

Around the Brick Wall: Tracing Back an Irish Family Through Collateral Lines

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Genealogy involves forging the chains that link each generation to the preceding one. We look for pieces of evidence (some say three) that establish a parent/child relationship. But what if no such evidence can be found? Sometimes a sideways shuffle will solve the problem: link an ancestor to a sibling and the sibling to a parent.

Case Study One

For 19th century research in England and some other places linking to siblings would probably start with a census entry that shows a family group. Birth certificates could be obtained for younger children born after the start of civil registration to identify a mother's maiden name. This would probably be accurate for the older children if the baptismal record shows the same given name for the mother. In Ireland, however, the 19th century census records have not survived.

We can, however, look for potential siblings in civil registration records and *then* look for other records to confirm a sibling relationship between the subject of the birth/marriage/death registration and our ancestor. This is reasonable only if the surname is not too common or the place too big.

In this case study an Irish ancestor married in 1838 and no parents' or witnesses' names given in the church record. Civil registration for non-Catholic marriages started in 1845 so it is possible that the bride had younger siblings who married after 1845. Two possible women are identified, both with the same father. A tombstone links one of these woman to both her parents.

When this woman married, her father-in-law bestowed property on her. This would preserve a family asset in the event that her husband were to become bankrupt. Woman could not hold property in their own names at this time so two trustees were to hold it in trust for her. Traditionally the trustees were from each side of the family. One of the trustees has the same surname as the groom. The other is the husband of the ancestor with the same surname as the bride. This strongly suggests that the trustee was the bride's brother-in-law. Further research shows other linking information: naming patterns and the Methodist faith.

A memorial of this marriage settlement was made at the Registry of Deeds in Dublin.

Henrietta Street, Dublin 1

http://www.landirect.ie/eng/About_Us/Registry_of_Deeds_Services/

Copies of the memorials and indexes are also available on 2686 microfilms listed in FamilySearch Catalog.

Ireland. Registry of Deeds. *Transcripts of memorials of deeds, conveyances and wills, 1708-1929*
Under "Ireland – Land and property"

First film number 100251

There are indexes to the memorials by the name of the grantor (NOT the grantee) and by place name. The finding aid to the indexes is called *Ireland : registry of deeds, surname and county index 1708-1904, register of contents..* It is in the FamilySearch catalog as film 599270. You can download a digital copy.

Case Study Two

This illustrates two strategies: using probate records to link people together and using “English” records for Irish people.

The calendars for English probate records are available on Ancestry.

England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1966

Search the Ancestry card catalogue for the title “England probate”.

There are links to how to order the actual probate records.

If people died elsewhere, but held property in England, the will would have to be resealed in England.

There are many entries for Irish people in the probate calendars for England and Wales.

The National Archives of Ireland has now digitized the calendars of grants of probate of wills and letters of administration for the years 1858-1982. The years 1922-1982 are available as pdf's and are more difficult to search than those from 1858-1920.

<http://www.nationalarchives.ie/genealogy1/genealogy-records/wills-testamentary-records/>

The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) has probate records for the three District Probate Registries of Armagh, Belfast and Londonderry:

http://www.proni.gov.uk/index/search_the_archives/will_calendars.htm

For the period before 1858 look for wills in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury for people of Irish origin. The calendars are on the website of The National Archives:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/wills.htm>

Look particularly for probate records of childless relatives. The example in the case study names many relatives (his own and those of his two wives). One “cousin” turns out to be a cousin's daughter and leads to the name of another sibling of the earliest ancestor. She lived until after the 1901 census and her census entry provides a county of birth.

Case Study Three

Unusual middle names (particularly surnames) can be helpful leads. They are not necessarily the person's mother's or grandmother's maiden name! In this particular family parents sometimes named a child after an uncle by marriage.

My Irish family gave a son the names “George Thrift”. I am grateful to James Thomson of Toronto for his assistance on this part of the research.

No record could be found to link with Thrifts in Ireland, but an 1851 English census entry of a George Thrift and his Irish-born wife Maria shows a visiting Irish niece (who turns out to be the wife's niece) of the right name and age to be a daughter of the Irish ancestors.

The English marriage record of the census couple gives the woman's father's name and this leads to a Dublin baptismal entry.

<http://churchrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/>

The Dublin baptisms include a sister of the woman who married George Thrift, but not the person who is the direct ancestor.

At the same time I had been digging deep to find descendants of the family and followed a male line to Australia. I found a living descendant by using Australian resources :

- New South Wales births, marriages and deaths http://www.bdm.nsw.gov.au/bdm_fh.html
- The Ryerson Index to death notices and obituaries in Australian newspapers <http://www.ryersonindex.org/>
- A look-up in the current electoral roll by the State Library of New South Wales.

My new-found Australian relative sent me an undocumented family tree compiled by his father and uncle before they died in 1996. It closely matches both my confirmed family tree and the probable extension and takes the line a couple of generations further back. This leads to people in the landed gentry and published compilations.

Burke's Landed Gentry of Ireland, 1899 on www.findmypast.ie

Further research:

- Memorials in the Registry of Deeds to find records linking the people on my tentative line to those on the Australian's tree and to those in the landed gentry
- DNA testing - My Australian relative matched to me on the autosomal test at Family Tree DNA, confirming our paper relationship. He has taken a Y-chromosome test but does not as yet have matches of the appropriate surname. I am tracing downward from the prominent people on the Australian's family tree to find a living candidate for a Y-DNA test.

Conclusion

Irish research does not proceed as tidily as in some other places. In some cases there may be no records available to forge direct links from child to parents. But stepping sideways and linking to a sibling and then the sibling to parents (or through a cousin) can sometimes build a case that advances the research. It can be worth following collateral lines who emigrated..