

Making Sense of Irish Locations

By G. Vaughn Johnson

Finding your Irish ancestors is dependent on knowing where they lived. Irish jurisdictions are unique. Understanding these differences is important in finding your ancestors. I have often said the secret of Irish Genealogy is location, location and location.

The historic country of Ireland was divided into 32 counties. Ireland won its independence from England in 1921. The terms of the treaty allowed six counties in Northern Ireland to remain in the United Kingdom. Opponents of the treaty fought a civil war to reject the treaty. The opponents occupied the Four Courts Building. In the process of defeating them the building was substantially destroyed and many records lost.

Civil Jurisdictions (government) in Ireland are shown in the diagram (see presentation slide). Civil parishes have a religious connection. They have the same boundaries and name as the Church of Ireland Parishes. The Church of Ireland was the State Church. The English government imposed the Church of Ireland (which was the Irish branch of the Church of England) on the Irish nation.

Counties are divided into Civil Parishes. Government records use Civil Parish locations. These include the census, civil registration of births, marriages and deaths, Griffiths Valuation, and other.

How can you determine the townland where an ancestor lived? Griffith's Valuation which was a nationwide property assessment from 1848 -1864 identifies the parish and townland of the occupant. Civil registration, the census and some church records identify the townland.

Townland maps can be obtained by entering – townlands.ie.

Some important resources for identifying the location of ancestors include:

[IreAtlas Townland Index](#) (Formerly Sean Ruad)

IreAtlas Townland Index has a search form which allows searches by county, civil parish, townland, and Poor Law Union. If one enters the county and the parish it will display the townlands in that parish. Towns are also displayed. They are identified by an entry in capital letters followed by a capital T.

[John Grenham](#)

Use John Grenham's web site to explore Irish placenames. To access John Grenham's web site google – John Grenham. Click on Placenames and next on Civil Parish Maps. Choose a county and then select a civil parish. After selecting a civil parish the program will display places in the selected parish. These are townlands. Parishes are divided into townlands. Townlands may

consist of a few houses on just a few acres. Towns are small communities. There are over 60,000 townlands in Ireland and they all have names.

Finding Catholic parishes is challenging for two reasons. Often Catholic parishes have had multiple names and they usually have different boundaries and names than civil parishes. Again, we will use John Grenham's site. Click on Irish Placenames, enter a county, and a map of Catholic parishes is displayed. Hovering the pointer over a parish will display alternative names for the parish.

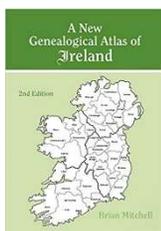
[Griffith's Valuation](#)

Griffith's Valuation can be accessed from the web site askaboutireland.ie. Click on Griffith's Valuation near the bottom. Enter the family name, the first name and the county. The parish is optional. Click on search.

Find the desired individual in the results page and click on details. This shows the property tenant and the landlord. Detailed location information is displayed including the townland and the year of the valuation. Further options include the original page which shows the size of the property and the valuation. Lastly it offers a map of the property.

As indicated before Griffith's Valuation was a nationwide valuation of property taken between 1847 and 1864. It serves as an instrument for locating ancestors and as a census substitute.

Mitchell, Brian, *A New Genealogical Atlas of Ireland*, 2nd Edition, Genealogical publishing Co., Inc. Baltimore, Maryland, 2002.



To resolve civil vs Catholic parish boundaries, use *A New Genealogical Atlas of Ireland* to compare their respective boundaries. Catholic parishes may have multiple names. This problem can also be addressed in the National Library of Ireland site which will be introduced in the church records presentation.

Civil Registration District's boundaries are identical to Poor Law Unions. Civil Registration Districts/Poor Law Unions boundaries can be identified in Brian Mitchell's book, *A New Genealogical Atlas of Ireland*. Civil Registration Districts may be found from searches of an ancestor in FamilySearch, Findmypast, or Ancestry. Civil Registration districts are necessary for most searches in Irish Genealogy.

[National Archives' Census](#) contains digitized images and a free searchable index of household returns and ancillary records for the censuses of Ireland of 1901 and 1911.