

# Place Names and Townlands Activity Pack



Belfast

Omagh

Coleraine

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## Activity 1

# A History of Townlands

Read the following passage and answer the questions below:

Ireland is divided into four provinces, Ulster, Leinster, Connaught and Munster.

Below the provinces there are counties, across the whole of Ireland there are thirty two counties, this includes six in Northern Ireland.

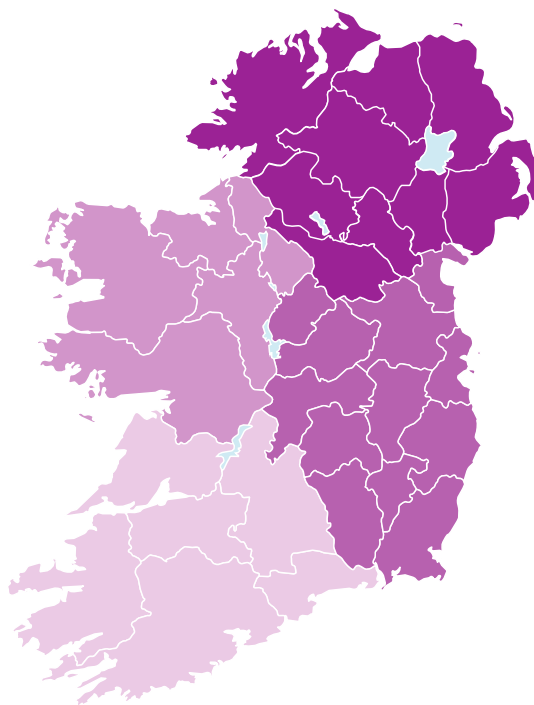
In the past the counties were divided into baronies, there were almost three hundred baronies in Ireland, these are no longer used. Below the baronies are parishes, there are nearly two thousand five hundred parishes. The parishes are then divided into townlands, the townlands are the smallest areas of land.

In Ireland there are over sixty thousand townlands, they go back to the old Gaelic times. The average size of a townland is three hundred and twenty five acres (the size of two hundred and fifteen football pitches). Some are smaller, no bigger than a few fields, others are bigger and can stretch vast distances.

A townland is not a town, but it can be part of a town, or it can be a rural area. A townland is the smallest way of dividing up the land. The Irish word for townland “baile fearainn” comes from a combination of words; baile (farm or settlement) and fearainn (land or territory.) The Ulster Scots word for townland is “toonlann”.

The same townland names can occur several times in the same county or in different counties (e.g. there are twenty six townlands in fifteen counties called Leitrim).

The origins of townlands is not clear, but they existed long before parishes and counties. Oral tradition played a huge part in making sure that placenames were handed down from generation to generation.



**4 Provinces**

**32 Counties**

**3,000 Baronies**

**60,000 Townlands**

## Activity 1

# Questions

**1.** What are the names of the 4 provinces in Ireland?

.....

**2.** What division of land, no longer used, was below a county?

.....

**3.** How many baronies were there in Ireland?

.....

**4.** What are the smallest areas of land called?

.....

**5.** What is the average size of a townland?

.....

**6.** What does the word townland mean?

.....

## Activity 2

# Comprehension

Read the following passage and answer the questions below:

Saul is a townland in County Down.

In the year 432, St. Patrick is said to have arrived by boat in Strangford Lough and landed at the mouth of the Slaney River in the townland of Ringbane. Strangford is a Norse name meaning “the place of strong currents” or “strong ford”. Ringbane means the “White Point”.

Here Patrick was met by Dichu, a local chieftain. Dichu is said to be the first person who St. Patrick converted to become a Christian in Ireland. Dichu gave Patrick a barn in which to shelter and it was here that St Patrick founded his first church in Ireland. The name Saul comes from the Irish word Sabhall which means a barn.

Patrick travelled all over Ireland preaching and it is said that he returned to the area of Saul when the time came for him to die. A bishop called Tassach was chosen by St. Patrick to give him communion before he died. There is a church called St. Tassach’s in the townland of Carrowcarlin, which means Carlin’s quarter (land).

High on the hill known as Slieve Patrick there stands a huge statue of St. Patrick. Slieve is an anglicisation of the Irish word Sliabh which means mountain. This statue was built to celebrate the 1500th anniversary of Patrick’s arrival in Ireland. This statue is the largest statue of St. Patrick in the world! The statue stands 10 metres in height and is made of a type of stone called granite. If you look closely, you will see that St. Patrick has a workman’s boot on one foot and a sandal on the other! On a clear day you can see as far as Strangford Lough, Scrabo Tower and the Isle of Man.

It is said that St. Patrick died on March 17th and is buried at Down Cathedral in Downpatrick (St Patrick’s fort). Two other saints are thought to be buried alongside him in the grave, St. Bridget and St. Colmcille. Do you know the rhyme which says:

“In Down, three Saints, one grave do fill,  
Patrick, Bridget and Colmcille”

## Activity 2

# Questions

**1.** What year did St.Patrick arrive in Ireland?

.....

**2.** What does the name of the townland Ringbane mean?

.....

**3.** What was the name of the local chieftain whom Patrick met when he arrived?

.....

**4.** What does the Irish word Sabhall mean?

.....

**5.** Who was the bishop that gave St. Patrick communion before he died?

.....

**6.** Why was the statue of St.Patrick built on the hill known as Slieve Patrick?

.....

**7.** What height is the statue and from what type of stone is it made?

.....

**8.** What is unusual about the statue?

.....

**9.** If you were standing at the top of Slieve Patrick, name two places which you may be able to see.

.....

**10.** What are the names of the two other saints who are thought to be buried with St. Patrick?

.....

## Activity 3

# Creative Writing

The extract below is taken from a poem “Ulster Names” from the Northern Irish poet John Hewitt.

“I take my stand by the Ulster names,  
each clean hard name like a weathered stone;  
Tyrella, Rostrevor, are flickering flames:  
the names I mean are the Moy, Malone  
Strabane, Slieve Gullion and Portglenone.”

Using the poem as inspiration, look at the townlands and placenames in your local area and write a poem or a short paragraph which highlights the placenames and townland names.

To help you it might be useful to think of the following:

Is there something significant or of interest in the townland or local area?

.....

.....

Is there something significant about the history of the local area?

.....

.....

Does the name have any significant meaning?

.....

.....

Does anyone famous come from the area?

.....

.....

Why do you love living there?

.....

.....

## Activity 3

# Creative Writing

## Activity 4

# Townlands Wordsearch

Words can be found in any direction (including diagonals) and can overlap each other. Use the word bank below. As a follow up write in the meaning of each of the townlands.

U	W	B	E	R	O	M	Y	E	N	O	M	Z	H	D
E	J	L	Y	R	W	L	W	K	H	W	C	R	G	A
A	U	D	L	E	Y	S	A	C	R	K	X	X	A	N
A	E	E	E	I	G	I	L	N	O	C	H	I	E	O
N	W	O	D	R	O	E	C	S	D	U	E	B	R	T
D	O	H	M	E	R	I	U	E	Q	M	A	E	G	N
Z	R	C	N	H	V	Y	R	D	H	T	Y	N	N	I
F	E	E	N	Y	A	R	L	X	Q	R	T	B	E	F
B	I	P	N	Z	Y	Z	R	I	H	O	X	U	R	R
B	K	M	G	A	F	C	Q	S	N	P	S	R	R	T
N	J	R	D	L	E	U	P	T	S	Y	G	B	D	L
R	C	D	Q	K	H	O	L	L	Y	M	O	U	N	T
J	O	B	A	L	L	I	N	T	O	Y	S	U	G	T
J	A	D	Y	R	R	U	M	N	U	D	W	A	P	C
M	P	N	A	G	U	D	Y	L	L	A	B	G	W	G

Ballintoy .....

Portmuck .....

Derrylin .....

Feeny .....

Derryadd .....

Dunmurry .....

Benburb .....

Fintona .....

Moneymore .....

Conlig .....





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