

Local History Series: 8



Ordnance Survey Maps

PRONI has the most extensive holdings of Ordnance Survey maps for Northern Ireland, including the published and manuscript town plans for the major towns and villages in the Province.

Before the nineteenth century various parts of Ireland had been mapped by landowners in the interests of estate management. Surveyors were employed to measure and plot each part of the estate in varying degrees of detail depending on the amount of money available. It was not until the early nineteenth century, when the idea of having a new land tax was introduced, that the Government decided that it required the whole of Ireland to be mapped on a large scale in order to show the land boundaries more accurately.

6 Inch County Series

Maps on the scale of six inches to one statute mile were completed for the whole country by 1842 (PRONI Reference **OS/1** and **OS/6**). This massive undertaking ensured that Ireland was surveyed and mapped with a degree of thoroughness and accuracy unique for its time in the world. It is particularly opportune that the mapping programme was undertaken shortly before the Great Famine when the country had its maximum recorded population.



*1st edition Ordnance Survey map
showing Magherafelt
(PRONI Reference **OS/6/1**)*

By 1846, when the publication of the first edition of the six-inch map was completed, revision of the early six-inch maps had already begun. The Ordnance Survey maps are a faithful record of the landscape for this period of the nineteenth century. For the first time the boundaries of all townlands, civil parishes, baronies and counties were delineated. Man made items such as roads and settlement features are shown on these maps. The nineteenth century interest in antiquities was reflected in the care taken to mark the location of such things as castles, medieval and early Christian churches and raths.

However, most of the early 6 inch editions for Ulster will not show field boundaries which were initially excluded. In 1835 it was decided that leading fences should appear in future but unfortunately much of Ulster and parts of the surrounding counties had already been surveyed so field boundaries will often not appear until the first revision in the 1850s

Revisions to the 6 inch sheets were published 1853-61, in 1903-6 and 1921-39 enabling you to track changes in the landscape over a 100 year period.

A copy of the 'Conventional Signs' used on 6 inch maps of the Ordnance Survey can be found in **OS/2**.

Mapping of the towns

Larger scales were required for the valuation of urban areas. Initially there was no uniformity of scale but eventually agreement was reached that towns should be mapped at 10 times the basic scale (5 feet to the mile - 1:1056). However, only half the towns in Northern Ireland were surveyed at 5 feet to the mile in the period 1830 - 35. There was no comprehensive programme for revising the town plans; indeed some new surveys began to be published in 1856/7 but by this time government decide to enlarge the urban scale to 10 feet to the mile (1:500). Over 25 towns in Northern Ireland were mapped at the 1:500 scale in 1859-60 but later other scales continued to be used, including the 5 feet to the mile scale. These large scale plans, some of which are in colour, are extremely detailed, even to the extent that interior walls and layout are usually shown for public buildings. Plans of 163 towns in Northern Ireland are to be found in the published series (PRONI Reference **OS/8**); they complement a collection of manuscript town plans (PRONI Reference **OS/8**) which frequently contain older unpublished maps of the towns found in the published maps in **OS/8**. For the index to the Borough of Belfast you should consult the index map in the Search Room in PRONI.

25 Inch County Series

By the end of the 19th century maps at other scales were being introduced. In 1887 it was decided to resurvey the whole island of Ireland at a scale of 25 inches to the mile. There were subsequent revisions up to the 1960s. (PRONI Reference **OS/10**)

Irish Grid Series

In 1950 Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland moved away from mapping on a county basis to mapping on the grid system so that every point on a map could be located by its grid reference. This new series (known as the Irish Grid) superseded both the 6 inch and 25 inch county maps (PRONI Reference **OS/7** and **OS/11**). For the index to the Irish Grid which shows both the 6 inch and 25 inch county Ordnance Survey

sheet numbers and the corresponding Irish Grid number, consult the map in the Search Room in PRONI.

Researchers interested in maps with valuation markings can locate these under the PRONI Reference '**VAL**' as the Ordnance Survey sheets do not contain valuation details.

A joint project between PRONI and Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland has just been completed the digitisation of all of PRONI's holdings of Ordnance Survey maps, including a wide range of points of interest such as schools, mills, churches, factories and public buildings. This should eventually be available on-line.

