/429/1), which may have been the product of an attempt to compile a central register of baptisms. Although incomplete, it contains baptisms from 1815 to 1840 that often pre-date the existing baptismal registers of Methodist churches.

Some information about early Methodist in the Sperrins is contained in the Ordnance Survey memoir for the parish of Cappagh of 1834 which includes the following statement: 'There is a great deal of class reading on the eastern side of the parish, particularly among the Methodists. They assemble together at each others' houses, appoint a leader, who reads a portion of Scriptures and then explains each text according to his idea on the subject'.

The information found in church records can be categorised as follows:

### *Baptismal registers*

The basic information provided in a baptismal register is the name of the child, the name of the father and the date of baptism. The mother's name will usually be given as will a specific location. The occupation of the father and the date of birth of the child may also be provided. Roman Catholic registers will normally give the names of the sponsors of the child.

### *Marriage registers*

Prior to the standardisation of marriage registers after 1845 for non-Catholics and 1864 for Catholics, these will give in their simplest form the date of the marriage and the names of the bride and groom. The residence and the name of the father of each party are often provided. The names of the witnesses may also be given.

### *Burial registers*

Burial registers can be fairly uninformative, with the name of the deceased, the date of burial and occasionally the occupation and age at death given. The deaths of children will usually include the name of the father, while the burial of a wife may include her husband's name. Many Catholic 'burial' registers are actually registers recording payments made at the funeral of the deceased.

### *Vestry minute books*

Vestry minute books record the deliberations of the parish vestry and will be found, where they survive, with the Church of Ireland records for a particular parish. The role of the vestry included the upkeep of the Church of Ireland church, the maintenance of roads in the parish and the care of the destitute and abandoned children. The money to pay for these things was raised through a cess or tax on the land in the parish. Vestry minute books are a rich source of information on life in a parish in bygone times. Occasionally they will include a list of the names of the parishioners drawn up for taxation purposes.



## *How to use gravestone inscriptions for research*

The value of gravestone inscriptions for ancestral research has long been recognised. The discovery of a single gravestone may provide more information on the history of a family than could otherwise be gleaned from hours of searching through documentary sources. A visit to the graveyard in which your ancestors are buried is, therefore, an essential part of compiling your family tree. Discovering the graveyard in which your ancestors are buried is not necessarily straightforward. They may be buried in the graveyard adjoining the church to which your family belongs. Alternatively they may be buried in a graveyard no longer in use or adjoining another church. Burial registers kept by a church are one way of finding the place of burial, but as was explained above, these have limitations and do not survive for every graveyard.

In nearly every parish in the Sperrins area there is at least one graveyard pre-dating the Reformation of the sixteenth century. In these graveyards it is not unusual to find all denominations buried. In a number of pre-Reformation graveyards there will still be a church. For example, Lower Badoney Church of Ireland church stands in a graveyard dating back to the first millennium AD. The graveyard adjoining Carrickmore Catholic Church is a pre-Reformation graveyard. It was the site of a Church of Ireland church from the early seventeenth century through to about 1730 when it was abandoned.

The information recorded on a gravestone varies considerably. Some gravestones will record the dates of death of several generations of one family. Others may simply record the family surname. In most graveyards there will be at least one gravestone that has an overseas connection. For example, in the graveyard beside Carrickmore Catholic Church there is a headstone that was erected by 'John Terney, grocer, Weldon St, Providence, Rhode Island' in memory of his mother who died here. Ages of death on gravestones should be treated with some caution as they are often guesses or have been rounded up. Nonetheless they provide a basis for working out the year of birth which can be useful when it comes to looking for a birth certificate or record of baptism.

The Ulster Historical Foundation has recordings for a large number of graveyards in east Tyrone and south Derry. These are available on its History from Headstones Online website: [www.historyfromheadstones.com](http://www.historyfromheadstones.com). Another major resources on this website is a series of maps showing the location of graveyards. These are interactive so that it is possible to plot graveyards by denomination or view the location of all graveyards in a county at one time. Precise grid references are provided making it possible, using the Ordnance Survey Discoverer series of maps (1:50,000 scale), to pinpoint exactly the site of a graveyard. Case studies look in detail at individual graveyards and there is also a guide to how to study a graveyard.

Irish World has also made its gravestone inscriptions, many of which relate to the Sperrins, available online at [www.irishgenealogy.ie](http://www.irishgenealogy.ie). Some Sperrins inscriptions appeared in the *Journal of the Association for the Preservation of the Memorials of the Dead in Ireland*, published in twelve volumes between 1888 and 1931. These recordings are particularly useful if the gravestone can no longer be traced. There are sets of the Memorials of the Dead in the Linen Hall Library and Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.



## *Twentieth-century sources*

### *1901 census*

On 31 March 1901, a census was taken of the whole island of Ireland. This is the earliest census of Ireland that survives in its entirety. The original returns are deposited at the National Archives in Dublin; microfilm copies of the returns for Northern Ireland are available at PRONI under reference MIC/354. The information in the census is listed under the following headings: name; relationship to the head of the household; religion; literacy; occupation; age; marital status; county of birth (or country if born outside Ireland); and ability to speak English or Irish. Every town, village and townland is represented and those inhabitants who were at home on 31 March 1901 are listed. The 1901 census is arranged by district electoral division (DED). To find out DED a particular townland is in it is necessary to consult the Townland Index of 1901 which is available on the shelves of the Microfilm Reading Room in PRONI. Each DED is listed in a series of calendars which will give you the appropriate reel number. Within each DED in the 1901 census the townlands are arranged alphabetically and numerically.

### *1911 census*

The 1911 census was taken on 1 April of that year and contains additional information including the number of years a wife was married, the number of children born and the number still living. This census is not yet available at PRONI, but it is hoped that it will be soon. Microfilms of the original census returns can be viewed at the National Archives in Dublin.

## *Old age pension claims*

It is worth checking the old age pension search forms, as they contain extracts from the 1841 and 1851 censuses, the originals of which were almost completely destroyed. The old age pension was introduced on 1 January 1909 for those over seventy years of age. For many born before 1864, when the state registration of births began in Ireland, it was necessary to pay for a search to be made of the 1841 and 1851 censuses in order to prove their entitlement to the pension. The forms submitted by the claimants include such information as the names of parents, location at the time of the 1841 or 1851 census, and age at the time of the claim and during the relevant census year. Individual application forms completed by or on behalf of the applicant are known as 'green forms'.

The green forms are held at the National Archives, Dublin, under reference CEN/S/8. Another form of evidence related to the old age pension returns are 'form 37s', which were submitted by local pensions offices. These include the applicant's name, stated age, parents' names and address at the time of the census. Details of the search were added to the form, and each claim was bound according to barony in a series of volumes that are now deposited in PRONI. A partial index is available on microfiche (MF/9/1/1-9), but its entries relate to the Mormon microfilm copy and do not always correspond to the originals. A volume based mainly on surviving old age pension claims was compiled by Josephine Masterson of Indianapolis, USA. This is entitled *Ireland: 1841/1851 Census Abstracts (Northern Ireland)*.

## *The Ulster Covenant, 1912*

Prime Minister H.H. Asquith introduced the Third Home Rule Bill to the House of Commons on 11 April 1912. It provided for a parliament in Dublin with limited powers, and it met with strong oppositions from Ulster Unionists who saw it as the first step to Irish independence. On 'Ulster Day', 28 September 1912, the Ulster Covenant was signed by 237,368 men and 234,046 women who pledged themselves to use 'all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland'. The Ulster Covenant Signatories of 1912 are an invaluable, if underused, genealogical resource. This source is more than simply a list of names and include street addresses, townlands, etc. The signatures have been indexed by PRONI and a searchable database is available on its website ([www.proni.gov.uk](http://www.proni.gov.uk)).



## *Nineteenth-century records*

### *Householders' Index*

The Householders' Index is arranged by county and provides a list of all the names appearing in the Primary or Griffith's Valuation and in the tithe applotment books. Explanations of the tithe applotment books and Griffith's Valuation are given below. In each county volume there is a general alphabetical index for the whole county followed by individual indexes for each civil parish. In the general alphabetical index each name is recorded against the barony in which it occurs. The Householders' Index is available on the shelves of the Public Search Room at PRONI. A searchable database of the Householders' Index for Ulster can be found on the UHF website.

For Griffith's Valuation the number of times a particular name occurs in that source is indicated by the figure after the letter 'G' in the index. For the tithe applotment books, however, only the occurrence of a name in a parish is recorded, not the number of times it appears. The letter 'T' indicates that the name appears at least once in the tithe applotment book for the parish in question. The parish indexes are arranged in alphabetical order within each barony. It should be borne in mind that some parishes are split between more than one barony. For example, the parish of Termonmaguirk is mainly in the barony of Omagh East, but a small part of it is also in the barony of Strabane Upper.

The Householders' Index can be useful when it is not known where exactly a person's ancestors came from. If a surname can be shown to have been concentrated or even to have occurred in a particular parish this may provide a clue to the ancestor's place of origin. Even better is when the surnames of both parents occur in the same parish. Of course, many names will occur in nearly every parish in significant numbers, and people often married outside their parish. Nonetheless, by consulting the Householders Index it may be possible to discover clues in the hunt for one's ancestors. The following are the five most frequently occurring surnames in selected parishes in the Sperrins c.1860 with the number of instances of each in brackets: It is clear that some names dominated. In the parish of Dungiven, for example, the name McCloskey was nearly four times as popular as the next most common names.

### *Ballinascreen*

1. Bradley (87)
2. Kelly (66)
3. Henry (40)
4. McWilliams (39)
5. Hagan (33)

### *Bodoney Lower*

1. McCullagh (100)
2. Morris (62)
3. McRory (59)
4. Devlin (42)
5. Keenan (28)

### *Bodoney Upper*

1. McCullagh (87)
2. Conway (61)
3. McBride (33)
4. McGillian (29)
5. Morris (28)

### *Dungiven*

1. McCloskey (132)
- 2=. Kane (36)
- 2=. Kealy (36)
4. Irwin (27)
5. McLoughlin (26)

### *Kildress*

1. Loughran (63)
2. McGurke (60)
3. Quinn (39)
4. Black (32)
- 5=. Henry (30)
- 5=. McKenna (30)

### *Termonmaguirke*

1. Rafferty (76)
2. Kelly (61)
3. Donnelly (46)
4. Daly (44)
5. McGuirk (40)

## *Tithe applotment books, 1823–38*

The tithe was not a tax but a charge upon land. The tithe system earmarked one-tenth of the produce of the land for the maintenance of the clergy. In Ireland, because the tithe system was used for the upkeep of the Established Church only, it caused a great deal of unrest among Roman Catholics and Presbyterians. There are few early lists, but one that does survive is for Kildress parish and dates from 1737. This can be examined in PRONI under reference D/2395/9.

In 1823 the Tithe Applotment Act was passed, which stipulated that henceforth all tithes due to the Established Church were to be paid in money rather than in kind. This necessitated a complete valuation of all tithable land in Ireland, the results of which are contained in the manuscript tithe applotment books for each civil parish. For the Sperrins the tithe applotment books are available in PRONI under reference FIN/5A. A printed list of the tithe books is available in the Public Search Room of PRONI.

The tithe applotment books are unique records giving details of land occupation and valuations for individual holdings prior to the devastation brought about by the Great Famine and the resulting mass emigration. They list the occupiers of tithable land and are not a list of householders, as is the case in a census. Therefore, landless labourers and weavers were omitted, in addition to all purely urban dwellers. For a small number of parishes – Donaghedy, for example – there is no tithe book. In 1838 the tithe payment was reduced by 25% and transferred from the tenant to the landowner. Tithes were finally abolished in Ireland in 1869. An index to the Tithe Applotment Books for Northern Ireland is available on CD-ROM from Heritage World.

## *The First or Townland Valuation of the 1830s*

Though often dismissed as being of fairly limited genealogical value, the townland valuation carried out in the 1830s can be an important source for those searching for their ancestors, particularly if those ancestors were urban dwellers. The bound manuscript returns are arranged by barony and parish and those for the Sperrins area are available at PRONI under the reference VAL/1B. Although the Townland Valuation was primarily concerned with the agricultural value of land, it also included details on houses valued at £3 or

over (in 1838 this was raised to £5 or over). In the rural areas the names of only a few householders were given, and the entry for many townlands will include the sentence: 'No houses in this townland worth £3'. Those that were recorded tended to be of the gentry or the better class of tenant farmers. Nonetheless, many houses were included which were subsequently dismissed as being of lower than £3 in value.

In towns, however, many more houses were substantial enough to reach the valuation, with the result that a large number of householders are recorded. The information recorded usually included the dimensions of the house and outbuildings (referred to as offices in the field-books) and a coded system to indicate the age (new, or nearly new, medium and old) and materials used in the construction of the buildings (such as thatch, stone, brick or mud). Accompanying the field-books are annotated Ordnance Survey maps on the scale of 6 inches to the mile. These show the different areas of land use within a townland. They also indicate by a numbering system the houses recorded in the field-books. The maps are listed under VAL/1A. In addition there are larger scale maps for towns under VAL/1D.

### *The Primary or Griffith's Valuation, 1848–64*

In contrast to the First Valuation, the 1848–64 valuation gives a complete list of occupiers of land, tenements and houses. This Primary Valuation of Ireland, better known as Griffith's Valuation after the Commissioner of Valuation, Sir Richard Griffith, is arranged by county, within counties by Poor Law Union division, and within Unions by parish. It includes the following information: the name of the townland; the name of the householder or leaseholder; the name of the person from whom the property was leased; a description of the property; its acreage; and finally the valuation of the land and buildings.

In some townlands where two or more individuals of the same name appear some attempt will have been made to distinguish between them. Sometimes this will be done by adding the first name of the father in brackets after the name of the lessee. On other occasions it will be some obvious attribute of the lessee. For example, in the townland of Carrickayne in Donaghedy parish the following lessees appear in Griffith's Valuation: Neal O'Neill (Short), Neal O'Neill (Long), Patrick O'Neill (Little) and Patrick O'Neill (Big).

Griffith's Valuation is of particular interest to anyone wishing to trace their family tree, due to the fact that so little of the nineteenth century census returns has survived. It is available in manuscript form at PRONI (VAL/2B). A bound and printed summary version is available on the shelves of the Public Search Room, PRONI, and at major libraries. These volumes are arranged by Poor Law Union within counties, and then into parishes and townlands. There is an index at the front of each volume which enables searchers to identify the page or pages in which a specific townland may be found. The Householders' Index can be used as a guide to the surnames listed in the Griffith's Valuation. The valuer's annotated set of Ordnance Survey maps showing the location of every property is available at PRONI (VAL/2A). These enable a researcher to identify the exact location of the house in which an ancestor may have lived. An index to Griffith's Valuation for all of Ireland is available on CD-ROM from Heritage World in Donaghmore.

### *Valuation revision books, from c.1864*

The manuscript valuation books were updated on a regular basis and these books up to c.1930 are available under PRONI reference VAL/12B. The so-called 'cancelled books' consist of manuscript notebooks kept by the valuation office and updated to take account of changes in tenure. When a change of occupancy occurred, the name of the lessee or householder was crossed off and the new owner's name written above it, while the year was noted on the right-hand side of the page. Different-coloured ink was often used to differentiate between years with a key at the start of each book to indicate which colour went with each year.

The years in which changes in occupancy took place help to establish significant dates in family history, such as dates of death, sale or emigration. On rare occasions there can even be a comment to the effect that a family had emigrated or that an individual had died. Changes in the valuation of buildings can indicate when a new house was built or when the existing one was abandoned. By the early years of the twentieth century most of the occupiers of land had become landowners, thanks to a series of land purchase acts. This explains the initials L.A.P. (Land Act Purchase) that may be found stamped on an entry in the revision lists. The corresponding maps are also available under reference VAL/12D. Later valuation revision books are now available in PRONI up to the 1990s.

## chapter

# 7



### *seventeenth- and eighteenth-century records*

The further one goes back in time the more difficult it becomes to discover precise details about family history. Sources specific to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are rarely more than lists of names, sometimes arranged by townland and parish. They will usually not provide information on family relationships, and because they almost always give the name of the head of the household nearly all of the names will be those of men. Occasionally two men with the same name will be found in the one townland and may be distinguished with the words, ‘senior’ and ‘junior’, in which case it is reasonable to infer that they are father and son. At the same time, despite their limitations sources from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are useful if they can be used to demonstrate that a particular name occurred in a parish or townland at a certain date. The principal sources from this period are set out below.

#### *Poll tax returns*

Poll tax returns survive for a handful of parishes in Ulster. These date from the early 1660s and record the names of every person liable to pay poll tax by townland. This was paid as follows: a gentleman 4 shillings; yeoman 2 shillings, servant 1 shilling, with the sum doubled if the individual was married. For the Sperrins the only parishes with surviving returns are

Donagheady and Termonmaguirk. The former was published in J. Rutherford, *Donagheady Presbyterian Churches and Parish* (Belfast, 1953), while the latter appeared in Earl of Belmore, *A History of Two Ulster Manors* (London and Dublin, 1903).

### *Hearth money rolls*

In the 1660s the government introduced a tax on hearths as a means of raising revenue. The returns, arranged by parish and usually with townland locations, list the names of all householders paying this tax survive for half the counties in Ireland with coverage most complete in Ulster (in full or in part for all counties except Down). Hearth money rolls for the Sperrins area are available in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland under reference T/307A.

### *The 'census of Protestant householders', 1740*

What has generally been termed a 'census of Protestant householders' was compiled in 1740. The returns were made by the collectors of the hearth money and it has, therefore, been suggested that this 'census' is actually a hearth money roll and for some areas, such as the barony of Loughinsolin in south Derry, includes Catholics as well. It is no more than a list of names arranged by county, barony and parish and, reflecting its supervision by the inspector responsible for collecting hearth money, it is occasionally divided into 'walks'. Some parishes are also divided into townlands. The original records of this survey were destroyed in Dublin in 1922 but copies survive for part of the survey in transcripts prepared by the genealogist, Tenison Groves. A volume containing these transcripts is available on the open shelves of the Public Search Room of PRONI. For the Sperrins area there are returns for all the parishes in County Londonderry and for the parishes of Derryloran and Kildress in County Tyrone.

### *The religious census of 1766*

In March and April 1766, Church of Ireland rectors were instructed by the government to compile complete returns of all householders in their respective parishes, showing their religion, as between Church of Ireland (Episcopalian), Roman Catholic (termed 'Papists' in the returns) and

Presbyterians (or Dissenters), and giving an account of any Roman Catholic clergy active in their area. Some of the more diligent rectors listed every townland and every household, but many drew up only numerical totals of the population. All the original returns were destroyed in the Public Record Office in 1922, but extensive transcripts, again made by Tenison Groves, survive. Bound volumes of these transcripts can be found on the shelves of the Public Search Room at PRONI.

### *Petition of Protestant Dissenters, 1775*

The Petition of Protestant Dissenters is a list of names of Dissenters on either a parish or a congregational basis which were submitted to the government in October and November 1775. A bound volume containing a typescript of the petitions can be found on the open shelves of the Public Search Room of the PRONI.

### *The Flaxgrowers' List, 1796*

In 1796 as part of a government initiative to encourage the linen industry in Ireland, free spinning wheels or looms were granted to farmers who planted a certain acreage of their holdings with flax. The names of over 56,000 recipients of these awards have survived in printed form arranged by county and parish. More than half the names relate to Ulster. The only copy of the book listing the names of these recipients known to exist until recently was held in the Linen Hall Library, Belfast. Another copy has now been acquired by the Irish Linen Centre in Lisburn Museum. A typescript copy is available on the shelves of the Public Search Room at PRONI (reference T/3419), and a microfiche index is available (reference MF/7/1).



### *Landed estate records*

Until the early part of the twentieth century, most of the land in the Sperrins, like the rest of Ireland, was split between a number of landed estates. In most cases the origins of these estates went back to the early seventeenth century and the scheme for the plantation in Ulster (see Introduction). Estates changed hands through inheritance, marriage and purchase. While some of the estates were extremely large, such as the Abercorn estate at over 47,000 acres in County Tyrone, others were more modest in size. For example, in County Tyrone as a whole there were 160 landowners in 1876 who owned between 500 and 2,500 acres. This compares with the whole of County Londonderry where there were only 78 estates in this range. Many of these estates originated with fee farms or freeholds granted in the early seventeenth century by the substantial landowners. For example, the Holy Hill estate near Strabane of around 2,100 acres belonged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the Sinclair family. It originated in the early seventeenth century with a grant in fee farm (that is, in perpetuity) to David Magee by Sir George Hamilton of Greenlaw. In 1683 Magee's son sold the freehold to John Sinclair, a Church of Ireland minister, whose descendants lived there for the next 250 years.

## *The records*

The records generated by the management of landed estates are a major source of genealogical information. The best collection of Irish estate papers is housed in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. A two-volume *Guide to Landed Estate Papers* is available for consultation in the Public Search Room. It is arranged by county with the estate collections listed alphabetically according to the name of the landowning family. A brief synopsis of what is available is provided for each estate collection along with reference numbers. For several of the larger estates there are excellent records. These include the Abercorn estate and the estates owned by the Drapers' and Salters' Companies. For many of the smaller estates, however, there are relatively few records available for inspection in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

Some categories of estate papers are more useful to genealogists than others. Title deeds are concerned with the legal ownership of an estate, and are generally of limited value to genealogists. The same can be said of mortgages. Wills and marriage settlements usually refer only to the members of the landowner's family. However, rentals, leases, lease books, maps and correspondence can all be extremely useful to those searching for their ancestors within landed estate records.

Rentals, rent rolls or rent books record rent payments made by a tenant to his landlord. They are generally arranged by year (rents were usually paid half-yearly) or with several years covered by the same volume. The information provided will usually be limited to the name of the tenant, the extent and location of his holding and the rent payable by him. Occasionally rentals are annotated with a change in occupancy, and the reason for it is sometimes noted.

A lease granted by a landlord to a tenant gave him the right to occupy the property for a specific period of time. Two copies of the lease were usually prepared; the original lease was signed by the landlord and kept by the tenant. The counterpart was signed by the tenant and kept by the landlord. A lease was usually for a term of years, 21 or 31 being quite common, but leases for three lives were in fairly widespread use. A three-life lease expired when all the three persons named in the lease died.

Three-life leases are very useful for genealogists because a tenant often

named members of his family (particularly sons and grandsons) as the lives. When new lives were inserted details of age and relationship were often included and it is possible to work out when the old life died. Lease books can be among the most useful of estate papers as far as genealogy is concerned. They record in condensed form the same sort of information contained in the original leases, such as the name of the lessee, the location and extent of the holding and the rent payable on it. Generally covering an entire estate, they can be a much quicker way of finding information on a tenant farmer than searching through several bundles of leases.

Maps form an important element in most estate collections. These show the property of the landlord, who employed a surveyor to illustrate the extent of his land and the more important features on his estate. Maps come in all shapes and sizes and can be coloured or roughly etched in black and white. The correspondence between a landlord and his agent can be of immense genealogical value. Not only does it include details of the day-to-day running of the estate, but mention is often made of those who worked on the estate.

Many of those who occupied smallholdings will not appear in estate collections because they did not lease their ground directly from the landlord. Instead their few acres were sublet to them by another farmer. John McEvoy, in his *Statistical Survey of the County of Tyrone of 1802* refers to 'the poor cottiers, who generally derive under the farmers of all denominations. ... Without any kind of a cot-take, but the bare walls of a cabin, frequently without even a small garden, the poor man must struggle through life. ... one house generally answers for the family and the cow'. McEvoy was of the opinion that until 'men of property' devised plans to help the poor there was no chance of relieving their situation. While landlords were firmly opposed to the practice of subletting they found it very difficult to stamp out. It does, however, make it almost impossible to identify such people in the historical record. Occasionally they will turn up in correspondence if a landlord was trying to do something about subletting on his estate.

### *The Registry of Deeds*

Though one of the most difficult archives to use, the Irish Registry of Deeds, founded in 1708, is an invaluable source for family historians and is particularly useful when tracing ancestors from the eighteenth century.

Registration was not compulsory, and the number of deeds registered varied from place to place. The deeds registered include leases, mortgages, marriage settlements and wills. This can provide the researcher with names, addresses and occupations of the parties involved as well as the names of those who acted as witness. During registration, which often took place years after the original transaction, a copy of the deed called a memorial was made. The details of the memorial were then copied into a large bound volume. It is these transcript volumes that are available for public inspection.

Each registered deed was given its own individual reference number. In the indexes to the deeds the volume and the page are also given. For example, the reference 18.236.8764 means that this particular deed is on page 236 of volume 18 and is deed number 8764. This referencing system was used until 1832. After that the reference number includes the year in which the deed was registered. Two indexes are available to the researcher: the Index of Grantors and a Lands Index. The format of the Index of Grantors has changed over the years. Before 1832 the Index gives the surname and the Christian name of the grantor, the surname of the grantee and the reference number. There is no indication of the location of the property concerned. After 1832 the Index is more detailed and includes the county in which the property is located.

The Lands Index is arranged by county, with one or more counties per volume. The entries are arranged alphabetically, but only with regard to initial letter. Each entry gives the surnames of the parties, the name of the denomination of land, and the reference number. After 1828 the Lands Index is subdivided by barony. Deeds relating to corporate towns are indexed separately from the rest of the deeds for a particular county.

The Registry of Deeds is located in a large Georgian building in Henrietta Street, Dublin. The main entrance for vehicles is off Constitution Hill. The Registry is open Monday to Friday, 10.00 a.m. to 4.30 p.m., and a small fee is charged for accessing the records. A member of staff will be on hand to offer help and advice. Although the layout of the building can be confusing, the arrangement of the records somewhat haphazard and the transcript volumes heavy and cumbersome, the Registry of Deeds is unlike any other archive in Ireland and is well worth a visit. PRONI has microfilms of both the indexes and the deeds (MIC/7 and MIC/311).



## *wills and testamentary papers*

Once the date of death of an ancestor has been discovered, it is worth finding out whether they left a will. Wills contain not only the name, address and occupation of the testator, but can also include details of the larger family network. Many wills also include the addresses and occupations of the beneficiaries, witnesses and executors. It must be borne in mind, however, that the vast majority of people did not make a will. This section will demonstrate how to find out whether or not someone left a will and, if a will was made, to how access it.

### *Wills before 1858*

Prior to 1858 the Church of Ireland was responsible for administering all testamentary affairs. Ecclesiastical or Consistorial Courts in each diocese were responsible for granting probate and conferring on the executors the power to administer the estate. Each court was responsible for wills and administrations in its own diocese. However, when the estate included property worth more than £5 in another diocese, responsibility for the will or administration passed to the Prerogative Court under the authority of the Archbishop of Armagh.

Unfortunately, nearly all original wills probated before 1858 were destroyed in Dublin in 1922. However, indexes to these destroyed wills do exist and are available on the shelves of the Search Rooms at PRONI and the National Archives in Dublin. These are useful, for although the will cannot

now be produced, the index contains the name and residence of the testator and the date that the will was either made or probated. Occasionally the testator's occupation is given. The indexes are arranged by diocese, not by county. The Sperrins area is divided between two dioceses: Armagh and Derry. The Derry will index is in published form, but the Armagh index is handwritten.

Despite the loss of virtually all pre-1858 wills, in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland there are over 13,000 abstracts, extracts and duplicate copies of the originals. These derive from a wide variety of sources: landed estate papers, solicitors collections, the papers of private genealogists etc. There used to be a card index of these wills, but in more recent times this has been superseded by a typed index available in calendar form in the Public Search Room of PRONI. This index is by no means complete, however, and many more abstracts or duplicate copies of wills can be found in unsorted boxes of landed estate papers and solicitors collections as well as the massive Land Registry archive in PRONI.

Another useful source for pre-1858 wills is the Registry of Deeds in Dublin. A will was usually registered if there were concerns that it was going to be contested. Abstracts of over 2,000 wills registered between 1708 and 1832 were published in three volumes by the Irish Manuscripts Commission (P.B. Phair & E. Ellis (eds), *Abstracts of Wills at the Registry of Deeds* (1954–88)).

## *Wills 1858–1900*

The testamentary authority of the Church of Ireland was abolished by the Probate Act of 1857. Testamentary matters were brought under civil jurisdiction and exercised through District Probate Registries and a Principal Registry in Dublin. The registries covering Ulster were at Armagh, Belfast and Londonderry. The wills of wealthier members of society tended to be probated at the Principal Registry. The district registries retained transcripts of the wills that they proved and of the administrations intestate that they granted before the annual transfer of the original records (20 or more years old) to the Public Record Office of Ireland in Dublin. The original wills were destroyed in Dublin in 1922 but the transcript copies in will books survived. These are now on deposit in PRONI and the National Archives, Dublin. Those for Northern Ireland are available on microfilm at PRONI for the period 1858–1900 (MIC/15C). Each volume begins with an alphabetical index.

There is no comprehensive index to these post-1858 wills and grants. However, there are bound annual indexes called 'calendars' on the shelves

of the Library at PRONI. These calendars are of value to genealogists since they provide the name, address, occupation and date of death of the testator as well as the names, addresses and occupations of the individual or individuals to whom probate was granted, the value of estate and the place and date of probate. Each calendar covers a single year and the entries are in alphabetical order. Even if you have only an approximate date for the death of an ancestor it is worth looking through a number of volumes in the hope of spotting an entry giving details of their will.

When using these calendars to gain access to a will or transcript, the vital date to note is not the date when the will was signed or the date of death. It is the date of probate, i.e. the date when it was officially proved in a probate registry. This date of probate is normally a few months after a person died. However, it is well to bear in mind that, for a variety of reasons, a significant number of wills were probated ten or more years after death. Such delays may have been more common where probate was in the Principal Registry in Dublin.

A consolidated index to the calendars, 1858–77, is available in the National Archives, Dublin and at PRONI. This gives the year and the registry where the will was probated. The Ulster Historical Foundation has an index to the calendars covering the period 1878–1900 on its website ([www.ancestryireland.com](http://www.ancestryireland.com)). This index gives the date of death and county of residence. Access to the index is available to members of the research co-operative, the Ulster Genealogical and Historical Guild.

PRONI also has a card index to post-1858 surviving wills and will abstracts. This index is most useful when looking for a copy or abstract of a will probated at the Principal Registry in Dublin, which would have been destroyed in 1922 without a transcript being made.

### *Wills from 1900*

PRONI has in its custody all wills for the districts of Belfast and Londonderry from 1900 to, at present, the mid-1990s, and Armagh from 1900 until it closed in 1921. After 1900 the original wills and their associated papers are available filed in a separate envelope for each testator. If the person did not make a will there may be letters of administration that give the name, residence and occupation of the deceased as well as the name and address of the person or persons appointed to administer the estate. Post-1900 wills are found by using the annual will calendars located in the reception area at PRONI.



### *School records*

A state-run system of education was established in Ireland in 1831. Prior to this (and for some time after it) there were several different organisations and institutions providing education in Ireland. For example, according to the Ordnance Survey memoir, there were fifteen schools in Cappagh parish in 1834: one under the control of the Capel Street Association for Discountenancing Vice; five under the Kildare Street Society; four under the London Hibernian Society; four under the New National Society; and one Church of Ireland parish school. The availability of education was such that the compiler of the Ordnance Survey memoir was to write: 'No poor persons anxious to educate their family need send them far from home in this parish'.

From 1831 national schools were built with the aid of the Commissioners of National Education and local trustees. Between 1832 and 1870 about 2,500 national schools were established in Ulster. A large number of records for schools in the Sperrins are held at PRONI. Of particular interest are the registers of attendance. The earliest registers date from the 1860s and record the full name of the pupil, date of birth (or age of entry), religion, father's address and occupation (but unfortunately not his name), details of attendance and academic progress and the name of the school previously attended. A space is also provided in the registers for general comments, which

might tell where the children went to work after leaving school or if they emigrated. For example the boys' register for Greencastle National School records that Thomas Jerome Deery of Teebane West, a farmer's son, started classes on 29 May 1922. He attended the school for just under three years for a note added to the register on 18 April 1925 stated: 'Parents sold farm & left for Connaught en route for USA'. Another entry in the register for Francis Conway of Crockanbuoy, who started school on 1 April 1909, ends sadly in the summer of 1915 with the words, 'Died R.I.P. Amen'. Some registers have an index at the front that can greatly ease searching.

As they include the age of pupils, school registers can be cross-referenced to other records such as baptismal records or birth certificates. Many of the schools, particularly in the early part of the century, were cross-denominational, with the religion of the child listed as RC (Roman Catholic), P (Presbyterian) or EC (Established Church, i.e. Church of Ireland). A series of calendars listing the registers available at PRONI are available on the shelves of the Public Search Room. Each school is given the prefix SCH and then a separate reference number. Not all school records are in PRONI, as some are still in local custody, while others have been lost or destroyed.

*chapter*

11



### *Election records*

Election records come in various forms. Registers of freeholders list the names and addresses of individuals entitled to vote at parliamentary elections. Poll books (often in printed form before the Ballot Act of 1872) list the names of voters and the candidates they voted for. Until the late nineteenth century the qualification for voting was generally linked to the tenure of land, and only a small minority of men had the right to vote. In Ireland, from 1727 to 1793, only Protestant men with a 40-shilling freehold had the right to vote. Between 1793 and 1829 both Protestants and Roman Catholics with 40-shilling freeholds had votes, although a Catholic still could not become a member of parliament. The 40-shilling freehold was property worth 40 shillings a year above the rent, and either owned outright or leased during the lives of named individuals. Many important and indeed prominent people had no vote because they leased their property on the wrong terms. Surviving electoral records are available at PRONI.



## 12. *Board of Guardians records*

The new English system of Poor Law administration was applied to Ireland in 1838. Destitute poor who were previously granted relief at parish level were to be accommodated in new workhouses, where conditions were to be as unpleasant as was consistent with health. Ireland was divided into 137 Poor Law Unions. These ignored traditional divisions, such as the county, barony and parish, and were centred on a market town where a workhouse was built. Each workhouse kept registers of those admitted to it; these give the name, religion and residence of each the inmate.

Workhouses were built in the market towns of Cookstown, Dungannon, Limavady, Magherafelt, Omagh and Strabane, ringing the Sperrins. The only one built in the Sperrins was at Gortin. Completed in 1842, this was a relatively small workhouse that could only accommodate 200 'inmates'. In contrast Magherafelt workhouse could house 900 people.

The management of the workhouses was the responsibility of the Boards of Guardians composed of elected representatives of the ratepayers in each union, together with ex officio members including Justices of the Peace. In the minute books kept by the Guardians are details of the day-to-day running of the workhouse, including information on many of the inmates and those employed in the workhouse as teachers, nurses, chaplains, etc.

Indoor registers provides the names of those who were admitted to the workhouses. The information recorded also includes the townland, age, spouse's name and religion of each inmate. Vaccination registers are another useful source among the Board of Guardians records. Surviving Board of Guardians records for Northern Ireland are deposited at PRONI under reference BG. Access to some of these records can be a problem, as there is a 100-year closure rule on all documents in the Boards of Guardians papers. This means that, for example, an admissions register covering the period 1870–1910 will not be available to the public until 2011.



## *Printed sources*

### *Ordnance Survey memoirs*

Ordnance Survey memoirs provide a great deal of background information on the character and habits of the people who lived in Ireland during the early part of the nineteenth century.

The memoirs were written descriptions intended to accompany the original Ordnance Survey maps, containing information that could not be fitted on to them. They are a unique source for the history of the northern half of Ireland before the Great Famine, as they document the landscape and situation, buildings and antiquities, land-holdings and population, employment and livelihoods of the parishes. The surveyors recorded the habits of the people, their food, drink, dress and customs. Details of ruined churches, pre-historic monuments and standing stones were also included. The Ordnance Survey memoirs were published in 40 volumes by the Institute of Irish Studies at The Queen's University of Belfast, with an additional index volume covering the entire series.

### *Street directories*

Street directories contain a great deal of information on the gentry, the professional classes, merchants, etc. They include information on even the smallest of market towns and ports in Ireland. Beginning with a description

of the town and surrounding countryside, the names and addresses of the local butchers, pawnbrokers, blacksmiths and coach-builders are given, as well as the various places of worship, with the names of the local ministers etc. and the location of local schools. Street directories can therefore be useful if you wish to find out which church or school your ancestor attended. The names and addresses of the local members of parliament, magistrates, Poor Law Guardians and town commissioners are also included in many street directories. In fact the only classes that are excluded from all directories are the small tenant farmers, landless labourers and servants. There is a good collection of street directories in Belfast Central Library, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, the Linen Hall Library and Omagh Library.

### *Newspapers*

Newspapers are an important source of family history information. The major drawback with using them is usually the lack of an index of names. Of particular interest to genealogists are birth, death and marriage notices. In many cases a newspaper notice may be the only record of one of these events if it took place prior to civil registration and if a church record has not survived. The *Belfast Newsletter* was first published in 1737. As its readership extended far beyond Belfast to cover much of Ulster, many items of interest from the Sperrins area were published. The first newspaper published in County Tyrone was the Strabane Journal which first appeared in 1771. The earliest Tyrone newspaper still in circulation is the *Tyrone Constitution* which was first printed in 1844. The *Londonderry Journal* as it was originally known first appeared in 1772. Its readership extended far beyond the city of Derry and it contains much of interest about the Sperrins. There is an excellent collection of microfilm copies of newspapers in Omagh Library. In addition, the Newspaper Library in Belfast, the Linen Hall Library and PRONI all have good newspaper collections.



## *Useful addresses*

### BELFAST CENTRAL LIBRARY

Royal Avenue

Belfast, BT1 1EA

Telephone: (028) 9050 9150; Fax: (028) 9033 2819

E-mail: [info@libraries.belfast-elb.gov.uk](mailto:info@libraries.belfast-elb.gov.uk)

Website: [www.belb.org.uk](http://www.belb.org.uk)

### GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Oxford House

49/55 Chichester Street

Belfast, BT1 4HL

Telephone: (028) 9025 2000; Fax: (028) 9025 2044

E-mail: [gro.nisra@dfpni.gov.uk](mailto:gro.nisra@dfpni.gov.uk) (Birth, Death and Marriage Certificate Enquiries)

E-mail: [groreg.nisra@dfpni.gov.uk](mailto:groreg.nisra@dfpni.gov.uk) (Marriage, Re-registration and Adoptions)

E-mail: [grostats.nisra@dfpni.gov.uk](mailto:grostats.nisra@dfpni.gov.uk) (Statistical Queries)

Website: [www.groni.gov.uk](http://www.groni.gov.uk)

### LINEN HALL LIBRARY

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Belfast, BT1 5GD

Telephone: (028) 9032 1707; Fax: (028) 9043 8586

E-mail: [info@linenhall.com](mailto:info@linenhall.com)

Website: [www.linenhall.com](http://www.linenhall.com)

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND

66 Balmoral Avenue

Belfast, BT9 6NY

Telephone: (028) 9025 1318; Fax: (028) 9025 5999

E-mail: [proni@gov.uk](mailto:proni@gov.uk)

Website: [www.proni.gov.uk](http://www.proni.gov.uk)

SELB IRISH AND LOCAL STUDIES LIBRARY

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Armagh, BT61 7EB

Telephone: (028) 3752 8751; Fax: (028) 3752 6879

E-mail: [selb.hq@selb.org](mailto:selb.hq@selb.org)

Website: [www.selb.org/](http://www.selb.org/)

GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Convent Road

Roscommon

Co. Roscommon

Website: [www.groireland.ie](http://www.groireland.ie)

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF IRELAND

Bishop Street

Dublin 8

Telephone: (01) 407 2300; Fax: (01) 407 2333

E-mail: [mail@nationalarchives.ie](mailto:mail@nationalarchives.ie)

Website: [www.nationalarchives.ie](http://www.nationalarchives.ie)

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF IRELAND

Kildare Street

Dublin 2

Telephone: (01) 603 0200; Fax: (01) 676 6690

E-mail: [info@nli.ie](mailto:info@nli.ie)

Website: [www.nli.ie](http://www.nli.ie)

REGISTRY OF DEEDS

Henrietta Street

Dublin 1

Telephone: (01) 670 7500; Fax: (01) 804 8406

Website: [www.irlgov.ie/landreg/](http://www.irlgov.ie/landreg/)

CENTRE FOR MIGRATION STUDIES

Ulster-American Folk Park

2 Mellon Road

Castletown

Omagh, Co. Tyrone, BT78 5QY

Telephone: (028) 8225 6315; Fax: (028) 8224 2241

Website: [www.qub.ac.uk/cms](http://www.qub.ac.uk/cms)

OMAGH LIBRARY

Spillars Place

Omagh, Co. Tyrone BT78 1HL

Telephone: (028) 8224 4821; Fax: (028) 8224 6716

E-mail: [Omagh\\_library@welbni.org](mailto:Omagh_library@welbni.org)

Website: [www.welbni.org](http://www.welbni.org)

ULSTER-AMERICAN FOLK PARK

2 Mellon Road

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Website: [www.folkpark.com](http://www.folkpark.com)



## *Glossary of land divisions*

### *Townland*

The townland is the smallest unit of land used in Ireland. The area varies in size from less than ten acres to several thousand acres. Despite their name these units do not necessarily contain towns, indeed some have no occupants at all. There are around 64,000 townlands in Ireland, and they are the most specific address usually available to rural dwellers. They are generally organised into civil parishes.

### *County*

The county is a major division of land. The counties were gradually established by the English since the arrival of the Normans. There are thirty-two counties in Ireland, twenty-six in the Republic of Ireland and six in Northern Ireland.

### *Parish*

Parishes are important units for record purposes. They generally contain around twenty-five to thirty townlands as well as towns and villages. There are around 2,500 civil parishes in the country. In many cases civil parishes straddle county and barony boundaries. Ecclesiastical parishes, particularly those of the Catholic Church do not necessarily conform to civil parishes, even though they may bear the same name.

## *Barony*

A barony is a portion of a county or a group of parishes. Historically it was introduced by the Anglo-Normans and is usually based on a tribal territory or “tuatha”. Barony boundaries do not always conform to those of the civil parishes within them. There are 273 baronies in Ireland.

## *Poor Law Union*

Under the Irish Poor Law Act of 1838 commissioners were empowered to “unite so many townlands as they think fit to be a union for the relief of the destitute poor”. A Union was a group of parishes usually centred on a market town, where a workhouse might be built, with parishes and townlands as subdivisions. Rates, land based taxes, were collected within these areas for maintenance to the poor. They were named after a large town. The same districts later became used as General Register Districts.

The Ulster Historical Foundation is a not-for-profit educational charity (Ref. No. XN48460) that was founded in 1956. It exists to promote a knowledge of, and interest in, Irish history and genealogy, with particular reference to the historic province of Ulster, and to make information about the documentary sources in this field readily available.

If you have any queries of a historical or genealogical nature arising from this booklet please contact us at the address below:

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