

Genealogy Basics – Using Ancestry’s Ireland, Catholic Parish Registers, 1655 - 1915

By Joe Petrie

BACKGROUND:

This article focuses on helping users to search Ancestry’s Ireland Catholic Parish Registers records, 1655 – 1915, a database which as of March 2016 contained over 25 million records. I use Ancestry Library at the Norwood MA Morrill Memorial Library, my home town library. Ancestry Library is available for use at the library during library hours to anyone who has a valid Massachusetts a library card. Unfortunately, Ancestry is a subscription web site. (I prefer free sites.)

Ancestry indicates that the Ireland, Catholic Parish Register database contains indexed records of the National Library of Ireland’s Roman Catholic Records. In September 2015, I described a detailed approach to view images of the Registers’ pages in Genealogy Basics - Finding Irish Vitals. My article is entitled: How to Find Irish Vitals in the IrishGenealogy.ie Web Site. Please note that IrishGenealogy.ie is a free web site but the records on the Registers’ pages are not indexed. The pages/images can be browsed. Also, please note that the Find My Past web site, another subscription database, has indexed the Register’s records. I have not used Find My Past.

About Ancestry’s version: I was surprised that the nearly 400 thousand images in the National Library of Ireland’s database became 25,631,162 indexed records in Ancestry. Also I was surprised that a record that I found in IrishGenealogy.ie was not in Ancestry’s version.

The following paragraphs are from Ancestry.

“Original data:

Catholic Parish Registers, National Library of Ireland, Ireland. Published under the National Library of Ireland's Terms of Use of Material made available on registers.nli.ie.”

“About Ireland, Catholic Parish Registers, 1655-1915:

The Ireland Catholic Parish Registers is the single most important collection needed to trace your Roman Catholic ancestors in Ireland in the 1800’s. According to the 1861 census, almost 78 percent of the population was Catholic; by 1891, this had risen to 89 percent. This collection is made up of baptism, marriage and death records from over 1,000 Catholic parishes across the whole of the island of Ireland - both in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, as it is known as today. While baptism and marriage records make up the majority of the collection, death records can be found primarily for parishes in the northern regions.”

“Approximately 94 percent of Catholic parishes are included in this collection, though not all registers from these parishes are available. For more information, visit the National Library of Ireland website at registers.nli.ie.”

“It is worth noting that, while the Church of Ireland was the established state church from 1536 to 1870, an overwhelming amount of the Irish population remained Roman Catholic throughout this period. Irish Catholic Emancipation was secured under the Roman Catholic Relief Act in 1829, lifting legal restrictions that were previously in place against all Catholics. By this time, Penal Laws were also lifted, which had forbidden the Catholic Church to maintain parish registers.”

“Catholic Emancipation brought more freedom to record vital events within the Catholic Church. As such, the bulk of the records in this collection date from the late 1820’s

onwards. Where some earlier registers exist back to the 1650's, they are known to cover the more prosperous and anglicised eastern counties of Ireland."

"The records are written in either English or Latin. For help understanding the Latin entries please see our helpful glossary of common terms."

"The indexes to this collection have been created from approximately 367,000 digital images made available for free by The National Library of Ireland. In keeping with the ethos of The National Library of Ireland efforts, the images in this collection are also available for free on this website. The index has been created and the images published by Ancestry under the National Library of Ireland's Terms of Use of Material."

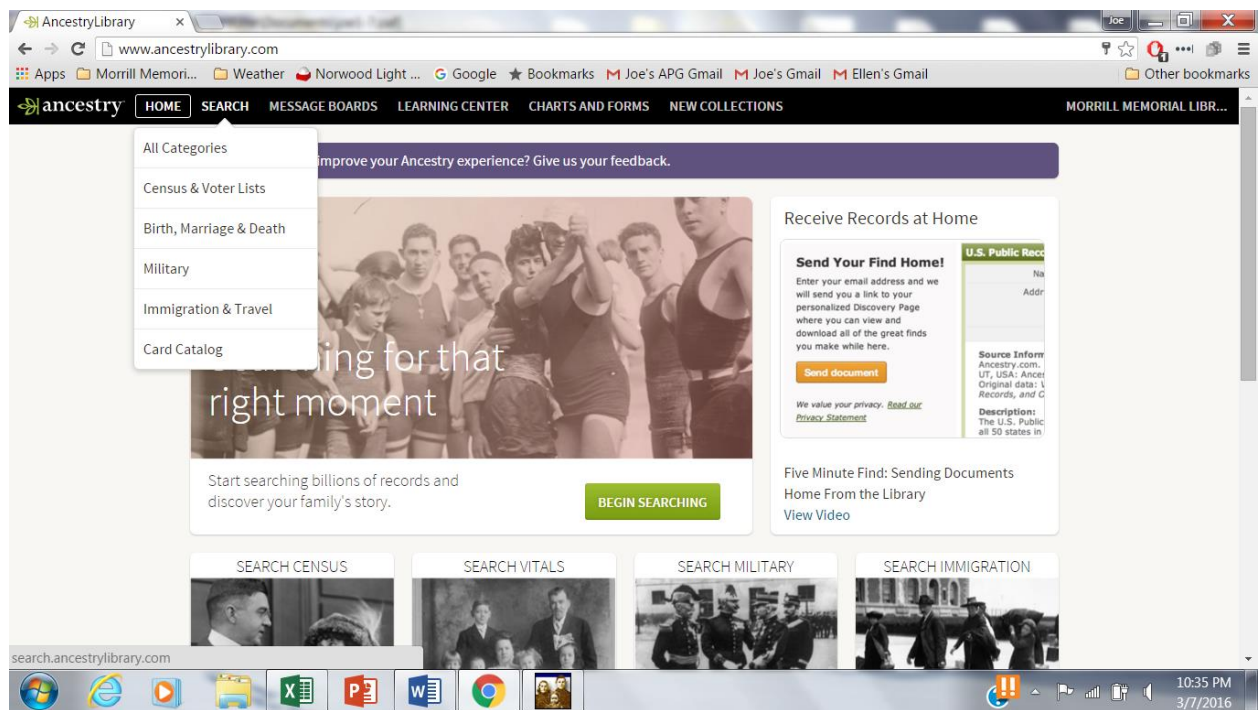
"Tips for Using Irish Parish Records

It's helpful to know family structure and important to know at least a county of origin in Ireland to correctly identify your ancestors in this collection. See our guide on finding ethnic origins here. Try searching for just a last name and parents' names to see all of the children born to a couple."

MY APPROACH – Use the "Births, Marriage and Deaths" Ancestry Search Screen:

The starting point is the Ancestry Home Page.

To search the Catholic Parish Registers, I click on the SEARCH tab.



The result is the Category Drop Box which identifies six categories. Please note the enumeration of the various categories in the drop box to the left of the photo/image.

In the list, I never select the All Categories selection at the top of the list. When I want to search all records in Ancestry, I click on the green Begin Searching Button under the photo/image on the Ancestry Home Page.

The following screen results from selecting the Birth, Marriage and Death category.

Birth, Marriage & Death

View sample images and collection details

SEARCH ☐ Match all terms exactly

First & Middle Name(s) Last Name

Birth Day Month Year Location City, County, State, Count

Death Day Month Year Location City, County, State, Count

Marriage Day Month Year Location City, County, State, Count

Any Event Day Month Year Location City, County, State, Count

Add family member: Father Mother Spouse Child

First & Middle Name(s) Last Name

Narrow by Category

- Birth, Baptism & Christening
- Marriage & Divorce
- Death, Burial, Cemetery & Obituaries

Featured data collections

- U.S., Social Security Death Index, 1935-2014
- England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915
- England & Wales, FreeBMD Marriage Index, 1837-1915
- England & Wales, FreeBMD Death Index, 1837-1915

For this article, I'll search for a record for my 2nd great grandfather, John Cummings of Lingan, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. He was born in Thurles, Tipperary according to his 1839 marriage record in Register of the Basilica of St John's which I discovered years ago at the Newfoundland Archives in the Colonial Building in St. John's. (The Archives is now at the Rooms in St John's.)

In three Canadian censuses (1881, 1891 and 1901) John Cummings had different ages. In the 1881 Census, he was born in 1816. In the next Census he was born in 1818. In 190 Census, his date of birth was 24 May 1820. I believe that the Cummings family moved to Cape Breton before 1860 but I have not found them in the 1861 and 1871 censuses. For the search, I used 1816 as the year of birth. Also for two of the search Locations (Birth and Any Event), I entered Thurles, Tipperary, Ireland.

Birth, Marriage & Death

View sample images and collection details

SEARCH ☐ Match all terms exactly

First & Middle Name(s) Last Name

John Cummings

☐ Exact... ☐ Exact...

Birth Day Month Year Location City, County, State, Count

1816 Thurles, Tipperary, Ireland

☐ Exact +/-... ☐ Exact...

Death Day Month Year Location City, County, State, Count

Marriage Day Month Year Location City, County, State, Count

Any Event Day Month Year Location City, County, State, Count

Thurles, Tipperary, Ireland

☐ Exact...

Add family member: Father Mother Spouse Child

First & Middle Name(s) Last Name

Narrow by Category

- Birth, Baptism & Christening
- Marriage & Divorce
- Death, Burial, Cemetery & Obituaries

Featured data collections

- U.S., Social Security Death Index, 1935-2014
- England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915
- England & Wales, FreeBMD Marriage Index, 1837-1915
- England & Wales, FreeBMD Death Index, 1837-1915

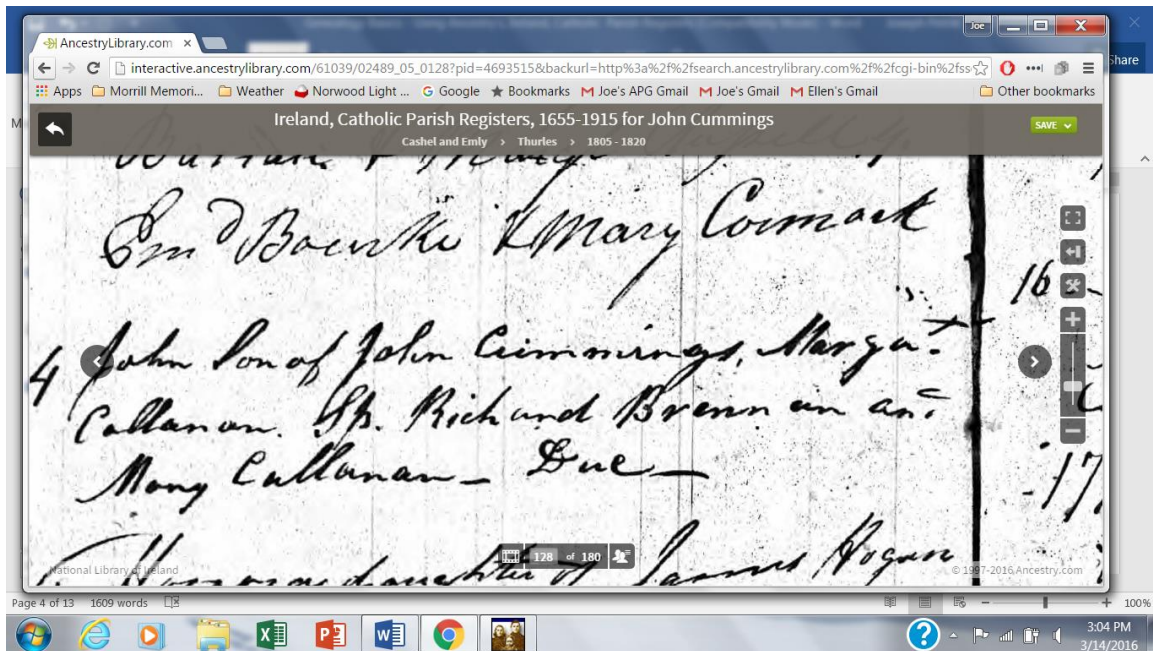
The following screen print is the first page of the Results Screen.

The screenshot shows the Ancestry website search results for John Cummings. The page title is "All Birth, Marriage & Death results for John Cummings". On the left, there are search filters for "John Cummings", "BORN: 1816", "IN: Thurles, TL...", and "ANY: Thurles, Tip...". Below these are buttons for "Edit Search", "New Search", and "UPDATE". A list of categories is shown: "Birth, Marriage & Death" (selected), "Birth, Baptism & Christening" (+5,000), "Marriage & Divorce" (+5,000), and "Death, Burial, Cemetery & ..." (+5,000). The main results area shows "Results 1-20 of 118,202". The first record is for "Ireland, Catholic Parish Registers, 1655-1915" with details: NAME: John Cummings, BAPTISM: 4 Jun 1821 - Tipperary, Ireland. The second record is for "Ireland, Catholic Parish Registers, 1655-1915" with details: NAME: John Cummings, BAPTISM: 8 Nov 1836 - Tipperary, Ireland, RESIDENCE: Clunduff. The third record is for "Ireland, Catholic Parish Registers, 1655-1915" with details: NAME: John Cummings, BAPTISM: Nov 1844 - Tipperary, Ireland, RESIDENCE: Magoury. The page footer shows "Page 4 of 13" and "1701 words".

The first record is a close fit. The following transcription record resulted when I clicked on the first record.

The screenshot shows the Ancestry website transcription record for John Cummings. The page title is "John Cummings in the Ireland, Catholic Parish Registers, 1655-1915". On the left, there is a thumbnail image of a document with a "VIEW" button. The main content area displays the following information: Name: John Cummings, Event Type: Baptism, Baptism Date: 4 Jun 1821, Baptism Place: Thurles, Tipperary, Ireland, Diocese: Cashel and Emly, Father: John Cummings, Mother: Margret Callanan. Below this is a "Source Citation" section: "Catholic Parish Registers, The National Library of Ireland; Dublin, Ireland; Microfilm Number: Microfilm 02489 / 05". On the right, there is a "Send Your Find Home!" section with a form to enter an email address and a "SEND DOCUMENT" button. Below this is a "View printer-friendly" link. The page footer shows "Page 4 of 13" and "1622 words".

The following screen print is a magnified section of the image/photo of the Parish Baptism Register. The record starts with the number 4 because the baptism event date was 4 June 1821.



Record 4 is for John Cummings, son of John Cummings and Margaret Callanan. The sponsors were Richard Brennan and Mary Callanan.

COULD THIS BE MY ANCESTOR?

I am not troubled by the gap between my ancestor's birth and this baptism. Remember that in rural parts of Ireland and in many parts of the world, Catholics did not get to see priests often. Baptisms by water were common. Later, the priest would perform and record the actual baptism.

I believe that my Callanan, Cummings and Maher relatives were from Brittas (Brittan), a rural community in Thurles about 8 miles from down-town Thurles. Eight miles in the early 1800s was quite a distance.

If John Cummings and his first wife Johanna followed the old Irish naming pattern, they would have named the first son John. The first son was named Michael. John was the second son. Their first daughter was named Mary Elizabeth (Elizabeth). Their second daughter was Mary Anastasia.

I wonder if Michael was named for his maternal grandfather Michael Maher. I wonder if Elizabeth (Mary Elizabeth) was named for her maternal grandmother.

I am not troubled by the Baptism record identifying John's mother as Margaret. Remember the Scottish and Irish penchant for using Middle Names. By the way, John and Johanna's daughter Mary Elizabeth was called Elizabeth and their other daughter Mary Anastasia was called Ann, Anna and Annie.

Ancestry Items

I am troubled by the fact that Ancestry does not have a record for a John Cummings that I found in 2014 in the National Library of Ireland database (www.nli.ie). It was for a John Cummings baptized in Thurles in May 1820. His parents were George Cummings and Mary Barton. The sponsors were Con and Margaret Ryan. George's baptism record is on page 121 of microfilm 02489/05 for the Thurles Parish. I considered including screen prints. But since there was no George in my 2nd great grandfather John's 2 families, I was convinced that George's son was not my 2nd great grandfather.

I am troubled by the fact that Ancestry's Burial record for Johanna Maher Cummings. It indicates that she was buried in Harbour Grace, Bay de Verde, Newfoundland. In fact, she died and was buried in Lingan, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada. I found the record by browsing the source images in FamilySearch, Nova Scotia, Antigonish Catholic Diocese. Months after her death, a death notice was published in the Harbour Grace newspaper. I presume that she had relatives in the Conception Bay area. The death notice is the basis for the incorrect Newfoundland record.

I am not a subscriber. I can't find a way to contact Ancestry to report the above. I'll call them today (St Patrick's Day, 2016).

#

Your corrections, comments and suggestions are appreciated. Please Email me at joe-apg@norwoodlight.com.

Joseph F. Petrie, AB (Economics and Business – St. Anselm College)

MA (Economics – Boston College)

Founding Member, Friends of Irish Research (FIR)

Member, Cape Breton Genealogy and Historical Association (CBGHA)

Member, Family History Society of Newfoundland and Labrador (FHSNL)

Member, New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS)

Member, Association of Professional Genealogists (APG)

Research Correspondent, Cape Breton Genealogy and Historical Association (CBGHA)

Member, Friends of Morrill Memorial Library, Norwood, MA

Resident Genealogy Volunteer, Morrill Memorial Library, Norwood, MA