

Irish Community Archives Network

Local History: Research, Sources and Methods

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January – February 2021

LECTURE 1



Lecture 1



Discussion of aims & Value of Local History



Sources for local history



Identifying themes



Planning research



Maintaining records



Referencing

Lecture 2

Oral History, Personal
Testimony and tradition,

Interview dynamics

Sample Collections

Sample audio and analysis

Using oral history and
memory

Lecture 3

Time and research

Understanding Sources

Potential drawbacks with sources

Analysing sources

Using Local Archives & Rules and Policies

Comprehensive searching

Lecture 4



Writing and Publishing



Creating a plan for a written piece



Characteristics of a well written history



Importance of referencing and source citation



Review of key learning outcomes

Course Outcomes

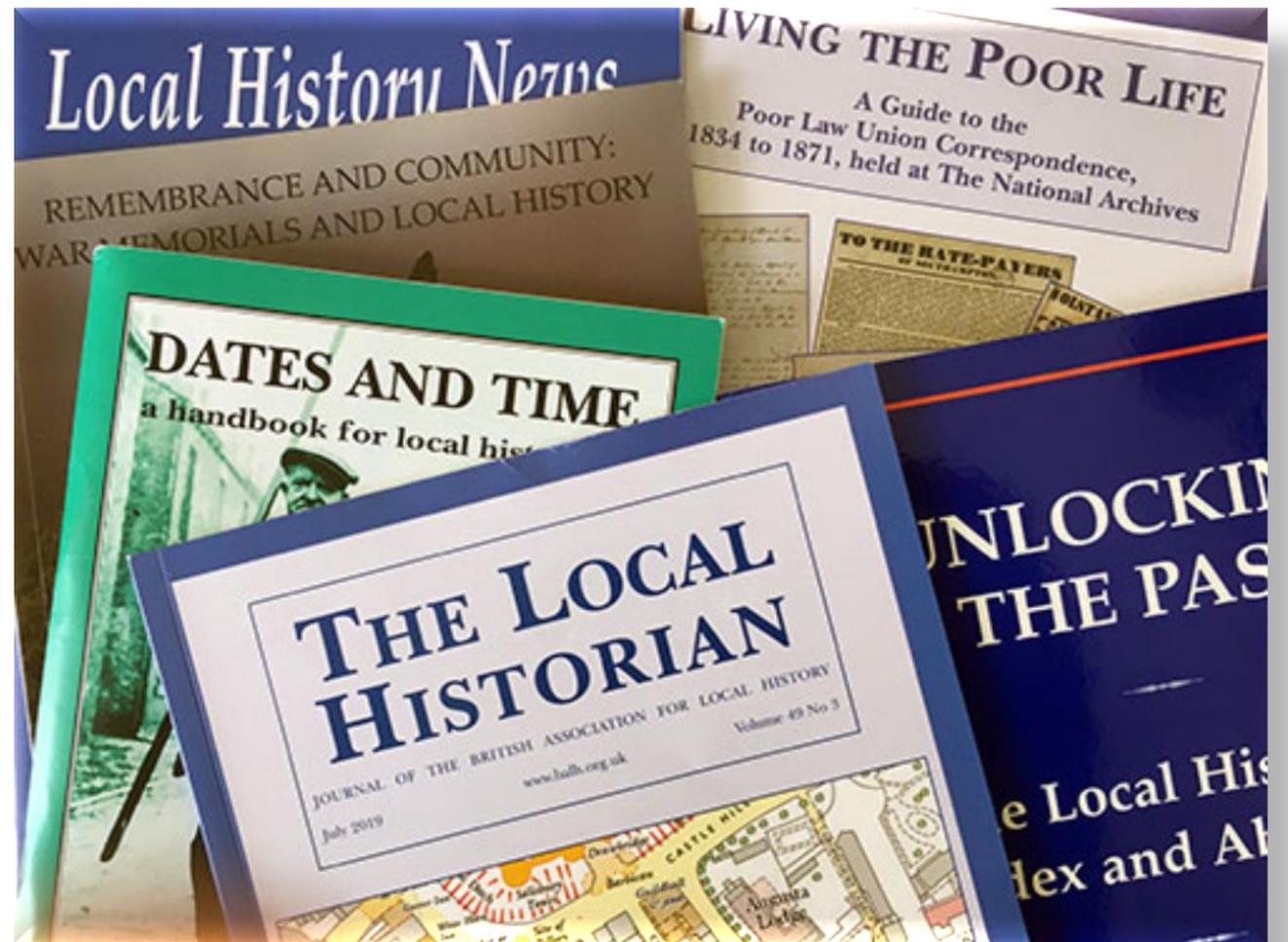
Identify	Identify key primary sources for the study of local history
Engage	Critically engage with a range of primary sources, visual, documentary and oral.
Illustrate	Illustrate an understanding of key methodological issues.
Demonstrate	Demonstrate a familiarity with key phases in the historical development of their region/subject area
Illustrate	Illustrate an understanding of local history from a variety of perspectives (social, cultural, economic and political).
Understand	Understand where local history sits within the broader field
Appreciate	Appreciate the importance of a coherent and credible presentation of findings

Why Are you
really here?



Local History

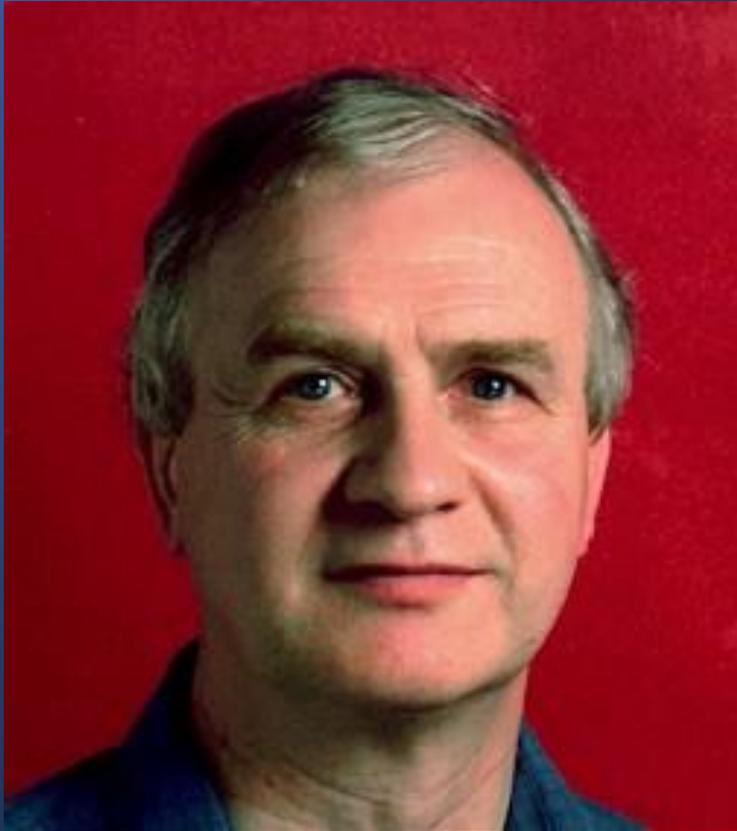
- What is local history?
- Is there a hierarchy?
- Historic views
- Current Views
- Your own views
- What is the purpose and value of **YOUR** work?



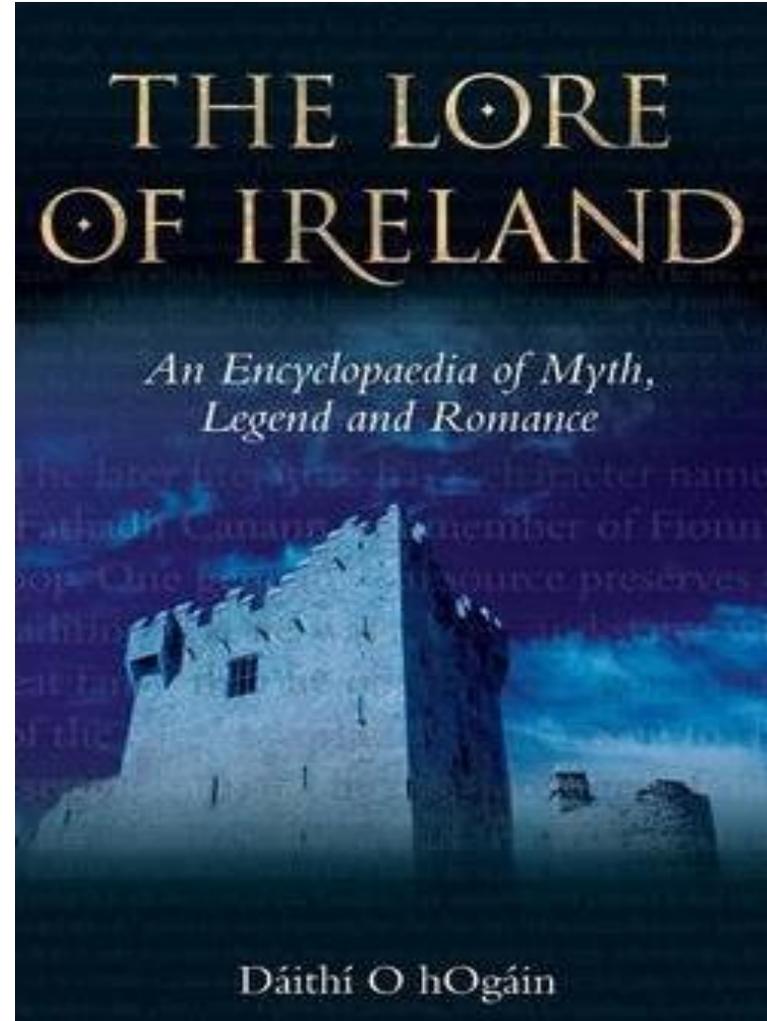


Value of Local History

- New avenues - Effective use of non-documentary sources such as oral history folklore, architecture and visual material.
- The smallest geo unit (townland) can be fount of immense information with intensive trawl through surviving evidence
- How this material can be meaningfully interpreted and attractively presented.
- SOURCES



- Value of great nineteenth-century local studies (Carrigan's history of the diocese of Ossory) was their encyclopaedic knowledge of the source material for their own area.'





Researching and Writing History: Start at the beginning

What can go wrong?

1. No clear thesis
2. Poor structure
3. Lack of background research
4. Little analysis
5. Sources are questionable
6. Using evidence uncritically
7. Sloppy with chronology
8. Quote excessively & improperly
9. Failure to underline findings
10. Unsupported generalisations
11. No proofreading
12. Wordy
13. Anachronistic moralising
14. No author given
15. Poor or no referencing/citation

Problematic attitudes

- Starting out with a conclusion
- Objectivity
- Presumption of detail
- Any secondary source will do ...
- Timing
- Overdependency on a name
- rely overly on sources without interpretation or explanation.

Planning Your Research

What topic are you trying to research?

Choice of topic is critical

Best research is driven by a desire or a need to research

You need at the beginning are two things:

- (a) a problem that you are genuinely interested in
- (b) a specific issue, controversy, period, person, etc. that is likely to offer a fruitful way forward for exploring your problem.

In the early stages, it's often a good idea to be general about (a) and very specific about (b).



Steps

- Desktop research (Record Keeping!)
- Visit your **local** studies library.
- Visit your **local** museum.
- Visit your **local** archives.
- Join a **local history** society.



General to Specific

- Perspective
- Keep the big picture in mind
- Consider where your subject/theme sits within that bigger picture
- As you progress your research, you should be narrowing in on your central theme
- Think about broad trends and cultural themes that impacted the subjects you're studying

Keep Records/Take Notes

- **Always take notes!**
- When researching historical or cultural phenomena, you will be bombarded by facts
- Keep information manageable - develop a note-taking habit.
- Keep hard copy journals
- Create digital files and add and develop – file name clearly
- Psychological benefit to good record keeping
- Reference/Reference/Reference

Planning Your research – Steps

- Begin by collecting basic facts about person or topic you are interested in.
- Undertake background reading about period in question to contextualise archival sources.
- In person research comes later
- Investigate secondary to find primary
- Confirm their location prior to in person research

Considerations



Don't try to find out everything about your topic: pick those aspects that are likely to prove most fruitful for the direction your research is heading.



Remember that the best history almost always depends on developing new approaches and interpretations, not on knowing about a secret archive no one has used before.



As you become familiar with your topic, you are likely to find that evidence you dug out at the beginning of your project is much more significant than you thought it was.



You are never more prepared to begin than when you are ending!

Be mindful of chronology

- Need to know the chronological order in which events happened
- This applies to a shortened timeline
- This does not mean, you need to present research paper in chronological order.
- Good historians keep broad trends and cultural changes in mind



Printed and online guides
Secondary sources (books, journal articles, etc.)

Hardcopy guides

- Richard J. Hayes (ed.), *Sources for the history of Irish civilisation : articles in Irish periodicals* (9 vols., Boston, 1970)

Bibliographies

- See for example the various volumes of *A new history of Ireland* (Oxford)
- Local bibliographies sometimes exist

Secondary Sources

- When beginning research project, go right to the source by reading, viewing, or listening to historical documents from the era you are studying.
- Secondary sources like history textbooks can be fantastic resources,
- They still reflect the biases of their authors.
- Good research rely more on primary documents than secondary sources.

Online guides

www.irishhistoryonline.ie – provides bibliographical references

www.nli.ie – National Library, Ireland

www.estc.bl.uk/ – English short title catalogue of books published between 1473-1800

www.bl.uk/ – British Library catalogue

<https://libguides.bc.edu/irishhist/bibliographies> - Boston College - Irish History (Irish Studies)Bibliographies

<https://www.thejournal.ie/irish-history-online-records-2532204-Jan2016/> - Maynooth Research Guides for Irish Local History

Finding
PRIMARY SOURCES
in History



Tuesday, April 12, 12:15 - 1:05

Consult primary sources

- A primary source is something that was written, filmed, or recorded during the era you are studying
- Letter
- Treaty
- Photograph - visual culture and historical evidence (L 3)
- Newspaper article
- Government documents
- Oral history from someone who lived during the time period.



What is the
Common Factor?

Primary sources

Hardcopy guides

- Richard J. Hayes (ed.), *Manuscript sources for the history of Irish civilisation* (11 vols., Boston, 1965)
- Volumes on persons, places, subjects, chronology
- *Maynooth guides to sources*

Examples: Brian Gurrin, *Pre-census sources for Irish demography* (Dublin, 2002).

Andrés Eiríksson and C. Ó Gráda, *Estate records of the Irish famine : a second guide to famine archives, 1840-1855* (Dublin, 1995).

- *Guides to institutions*

Example: P. B. Phair, 'Guide to the Registry of Deeds' in *Annalecta Hibernica*, 23 (1966), pp 257-76.

- *Thematic guides*

Example: Margaret Ó hÓgartaigh, 'Archival sources for the history of professional women in late-nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland' in *Irish Archives*, ns, 6:1 (1999), pp 23-5.

Remember Colleagues and Peer Groups



Online guides for Sources

- Hayes is now available as <http://sources.nli.ie/>
- S. Helferty and R. Refausse (eds), *Directory of Irish archives* (Dublin, 2004)
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archon/ - directory of British and Irish archives
- <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/> –searchable catalogue main archives in Britain and Ireland
- **Manuscript catalogues** – National, regional and local institutions
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk – contains ten million descriptions of documents
www.proni.gov.uk – contains vast amount of Irish official and family papers
Local archives and repositories – Some are digitized – catalogues available

National Archives of Ireland

- What to understand about National Archives before I visit?
- Type of records NA hold
- Be clear about what you are hoping to find. Archival research can be difficult and time consuming.
- Onus on researchers to ensure they provide themselves with adequate and realistic timeframes
 - Tithe Applotment records for a person living in the 1820's or 1830's;
 - Primary Valuation and valuation records for a person living in the 1840's, 1850's or 1860's; and
 - 1901 and 1911 census return for a person living in the early 20th century.
 - records of births, deaths, marriages, baptisms and burials.
 - Private Source Records, including Landed Estate Collections
 - In person Archival research required for rounded research

Military Archives of Ireland

- Bureau of Military history
- Records of the Defence Forces
- Department of Defence
- Army Pensions Board
- Military Archives Oral History Project
- Private Collections
- Very strong organisationally and knowledge team

www.militaryarchives.ie/

Referencing/Citations



Why are references/citations important?



DOES YOUR WORK AND EFFORT
JUSTICE



DOES THE SUBJECT YOU EXPLORE
JUSTICE



UNDERMINES THE WORK OF THE
HISTORIAN BY PLACING DOUBT IN
THE MIND OF THE READER



GIVES PROPER CREDIT TO THE
AUTHORS OF THE WORDS OR IDEAS
THAT YOU INCORPORATED INTO YOUR
RESEARCH.

Continued...



Allows those who reading your work to locate your sources, in order to learn more about the ideas that you include in your research.



Citing your sources consistently and accurately helps you avoid committing plagiarism in your writing.



No **historian** ever works in isolation; scholarly inquiry is an endeavour carried on within a community of **historians**.

Examples

- *Irish Historical Studies (IHS)* guidelines
- <https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-file-manager/file/57597b33fdacd191593ca09e/IHS-rules-for-contributors.pdf>
- Forename Surname, *Book title* (Place, Year), p. xx.
In Bibliography:
 - Surname, Forename, *Book title*, (publisher, place, year)
- If you are referencing a journal article, it will look like:
- Forename Surname, 'Article title' in *Journal title*, Volume (Year), pp xx-xx.



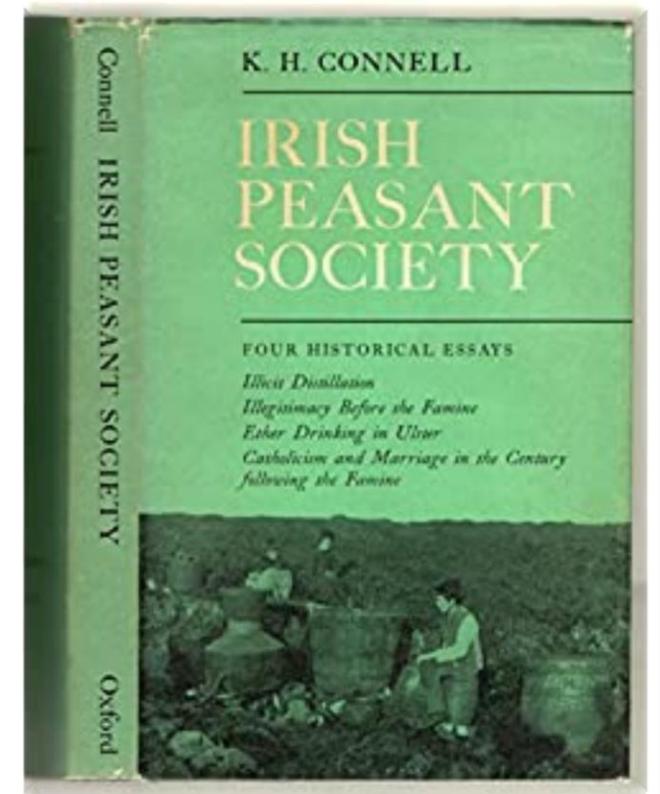
Example of footnoting a book

First name Surname, *Title of book in italics* (place, date of publication), p. numbers.

K. H. Connell, *Irish peasant society* (Oxford, 1968), pp 2-4.

Subsequent references of same source:

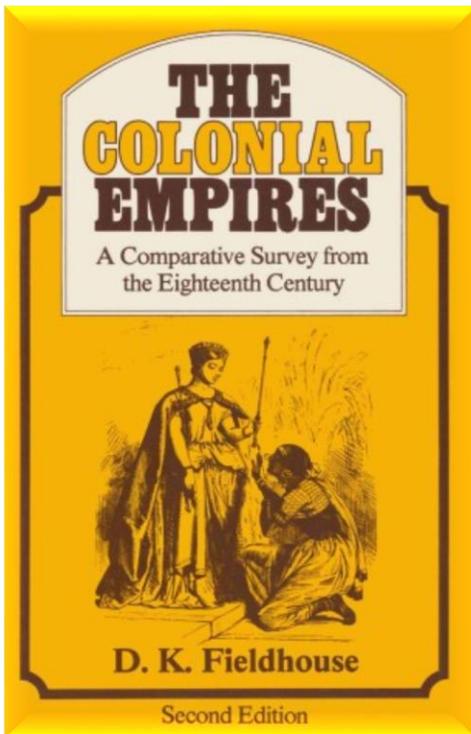
Connell, *Irish Peasant Society*, p xx



Example of footnoting a book – 2

First name Surname, *Title of book in italics* (place, date of publication), p. numbers.

D. K. Fieldhouse, *The colonial empires: a comparative survey from the eighteenth century* (2nd ed., Basingbroke, 1982), p. 12.



Subsequent references of same source:

Fieldhouse, *The colonial empires*, p xx

Footnoting an article

First name Surname, ‘Title of article in single inverted commas’ in *Title of journal in italics*, vol number, issue number (date), page numbers.

C. Whyte, “‘Freedom but nothing else’: the legacies of slavery and abolition in post-slavery Sierra Leone, 1928-1956’ in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 48, 2 (2015), pp 231-50.

Subsequent references of same source:

White, ‘*Freedom but nothing else*’, p xx

Essay in a collection

1. Ciaran Brady, 'Comparable histories? Tudor reform in Wales and Ireland' in Steven G. Ellis and Sarah Barber (eds), *Conquest and union: fashioning a British state, 1485-1725* (London, 1995), pp 64-86.

Subsequent references of same source:

Brady, 'Comparable histories?', p xx

Review



- Your aim/ambition
- Local History
- Planning
- Record Keeping
- Sources
- Referencing
- Enjoy your work!