



How The North of Ireland Family History Society has coped with Corona.

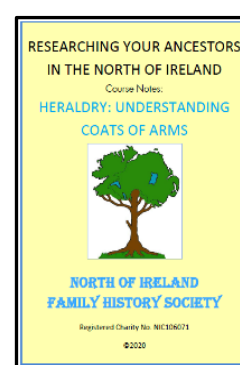
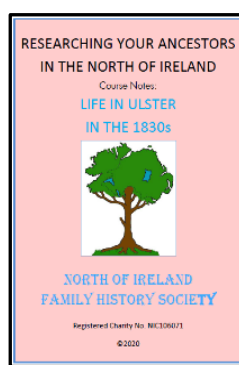
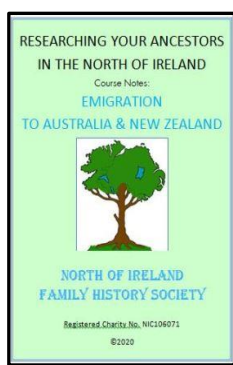
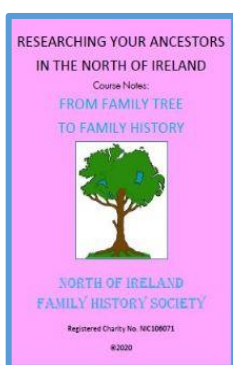
A Report by Mike McKeag, Vice President, NIFHS

Like other societies, Corona has affected our services and our finances as well as our administration. In addition to our Society's Research Centre, we have eleven Branches that normally meet monthly, but all of these have had to close down until things improve. Because meetings were cancelled, Branches saved on room rental and speakers' costs and have chosen to reduce subscriptions for the coming year to encourage renewals by softening the blow of meetings being cancelled. Branches and the Society will consequently receive less in direct income and Gift Aid.

To make it easier for Branch members to renew, they can now do so online, just as Associate members from around the world usually do, instead of handing over their subscriptions at the Branch meetings.

Because our Research Centre with its library had to close, the Society has lost income from Courses; normally the wide range of Courses, although cheap to attend, together bring in a few thousand pounds a year. As an experiment we hope to recoup some of the loss now that we have published the following 28 or 32 page illustrated Course Note booklets for sale at £4 each to members and the public, local and abroad, who cannot attend Courses:

- **From Family Tree to Family History** - how to organise and write a history of your family and where to find stories and pictures to bring the people to life
- **Emigration to Australia & New Zealand** - the earliest immigrants, convicts, free settlers, and gold rushes; the colonies, states and territories and their records
- **Life in Ulster in the 1830s** - most Ulster families can trace their ancestors this far but not much further; there is a wealth of information about this interesting era
- **Heraldry: Understanding Coats of Arms** - heralds and the science and art of heraldry and the language of blazon for describing coats of arms



They are very competitively priced at only £4 each, so why not give yourself a wee treat?

You will find more information on the NIFHS shop website - www.nifhs.org/shop

To provide a service to all our members, at a time when normal services closed down, and to encourage Associate and Branch members to renew, a **series of 15 weekly Bulletins was emailed throughout lockdown** and many members from all Branches contributed items. On average about 70% of our worldwide membership of about 1,100 read these Bulletins and we received many unsolicited thanks. Each week a different Branch or overseas member provided an Advice Service and fielded between 1 and 22 queries; this was in addition to our normal Look Up Service, which received many queries although we were severely limited in the range of materials available for research as most were locked in our library.

Over the last six months, we were glad to welcome many new Associate members from all over the world.



The main effect on our administration is that Annual General Meetings could not be held as usual. However the Branches have belatedly held theirs, using one or more rounds of email, post and Zoom. The Society's AGM will be held using a combination of these. Indeed the monthly Council meetings have used Zoom successfully. Sadly, a major event to celebrate 40 years since the foundation of the Society has had to be cancelled.

As regards the new Branch year starting in September, we realise that physical meetings will remain out of bounds at least until the end of 2020 and possibly for longer. Branches are to use Zoom for their monthly meetings with help available for members who have not become familiar with that technology. Fortunately, potential speakers generally seem happy to use Zoom and many members have become familiar with Zoom for other activities during lockdown. Transcription projects have continued apace with many transcribers delighted to have something worthwhile to do while isolating. Likewise, contributions to our journal, *North Irish Roots*, have come pouring in. DNA projects have also continued with further light being shed on our detailed Ballycarry study - this promises to be an excellent template for other geographical research projects. So, as you see, all is not lost, and much good work carries on despite Covid.

NIFHS Branches - Plans for 2020/2021

Lisburn Branch

With no possibility of holding indoor meetings in the foreseeable future, local branches have turned to planning virtual meetings, at least up to the end of 2020. The Zoom technology involved is new to many of us and there is a lot to learn. However, the 'new normal' gives us opportunities to invite speakers who would not be within travelling distance of our Branch meetings.

For example, **Belfast & Larne Branches** will have Chris Paton from Ayrshire speaking on 'Tracing the Irish in Scotland'. **North Armagh Branch** will have Dr Janet Few from Devon on 'Putting Your Ancestors in their Place: ten steps to a one place study'. **Lisburn Branch** has invited Surrey based historian Dr Nick Barratt to speak on 'Family History and the Media: behind the scenes of Who Do You Think You Are'.

Other speakers will be local historians and Branch members. Some of our smaller Branches are investigating the idea of sharing speakers. One positive to come out of the Coronavirus pandemic is that Branches will be able to invite other NIFHS members from far and wide to join some of their meetings.

As they become available, Branch programmes will be added to the Society Website - www.nifhs.org/branches



Group visits have also had to be curtailed. Some Branches are investigating the possibility of small groups visiting for example a local graveyard. These will very much depend on Government restrictions and guidance at the time. Other Branches are considering how the needs of members may be met using Zoom or Facetime.

We are very aware that there is a section of the membership in every Branch that will not be able to use Zoom technology. Making up for the loss of the social aspect of monthly meetings is a challenge. During lockdown, some Branches have been using regular newsletters to keep their members involved and it is hoped this will continue. It may also be possible to produce printed handouts for those members unable to attend virtual meetings.

It is very disappointing that Branches are unable to physically meet together and have had to abandon their original plan for 2020/2021 season, but it is hoped that in 2021 a return to physical meetings may be possible.

Request - would any of our members (Associate/Branch) be willing to present a Zoom talk?

We would love to hear from you -if you could offer to help please contact the Secretary at secretary@nifhs.org



BACK TO OUR PAST

As events up and down the country are cancelled due to the pandemic, some of these are reinventing themselves and moving online. Back To Our Past which is held twice yearly in Ireland (in Dublin and Belfast) plans to hold a virtual conference on 18th to 20th September 2020. Latest information on this event is here: <https://backtoourpast.ie/>

PRONI REOPENS TO THE PUBLIC



The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland is partially reopening to the public, on an appointment only basis, from 24 August. You can find the rules surrounding the reopening and instructions on booking an appointment here: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/appointment-system-how-visit-proni>

Some important points to note are that only the reading room will be accessible (but microfilm readers are now available in the reading room). Documents and microfilms must be ordered in advance and only persons with a current PRONI pass will be able to access the building. The search room (containing microfilms and GRONI terminals) is still out of bounds.

GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE REOPENS PUBLIC SEARCH ROOM

The General Register Office of Northern Ireland (based at Colby House in Stranmillis, Belfast) is reopening its public search room on a limited basis from Wednesday 2 September for family history research. The public counter (where certificates can be ordered) remains closed - these can be ordered using the online service.

Multiple visits per week by the same person are being limited in order to ensure that the search room is accessible to as many people as possible despite the limited number of spaces available. Booking is essential however it is recommended that you put alternative availability in the additional information box when booking an appointment in case your preferred slot is not available.

More information can be found here: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/family-history-heritage-and-museums/research-family-history-general-register-office-ni-groni> and bookings can be made online here: <https://geni.nidirect.gov.uk/Appointments>

After your appointment request is received, the GRO will reply by email and confirm the date and time. They will also include a protocol of what is expected from customers and what they can expect at the GRO. It is also important to note that all users must have their GRONI account set up before they arrive and know their password.

The advantage of going to the public search room is that you can access indexes and view certificates online for all births, marriages, and deaths up to the present day (without the date restrictions on the online version of GRONI).

If you want to see the full range of records available in the search room you can find details here: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/introduction-groni-and-its-records>

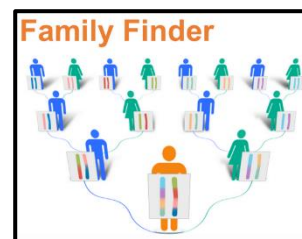




THE CHANGING FACE OF DNA

Martin McDowell, NIFHS DNA Project

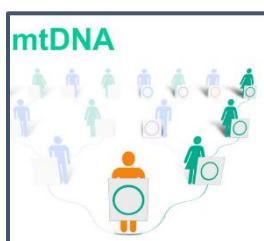
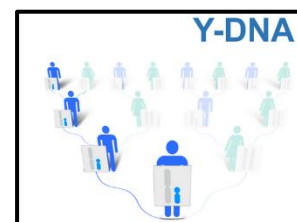
Since lockdown began the shape of our DNA project has been evolving in a way it never has before. Up until now the major growth area has been on autosomal (family finder) tests where people are seeking to make progress on all areas of their family trees, through all their various ancestral lines. People have been routinely asking relatives to test to increase the benefit of autosomal testing however this has all changed, as Covid 19 has made it more difficult to visit our extended family members.



Interestingly people seem to have been pursuing their answers through DNA by taking things in a new direction - they are taking different types of DNA tests: Y tests, Mitochondrial tests and even the relatively more expensive Big Y have experienced a big boost in popularity. I think this can be partly explained by the fact that these tests can be done on the existing DNA sample and means that no further DNA sample needs to be sent off.

Whilst this was not foreseen as a consequence of the pandemic, I think that people have been continuing to look for new ways to grow their family trees and as more people take these more specialist tests, the benefit to everyone else increases as the size of the database grows. At the time of writing the number of people within our North of Ireland DNA project has risen to over 5,200 with about 70 to 100 additional people signing up each month from around the world. The vast majority of these all have autosomal results (either tested directly with Family Tree DNA or transferred from another company).

Family Tree DNA is currently the only company in the world with a matching database for both Y and mitochondrial DNA, which is a good thing as it means that almost all the results processed in recent years are within their database. Over 1,300 of our 5,200 members currently have tested their Y DNA which is very good when you consider that only men can take the Y test and many of our members are females.



In terms of mitochondrial DNA, which has so far been the least popular of the three tests, over 750 of our 5,200 members have taken the plunge. This may only be 14% of our total eligible members but the number has still increased greatly over the last few months and no doubt will continue to do so.

Big Y is the most advanced (and expensive) Y test available and it too has experienced a surge in uptake - so far 665 of our project members have upgraded (out of roughly 2,600 who could potentially purchase it).

These numbers show that the interest in DNA amongst people with Northern Irish ancestry is continuing to grow and that people are now seeing the benefits of taking different types of tests. Having more tools in your DNA toolbox is always a good thing!

Through my recent Y test, I was able to discover that my McDowells were originally MacDougalls who lived on the Scottish islands of Mull, Ulva, and Islay. What discoveries are awaiting you?

If you would like to extend your DNA research and take one of these additional tests you can contact dna@nifhs.org for more advice. If you live within the UK you can also order a kit through us and take advantage of our discounted rates and free delivery offers. Just send an email to the above address to order.

If you live outside of the UK you can read more about the benefits of these different tests (and order) here: <https://www.familytreedna.com/products/y-dna> and <https://www.familytreedna.com/products/mt-dna>



CAN'T GET OUT TO RESEARCH ? - YOUTUBE IS YOUR FRIEND!

If you are not able to get out to do research at your local research centre, library or archive at the moment then now is the moment to take advantage of the ever growing number of talks and videos out there that can assist you in your research. The society is currently exploring ways of increasing its online presence by making some short courses available however in the meantime do not forget that YouTube is there to educate and inform!

The Society's very own Anne Johnston delivered an excellent talk at PRONI recently about **WikiTree** and how to use it which can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFxo555VbHQ>



PRONI have also added a recent video that explains how to use online **land valuation revision books**: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wO8_QhA4VV0

Limerick's Life gives you some tips on using irishgenealogy.ie to find civil registrations (births, marriages and death): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmRWosvurTO>

Donna Moughty, the American researcher who gave us a talk last Autumn, gives a guide to using **Irishgenealogy.ie**: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHkiB9S9ICA>

Watch a video guiding you through using the **census records**: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qa9LNIr_9yk

Family Search also have produced a video showing you how to find **elusive records** on their search engine: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rn2VY-wSfkw>

The three videos shown and listed below relate to **DNA** and our own Society

DNA Videos on YouTube

		
DNA and NIFHS – A Winning Combination (Martin McDowell)	Ballymena NIFHS DNA Lecture (Maurice Gleeson)	Raising the Dead (Martin McDowell)

DNA and North of Ireland Family History Society
Using DNA to help research your Northern Irish Family Tree
Raising the Dead

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Ftt_pjV_uI
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0U-1zQicoB4>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8REqT7DDPO>

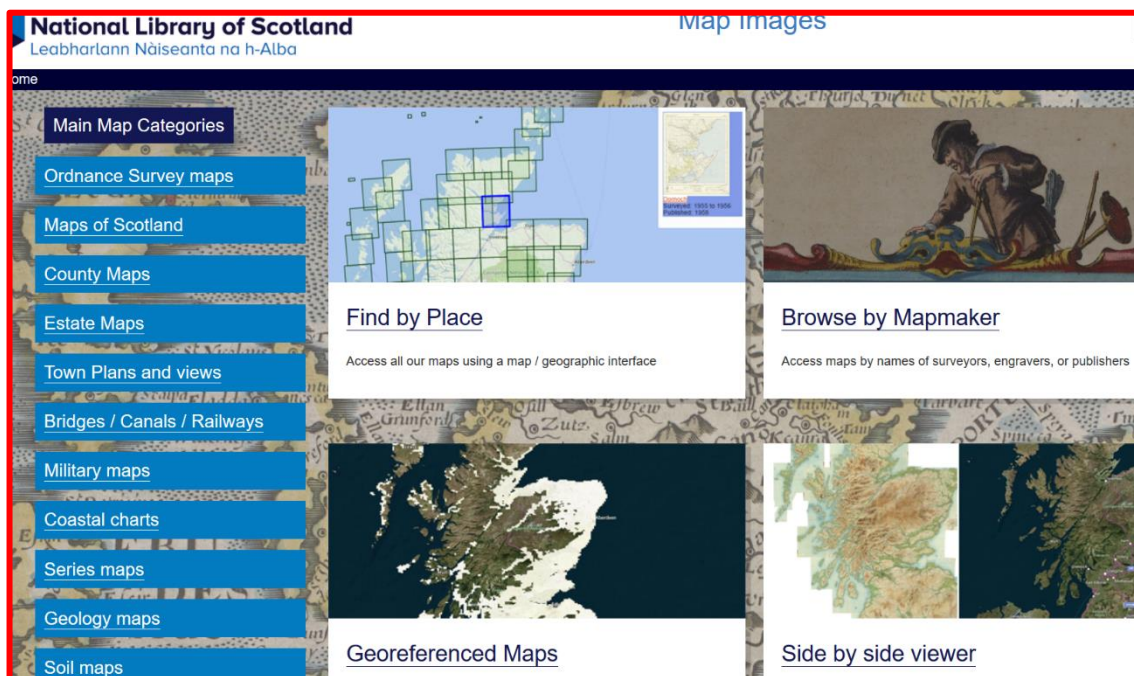
Our final suggestion is a talk which takes you through what resources can be found on **FindMyPast**: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3nDGbhNmy4> whilst now 4 years old, it still gives a flavour of what can be found on Find My Past to which even more records have been added in recent years.

There are many useful videos on all aspects of genealogy on YouTube - just search and see what you can find.



A GOOD MAP RESOURCE <https://maps.nls.uk/>

If your ancestors came from Scotland or went over from Ireland to Scotland, check out this interesting collection of online maps of Scotland and further afield - free to access at the National Library of Scotland website



IRELANDXO - REACHING OUT <https://irelandxo.com>

Evelyn Barrett Newtownabbey Secretary

I discovered this website during lockdown. It has been in existence since 2009 and describes itself as:- Ireland Reaching Out (Ireland XO) is a volunteer-based, non-profit initiative which builds vibrant, lasting links between the global Irish Diaspora and parishes of origin in Ireland.

Their mission is to connect all 70 million people of Irish descent scattered throughout the world using 'reverse genealogy'. The website is full of things to do and takes a while browsing around until you find what you want to use it for.



On first reading I thought it would not be of much use to us home-birds still roosting on the island, but I was wrong. I posted a query on the message board and received some really useful information back in no time flat. Since then I have explored more about it.

Members are encouraged to post 'Chronicles' of their family members born more than 100 years ago. These are mini biographies which are linked to the civil parish your family originated from. As the website builds you will share some of your family's experiences with other non-related families from the same area thus creating a better picture of how your family lived and what they experienced. If you are interested in creating more of a family history rather than a family tree, this is the website for you. You may well also find others who are related to you, either by birth or by marriage. There are webinars, timelines, message boards, to name but a few facilities available and best of all - free! I cannot do the website justice here and I would suggest you have a look for yourself.

One little word of caution, if you do become a member be prepared to receive many, many emails from them. It does not really bother me, but it might prove tedious for some.



WHAT IS LURKING IN YOUR ATTIC?

Martin McDowell, NIFHS, Education Officer

As many of you will know, PRONI has made many copies of old wills available digitally on their website:-
<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/search-will-calendars>. From 1858 onwards, all wills that went into probate still exist. However, very few exist prior to that date. PRONI does hold a few of these earlier wills and you could check if a will once existed for a family member using PRONI's name search index (see the example image below). If the will has survived and PRONI has it then it will be noted on the index record. Check at their website:-
<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/use-name-search-find-early-family-history-records>

As part of our ongoing research into old Ballycarry families (Ballycarry DNA project) I was recently lucky enough to receive a transcription of one of the missing wills which is still held within the family. This copy of the will is the only existing copy as PRONI did not have it. The information contained within provided much genealogical information which helped to link up various families whom we would not otherwise have connected. This one will has provided a fascinating look at a largely forgotten time and it has made me wonder how many other wills are lying around in family attics undiscovered?

Below is the index record for a will which once existed for James Clarke Snr. of Magheragal, County Antrim who I believe was my 4xgreat grandfather. The PRONI index does not tell me how old he was, and I cannot confirm if he is the person I think he was, but it is still giving me a clue as to when he could have died.

I am sure if this will still existed it would give me additional family information which could greatly expand my family tree or perhaps rule him out as being one of my ancestors.

Index :	Pre-1858 Wills and Admons
Sub-Index :	Connor Diocesan Wills
Surname :	Clarke
Forename :	James Senior
Occupation :	
Town or Townland :	Magheragal
Parish :	
County :	
Notes :	
Description :	
PRONI Ref :	
Date :	1847
Original Documents :	The original documents referred to in this index DO NOT exist.

If you have any wills predating 1858 the North of Ireland Family History Society would love to hear from you as we would like to compile a list of these extra resources.

If you have one you think is missing from the official records please email me on education@nifhs.org - I'll be delighted to hear from you!

SHANE WILSON

Website <https://www.swilson.info/> and **Blog** <https://www.swilson.info/wp/>

These are two sites with lots and lots of research aids - well worth a look. Maps, RIC stations, Coastguard stations, Registration district browsable map, Parish browse and search, Townland database and much more to explore.

Shane has also some useful tools and user guides - for example.

GRO Image Browse Tool <https://www.swilson.info/wp/?p=2341> and <https://www.swilson.info/wp/?p=2105>
Use to locate missing or incorrectly linked Birth, Marriage or Death images on www.irishGenealogy.ie
Also use in combination with the FamilySearch / FindMyPast indexes to locate correct images for entries either not found on www.irishGenealogy.ie or where the image link is missing or invalid.

Census Image Browse Tool <https://www.swilson.info/wp/?p=2122> and <https://www.swilson.info/wp/?p=2428>
Use to locate certain missing pages for 1901 & 1911 census on NAI website. <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/>





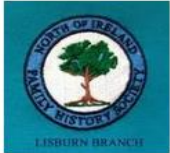




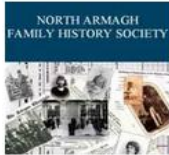


ANY UNSOLVED QUERIES OR BRICK WALLS?

The Branches of this Society have very active Facebook pages and groups where there are lots of friendly, enthusiastic folk ready and willing to help and advise you with your family research. Do consider joining some of them to get tips and also make new friends.

NIFHS Branches on Social Media

Some of the NIFHS Branches use social media to extend their contact with those interested in Family History research.
Facebook Groups may be "Public" or "Private".
During this time of restrictions on meetings these channels may be useful for making progress in your research.

<p>Ballymena Branch Facebook Private Group</p> 	<p>Belfast Branch Facebook Private Group</p> 	<p>Killyleagh Branch Facebook Page</p> 	<p>Larne Branch Facebook Private Group</p> 
<p>Lisburn Branch Facebook Page</p> 	<p>Newtownabbey Branch Facebook Page</p> 	<p>South Tyrone Branch Facebook Page</p> 	<p>Tyrone Branch Facebook Private Group</p> 
<p>Causeway Branch Facebook Page and Private Group</p> 		<p>North Armagh Branch Facebook Page, Private Group and Twitter</p> 	



The North of Ireland Family History Society also has a Facebook page where news items and forthcoming events are posted.

<https://www.facebook.com/NIFHS/>

HAVE YOU SOME SPARE TIME ON YOUR HANDS?

The Society is hoping to produce this newsletter on a more regular basis but in order to do that we need your help. We are currently looking for a team of people to either write content or those with the design skills to produce a newsletter such as this for circulation.

You do not have to live in Northern Ireland to help us with this as everything can be done online. So if you are a branch or associate member who is eager to get more involved in the society this may be the opportunity you have been waiting for! If you feel that you would like to help with this then please contact us on secretary@nifhs.org

Newsletter content provided by NIFHS Newsletter team