



Map It Out Using Maps to Locate your Irish Ancestors

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When you're trying to figure out which individual of the same name is your ancestor, locations are important and maps can help. Our ancestors tended to remain in the same general area for generations, but may have moved just a short distance into another townland, or, if they were on the border of a parish or even county, they might have slipped over the border. That's why maps are important.

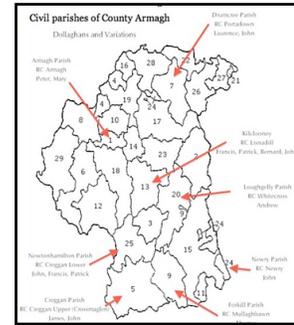
I'm always amazed when people aren't using maps. I had a person tell me one time that they planned to visit a cousin who lived just outside of Dublin. When I asked where, thinking they would say Wicklow or Meath, the answer was Donegal! Have you looked at a map? Ireland is not a big place...you can drive from end to end in a day. But when you're trying to figure out which individual of the same name is your ancestor, locations are important and maps can help.

Administrative Jurisdictions in Ireland

The smallest jurisdiction in Ireland, and the most important for genealogical research is the **townland**, of which there are more than 64,000. Townlands can be just a few hundred acres, or thousands of acres. They are grouped into **civil parishes** and from the name of the civil parish, it is possible to identify the ecclesiastical parish in order to look for church records. Parishes are grouped into **baronies**, a designation no longer used, but important for accessing the primary record collection of the mid 19th century, Griffith's Valuation. The Poor Law system was introduced in 1838 and townlands were grouped into **District Electoral Divisions** (DED) to fund the Poor Law Unions. The **Poor Law Unions** were established near market towns to provide support for the poor and destitute and became the **Civil Registration Districts** used for the recording of civil births, deaths and marriages. The District Electoral Divisions were used for census records. There are thirty-two **counties** in Ireland. After 1922, six of the counties (Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone) became Northern Ireland and the remaining twenty-six counties became the Republic of Ireland. Ireland is divided into four **Provinces**: Ulster, Leinster, Munster and Connaught. Ulster and Northern Ireland are not the same, as three counties of traditional Ulster (Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan) became part of the Republic of Ireland. You should have maps of all of the jurisdictions where your ancestor lived.

When I'm researching I begin with Brian Mitchell's [*New Genealogical Atlas of Ireland*](#). I saw a poor review of this on Amazon which said "it's just maps." Well, yes, that's usually what an Atlas is. It shows you the county borders (so you know that Dublin is not near Donegal). For each county there are maps showing the borders of the parishes, the baronies, the dioceses of the Church of Ireland (important for pre-1858 wills), Poor Law Unions (which became the civil registration districts), probate districts (for post-1858 wills), ecclesiastical parishes for the Roman

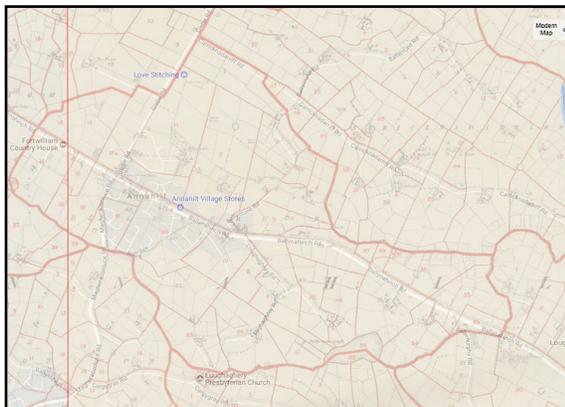
Catholic Church and Presbyterian congregations in the nine counties of Ulster. That's a lot of maps. I make a copy of the parish map and draw on it to show where families of a particular surname are located in Griffith's Valuation. When you have a number of individuals with the same surname, this is one way to divide them up into families. Given names in Griffith's can also be a clue based on Irish naming patterns. If there are a number of given names that have passed down in your family, it may indicate a relationship. If Peter, Laurence and Andrew were not names that passed down in the family, whereas the names Francis, Patrick and John occur in each generation, placing that onto a map would help identify the parishes where you should focus your research.



If you can't find the records of your family in the Roman Catholic parish church where you expect them perhaps they attended a closer church in a neighboring parish. Roman Catholic parishes were frequently larger and might encompass multiple civil parishes. Another site I use for maps is John Grenham's website, [IrishAncestors](http://IrishAncestors.com). The town of Dundalk is on the East coast of Ireland in County Louth. I was searching for a baptismal record in the late 1700s in the civil parish of Kane in the northern part of the county. There were multiple records for individuals of the same name, and I initially ignored the record in Dundalk, thinking it was too far away...until I looked at the Roman Catholic parish map. Dundalk Roman Catholic parish included multiple civil parishes all the way up to the border with Armagh.

Townland maps are sometimes hard to find. Do a [Google] search using the name of the parish with the words "townland map" and look at the images. Sometimes I'm lucky and can find a map. Ros Davies has a wonderful site for [County Down](http://CountyDown.com) with lots of records and maps. She has hand drawn townland maps for each parish. As I was putting together my cluster research on the Moag family this was critical to assigning individuals to the correct family based on their locations.

For the six counties of Northern Ireland, you can use the [Historical Map Viewer](http://HistoricalMapViewer.com) at on the PRONI website. I searched for the parish, took a screen shot and marked in the townland names. You can do something similar for the Republic of Ireland using [GeoHive](http://GeoHive.com). In this case I drew the boundaries of the parishes in manually to highlight the locations of interest.



If you have identified your ancestors in Griffith's Valuation, the sites have maps showing the location of the holding. [AskAboutIreland](http://AskAboutIreland.com) uses a later map, but is unique in that you can do an overlay of a contemporary maps to identify where the property is located now (in case you want to visit). The base map shows the holding from the OSI historical maps, and my family in Ballycrune was on lot 14. By overlaying a contemporary map (and adjusting the opacity) I can see that the property is on the current Ballanahinch Road, across from the Fortwilliam Country House.

Another way you might want to use contemporary maps is to determine the distance between two points. This can be helpful when looking at the likelihood that two locations are close enough for our ancestors to walk in the 19th century. Would your ancestor have courted someone who lived 20 miles or more away? Under what circumstances would they have met? I sometimes use Google Maps to determine a distance. It will typically give me the driving distance, but you can also look at the walking route, which typically would be shorter, across the fields. A Google Map gave me driving directions from the Fortwilliam Country House to the Loughaghery Presbyterian Church where my ancestors were baptized. It says it 1.4 miles and it would take 4 minutes. I've driven this and perhaps a local could make it in 4 minutes, but the road to the church is curvy and only wide enough for one car. It took me a lot longer!

As you research your family, also research the locality using maps. It just may help you break through your brick wall.

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*Databases require a subscription. Some articles and general information are free.