



Ireland Protestant Church Records

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Introduction

Protestants—outside of the Church of Ireland

- Were Nonconformists (non-Church of Ireland)
- Were affected by The Crown laws which restricted their religious freedoms
- Were not as affected by oppressive Penal laws (from esp. 1695) as Catholics were
- Families, individuals, and sometimes even a whole congregation left Ireland for N. America in search of greater freedoms. Learn the name of the minister and search extant *fasti* lists which give biographical info, in order to learn the origins in Ireland where they came from

The Records

Protestant church records in Ireland present researchers with a challenge. As nonconformists, Crown law affected those citizens who were not members of the Established Church or the Church of Ireland—which was also protestant--and tended to restrict religious freedoms. These laws uprooted centuries-held lands of Roman Catholics, and put families out into the streets. As a result, many indigenous Irish (Catholics) inhabitants reacted violently to these laws and conflicts, wherein skirmishes and rebellions occurred. At times—depending—the instability of the social and political climate with their chaos, induced many to emigrate. Because of this political culture, Protestants—including many Presbyterians—individuals, families, and sometimes even whole congregations with ministers along with their records--left Ireland for North American in search of greater freedom and more peaceful climates.

Many of the Protestant Church records commence from 1770-1820, thus rendering these records of less value to the researcher. The church registers include baptisms, marriages and burial registers. For example, many Protestants of other denominations, i.e. Methodists, Presbyterians, Huguenots are found in Church of Ireland registers. So Church of Ireland records may provide the critical burial sought, because just about all burials occurred in Church of Ireland churchyards. Moreover, after 1754, the Lord Hardwicke act required all Nonconformist marriages to be performed in church of Ireland parishes, but in 1782 Presbyterian ministers could legally perform marriages thereafter. Roman Catholics did not always adhered to this law, as well as sometimes Presbyterians. Due to the laws of primogeniture, and to prove a firstborn son's right to

estated land ownership of living heirs, (occasionally the firstborn son) was christened in the local Church of Ireland parish. Church of Ireland registers must be searched as well as Presbyterian Church registers in the area in which you are searching. Often, Church of Ireland church registers commence much earlier than the Presbyterian registers in a given area.

Things I need to know in order to search the records

- Must know the civil (or ancient) parish in which they resided
- An approximate age (at a dated event)
- Name[s] – given and surname
- Siblings names
- Birth order of siblings might help
- Occupation
- Parents' names

Key Events Affecting Protestant Church's Records

- 1559: John Knox brings to Scotland the teachings of the Protestant Reformation started by Martin Luther
- 1606: thousands of Presbyterian Scots settle in counties Antrim & Down
- 1608: Ulster Scots Settlement begins in earnest in six other counties: Armagh, Donegal, Tyrone, Coleraine, Fermanagh, (Londonderry)
- 1634: the first Church of Ireland parish registers commence from this time 1641: by this year, 100,000 Scots and 20,000 English have settled in Ulster Province
- 1654: the first Quaker (Friends) meeting took place
- 1685: Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (France) sends some French Huguenot refugees into Ireland
- 1708: there were 130 Presbyterian congregations in Ireland—mostly in counties Antrim & Down
- 1740's: many Scots-Irish emigrate to N. America; the Wesley brothers preach in Ireland for the first time (1747)
- 1754-1782: "lawful" marriages were to be performed in Church of Ireland parishes; many did not adhere to this law, however.
- 1770-1820: smaller townships/parishes of Church of Ireland registers begin; another wave of emigration to North America (especially Presbyterians)
- 1782: Marriages in Presbyterian churches are legalized
- 1800: laws governing most Protestant religions began to relax by this time
- 1814: Belfast Academical Institute created to educate Presbyterian ministers
- 1816: earliest Methodist Church registers commence from this year
- 1819: Presbyterian ministers required to keep registers of baptisms and marriages (note exclusion of burials)

- 1829: Emancipation Act is passed by Parliament allowing the free expression and growth of all nonconformist churches to flourish. A dramatic spike in most Protestant church's building construction is ignited.
- Marriage Act of 1844: (effective April, 1845) legalized marriages between Presbyterians and Church of Ireland members. All such marriages were registered in the GRO along with those of the Church of Ireland
- 1922: Four Courts, Dublin fire spawned by Ireland's Civil War destroys just over 1000 of Church of Ireland's collection of 2000 parish registers; 637 non-deposited registers survived; majority of (but not all) ministers made copies of their own registers before turning in original registers to the Public Record Office; these transcribed/copy registers are kept at their respective parish.

Irish Protestant Church Denominations

Ireland has had the following Protestant denominations within its borders:

- Church of Ireland from 1619 to present
- Church of Scotland Presbyterians [in Ireland] – 1603 (The Plantation Settlers from Scotland)
- Quakers (Friends) from 1647; many are Englishmen in Ireland
- Huguenots – & Reformed Presbyterian (Covenanters) Church – [by] 1690
- Methodists – 1816-on
- Baptists – 1653-on
- Associate Church, later, the United Secession Church – from 1733

CHURCH OF IRELAND

1. Only about 11 percent of Ireland were members of the Church of Ireland, the Established or sponsored under Royal Crown
2. Followed many migrants from England over to Ireland during and after the Plantation Settlements, 1603 and onward.
3. Parish registers and transcribed registers are found in various locations.
4. Search Vestry books for additional info re: the poor and names of those in other religions

METHODISTS

- Methodism began as a 'movement' within the Anglican Church in both England and Ireland
- Didn't take root in Ireland until 1816
- Look in Church of Ireland parish registers, prior to 1816
- Records are found in various locations—usually at the Church or chapel or in a chapel nearby (if the original church closed)

BAPTISTS

Baptist Church didn't take root in Ireland until 1653

Records are housed at the local chapels

HUGUENOTS

- Were French Protestants who emigrated to Ireland
- From 1690's
- Registers mostly don't survive
- Later descendants assimilated rather easily into other Protestant religions
- Consider if a surname seems peculiarly French

PRESBYTERIANS

1. Some 17th & 18th C. Presbyterians attended Church of Ireland due to austere laws.
2. Adherents were willing to traverse considerable distances to worship services in another outlying township or civil parish. Search towns all around the target township of interest, for extant Presbyterian chapel[s].
3. Where complete congregations and ministers emigrated from Scotland to Ireland (especially 17th century), search the Calendars of Patent Rolls of James I, and the Chancery Court records of Ireland, for the names of land proprietors who uprooted and left to come to Ireland. These proprietors brought with them many land tenants to Ireland, with the early migrants being Church of Scotland members (Presbyterians). They came mainly from Scotland's western counties, to settle in mostly Northern Ireland's counties Down and Antrim and surrounding counties.
4. Must know the name of the civil parish in which your ancestor resided in order to determine the Protestant church[es] found therein.
5. Most church register copies are housed at PRONI; those remaining—usually in local custody (i.e. the original church, or at a Presbyterian church in a township elsewhere)
6. PRONI or the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland holds the church registers of numerous Presbyterian chapels throughout Ulster Province. To determine

more precisely what holdings they have in their Presbyterian Church records collections, visit the following website's pages:
www.IrishTimes.com/ancestors/browse/counties; then click name of county, then civil parish to determine availability of extant Presbyterian chapel[s]. Also, an excellent publication, *Irish Church Records* by James Ryan; see Appendix 4.2--it provides a list of all Presbyterian Church records microfilmed by PRONI, and Appendix 4.3 which provides researchers with a list of church registers still held in local custody.

FamilySearch online Catalog

Searches include—

- 1) Places, i.e.
 - a. Antrim, Belfast – Church records
 - b. Antrim, Belfast – Church records – Indexes
 - c. Antrim, Belfast – Church History [look for Presbyterian]
 - d. Antrim, Belfast – Cemetery records [look for Presbyterian]
- 2) Keyword: use such “search” terms as “Presbyterian”, “baptisms”, [name of] “place”, (i.e. county, or town or parish, or under “Ireland”
- 3) Author
- 4) Title

Websites for Irish Protestant records

- PRONI's Guide to Church Records (http://www.proni.gov.uk/guide_to_church_records.pdf)
- The National Archives Ireland (Dublin) holds some Church of Ireland registers
- Presbyterian Church Directories – FHL catalog: “Ireland – Church Directory”
- Roots Ireland at: www.rootsireland.ie - currently the most powerful and helpful site for Irish researchers, with approximately 22 million Irish names
- Google!-ing: search all three or more following terms: i.e. “baptisms”, [name of] “town/parish”, “Presbyterian”. [Note: More Irish websites going online than ever!]
- Irish Genealogy at: www.irishgenealogy.ie (Lucan Parish, only, Co. Dublin as of Mar '14)
- findmypast at: www.findmypast.ie
- Irishtimes: see www.Irishtimes.com/ancestor/browse/#counties (try clicking on “Gravestones”; town name)
- John Grenham's website at: www.johngrenham.com/#links/
- NIFHS – North of Ireland Family History Society – email for lookups to 50-70 chapels
- Ireland Genealogical Project (IGP) – www.igp-web.com – a gateway site to Irish links with online data from several types of genealogical records

- Family History Library’s “Favorites” posted online at: www.fhlfavorites.info - see several hundreds of Irish website links with online data
- www.presbyterianhistoryireland.com
- Emerald Ancestors at: www.emeraldancestors.com – 1m Ulster names
- Ulster Historical Foundation at: <http://www.ancestryireland.com/> - 2m names online

How to Counter Under-Registration in Protestant Church Registers

Alternatives to counter this issue of under-registration in parishes, i.e. baptisms, marriages and especially deaths—no matter the reason whether due to the clerk’s neglect, or your ancestors’ nonconformist religious persuasions, always be certain to search in the following records (after, of course, searching the Church of Ireland parish vestry registers first) at the local level:

1. Kirk session (Presbyterian) records
2. Nonconformist registers in the target civil parish
3. Nonconformist registers in parishes surrounding target civil parish
4. Marriage registers of surrounding parishes
5. Marriage registers of the Presbyterians in Church of Ireland parishes in a large city
6. Church burial registers (where extant)
7. Monumental inscriptions (MI’s) where they exist
8. 19th Century: Civil registration records of death and marriage
9. Marriage Contracts: from Register of Deeds (sometimes given after husband’s death)
10. Follow these steps for known siblings

Other Resources

- FHLC or Family History Library Catalog (online at FamilySearch.org; click “Search”; then “Catalog”; search under the name of the civil parish) – holds some transcribed registers
- *Fasti* or minster lists provide names and biographical info for many Presbyterian ministers. Consider the following publications available at the FHL:
 1. *Fasti of the Irish Presbyterian Church, 1613-1840*. Authors: McConnell, James; McConnell, Samuel; Presbyterian Church (Ireland)
 2. *Fasti of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*. Authors: Barkley, John M. (John Monteith); Presbyterian Church (Ireland)
 3. *Fasti of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland*. Author: Loughridge, Adam
 4. *Fasti of seceder ministers ordained or installed in Ireland 1746-1948*. Authors: Bailie, W. D.; Kirkpatrick, L. S.

5. *Fasti Ecclesiae scoticanae* : the succession of ministers in the Church of Scotland from the reformation. Author: Scott, Hew, 1791-1872
- For early 17th Century Ireland Presbyterian research: Find Land proprietors' names in the Calendar of Patent Rolls, James I —who brought many land tenants from Scotland, with them to Ireland-- and which give Scotland place of origin, and their Irish place of settlement, see the following FHL books (and film)—
 - 942 B4pro v. 97
 - 942 B4pro v. 98
 - 942 B4pro v. 109
 - 942 B4pro v. 133
 - 942 B4pro v. 134
 - 942 B4pro v. 157
 - 942 B4pro v. 164
 - County Armagh: Calendar of patent rolls James I see FHL Film #1279356 Item 21
 - An historical account of the plantation in Ulster at the commencement of the seventeenth century, 1608-1620. Author: Hill, George, 1810-1900. See FHL film #1426119, item 2. Note: This contains numerous notes about families of the founding “undertakers” of the early Ulster Settlements in the original six counties’ plantations.