

Searching for Irish ancestors
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Where is Ireland?

Ireland is an island in the North Atlantic, separated from Great Britain to its east by the North Channel, the Irish Sea and St. George's Channel

Ptolemy's Roman era [map](#), 140AD



- looks much like today's Ireland
- Ptolemy called Ireland 'Iouerniā' - thought to mean 'abundant land' and from which derive the Irish names *Ériu* & *Éire*
- intimate Mediterranean knowledge of Ireland, its peoples, coastal features & principal places but not the interior of the country
- the ancient Irish settlement Eblana on the map is believed to be the modern day Dublin
- Irish [language](#)

Provinces, counties, parishes, townlands

- medieval period - many territorial divisions
- early 17th century - 4 Provinces: Connacht, Leinster, Munster & Ulster
- Irish word for territorial division, *cúige* - '5th part' - indicates that there were once 5 (Meath)
- Northern Ireland is a part of the UK with England, Scotland & Wales. Ireland (Republic of Ireland/ ROI) is a separate country & no longer has a **formal bond** to the UK
- there are 32 counties in Ireland (26 in the ROI & 6 in Northern Ireland)
- 87 parishes in County Kerry, for example
- road signage: *size & impact of Irish spellings* - implications of political situation

Travel routes - migrations

- **Keltoi** - name given by the Ancient Greeks to a 'barbaric' people who lived to the north of them in central Europe
- **Celtic** - Irish, Scottish, and Welsh - migrated from central Europe around 500BC

Irish famine (Gorta Mór) 1840s

- the worst humanitarian disaster of C19th Europe
- 1841 - c8.5+ million people in Ireland; by 1850, c1 million people died & c1¼million fled
- c400,000 births did not take place
- the social, cultural and psychological effects of the Famine lingered on long afterwards and emigration became a part of Irish life
- 50 years after the Famine, the population of Ireland had halved
- **the Famine changed the course of Irish history**
- reports from [Skibbereen](#) focused worldwide attention on the situation



Irish are the largest diaspora in world

'Typical' Irish 'looks' (general)

- Northern Ireland: red hair, pale skin, freckles
- Central Ireland: brown/ black curly hair & blue eyes
- Southern Ireland: black hair, blue eyes, beige skin - 'Black Irish' - possible links with Spain and Iberian peninsular

Irish surnames

- County Cork is given as the main origin of the Irish Diaspora
- surnames include for example: Murphy, Kelly, Sullivan, McCarthy, Walsh
- sign up for emails from [Letter from Ireland](#) website

Emigration to USA

People of Irish heritage were among the earliest white settlers. Many came to help build the canals constructed during the 1820s and 1830s. Irish men were given hard work and poor wages, and faced discrimination. Irish immigrants tended to establish their own communities. Once railroads arrived, many of the Irish workers laid the tracks. Many Irish went to USA as a direct result of the potato famine in Ireland during the 1840s. Friction arose, because most established Americans were from Protestant faiths and the Irish were Roman Catholics. The number of Irish immigrants continued to decline during the rest of the 20th century, with immigration nearly ceasing following World War II.

Push and pull factors

- indentured servants
- assisted passages
- transportation
- military

Irish Americans

- Americans who have full or partial ancestry from Ireland
- c33 million Americans - c10% of the total population - identified as being Irish in the 2017 American Community Survey conducted by the US Census Bureau
- compared with population of c7 million people in Ireland
- immigrant ancestors are inspiring and fascinating because they are diaspora (they left somewhere) and pioneers (they came to somewhere)

Censuses

- **1813** - the 1st official census of the population of Ireland; the work was poorly executed
- **1821** - first full government census of Ireland was taken in
- **1831 to 1911** - censuses at ten-yearly intervals
- **1834** - Daniel O'Connell initiated a count of Catholics & Protestants - the "*O'Connell Census*"
- **1851 to 1911** - censuses were taken under supervision of Registrar General of Births, Deaths, and Marriages
- **1851** - same information as the 1841 census plus 2 schedules were filled out. 1st - reported absent members of the household. The 2nd listed members of the household who had died since the last census & recorded for each the cause and year of death, age at death, sex, relationship to the head of the household & occupation

- online access to the **1821-1851** census fragments is through: The Census Finder website for Ireland and [Family Search](#) which has certified copies of [extracts](#) from the 1821, 1841, 1851 censuses
- original census returns for **1861** and **1871** were **destroyed** shortly after the censuses were taken
- **1881** and **1891** censuses were **pulped** during World War I
- returns for **1821, 1831, 1841** and **1851** were, apart from *a few survivals*, **destroyed in 1922 in the fire** at the Public Record Office at the beginning of the Civil War
- **1921** - **no census** was taken - War of Independence
- **1926** - 1st census of the population of the Irish Free State was taken after the 1926 Statistics Act
- responsibility for taking censuses was transferred from the Registrar General to the Statistics Branch of the Department of Industry and Commerce, now the [Central Statistics Office](#)
- returns for **1926 - 1946** and part of those for **1951** are held in the National Archives
- censuses were taken in **1936, 1946, 1951, 1956, 1961, 1966, 1971, 1976** census was **cancelled**, **1979, 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996, 2002 and 2006**

**** next available Census Returns: 1926 will be released to public inspection in [January 2027](#)****

Looking for records

- There are 2 jurisdictions in Ireland since 1922: the Republic of Ireland (ROI) comprises 26 counties and Dublin is the capital city. Northern Ireland is one of the 4 parts of the United Kingdom (UK). NI comprises 6 counties (Ulster), and Belfast is the capital city. Records are therefore in two separate archival repositories. The [National Archives](#) for ROI, and [PRONI](#) for NI.

Useful research sources:

- [Topographical Dictionary of Ireland](#)
- **BMD records**
 - order **BMD certificates**
 - **The General Register Office** - [GRO](#) holds all official records of Irish births, deaths, and marriages from 1864 and of non-Catholic marriages from 1845
- **Griffith's Valuation**: see taxpayers, inclusion of Senior & Junior (old/ young) agnomens - relationship clues; landlord
- **Dog licences**: 'Ireland Dog Licence Registers' in 'Find My Past' - from 1866 - owner's name, address, county, year, and date of licence; colour, sex, breed of dog
- **John Grenham's website**
- **Family Search website** - enter Ireland in the 'Place' box; 251 separate categories: almanacs, archives, cemeteries, church records, folklore etc.
- [Railways](#)
- **Who Do You Think You Are (WDYTYA)** for example: Julie Walters, Boy George, Molly Shannon, David Tennant, Dervla Kirwan, Alexander Armstrong, Barbara Windsor, Graham Norton
- regularly look for **new Irish records** recently released across websites
- **Guinness Storehouse Archives** - Ancestry - 1.6 million historical records. The digitized records give details about the employees of Guinness' Brewery in Dublin, from 1799 to 1939, including employees' home addresses, occupations, household compositions, earnings, and leaves of absence. This can reveal **generational involvement** of families in the brewery's workforce; possibility of tracing the **careers** of ancestors, showing progression through jobs and income.
- **Facebook** or other social media

DNA testing

- The major DNA testing companies identify Irish ancestry, and some will pinpoint regions, which can be very explicit



My ethnicity estimates

Vary slightly across different websites but reveal the same pattern

- **Ancestry:** Ireland 50% Wales 50%, plus pinpointed **regions**
- **Living DNA:** Ireland 54.5%, Wales 45.6%
- **MyHeritage:** 100% Irish, Scottish & Welsh
- **23&Me:** 100% British & Irish, Regions: Cork, Kerry, London, Carmarthenshire

Variations in ethnicity inheritance

me and my children's DNA ethnicity estimates vary due to randomness of inheritance patterns

	Penny	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Child 4	Child 5	Child 6	Children's range
Ireland	50%	45	34	35	18	24	21	18-45
Wales	50%	20	32	32	32	27	29	20-32

DNA matches

- collaborate with people with Irish ancestry
- download your DNA from testing site, upload to GedMatch
- more potential for collaboration (MRCA column, emails, chromosome browser)



Ethical dilemmas

- discovering ancestry can bring great joy, but famine story can be upsetting
- inherited trauma
- visiting Ireland: diaspora or tourist? diaspora and homelands - cultural appreciation or appropriation

Key takeaways, hints, tips:

- in Censuses, look specifically for where they came from - name of area
- marriage and death certificates often reveal father's or parents' birthplace
- utilise maps
- look for chain migrations
- think laterally for records
- connect with Irish people in Ireland

Stay in touch:

- **Email:** penny_walters@talk21.com
- **See website for my forthcoming webinars:** www.searchmypast.co.uk

Books

- **'Ethical Dilemmas in Genealogy'** 2019
- **'The Psychology of Searching'** 2020
- **Both available on Amazon in paperback and kindle**

