



# A short guide for people looking for their roots in North Down and the Ards

Interest in researching Irish ancestors has never been greater. Traditionally those looking for their Irish forebears tended to come from the United States of America or Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Now that so many census records are available online an increasing number of people in Britain have discovered, often unexpectedly, that they have an ancestor who was born in Ireland. Naturally, many of them wish to find out more. This short guide identifies the main sources that can be used to explore family history in North Down and the Ards, and gives a number of suggested steps that have the potential to lead you in the right direction.

There is not a townland in North Down and the Ards that has not been touched by migration in some way, whether through arrivals or departures. In recent times genealogical tourism has become an increasingly sector within the overall tourism field in Northern Ireland. The genealogical tourist is much more adventurous than the average visitor and much more determined to get off the beaten track and discover their heritage at first hand. They are the people who venture down country lanes, clamber over barbed wire fences and cut their way through brambles and briars. They hire cars, stay in rural guesthouses, eat in local restaurants and, more often than not, make return visits.

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#### **Getting started**

As is the case anywhere, the best way for someone to begin researching their Irish ancestry 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. Occasionally wrong information may be given, yet it is surprising just how often an elderly person's reminiscences prove to be an accurate recollection of the facts. 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. Once you find out what you do know you will then be aware of the gaps and will have a clearer idea of what you should be looking for.

#### **Administrative divisions**

For those unfamiliar with them, trying to grasp the range of different land divisions in Ireland can be baffling. The following are the main units of land administration in Ireland: Province

Provinces are composed of groups of counties. There are four provinces in Ireland: Ulster in the north, Leinster in the east, Munster in the south, and Connacht or Connaught in the west.  
County

There are 32 counties in Ireland, six of which are now in Northern Ireland and the remaining 26 in the Republic of Ireland. The county system as a form of territorial division was introduced into Ireland shortly after the Norman Conquest in the late twelfth century. The creation of counties or shires was gradual, however, and the present arrangement of county boundaries was not finalised until the early seventeenth century.

Barony

A unit used in Ireland between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries for administrative (census, taxation, and legal) purposes. Often drawn on pre-existing Gaelic divisions, baronies consisted of large groupings of townlands within a county. The 1891 census is the last to use the barony as an administrative unit. Parish

This territorial division refers to both civil and ecclesiastical units. Civil parishes, which form



one of the most important units of governance within the civil administration, largely follow the pattern that was established in medieval times. Following the Reformation in the sixteenth century, the Church of Ireland more or less maintained the pre-Reformation arrangement. Church of Ireland parishes are, therefore, largely coterminous with civil parishes. When the Catholic Church began its institutional re-emergence in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it constructed a new network of parishes which did not necessarily follow the civil parish network.

### **Townland**

This is the smallest administrative territorial unit in Ireland, varying in size from a single acre to over 7,000 acres. Originating in the older Gaelic dispensation, townlands were used as the basis of leases in the estate system, and subsequently to assess valuations and tithes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They survive as important markers of local identity, especially in rural parts of the Republic of Ireland where they form the crucial element in postal addresses.

### **Civil registration of births, deaths and marriages**

Civil 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. 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, master indexes covering the whole of Ireland were produced. *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* 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* 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.



General Register Office of Northern Ireland ([www.groni.gov.uk](http://www.groni.gov.uk))

The General Register Office of Northern Ireland 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. Pre-1922 marriages records are still held by local district registrars. The Ulster Historical Foundation has indexed virtually all civil marriages for North Down and the Ards and these are available on a payper-view basis via its website ([www.ancestryireland.com](http://www.ancestryireland.com)).

In 2009 the website FamilySearch.org ([www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)) introduced a pilot scheme to make available the Ireland Civil Indexes 1845-1958. Rather than searching the indexes in Belfast or Dublin genealogists can now search a single name index of births, deaths and marriages for the period 1845-1921 with additional indexes for the Republic of Ireland after 1922. Go to <http://pilot.familysearch.org/recordsearch> to search this database.

The International Genealogical Index (IGI) was created by the Latter Day Saints (Mormons). The IGI contains information on family history drawn from a variety of sources and is always worth consulting for it may provide clues as to the place of origin of an ancestor. The IGI is available on FamilySearch.org. Very usefully it includes abstracts of civil births in Ireland from 1864 to 1880, giving the exact date of birth, child's and parents' names and a location which can vary from the townland to the county. It is also possible to search by parents' names which can be a good way of finding additional siblings.

### **Census records**

The first true census was held in Ireland in 1821 and thereafter every ten years until 1911. Unfortunately, the earliest census that survives in its entirety for the whole of Ireland is the 1901 census. Census returns 1821-51 were almost entirely lost in 1922 in the destruction of the Public Record Office in Dublin. Census returns 1861-91 were completely destroyed by government order, many during the First World War as scrap paper.

#### *1901 census*

On 31 March 1901, a census was taken of the whole island of Ireland. 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.

#### *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. Microfilms of the original census returns can be viewed at the National Archives in Dublin.

A project being undertaken by the National Library of Ireland and Library and Archives Canada is to digitise both the 1901 and 1911 census returns for the whole of Ireland and make these available for free online at [www.census.nationalarchives.ie](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie).



### **How can I find the church my ancestors worshipped in?**

Just as people looking for their forebears have a strong desire to identify their ancestral burial place, so a great deal of importance is attached to finding the church in which their ancestors were baptised, married or were regular in attendance. It must be acknowledged, however, that the church in which a couple married was not necessarily the one that they were members of. Often a marriage took place in the bride's church, though on many occasions this was not the case.

Church records are also vital sources in reconstructing any family tree, and prior to the commencement of civil registration, they are the main sources of genealogical information. The availability of church records these varies from congregation to congregation. Some, mainly Church of Ireland, date from as far back as the seventeenth century, but many others, especially Catholic registers, start no earlier than the 1830s.

### **Denominations in the Ards**

#### **Presbyterian Church**

Presbyterianism came to Ireland from Scotland in the early seventeenth century. It did not become an organised denomination until the second half of the seventeenth century, however. In the early 1600s a number of ministers with Presbyterian convictions settled in North Down and the Ards. They included Robert Blair of Bangor, Robert Cunningham of Holywood and John Livingstone of Killinchy. To begin with such men were accommodated within the Church of Ireland, but in the 1630s they were forced out.

Following the establishment of the first formal Presbytery in Ireland at Carrickfergus in 1642, most of the parishes in North Down and the Ards were served by Presbyterian ministers. In 1660 with the restoration of the monarchy and the Episcopal form of church government, these men were ejected from their pulpits. Most of them remained in their parishes preaching to those who refused to conform to the established church. Many of the congregations in the region today owe their origins to this formative period in the history of Irish Presbyterianism. Given the fact that the majority of people in North Down and the Ards were of Scottish origin, it is not surprising that the Presbyterian Church became the single largest denomination in the area.

In many of the larger towns and villages in North Down and the Ards there are two or more Presbyterian congregations. Newtownards, for example, has several Presbyterian congregations. First Newtownards is the oldest and dates back to the seventeenth century. Second Newtownards originally had Seceder connections, while Regent Street was established in 1834. The formation of the Greenwell Street congregation can be linked to the 1859 Revival. Streatan Presbyterian Church outside the town came into existence following a disagreement in First Newtownards in 1865. It was named after its main instigator, Thomas Streatan, who gave over £8,000 to build a meeting house. More recently, Scrabo Presbyterian Church opened in 1972 in the West Winds housing estate.

As well as the main Presbyterian Church in Ireland there are two smaller historic denominations, the **Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church** and the **Reformed Presbyterian**



**Church.** Today there are Non-Subscribing Presbyterian churches in Ballyhemlin, Comber, Greyabbey, Killinchy, Moneyreagh, Newtownards, Rademon and Ravara. Today there is only one Reformed Presbyterian Church in North Down and the Ards – Newtownards, though until recently there was another church at Ballymacashon near Killinchy.

### **Church of Ireland**

Though the **Church of Ireland** is the largest Protestant denomination on the island of Ireland, in North Down and the Ards it comes in a distant second behind the Presbyterian Church. Until 1870 it was the established or state church and enjoyed various privileges in consequence of this. The Church of Ireland was organised into parishes which in general conformed to civil parishes. If this did not happen it was usually because of either the size of the parish or that of the local Anglican population. For example, in the early seventeenth century Bishop Echlin amalgamated the parishes at the southern end of the Ards peninsula with the church in Portaferry (Temple Cranny) serving this union.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century the smallness of the Anglican population in the Ards peninsula resulted in the union of the parishes of Ballyhalbert, Ballywalter and Inishargy. The churches in Ballyhalbert and Ballywalter were abandoned and a new church was built at Balligan in the parish of Inishargy in 1704. It is said that its roof timbers were taken from Whitechurch in Ballywalter.

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 1922 over 1,000 Church of Ireland registers were lost in Dublin in the destruction of the Public Record Office of Ireland. Thankfully relatively few of these were from North Down and the Ards.

### **Roman Catholic Church**

The Roman Catholic Church is strongest in North Down and the Ards at the southern end of the Ards peninsula, the area that remained in the ownership of the Savage family in the early seventeenth century and which was little settled by Scots. Following the Reformation in Ireland the 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. It is important for family historians to bear in mind that Roman Catholic parishes generally do not conform to civil parishes. At the northern end of the Ards, historically the Catholic parish of Newtownards took in not only Newtownards, but also Bangor, Comber, Donaghadee and Dundonald – in fact almost of the whole of the Lower Ards. This was a reflection of the relatively low Catholic population in this area.

There are no surviving Catholic registers for North Down and the Ards prior to the 1820s. Catholic records for Ardkeen begin in 1828 as do those for Ballygalget, while records for Ballyphilip (Portaferry) do not begin until 1843. The records of some other parishes begin later still.



## **Methodist Church**

Methodism emerged in Ireland in the eighteenth century as a result of John Wesley's many visits to the island. 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. Methodism was not as strong in North Down and the Ards as it was in other parts of Ulster, but in most of the towns there are Methodist congregations.

## **Categories of church records**

There are three main categories of church records and a summary of the range of information that can be found in each is given below.

### **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 will provide the name of the deceased, the date of burial, their former residence, and occasionally the occupation and age at death. The deaths of children will usually include the name of the father, while the burial of a wife may include her husband's name. Burial registers were most commonly kept by the Church of Ireland. Presbyterian burial records are comparatively rare. Many Catholic 'burial' registers are actually registers recording payments made at the funeral of the deceased. Other categories of church record include membership rolls, communion rolls, confirmation lists, and even occasionally a congregational census.

## **Accessing church records**

For a listing of records available for North Down and the Ards see the *Guide to Church Records* published by the Ulster Historical Foundation in 1994. An updated version is available in the Public Search Room at PRONI. *Researching Down Ancestors* by Ian Maxwell (Ulster Historical Foundation, 2004) also includes a full listing of church records for County Down.

The majority of church registers for North Down and the Ards surviving from before 1900 are available for inspection at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. Catholic records are usually only available up until c.1880, but the records of congregations in some other denominations can be available well into the twentieth century. Usually these records can be viewed on microfilm, though there are some original registers as well as photocopied records. Some registers are still in local custody. Generally these post-date the introduction of civil registration and it is usually not necessary to check these if the details of the birth or marriage



are available elsewhere.

The Ulster Historical Foundation has indexed most surviving pre-1900 Catholic records for North Down and the Ards. It has also indexed nearly all civil marriage records from 1845 to 1921. These can be accessed on a pay-per-view basis via the Foundation's website ([www.ancestryireland.com](http://www.ancestryireland.com)) or in person on a visit to its Research Centre at 49 malone Road, Belfast.

The North of Ireland Family History Society has indexed a large number of church records for ND&A, including many Presbyterian records. These are available on a look-up basis for members of the Society carrying out personal research only. For more information visit the Society's website ([www.nifhs.org](http://www.nifhs.org)). Details on the North Down and Ards branch of the Society are available at [www.nifhs.org/ndards.htm](http://www.nifhs.org/ndards.htm).

### **Finding the burial places of your ancestors in North Down and the Ards**

Graveyards and gravestones have long held a fascination for those with an interest in family and local history in Ireland. Jonathan Binns, author of *The miseries and beauties of Ireland*, wrote in 1837 on a visit to Portaferry: 'The remains of an old church called Temple Cranie, surrounded by tombs of very ancient date, supplied a subject of peculiar interest.' Today, few visitors to Ireland in search of their roots are satisfied until they have identified the last resting place of their ancestors.

Discovering which graveyard your ancestors may have been buried can be far from straightforward. Usually the deceased will be buried in a graveyard in the parish in which they lived. However, this was not always the case as people who move to a new area will often be taken back to their place of origin for burial. It can also be the case the more recent generations of a family are buried in one graveyard, but earlier generations in another.

### **Burial grounds in the Ards**

There are over 60 burial grounds in North Down and the Ards. Most of these adjoin a church currently in use, though in others the ruins of an earlier ecclesiastical structure may be found. Still others are more recent in date and were opened by local government authorities. In general they are well maintained. One early twentieth-century commentator wrote of the burial ground at Whitechurch, Ballywalter, 'The Ards has the honour of containing perhaps the most perfectly kept country graveyard in Ireland.' This graveyard is still properly looked after today. A few, however, are in a rather neglected condition. Templepatrick graveyard on the coast road south from Donaghadee is overgrown and indeed must be explored with caution.

Even if the graveyard is properly looked after, the family burial plot may be within railings that are impossible to get behind or squeeze between. An added problem is that many of the older memorials are largely if not completely illegible. Generally the inscription on a slate gravestone will have a much better survival rate than one on a sandstone memorial.

The oldest graveyards in North Down and the Ards are pre-Reformation in origin, many of them marking the site of a medieval parish church or monastery. Such burial grounds mark the final resting places of persons from all denominations – Anglican, Presbyterian and



Catholic. It was generally not until the late eighteenth century that Presbyterians began to lay out their own graveyards in the vicinity of their meeting houses. However, relatively few Presbyterian graveyards pre-date 1800. The same is true of Catholic graveyards.

A few of the older graveyards are difficult to access. Though one of the most picturesquely sited graveyards, Ardkeen is on a small peninsula that juts out into Strangford Lough, and does not have a road or even that lane leading to it. Modern municipal cemeteries are usually laid out on a regular plan. This makes the task of finding a headstone easier, but without the excitement of an unexpected discovery in an ancient burial place.

### **Locating inscriptions**

The recording of gravestone inscriptions for their antiquarian and genealogical value has been going on for centuries. Inscriptions from the following graveyards have been published by the Ulster Historical Foundation as part of its *County Down* series under the editorship of Professor RSJ Clarke:

#### **Name of graveyard Parish Volume number**

Ardkeen Ardkeen 13  
Ardquin Ardquin 13  
Balliggan Inishargy 14  
Ballyblack Pres Newtownards 12  
Ballycopeland Pres Donaghadee 16  
Ballygalget RC Ballyphilip 13  
Ballygilbert Pres Bangor 17  
Ballygowan Pres Killinchy 5  
Ballyhalbert Ballyhalbert 15  
Ballyhalbert Col Ballyhalbert 15  
Ballyhemlin NSP Ballyhalbert 14  
Ballymacashen RP Killinchy 6  
Ballyphilip Ballyphilip 13  
Ballyphilip Col Ballyphilip 13  
Ballytristan Ballytristan 13  
Bangor 1st Pres Bangor 17  
Bangor Abbey Bangor 17  
Bangor Col Bangor 17  
Carrowdore Col Donaghadee 14  
Castle Park Bangor 17  
Clandeboy Bangor 17  
Cloghy Pres Castleboy 14  
Comber Col Comber 5  
Conlig Pres Bangor 17  
Copeland Island Donaghadee 16  
Donaghadee Donaghadee 16  
Dundonald Dundonald 2  
Glastry Pres Ballyhalbert 15  
Gransha Pres Comber 1  
Greyabbey Greyabbey 12



Groomsport Col Bangor 17  
Groomsport Pres Bangor 17  
Holywood Holywood 4 & 5  
Inishargy Inishargy 14  
Kilcarn Killinchy 5  
Killaresy Killyleagh 6  
Killinakin [Killinchy] Killinchy 6  
Killinchy Col Killinchy 6  
Killinchy NSP Killinchy 5  
Killinchy Pres Killinchy 6  
Killyleagh Killyleagh 6 & 7  
Killyleagh CI Killyleagh 6  
Killyleagh P Killyleagh 7  
Killysuggan Newtownards 5  
Kilmood Kilmood 5  
Kircubbin Pres Inishargy 12  
Millisle Pres Donaghadee 16  
Moneyrea Pres Comber 1  
Movilla Newtownards 11  
Newtownards Col Newtownards 11  
Newtownards Priory Newtownards 11  
Portaferry RC Ballyphilip 13  
Raffrey Pres Killinchy 5  
Ravara NSP Killinchy 5  
Slanes Slanes 14  
Templepatrick Donaghadee 14  
Tullynakill Tullynakill 1  
Whitechurch Ballywalter 15

All of the published inscriptions are available to members of the Ulster Historical Foundation via the Members' Area of its website ([www.ancestryireland.com](http://www.ancestryireland.com)). They can also be purchased individually on a pay-per-view basis from the *History from Headstones Online* website ([www.historyfromheadstones.com](http://www.historyfromheadstones.com)). This website also includes maps showing the locations of graveyards in Northern Ireland.

Maps showing the location of virtually every graveyard in Northern Ireland were also created. There is also a themes section so that if someone were interested in, for example, inscriptions with an overseas connection they could bring up a list of relevant memorials.

### **Inscriptions**

The graveyards of North Down and the Ards are full of memorials with fascinating inscriptions and curious carvings. Memorials from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries frequently communicate more information about the departed than do more recent headstones. Information about the deceased's life, occupation and place of residence will often be recorded. Some inscriptions incorporate a mini-biography of the deceased. While there was a direct correlation between the wealth of the deceased's family and the elaboration of the memorial, it must not be thought that gravestones were entirely the preserve



of the elite. From the late seventeenth century an increasing number of headstones were erected by people from the middling strata of society.

A number of memorials also allude to the 1798 rebellion. In Whitechurch graveyard in Ballywalter a stone was erected in memory of Hugh and David Maxwell of Ballywalter 'whose bodies are here interred. They fell in an attack made on the town of Newtownards the 10th of June 1798.' In coastal areas graveyards abound in memorials to mariners.

### **Gravestone symbolism**

The symbols carved on memorials from this period also have much to tell us of the mental worlds in which our forebears lived. The most popular emblems were mortality symbols, which could include a combination of a skull, crossed bones, hourglass, coffin, bell, Bible and sexton's tools. These symbols represented visually what *memento mori* – 'remember you must die' – communicated in words. Masonic symbols also appear on many headstones. Symbols associated with the trade of the deceased were also carved on memorials. This occurred far less frequently in Ulster than it did in Scotland. The stone to William Stennors (d. 1626) in Bangor Abbey church, County Down, has representations of the symbols associated with the deceased's occupation of mason carved on it.

Symbols associated with a seafarer, including cannons, sextant and anchor, appear on the gravestone to Captain George Colvill in Bangor Abbey graveyard. Colvill was the commander of the private ship of war *Amazon* which was wrecked near Bangor on 25 February 1780.

Another interesting memorial is the headstone to Alexander McCormick (d. 1781) in Ballyhalbert graveyard, County Down, which features a well-carved figure of a Volunteer at the top, on one side of which is a flag with a harp on it, and on the other side a small cannon and a drum. The inscription records that McCormick was an 'Echlinvale Volunteer' and that 'His Hon. Captain & Companie did him honour at his death & he was buried with ye honours of war' when he died aged just fifteen.

### **How can I find the homestead where their ancestors once lived?**

Visiting the locality in which your ancestors lived is one thing, but it is quite another to be able to visit the homestead where they once lived. In some case it might be relatively easy to locate where this is. For example, the ancestral home might still be in the occupation of the family today. Or its situation might be known to elderly locals who can remember the family in question. On the other hand, the location of the family homestead might not be known. How then can it be found? If looking for a homestead from the nineteenth century, probably the best place to go looking for it is in Griffith's Valuation.



This Primary Valuation of Ireland, better known as Griffith's Valuation after the Commissioner of Valuation, Sir Richard Griffith, is the earliest comprehensive listing of property in Ireland. It is of especial interest to anyone wishing to trace their family tree, due to the fact that so little of the nineteenth century census returns has survived.

Griffith's Valuation gives a complete list of occupiers of land, tenements and houses. It is arranged by Poor Law Union. 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.

Accompanying Griffith's Valuation are annotated Ordnance Survey maps showing the location of every property recorded in it. The information in the column in the printed version of Griffith's entitled 'No. and letters of reference to map' acts as a guide to locating the property being sought on the corresponding valuation map.

The website [www.askaboutireland.ie](http://www.askaboutireland.ie) provides a free search facility for Griffith's Valuation. You can search by surname and first name and limit your search by county or parish. Not only does the website include scanned images of the original printed version of Griffith's Valuation, it also includes the annotated valuation maps.

### **Valuation Revision Books**

Griffith's Valuation was updated on a regular basis. 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. Valuation revision books for Northern Ireland are available in PRONI (ref. VAL/12B).

### **I think my ancestors came with Hamilton and Montgomery. Is this true?**

Many people in North Down and the Ards like to believe that their ancestors came with Hamilton and Montgomery at the beginning of the seventeenth century. But is this likely? And can it be proved? The answer to the second will be largely in the negative. The absence or loss of so many vital records, especially church registers, mean that it is rarely possible to make a direct and provable link to an ancestor who arrived here in the seventeenth century. At the same time, though piecing together fragments of evidence, it is sometimes possible to make a reasonable inference that an ancestor was among the earliest Scots to settle in County Down.

Writing c.1700, William Montgomery of Rosemount, commented that shortly after receiving



his lands in County Down, Sir Hugh Montgomery 'conducted his prime friends to join him therein'. These included his brother-in-law John Shaw of Greenock and some of his Montgomery kinsmen, such as Patrick Montgomery of Blackhouse who was granted Creboy near Donaghadee. Sir Hugh also leased farms to 'wealthy able men'. Similarly Sir James Hamilton introduced his relatives and others to his estate in County Down.

In these ways the 'Great Ards' quickly became populated with settlers mainly from the southwest of Scotland. The numbers who came in this initial period were considerable. In 1614 it was noted that there were 2,000 able Scots, well armed and ready to serve the king, on Hamilton's and Montgomery's estates. There is unfortunately no list of those who came with Hamilton and Montgomery in the first wave. Neither are there records of the thousands more who stepped off the boats from Scotland over the course of the next century. However, there are sources that can help to identify the names of some of the inhabitants of North Down and the Ards in the seventeenth century.

### **Hamilton and Montgomery Manuscripts**

Two vitally important books on the history of this period in North Down and the Ards are: George Hill (ed.) *The Montgomery Manuscripts* (Belfast, 1869). T. K. Lowry (ed.), *The Hamilton Manuscripts* (Belfast, 1867).

Both are family memoirs written around the end of the seventeenth century which look back upon the achievements of the two main settler families in North Down and the Ards over the previous 100 years. They contain a wealth of information, not just in the memoirs themselves, but also in the copious footnotes that the editors have included.

Among the particularly useful items that appear in the *Montgomery Manuscripts* is a list of the names of those who were in the procession at the funeral of Sir Hugh Montgomery in 1636. This provides a snapshot of the leading members of the settler community at that time. George Hill has also provided additional biographical material on the mourners derived from his extensive research in archives and libraries in Ireland and Scotland, including material in private ownership.

### **Denization rolls**

Scots born before 1603 (i.e. when James VI of Scotland became James I of England) who settled in Ireland did not enjoy the same legal rights as Englishmen. In order to have these rights it was necessary to receive a grant of denization. By acquiring a grant of denization, the individual concerned was usually indicating a desire to stay in Ireland and protect his possessions using the existing legal safeguards. Names of those granted denization appear in the printed calendars of patent rolls of the early seventeenth century.

The names of those Scots who were recorded as having been granted denization were published by Rev. David Stewart in pamphlet form as *The Scots in Ulster: Their Denization and Naturalisation* (Belfast, 1954). The pamphlet was reprinted as an article in *Familia: Ulster Genealogical Review* in 1995.

There are around 150 names of Scots in North Down and the Ards who received grants of denization. In most cases their townland of residence is provided. Women as well as men



could become denizens and in some cases whole families were granted denization. For example, on 11 November 1625 William Adair of Ballymughan (probably Ballymaghan, Hollywood), his wife Catherine (nee Cathcart) and their sons Robert and William all received grants of denization.

### **Muster rolls**

A muster roll was a list of able-bodied men who were capable of military service. For County Down there is a muster roll of c.1630. The original is in the British Library, but a manuscript copy is available at the Presbyterian Historical Society in Belfast. A copy of this, made by Rev. David Stewart, is available on microfilm at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (MIC/637). The muster roll shows that there were some 1,400 men on Hamilton's estate and another 1,300 on Montgomery's.

There are also muster rolls from the early 1640s, listing men raised as a defence force at a time when the settlers were under attack from the native Irish.

### **Subsidy roll of 1663**

Unfortunately, the detailed hearth money rolls that are available from the 1660s for other counties do not survive for County Down. Instead there is a subsidy roll of 1663. This lists those of means in the community who were subject to the payment of subsidies, which then formed the government's main method of direct taxation. They include the amount paid and the status of the person.

The subsidy roll of 1663 for County Down is available in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland under reference T307A. As an example of what survives, those who were taxed in the parishes of Ballyhalbert, Ballywalter and Inishargy were as follows (original spellings retained):

Collin Maxwell of Rowbane  
Adam Becke of Granshogh  
Adam Boide of Kirkcubbin  
John Read of Ballyhemmer  
Andrew Filton of Bally-Esterewgh  
Andrew Mahaffie of Ballyfrench  
David Boide of Glaswry  
Hugh Hamilton of Glanowry  
James Simple of Whyte-Church  
John Hamilton of Ballymagowne  
James Wallace of Ballyobikin  
John Stuart of Ballyvigin  
Alex Bailie of Inchcargie  
John Litle of Ballygarvin  
Robert Barry of Ballywalter

### **Irish names**

The Irish population did not vanish completely from North Down and the Ards in the seventeenth



century and Irish families appear in a number of documents of that period. For example, in his will of 1616 Sir James Hamilton left the following instructions, 'Owen Omulcreve his towne is requisite for seafaring men and fishers at Gilgrooms port and may be lett at a very good rate, but then the poor man should be provided for with favour'. Clearly Hamilton saw the value of Groomsport, but he was also concerned that its Irish tenant should be properly compensated for having to give it up.

A member of the same family, James O'Mulcrieve, appears in the subsidy roll of 1663 for Ballygrainey, Bangor parish.

It would appear that the Irish in North Down and the Ards largely assimilated into the immigrant Scots population. Their names became gradually modified and they adopted the religion of the newcomers, many of them becoming Presbyterians. Thus, many families in this area today have

Irish as well as Scots ancestors. For example, the name McGimpsey, which is prevalent in the Newtownards area, derives, like the name Dempsey, from the Irish word for proud.

Useful books on surname meanings include George Black, *The Surnames of Scotland*, Robert Bell,

*Book of Ulster Surnames* and Edward MacLysaght, *The Surnames of Ireland*.

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### **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 and most of them have been digitised and are available as a database on its website

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

### **Wills and testamentary papers**

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. The area encompassed by North Down and the Ards fell with the diocese of Down. 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 Library at PRONI. From 1858-99 transcripts of original wills are available at PRONI for the district registries of Armagh, Belfast and Londonderry. From 1900 onwards original wills for Northern Ireland can be read 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.

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.

The records of over 1,500 schools in Northern Ireland are held at PRONI, including many for schools in North Down and the Ards. Of particular interest are the enrolment registers. These record the full name of the pupil, his or her date of birth (or age at 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.

### **Useful addresses**

#### **ULSTER HISTORICAL FOUNDATION**

49 Malone Road  
Belfast, BT9 6RY  
Telephone: (028) 9066 1988  
Email: [enquiry@uhf.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@uhf.org.uk)  
Website: [www.ancestryireland.com](http://www.ancestryireland.com)

#### **GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND**

49/55 Chichester Street  
Belfast, BT1 4HL  
Telephone: (028) 9025 2000  
Email: [gro.nisra@dfpni.gov.uk](mailto:gro.nisra@dfpni.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.groni.gov.uk](http://www.groni.gov.uk)

#### **LINEN HALL LIBRARY**

17 Donegall Square North  
Belfast, BT1 5GD  
Telephone: (028) 9032 1707  
Email: [info@linenhall.com](mailto:info@linenhall.com)  
Website: [www.linenhall.com/Home/home.html](http://www.linenhall.com/Home/home.html)

#### **PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND**

66 Balmoral Avenue  
Belfast, BT9 6NY  
Telephone: (028) 9025 1318  
Email: [proni@gov.uk](mailto:proni@gov.uk)  
Website: [www.proni.gov.uk](http://www.proni.gov.uk)

#### **CENTRE FOR MIGRATION STUDIES**

Ulster-American Folk Park



Castletown  
Omagh, Co. Tyrone, BT78 5QY  
Telephone: (028) 8225 6315  
Email: [cms@librariesni.org.uk](mailto:cms@librariesni.org.uk)  
Website: [www.qub.ac.uk/cms](http://www.qub.ac.uk/cms)