

Researching your Ulster-Scots roots

A short guide for people researching their roots in the Ards and North Down

Interest in researching Irish ancestry has never been greater and no townland in Ards and North Down has been left untouched, whether through immigration or emigration. This short guide identifies the main sources you can use to explore your family history, suggesting a number of possible steps to help lead you in the right direction.

Getting Started

The best starting point for your research is within your own family. Almost every family has at least one member with an encyclopaedic knowledge of family marriages, offspring and where ancestors etc lived.

Collect as much information as you can on names, dates and places relating to your family. Write it down and begin to plot out the skeleton of a family tree.

Although occasionally some people may give you misleading information, you will be pleasantly surprised to find how often an elderly relative's recollection prove accurate.

Research sources

Civil registers of births, marriages and deaths provide basic family historical information but their usefulness will depend on the period being researched. Civil or state registration of all births, deaths and marriages began in Ireland on 1 January 1864. By law non – Catholic marriages including those conducted in a government registry office had be registered from 1 April 1845.

Organisations to contact include:

- General Registry Office of Northern Ireland – www.groni.gov.uk
- The Ulster Historical Foundation which has indexed virtually all civil marriages for North Down and Ards. These are available on a pay per view basis via the website www.ancestryireland.com
- The Ireland Civil Indexes 1845-1958 www.familysearch.org (database <http://pilot.familysearch.org/recordssearch>)
- The International Genealogical Index (IGI) which the Mormons created is also available from this source

Census Records

Unfortunately census records only offer information post 1901. The Public Records Office Northern Ireland (PRONI) has these on micro-film, reference MIC/354.

The National Library of Ireland and Canada's Library and Archives are currently digitising the 1901 and 1911 census returns for Ireland will make these available free of charge at www.census.nationalarchives.ie

Church Records

Church records often provide a wealth of information including registers of baptisms, marriages and burials. For a listing of available records for Ards and North Down, see the Ulster Historical Foundations 1994 Guide to Church Records. You can view an updated version in the Public Search Room at the Public Records Office (PRONI.) Ian Maxwell's publication *Researching Down Ancestors* (Ulster Historical Foundation 2004) also includes a full listing of church records for Co. Down.

You can inspect the majority of surviving pre-1900 church registers for Ards and North Down at the Public Records Office (PRONI). Catholic records are usually available only up to 1880 approx but records of congregations in some other dominations may be available well into the 20th century.

The Ulster Historical Foundation has indexed most surviving pre 1900 Catholic records for Ards and North Down. It has also indexed nearly all civil marriage records from 1845-1921. You can access these on a pay-per-view basis via the Foundation's website www.ancestryireland.com or in person at the Foundation's Research Centre at 49 Malone Road, Belfast. This source also offers information on graves and resting places along with inscription information available at www.historyfromheadstones.com which also includes maps showing the locations of graveyards in Northern Ireland.

The North of Ireland Family Historical Society has indexed a large number of church records. For more information, visit the Society's website www.nifhs.org. Details of the North Down and Ards branch of the Society are available at www.nifhs.org/ndards.html

How to find the homestead where your ancestors once lived

The Primary or Griffiths valuation 1848-1864 is the earliest comprehensive listing of properties in Ireland giving a complete list of occupiers of land, tenements and houses. Accompanying Griffith's valuation are annotated Ordnance Survey maps showing the location of every property recorded in it. The website www.askaboutireland.ie provides a free search facility for Griffiths valuation.

