

Herbert Wood's Guide to the Public Record Office of Ireland: What Was Lost in 1922 and What has Survived?



By Sean J Murphy

In 1919 Herbert Wood published his *Guide to the Records Deposited in the Public Record Office of Ireland*. Although most of the original PROI holdings listed by Wood were destroyed during the Civil War in 1922, there is more to his *Guide* than a mere catalogue of lost records.

Herbert Wood was born in Trinity Square, London, on 6 September 1860, the son of an Irish-born surgeon, William Wood, and Jane Mary Jeffries. In 1884 Herbert Wood joined the staff of the Public Record Office of Ireland in Dublin, a repository founded in 1867 with the aims of accumulating, arranging and cataloguing the official archives of Ireland.

In the early 1900s Wood was assigned the task of preparing a 'general guide to the records of Ireland' to aid users of the PROI. World War I delayed completion of the project and Wood's *Guide to the Records Deposited in the Public Record Office of Ireland* was finally issued in 1919. To mark the centenary of its appearance, this important work has now been republished online by the present writer (see list of websites on the opposite page).

In his introduction, Wood sketched the history of the public records of Ireland, noting the 'great vicissitudes' they had undergone, including periodic losses of

some records due to theft and fires. Wood concluded proudly that the 'centralisation of the public records in one building has been attended with excellent results', perhaps not foreseeing possible dangers posed by such concentration.

As is well known, in June 1922 most of the contents of the PROI were destroyed in the Four Courts complex during the Civil War which followed Irish independence. Debate continues over whether occupying anti-Treaty forces or attacking Free State forces were most to blame for this catastrophe, but it is clear that in the fury of internecine conflict neither side was greatly troubled by the loss of archives.

Wood had been appointed Deputy Keeper or head of the PROI in 1921 and despite the destruction of 1922 he continued to serve in that position until he retired in 1923. Wood returned to England and died in Bath in 1955, maintaining during his later years an interest in Irish public records and the work of archival reconstruction.

From the genealogist's point of view the worst loss in 1922 was undoubtedly that of most of the pre-1901 census returns. The censuses of 1821-51 were among the records burnt in the PROI in 1922, but the censuses of 1861-91 had in fact been destroyed earlier as a result of a bureaucratic misjudgement. Some fragments of the 1821-51 censuses survived and can be searched on the National Archives's website, as of course can the full censuses of 1901 and 1911, which were not deposited in the PROI until after 1922.

This reminds us that a considerable quantity of public records was not lost in 1922 because they had *never been deposited* in the PROI. Prominent among these are the records of the Valuation Office (local taxation), the Ordnance Survey (maps) and the General Register Office (births, marriages and deaths), all commencing in the nineteenth century.

The transfer of the records of the Valuation Office and the Ordnance Survey to the National Archives of Ireland is already well advanced.



County Antrim was historically within the Gaelic Kingdom of Dalriada, which was part of the territory of the O'Neills and associated families of McQuillan, O'Quinn. Due to its proximity to Scotland, there was significant immigration of Scottish families such as the McDonnells, Bissels, McNeills and McAllisters. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the Normans made several unsuccessful attempts to conquer the county, but were repulsed by the O'Neills and their allies. However, in the 17th century a failed rebellion by the O'Neills and O'Donnells led to their departure from Ireland, with their allies, in 1603. This was the so-called 'Flight of the Earls', and is regarded as the end of the old Gaelic order in Ireland.

In 1609 the 'Ulster Plantation' started the process of settling the confiscated lands with people from England and Scotland. The lands were granted to 'adventurers', i.e. those who had supported or funded the army which defeated the rebels. These grantees 'undertook' to settle the confiscated lands, hence the name 'undertaker'. The settler families they brought to the Belfast area were mainly from Devon, Lancashire and Cheshire and included families named Bradshaw, Bradford, Watson, Taylor, Walker, Wilson, Johnson and Young. North Antrim had more Scottish settlers including Boyd, Lindsay, Johnson, Morrison and Patterson. Antrim is arguably the county in which the objective of the Plantation, i.e. elimination of the native population and replacement with loyal settlers, was most successfully achieved. Repression of the limited Gaelic population continued through a series of 'Penal Laws' which disadvantaged Catholics (and to a lesser extent Presbyterians). These lead to bitter local divisions which have persisted. Many of the Scottish settlers (commonly known as Scots-Irish)

who were predominantly Presbyterian, left Antrim and other Ulster counties during the 1700s to settle in America.

The county was not badly affected by the Great Famine of 1845-47, but this was mainly due to the growth and prosperity of the linen and ship-building industry in Belfast and surrounding areas. In 1922 the county was one of six which remained as part of the United Kingdom when the Irish Free State (now the Republic of Ireland) was formed. The county currently has a population of over 615,000. The main towns are Belfast (also in Co. Down) and Lisburn, and other larger towns (18,000+) include Antrim, Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Larne and Newtownabbey.

Antrim has a diverse set of genealogical records, including all of the major national records: *Civil records of birth, death and marriage* start in 1864 and most of these are now on-line at www.irishgenealogy.ie (see [here](#) for full information). Note, however, that registration of births, marriages and deaths after 1922 was conducted within Northern Ireland by a separate

UK administration. Civil Records after 1922 are available from <https://geni.nidirect.gov.uk/>. *Griffith's Valuation* (a major survey of land occupiers) was conducted in 1861-2 and is available on many websites; and the 1901 and 1911 *Census returns* are available on-line at www.nationalarchives.ie.

If you are beginning search and do not know where in Antrim your family was located, these sources are useful starting points. *Griffith Valuation*, for instance, may show where your family name is located within the county (e.g. a civil parish). An easy way to do this search is through the excellent site <https://johngrenham.com/>. If you locate a possible ancestor, a search of church or civil records from that area may provide further verification. The 1901 census, although compiled long after the major period of emigration, may also indicate the local prevalence of a surname. When you have identified a likely area, or a definite ancestor, one or more of the following types of records can extend your search.

Dating Family Photographs:- 1870s to 1890s

In the second part of our four-part 'Dating Family Photographs' feature we cover the mid to late Victorian period. By the 1870s commercial studio photography was well-established throughout Ireland: urban photographers with fixed premises portrayed local residents and visitors to their studios, while some operators travelled out into the countryside to photograph people in remoter rural areas. With a general growth in both studio and open-air photography, many more of our ancestors appear in photographs by the late-1800s – images originating in Ireland and those taken overseas.

As outlined in the last issue, techniques for dating old family photos are: identifying the photographic format; researching photographers/studios (where known); dating the style of card-mounted prints; dating the visual image, especially the fashion clues.

Recognising Photographic Formats

By the 1870s, the early plate-based formats- daguerreotypes and ambrotypes were no longer being produced by studio photographers, although outdoor ambrotypes continued to be taken until the 1890s by open-air operators in the street, the park and on the beach. The other types of late 19th century photograph to be aware of are cartes de visite (cdvs), cabinet cards and tintypes (ferrotypes). Cdv prints on card mounts measuring 10 x 6.5cms, fashionable from 1860, remained the most common photographic format. Larger cabinet cards/portraits (around 16.5 x 11.5cms) had been launched in 1866, but only grew fashionable from the later 1870s onwards: most date to the 1880s/1890s and later.

Tintypes, more correctly termed ferrotypes, were cheap on-the-spot photographs, one-off images struck onto a thin piece of iron. Surviving examples may be framed under glass or cased, while others survive simply as small sharp-edged metal plates. Tiny 'gem tintypes' – little bigger than a postage stamp – were set into regular printed card mounts. First developed in the United States in the mid-1850s, tintypes were most popular in America, so ancestors who travelled across the Atlantic may well appear in tintype photographs. British tintypes are much rarer, especially studio tintypes: many more were, like ambrotypes, taken outdoors on the beach, and other places of entertainment.

Researching Photographers/ Studios

Plate-based outdoor ambrotypes and tintypes don't usually bear any

information, but card-mounted cdv and cabinet cards were often printed with studio details, wherever in the world they originated. It can help to investigate photographer/studio operational dates when trying to date old photographs and many researchers are already familiar with this method. It is certainly worth conducting an internet search for a named photographer/studio, to discover what, if any, information, including business dates, has already been recorded. Some reputable online sources exist for early photographers operating in particular countries, counties and cities. For instance, one website deals with Dublin studios <http://www.irisharchaeology.info/genealogy/photographers.html> while another covers the northern counties: https://www.lennonwylie.co.uk/Lost_photos_photographers_NI.htm

Victorian photography in certain geographical areas is examined in printed books and this is true of Irish photographs, for which I recommend: *A Century in Focus: Photography and Photographers in the North of Ireland, 1839-1939*, W A Maguire (Blackstaff Press, 2000) and *Through the brass-lidded eye: photography in Ireland 1839-1900*, E Chandler & P Walsh (Guinness Museum, 1989). Recorded dates can offer a useful guide, especially if a photographer was not in business for long, although we should be aware of the limitations of such data, which is not always complete. Some regional studios have not been fully researched and it may be necessary to undertake first-hand investigations, using census returns and trade directories. Alternatively, Ron Cosens, who supplied most of the images here, and who runs the commercial website www.cartedevisite.co.uk, may be able to



provide reliable data on application, for a small fee.

Dating Card Mounts

Most professional card-mounted photographs from the 1870s-1890s period are cartes de visite or cabinet prints and their individual characteristics can help with dating. Small cdvs dominated the 1870s and 1880s, larger cabinet portraits more common from the 1890s, so size matters! Mounts of the early-1870s were usually flimsy and had square corners but during the later 1870s they began to grow thicker and increasingly corners were rounded. Coloured mounts also occur, especially sugar pink and bright golden yellow in the later-1870s and 1880s; black or bottle green were fashionable between the early-1880s and c.1900.