

**Irish Place Names
A Genealogical Framework**

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Ireland has many charming geographical location names and it can get very confusing to try and locate specific areas mentioned by our ancestors, particularly when they used local terminology and spoke with brogues. Ancestral research requires a familiarity with these nuances and it is useful to summarize what is involved in Ireland generally and Roscommon specifically. Places can be defined as provinces, counties, baronies, townlands, civil parishes & dioceses, Catholic parishes & dioceses and areas of the Poor Law Union. Some of these use modern names and some use any of several historical names (see box below).

**Ireland – Internal Divisions In 19th Century
Provinces**

The Four Provinces, Ulster in the north, Leinster in the east, Connaught in the west and Munster in the south derive their names from the four ancient kingdoms of Ireland: Uladh, Laighean, Connaught, & Mumha. The fifth kingdom of Meath became merged in the province of Leinster. Other ancient kingdoms such as Aileach and Oriel had become integrated with Ulster since the 17th century.

Counties

The division of Ireland into countries began with King John in 1210 when he constituted twelve of the present day counties – Dublin, Kildare, Meath, later divided into east and west, Louth, Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford, Waterford, Cork, Kerry, Limerick and Tipperary. King’s and Queen’s counties were constituted during the reign of Queen Mary and the following under Elizabeth 1: Longford, Clare, Galway, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Leitrim, Armagh, Monaghan, Tyrone, Derry, Donegal, Fermanagh and Cavan. The origin of Antrim and Down as Counties seems uncertain and the last country to be formed was Wicklow which was divided from Dublin in 1605. Many counties have towns of the same name, e.g., Limerick, Cork, etc.

Baronies

The barony is a division of great antiquity based on the great Gaelic family holdings. At present there are 325 baronies in all Ireland. They were turned into civil divisions by the English for the purpose of the 19th century land valuations.

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Parishes

Parishes were of two kinds, ecclesiastical and civil. The civil parish again used for last century valuations, was normally smaller in area than the ecclesiastical parish and often differed in name from it. There are about two and a half thousand ecclesiastical parishes in the whole country.

Townlands

The townland was a small rural division of the parish. Its average area was 350 acres. The census of 1901 showed 60,462 such townlands.

Poor Law Unions

Under the Poor Law Relief Act of 1838, the country was divided into districts or unions in which the local ratable people were financially responsible for the care of all paupers in the area. These unions comprised multiples of townlands within an average radius of ten miles, usually with a large market town as centre, in which the “poor house” was located. Most of these poor houses may still be seen and many are still in use – for other purposes of course.

4 Provinces	<u>Connaught</u>	<u>Munster</u>	<u>Leinster</u>	<u>Ulster</u>
32 counties	5	6	12	9
	Galway	Clare	Carlow	Antrim
	Leitrim	Cork	Dublin	Armagh
	Mayo	Kerry	Kildare	Cavan
	Roscommon	Limerick	Kilkenny	Donegal
	Sligo	Tipperary	Leix	Down
		Waterford	Longford	Fermanagh
			Louth	Londonderry
			Meath	Monaghan
			Offaly	Tyrone
			Westmeath	
			Wexford	
			Wicklow	

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My paternal great-grandparents (Patrick Beirne, Catherine Tansey, Patrick Gavigan and Bridget Crowley) lived within 10-15 miles of one another in the West/Northwest area of County Roscommon and can serve as an example.

Ireland is a small country and an island. In size, it is roughly equivalent to the state of Indiana. Historically, it had many local chiefs and no real centralized government (See Irish history chapter). It was divided into four provinces or regions: Ulster, Connaught, Munster and Leinster. There are 32 counties. Prior to 1921, they were divided as follows:

The island of Ireland now has two distinct sections: Northern Ireland, which is part of Great Britain, and the Republic of Ireland which is also known as the South. This was not always the case (see Irish history) as Ireland has had numerous attempts to be totally independent since the 16th century. "Home Rule" for all of Ireland, including Ulster, has been a major issue since 1690 with numerous major and minor insurrections over the centuries. Its independence has been a contentious issue throughout the 1800s and early 1900s and a frequent divisive problem in British politics. The principle roadblock was/is Ulster as it was populated by those who owed allegiance to Great Britain and did not want to separate from Britain.

The Easter rising of 1916 was an attempt to seize all of Ireland and make it an independent nation. It failed and there were tremendous repercussions. The Irish Republic was formed in 1919 by Dail Eireann (the Irish assembly, now known as the Irish Parliament) and was lead by Arthur Griffith. It was committed to complete home rule for all of the 32 counties.

On December 6, 1921, another political entity was formed as the result of the Anglo-Irish Treaty that was signed in London by representatives of Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. It created the Irish Free State and split the country into two sections. This changed the affiliation of certain counties. Ulster remained a part of Great Britain but was restricted to six counties from its original nine. Counties Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan became part of the Irish Free State's 26 counties. The treaty was negotiated by Michael Collins who then lead the Irish Free State.

The treaty had supporters and opponents and those forces were still evident in 2004. The "Free Staters" wanted a complete country too but felt that a half loaf was better than none. Ireland had been seeking its independence since 1690 and they believed that this was a good start. Michael Collins was Ireland's representative to the treaty negotiations. At the midnight hour, he accepted the terms and thought that he would be supported back home. The anti-treaty forces were lead by Eamon deValera and refused to accept the treaty. They were known as republicans. They occupied the Public Records Office in Dublin that was the administration center for Ireland and the historical repository for most public records. They destroyed over 100 years of state and religious records before they were expelled by the Free Staters.

This precipitated the Irish Civil War that raged from June 1922 until April 1923. Griffith died and Michael Collins was assassinated in August 1922. The guerilla warfare and repeated as-

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sassinations left a bitter legacy that is still evident in today's political parties. Ireland's two largest parties are Fianna Fail (anti-treaty) and Fine Gael (pro-treaty). The two factions merged with W.T. Cosgrave as leader in 1922. This was the condition or state in 2004.

In the US census of 1920, Michael Beirne and Anne Gavigan Beirne declared that they were born in the Irish Free State so they were aware of the political changes in their home country. Roscommon was their home.

County Roscommon (Ros Comáin, "St. Coman's wood")¹

Connacht is the smallest and most westerly of the four provinces. The name of the province derives from the Connachta, the large tribal grouping which dominated the west and north of the island in the first few centuries A.D. It includes counties Galway, Mayo, Sligo, Roscommon and Leitrim. The county of Roscommon was created in 1565 and its name was taken from the major town that was named for Coman, a little known fifth century saint. The town was founded by the Dominicans in the thirteenth century and has the remnants of a ruined abbey.

It is bounded by the Shannon to the south and east and by its tributary the Suck to the west. Much of Roscommon is very wet, with extensive winter flooding of the lands adjoining the Shannon and many turloughs, underground lakes which rise from October to April.

The north of the county was included in the traditional lands of the MacDermots, while the south formed part of the territory of Uí Máine, ruled by the O'Kellys. Roscommon was little affected by the Norman invasion and was one of the counties that Cromwell left to the native proprietors in the seventeenth century. One result was that many of the old ways survived here longer than elsewhere. Another result, by the nineteenth century, was huge overpopulation and abject poverty. The fragile subsistence of the people was shattered by the Famine. Between 1841 and 1851, the population fell by almost a third, the largest single drop of any county in Ireland.

Some of the surnames associated with the county include names from our family (See bold type): McDermott, Beirne, Kelly,² Dockery, McGarry, Gavigan, Crowley, Duignan, Regan, O'Gara, Towey, O'Connor, and Hanly.

My paternal grandparents and great grandparents (Patrick Beirne and Kate Tansey and Bridget Crowley and Patrick Gavigan) lived in County Roscommon within 10-15 miles of one another.

1 Mitchell, Brian; *A New Genealogical Atlas of Ireland*.

2 Our Kelly relatives stated origins in County Cork (See various Kelly stories).

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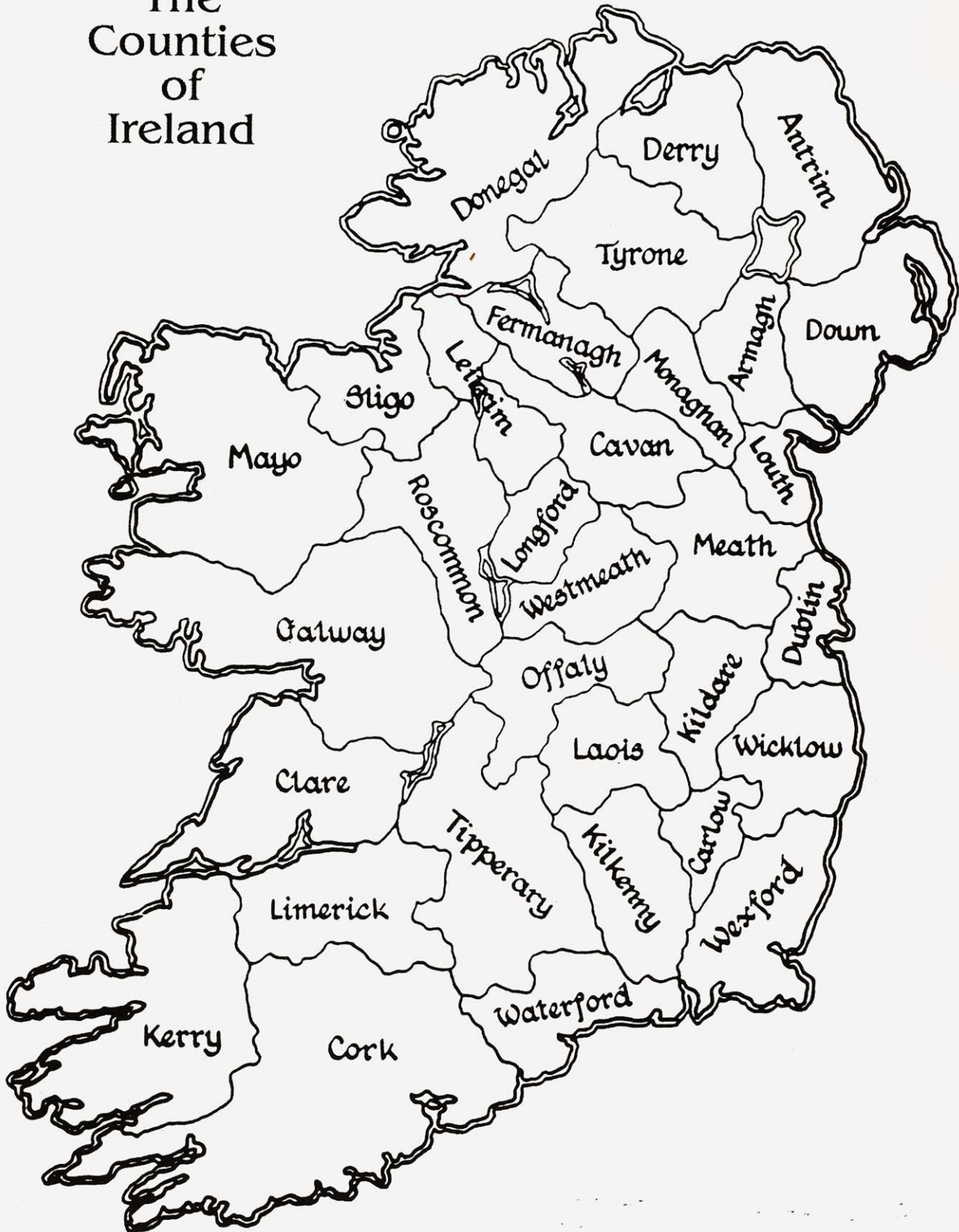
The specific locations are sometimes confusing as there are so many ways to define each geographical town. Depending upon who told the story, there were often different names used to define an area that made my research difficult. Below are the various ways to define my great grandparents home areas (see associated chart).

<u>Location Names</u>	<u>Beirne & Tansey</u>		<u>Gavagan & Crowley</u>	
• County	Roscommon		Roscommon	
• Barony	Frenchpark		Roscommon	
• Townland	Ardmoyle		Doughil	
• Poor Law Union	Boyle		Strokestown	
• Civil Parish	Kilnamagh		Cloonfinlough	
	<u>modern</u>	<u>historical</u>	<u>modern</u>	<u>historical</u>
• Catholic Parish	Ballinameen	Kilnamagh	Ballagh	Cloontuskert
		Estersnow		Kilgefin
				Curraghroe

The Beirnes and Tanseys have eight different geographic placenames and the Gavagans and Crowleys had nine. Each of these has its own set of data and records that have been used to develop their stories and genealogy.³

³ Some information used is from Ireland.com (2004).

The Counties of Ireland



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**Baronies & Locations
County Roscommon**

**Frenchpark-Beirne & Tansey
Roscommon- Gavigan & Crowley**

“A New Genealogical Atlas of Ireland” by Brian Mitchell

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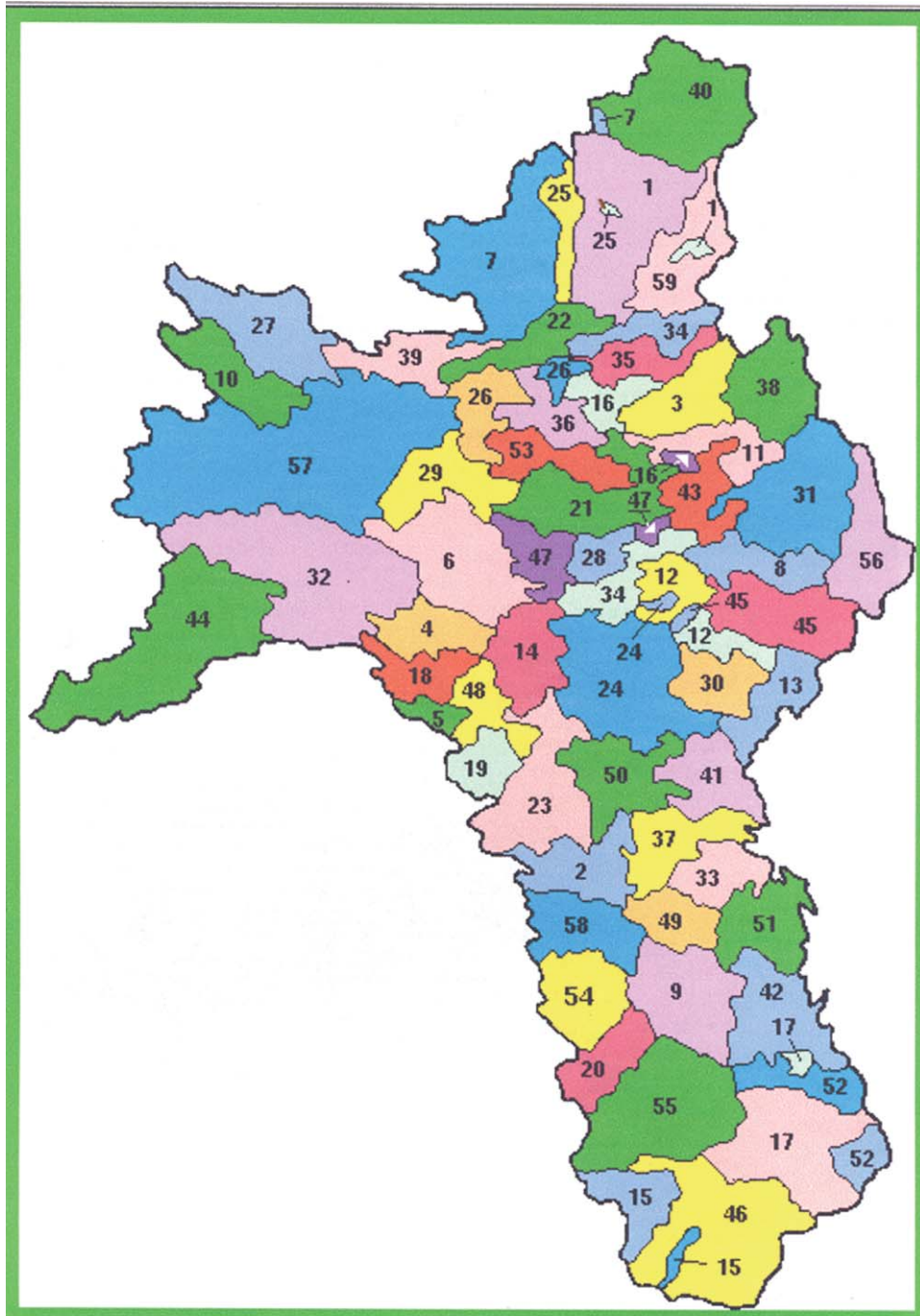


**Poor Law Union Locations
County Roscommon**

**Beirne & Tansey - Boyle
Gavigan & Crowley - Strokestown**

“A New Genealogical Atlas of Ireland” by Brian Mitchell

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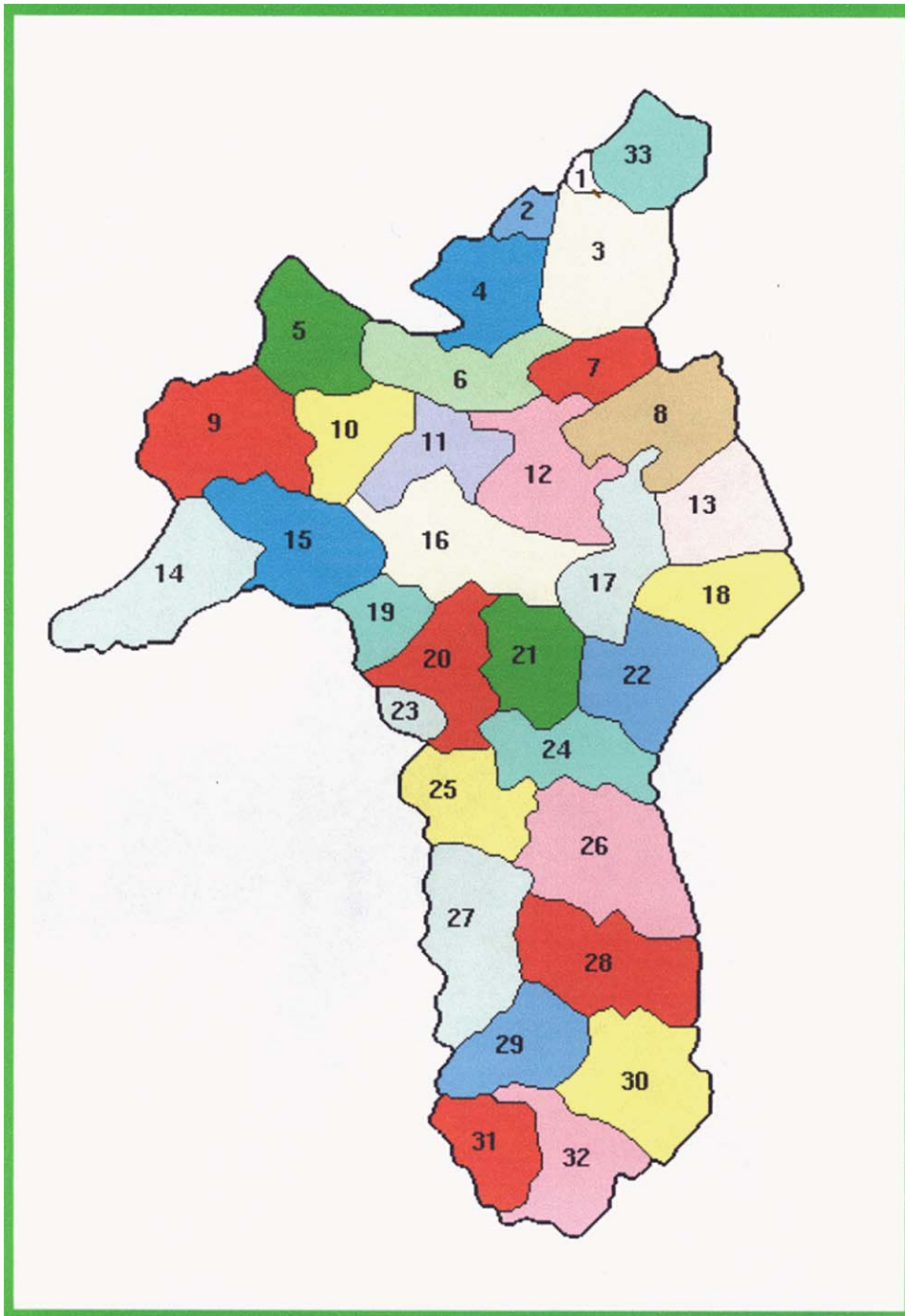


**Civil Parish Locations
County Roscommon**

**39 Kilmanagh - Beirne & Tansey
12 Cloonfinlough - Gavigan & Crowley**

“A New Genealogical Atlas of Ireland”

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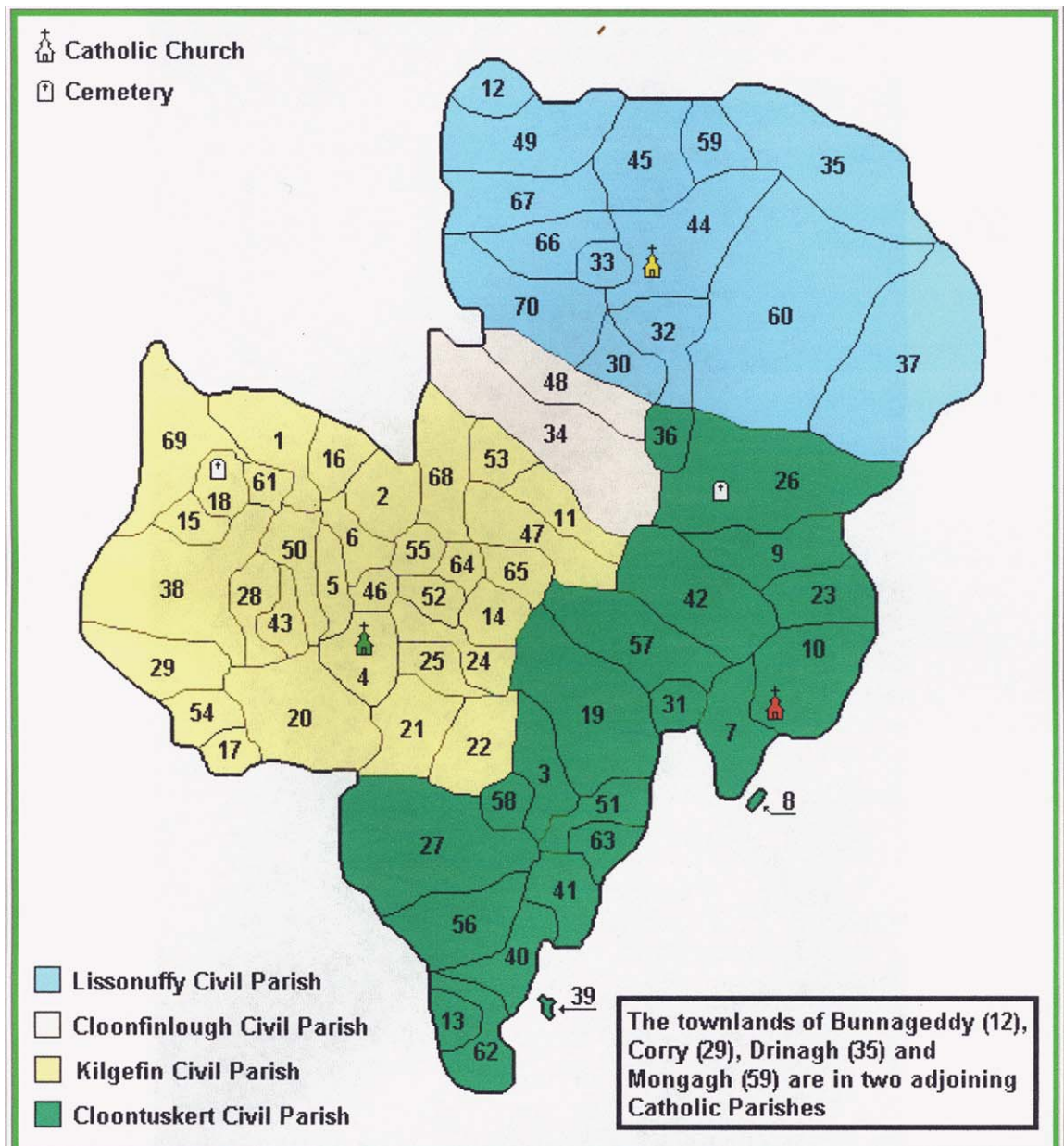


**Catholic Parish Locations
County Roscommon**

**6 Ballinameen - Beirne & Tansey
22 Ballagh - Gavagan & Crowley**

“Tracing Your Irish Ancestors” by John Grenham

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**Townlands of Ballagh Catholic Parish
Historic Names: Cloontuskert, Kilgefin & Curraghroe
County Roscommon**

34 Doughil-birthplace Anne Marie Gavigan Beirne

Letrim-Roscommon Home page