

Researching Irish Catholic Priests, Nuns and Religious Brothers

By Kyle J. Betit

Researching family members who were Catholic priests or religious nuns and brothers may be very fruitful for documenting the family in Ireland or for determining Irish immigrant origins. This article provides some details and examples specifically for Ireland, but the same principles for researching priests, nuns and brothers are valid in the countries where Irish immigrants settled, such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and elsewhere.

I maintain a "Catholic Genealogy" Twitter account @CatholicGeneal where I regularly publish information about Catholic research and sources. This includes information for researching the clergy and religious sisters.

There are several possible answers to the question "Why seek records of priests and religious brothers and sisters in Ireland?" Your ancestor may have been a priest, brother, or nun. Although priests and members of religious orders are required to be celibate, some became priests or joined religious orders after being widowed. More commonly, your ancestor may have had a brother or sister who was a priest or belonged to a religious order. The records of the sibling may provide important details about the family not available elsewhere. Generally, good records were kept of priests, nuns, and religious brothers in comparison to contemporaries.

There are essentially two groups to consider, with records in separate places: diocesan or "secular" priests and religious congregations of men and women. A religious congregation of men may include both priests and brothers; a priest in a religious order was historically called a "regular" or religious priest. Diocesan archives and religious order archives are generally helpful in assisting genealogical requests.

Diocesan (Secular) Priests

There are four major sources of information for diocesan (secular) priests:

- Diocesan Archives
- Diocesan Histories and Clergy Lists
- Seminaries for Diocesan Priests
- Catholic Directories

The Central Catholic Library in Dublin is a good resource for diocesan histories,



histories, and Irish Catholic directories. Many of these resources can also be found online.

Seminaries

St. Patrick's College in Carlow, the oldest seminary in Ireland, was established in 1793. St. Patrick's College, Maynooth was established in 1795, and since that date the greater number of Irish Catholic priests studied there. Especially prior to the 1790s many priests studied in continental colleges, such as the Irish Colleges in Paris and Rome. The Irish College in Rome still trains Irish seminarians today.

More Catholic seminaries were founded in the nineteenth century in Ireland, many under the patronage of individual Catholic bishops. All Hallows College trained Irish priests to serve in the

overseas missions of the Catholic Church around the world.

Religious Orders

Following the Reformation, the religious foundations in Ireland were suppressed and the number of religious men and women in Ireland decreased. However, the number of Catholic orders and their membership increased dramatically in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Records of members of religious orders are found in their congregations' archives or in published works about the order. Members' records often indicate birth place and parents' names. Records may be kept by individual abbeys, convents, houses or monasteries. For some orders records have been centralized with the province or generalate. For many orders, you can contact the archivist of the



Tracing Your...

Co. Fermanagh Ancestors

By James G. Ryan

County Fermanagh was historically the territory of the Maguires and was part of the Gaelic Kingdom of Oriel. Other Gaelic families associated with the county include Rooney (or Mulrooney), Muldoon, McKernan, Devine, McDonnell, Flanagan, Bannon, Owens, Fee, Corrigan, Hussey, Whelan, Corcoran and Breslin. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the Normans made several unsuccessful attempts to conquer Fermanagh, but were repulsed by the Maguires and their local allies, particularly the O'Neills of Tyrone. The Maguires nominally submitted to the English crown in the 15th century, but retained control of their lands.

However, in the early 1600s, the alliance of the Fermanagh Gaelic chieftains with the failed rebellion of the O'Neills and O'Donnells led to confiscation of their territories. In 1609 the 'Ulster Plantation' started the process of settling the confiscated lands with people from England and Scotland. The lands in the county were granted to 'adventurers', i.e. to those who had supported or funded the army which defeated the rebels. These grantees 'undertook' to settle the confiscated lands.

These undertaker and settler families included the names Johnston, Armstrong, Elliott, Smith, Graham, Irvine, Beatty, Thompson, Flowerden, Blennerhasset, Archdale, Warde, Barton, Hunings, Wirral, Hume, Hamilton, Gibb, Lindsey, Fowler, Dunbar, Balfour, Wishart, Atkinson, Cole, Gore, Davys, Harrison and Mistin. The Gaelic families retained some small territory, but from this period most of the original Irish were expelled, or remained as workers or tenants on the settler estates.

Although intended to supplant the native population, the plantation was only of mixed success in this county.

There was, however, continued repression of the Gaelic population through a series of legal provisions called the 'Penal Laws' which disadvantaged Catholics (and to a lesser extent Presbyterians). These led to bitter local divisions which have persisted to recent times. Many of the Scottish settlers, who were very predominantly Presbyterian, left Fermanagh and other Ulster counties during the 1700s to settle in America as the so-called Scots-Irish.

In 1922 the county was one of the 6 which remained as part of the United Kingdom when the Irish Free State (now the Republic) was formed. The county currently has a population of 65,000. Its rural nature is demonstrated by the fact that it has only one major town, which is Enniskillen (population 14,000). All other towns in the county have populations of less than 1,000.

Fermanagh has a diverse set of records for family research. It has 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. Note, however, that registration of births, marriages and deaths after 1922 was conducted within

Northern Ireland which remained part of the United Kingdom, and are collected by a separate administration to that in the Republic. Civil Records after 1922 are available from <https://geni.nidirect.gov.uk>.

Griffith's Valuation

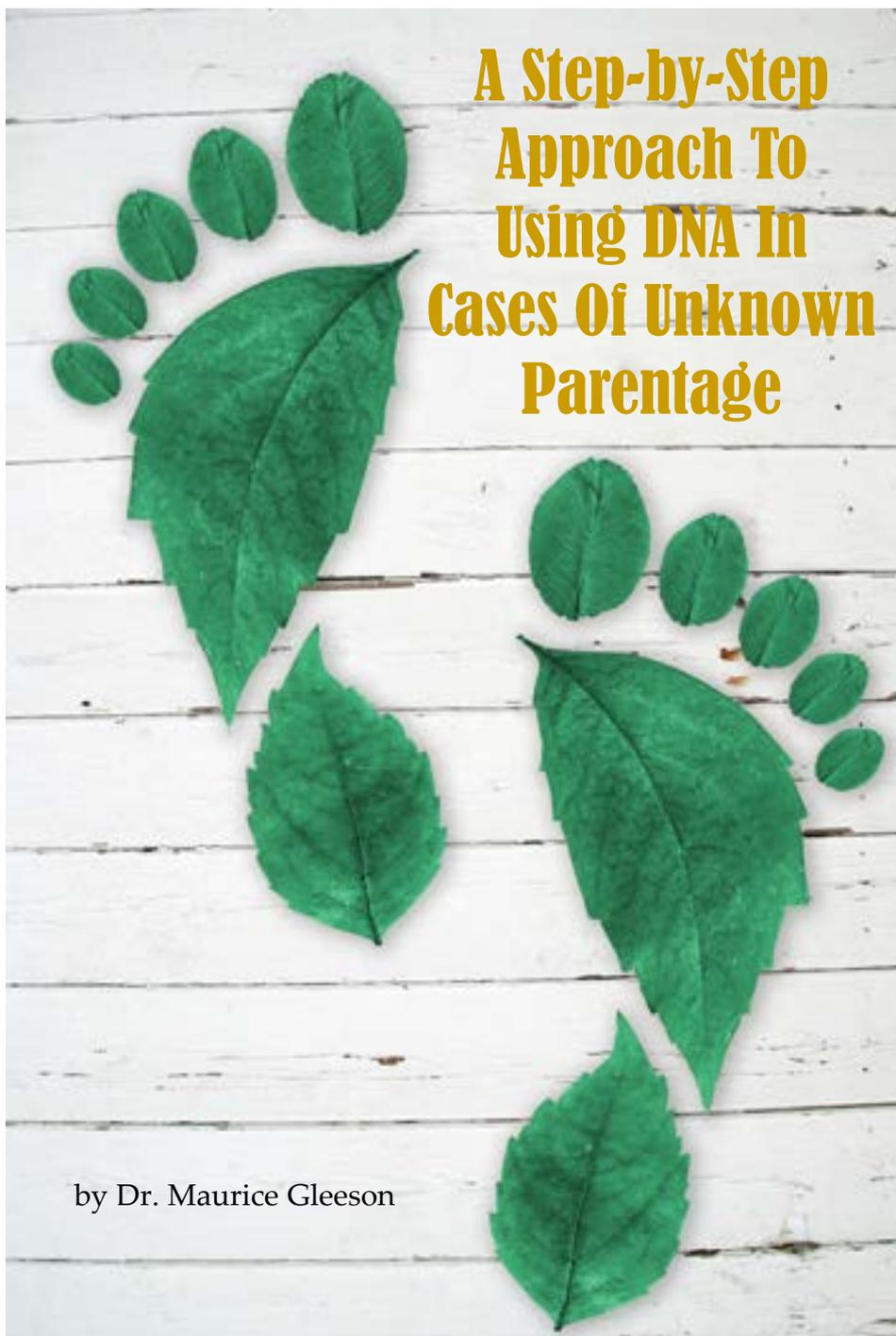
A major survey of land occupiers) was conducted in 1862 and is available on many websites; and the 1901 and 1911 *Census returns* are available on-line at www.nationalarchives.ie. Fermanagh is one of the few counties which also has remnants of the 1821 census. Most of the other returns were destroyed by a fire in 1922. The 1821 returns for the parishes of Aghalurcher and Derryvullan are downloadable from the above site.

A search in the *Griffith Valuation* will show whether the name is associated with a particular area within the county (e.g. a civil parish). If it is, then you can search the church or civil records from that area to find evidence of your ancestors. Equally, if you are lucky enough to find your ancestor in the remnants of the 1821 census, this will provide a family location. The 1901 census, although compiled long after

In a previous article (Spring 2018) I discussed how DNA is being used by adoptees in their quest to find their birth families. The technique used is the same technique that we as genealogists use to break through those Brick Walls in our own family trees and has simply been adapted for use in situations where your Brick Wall starts with your mother and father. However the same technique can just as easily be used if your grandmother was illegitimate or your great grandfather was a foundling. DNA combined with standard genealogical research can be a very helpful technique in such cases of unknown parentage.

So, for example, if you are an adoptee, you should put your autosomal DNA (atDNA) in all the major DNA databases currently available, in the hope that you will find close relatives there. According to an Adoption Testing Study (Jan 2017), 8% of US adoptees found either their birth parents or their half-siblings in their list of matches when they first opened their results.(1) So reconnecting can be a lot quicker than you might imagine. And these figures have probably increased since then as the databases have continued to grow in size (currently some 24 million). (2)

My favoured approach is to do your first DNA test with Ancestry and once you have your results, you can download a copy of them to your computer and upload them to several other databases for free, namely: FamilyTreeDNA, MyHeritage, LivingDNA and Gedmatch. If you have no close matches in these databases (which is unlikely), you could consider testing with (23andMe, 99 euro).



by Dr. Maurice Gleeson

It's likely that your closest match will be a third cousin, or if you're fortunate, a second cousin. Both of these scenarios are good news. What then follows is a sequence of steps to figuring out who is your common ancestor (or rather your common ancestral couple – because most of the time you will share an ancestral husband and wife in common). This phase uses the Triangulation technique (discussed in the Autumn 2018 edition of Irish Roots). Once the common ancestral couple is identified, the next phase is to build their family tree forward in time – one of their descendants will be your birth parent. Oftentimes, these steps are done in parallel rather than in sequence.

The steps below are written as if it is an adoptee doing the searching, but these can be adapted for other cases of unknown parentage.

A Step-by-Step Approach To Using DNA In Cases Of Unknown Parentage

Step 1 –Organize Your Close Matches Into Groups Of Shared Matches

Focus on those matches with whom you share 100 cM of DNA or greater – these should be 3rd cousins or closer. Find other people who match you and each of your close matches. If you are lucky, you will end up with several groups of Shared Matches (i.e. people who all match each other). The chances are that these “Shared Matches” or “In Common With” matches are all descended from the same common ancestral couple ... and you are likely to be descended from that same couple too (or from one or two generations further back – it all depends on where you are likely to sit in the family tree relative to the Shared Matches in that group).