

HOW I WENT ABOUT DATING OUR THATCHED COTTAGE

by Anne Swanton

When we bought our cottage in 1981 our solicitor handled all the paperwork and we were too busy to pay much attention to legal things – we were far more concerned with getting our hands on the house.

So when I recently got interested in trying to date the house I went searching for any paperwork we had. It was only then I recalled that our solicitor had told us that there was no paperwork as such but that it was "Folio No: ---" should we ever need to establish our ownership. So that was it – all I had to go on was a four digit number . So my first port of call was the Land Registry Office website (www.landregistry.ie) which helped me establish which office dealt with my house. A quick call to them quoting the folio number gave me my first pieces of information – the name of the purchaser, that it was a 1911 Land Commission purchase, and the name of the original estate bought by the Land Commission. It also gave me a schedule number which I'd need if I contacted the Land Commission.



The Title Applotment book came up trumps and confirmed that the house existed in 1833 (the date of the record for our house's area) and that the occupiers were the same family name as listed in the Valuation Office records, which backed up the Land Commission's view that the house was probably in the same family for generations. The house is older than this.

It turns out that, like many another cottage in Ireland, it was a Land Commission purchase, which explained why there were no title deeds as such. The system at the time (early 1900s) seems to have been that the Land Commission bought out the landlords of large estates and then helped the existing tenants of the various plots to buy their own holdings by way of loans.

I had hoped that the Land Commission would have details on the tenancy prior to 1911 but it turns out that their records would only show the original landlord's title to the land. I was told that it was likely that the house was in the same family for generations and the helpful staff suggested I go to the Valuation Office which would have records going back to 1855 recording the rates charged and paid.

So off I went to the Valuation Office, which is located in the Irish Life Centre, Dublin 1 (at the end of Abbey St, heading for the Busarus, facing the road that sweeps around the back of the Customs House). Again, more helpful staff who were more than willing to help me find my way round their system and hunt down my house. It's helpful to know what Ordinance Survey map your house is located on for pinpointing the right books, but not essential. Other information that helps in searching is knowing the barony, electoral division, townland and civil parish in which your house is located. Each property has a "lot" number, which is used to identify the house and lands e.g. 11ABCA.

The records cover the three periods: 1938 to present, 1883-1938 and 1855 – 1883. In each of the books amendments can have been made to reflect changes in the records e.g. change of occupier, acreage, and it's easy to date these changes from the entries and colours of the entries in the "Observations" column. You start at the most recent register and work backwards to establish who occupied the the property at any particular time, whether it is "house, out-offices, land" and



Plot Number 11c is where our house is located – look closely and you will see the outline of the square house just beside the road. Plot '9' over the road is common land (Size: 1 acre, 3 roods & 25 perches) divided between the following five owners in 1937: Michael Keating (plot 11c – our plot), Mary Walsh, Stephen Corish, Margaret Walsh and Patrick Keogh.

the acreage involved and whether it increased/decreased, and the rates paid over the years. For a small fee you can get access the records and also get photocopies of the entries in the ledgers and of the valuation maps for your property.

So now I could prove that the house existed in 1855, but wondered how I could check back further.

I decided to contact Wexford County Library as, according to the website, they had an archive section. Unfortunately they had nothing going back to the period I wanted and suggested I contact the National Archives in Henrietta St.

I contacted the National Archives and enquired if there were any state papers in the name of the original owner of the estate which the Land Commission had purchased. They checked, but could find nothing of relevance but told me I was more than welcome to come in any time and check out whether any of their maps would be of relevance. That's one I have to go back to.

Next stop was the Genealogy Advisory Service of the National Library on Kildare Street, (www.nil.ie) where again I encountered more helpful staff (everyone working in historical records seems to be really generous with their time and offered numerous suggestions on how I could go about my task). Their main business is tracing your ancestry but they weren't phased by me trying to trace a house's ancestry instead. They have several reference books that can be consulted and suggested I check Griffith's Valuation (1848-1864) (which gives details by county of occupiers, lessors, descriptions of holdings) in the National Library. They also suggested I consult the Tithe Applotment Book 1823-1838, which gives details of the Church of Ireland titheable land by parish, also to be found in the National Library. They also suggested I check out the Ordinance Survey 6" maps, the earliest of which were drawn in 1847.

Next stop – The National Library. Again more really helpful staff. I had a look at the oldest 6" map dated 1847 and I established that the house was featured. The Library also has a wonderful book which contains the notes backing up the 6" maps. You could spend all day reading these as they are fascinating. (Check out the story of the holy well of St. Manen, where the author solemnly claims the bell stone eventually disappeared and it was assumed it was "taken up to heaven - or stolen by an antiquarian). Unfortunately it had nothing to add to my knowledge about our house. The house is now eight years older...

Unfortunately Griffiths Valuation, while it had precise details on some areas/towns, had nothing specific on my area.

I also checked "Lewis Topography" which was published in 1838 but had no luck there.

The Tithe Applotment book (it's on microfilm) however came up trumps and confirmed that the house existed in 1833 (the date of the record for our house's area) and that the occupiers were the same family name as listed in the Valuation Office records, which backed up the Land Commission's view that the house was probably in the same family for generations.

Another possible source of information which I checked in the National Library was a microfiche of handdrawn outlines of "parishes" maps of the Down Survey superimposed on the Ordinance Survey maps, dating back to 1641. This refers to "Hiberniae Delineatio" and "Hibernia Regnum". I found it hard to find my way around it and will have to have another go some other time.

(The Down Survey (Down Survey and Census of Ireland) was completed in 1654-1656 and was drawn up to prepare for the the transfer of lands confiscated from Irish Catholics to Protestant soldiers following the 1641 rising. No copies of these are available in Ireland (some parts survive in the British Library in London) but the background information on the names of proprietors and their lands is contained in the "Books of Survey & Distribution", in the Manuscripts Section of the National Library, for which you have to apply for a reading ticket. I checked this out but found nothing conclusive. Then again, I wasn't sure what I was looking at and would probably have learnt more if I understood the system for entries in the record.)

So that's as far as I've got.

I still have to check out:-

- Herald's Visitation of 1618, which I was told was a long shot;
- Pender's "Census" of 1659 in the Manuscripts Section;
- The Land Commission records in the Catalogue Room, Main Library
- The Registry of Deeds, in Henrietta St to get information of the deed showing when the lands were granted.
- Maybe a trip to the British Library?

Have any of our readers, any other suggestions?

COUNTY OF <i>Weymouth</i>		UNION OF <i>Weymouth</i>		Rural District of <i>Weymouth</i>		Electoral Division of <i>Rillmore</i>	
Townland of <i>Bridgetown</i> O.S. 47							
Plot No.	Original Owner	Acquired by	Description of Tenement	Area	Value	Value	Value
76	<i>John Hayes</i>	<i>Michael Hayes</i>	<i>In fee</i> <i>Contributory towards road & garden</i>	0 0 30	0 5 0	10 0 0	10 0 0
		<i>Michael Hayes</i>	<i>Half Acre or less</i> <i>Contributory towards road & garden</i>				8 0 0
8	<i>See lot 4B</i>						
9	<i>See lot 4B</i>	<i>Michael Hayes</i>	<i>Land</i> <i>Plantation (over)</i>	1 3 25	1 5 0		1 5 0
10	<i>John Walsh</i>		<i>1/2 off land</i>	3 1 30	2 15 0	0 10 0	3 5 0
11	<i>Michael Hayes</i>			3 0 30	2 10 0	0 10 0	2 0 0

This is a photograph copy of page 46 of the Land Registry. You can see at the top that Bridgetown covered in the (OS) Ordinance Survey Map number 47. Look closely and you'll see that Michael Keating (Green ink) purchased plot 11 from Patrick Hayes in (green ink again) 1934. You'll also see that Michael Hayes got it through a Land Commission (Red ink LAP) purchase in 1913 (Red ink). Look up to plot 9 and you'll see Michael Keating's name again. Plot 9 (over the road from plot 11) is commonly owned by five owners. And again, if you look carefully, you'll see that plot 9 was originally part of the Rowe Estate when it was a plantation. The 'observations' column give details of what happens to a site over time.