The Irish Registry of Deeds: A hidden Treasure

Jenny Joyce (jenny@jennyjresearch.com)

The Registry of Deeds was established in 1708 to provide a method of recording deeds of land conveyances and deeds. One of the reasons it was established was to make it harder for Roman Catholics to buy land or to enter into leases longer than 31 years. It was never compulsory to register a deed, but despite that large numbers were registered. As well as deed, the registry also contains details of wills, marriage settlements, mortgages and leases.

The original deeds were not kept, instead a synopsis of the deed were recorded in what is called a memorial. These were copied into books which have now been filmed and digitized by FamilySearch, and which cover the period from 1708 to 1929. There were also two sets of indexes created. The first is for the primary grantor, and the second is for the townland[1] or townlands applicable to the memorial. There is no index for the grantees.

A memorial might make reference to an earlier deed, which itself might refer back to another deed, so it may be possible to trace back the occupation of land over a long period, and this might help build up several generations of a family. Deeds might be registered much later than when it was executed, so it is important to search forward over a long period if you are having trouble finding a memorial.

The memorials will always name all the grantors and grantees and witnesses to the memorial. And sometimes they will also name a person who is a "life" specified in the deed, a beneficiary of the deed, previous, current or neighboring occupants of the land, relations of people mentioned in the deed, and people relevant to a previous deed. One deed is known to contain 196 names, yet only the primary grantor for each memorial are indexed.

In order to provide a way to find these other named people, a website named *Registry of Deeds Index Project Ireland* (http://irishdeedsindex.net) has been set up for volunteers to record people named in any deeds they have accessed. It is by no means complete, but it is being added to on a regular basis, and as at 1 October 2017 has 254,500 index entries from 28,391 memorials.
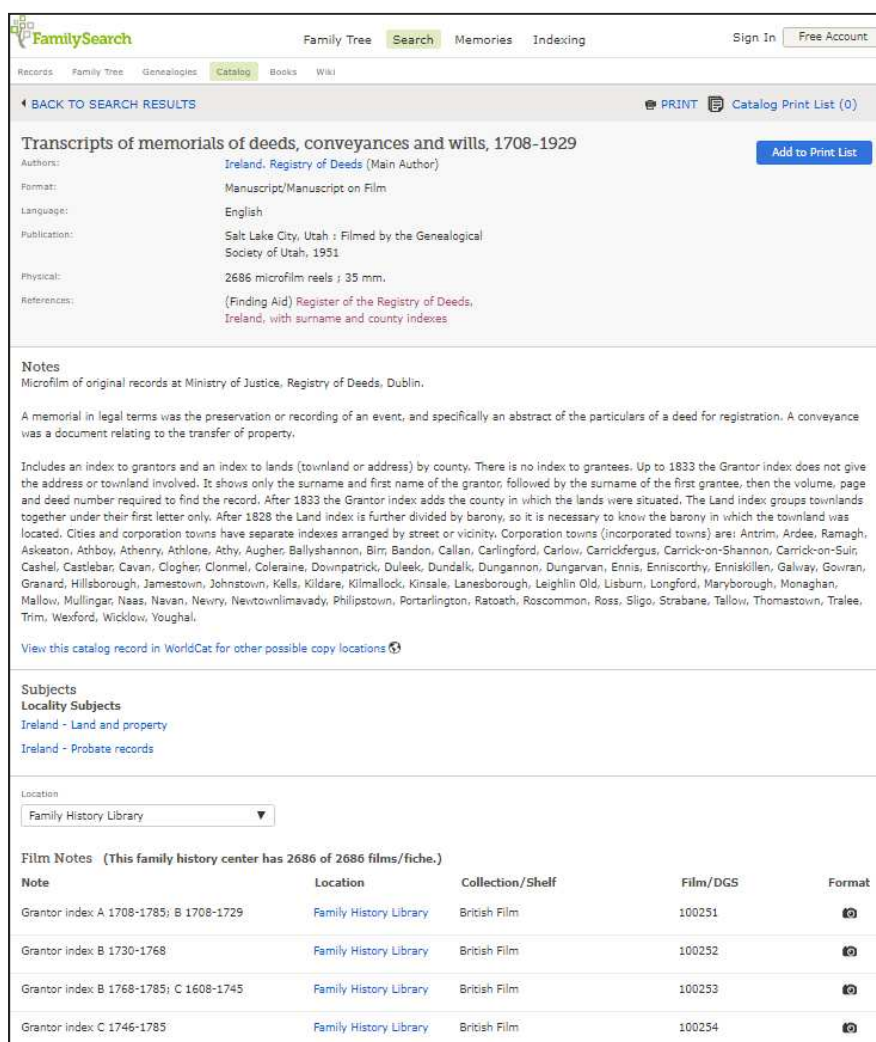
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[1] A townland is the smallest division of land in Ireland. Knowing the townland where your ancestors lived is very helpful in Irish research.

How to access the Registry of Deeds microfilms

Although the deeds have been filmed by FamilySearch, they have not been indexed and the collection is not linked to the record search. The two easiest ways to access the catalog entry, and from there the films, are as follows:

1. Search the *FamilySearch Wiki* (https://www.familysearch.org/wiki) for "Ireland Land and Property". This article contains a section on the Registry of Deeds along with a link to the catalog entry.
2. Via the *Registry of Deeds Project* (http://irishdeedsindex.net). Choose "Browse guides to the Registry of Deeds". Select "A guide to navigating the virtual microfilms on FamilySearch". In the second paragraph you will find a hyperlink to the catalogue entry.

The start of the catalog entry looks like this:

Scroll down for more index entries and the entries for the books containing the transcript of the memorials.

Accessing the memorials

Unless you have already found a reference to a memorial of interest on the *Registry of Deeds Project* web site, you will need to search the indexes to the deeds. The indexes are arranged in groups of years, either by the grantor or the place. The early place indexes are arranged by townland within each county, and the later ones by townland within a barony for each county. The grantor indexes are indexed by name. The catalog entries for the Grantor Index looks like this:

Grantor index K-Mc 1850-1859	Family History Library	British Film	100322	📷
Grantor index M-O 1850-1859	Family History Library	British Film	100323	📷

Click on the little camera icon to access the digital microfilm.

The early place indexes are titled "Land Index", and the later ones "Place name index" but they are the same type of index.

Land index: Clare 1708-1738	Family History Library	British Film	100383	📷
Land index: Cavan, Donegal, Down 1708-1738	Family History Library	British Film	100384	📷
Land index: Carlow, Dublin 1708-1738	Family History Library	British Film	100385	📷

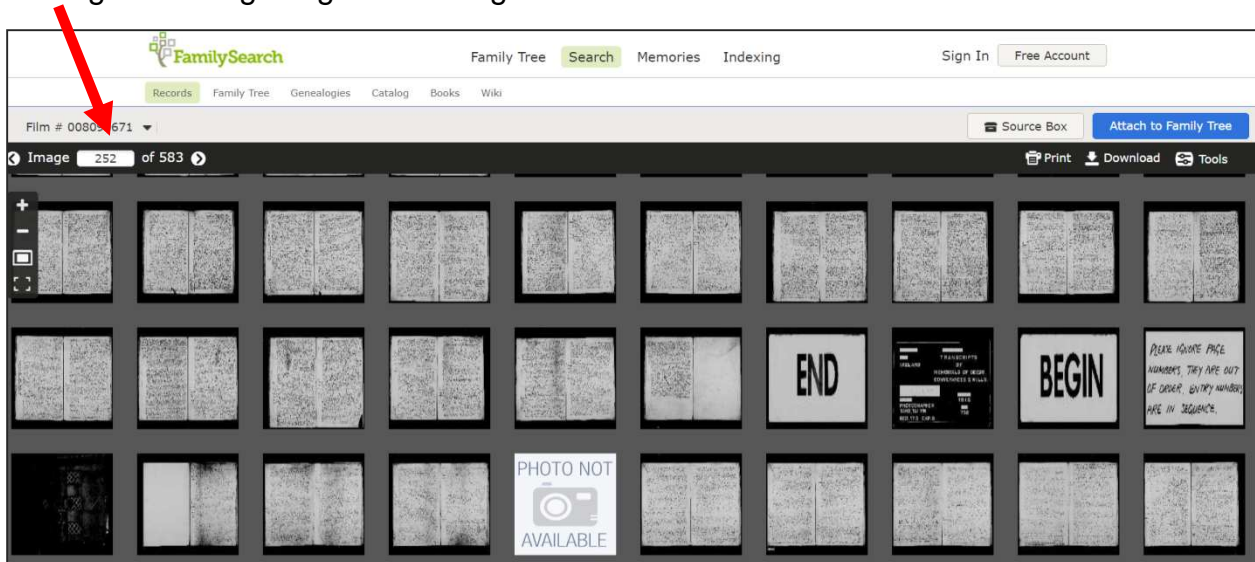|				
Place name index by county, Sligo, Tipperary and Tyrone 1860-1861	Family History Library	British Film	100603	📷
Place name index by county, Waterford, Westmeath, Wexford and Wicklow 1860-1861	Family History Library	British Film	100604	📷

Prior to 1833 the memorials are numbered in one continuous sequence, but after that date they re-start the numbering each year. For that earlier group of memorials the indexes will give you the volume number, the page and the memorial number. For the latter for some of the later group the information given will be year, volume, memorial number and then page. Make sure to check the heading in the land index to know which numbers are which

In all cases, the important things are the year (if 1833 or later), the volume number and the memorial number. The page number can be misleading and is certainly not helpful when there are multiple volumes on one digital microfilm.

Using that volume number, consult the catalog list to find the relevant film.

Deeds, etc., v. 731-732 1818	Family History Library	British Film	463943	📷
Deeds, etc., v. 733-734 1818	Family History Library	British Film	463944	📷

Be aware that if there are two volumes on a film, as in the examples above, and it is the second one you need, you will need to look for that second volume on the microfilm. The easiest way to do this is to scroll through the thumbnails of the digital microfilm, looking for the big image containing "BEGIN" which indicates the start of the volume.

Double-click on one of the thumbnails to enlarge the image.

In order to find the right page jump to a page part-way through the film, looking for the memorial number, and then gradually narrow down on the relevant image. For example, it the above example starts of image 255 and continues to image 583, you might want to start by looking at image 400, which you can do by typing the image number in the box above the thumbnails. If the memorial you are interested in has a lower number than the images on that page, you might choose to jump to image 300, then keep jumping around until you find the right page. This process will be much quicker than scrolling through every image until you find the page of interest, unless the memorial number you are looking for is close to the beginning of the volume.

Good luck with searching the information in the Registry of Deeds, and please remember to add details of any memorials you look at into the *Registry of Deeds Project* website (http://irishdeedsindex.net).