

# Genealogical Treasures in Irish Archives

Board for Certification of Genealogists® Webinar, June 2020

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## Overview

An enormous variety of Irish manuscripts tell the stories of our ancestors. Parish registers, census returns, Griffith's Valuation, and civil registration of births, marriages, and deaths provide a great beginning for Irish family history research. However, a careful search of record repositories in the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom reveals many more Irish archives of great worth. These include collections of estate papers, tenement and townland valuations, valuation revision books, tithe applotments, poor law registers, vestry minutes, ordinance survey maps, deeds and memorials, National School registers, militia lists, electoral rolls, Petty Sessions court registers, Irish Reproductive Loan Fund records, outrage papers, and much more.

## Major "Treasure Chests"

Over a dozen archives and libraries provide historical manuscripts and published works of genealogical value with national coverage. Many of these archives are listed below, with reference to their websites for additional information. Two guidebooks listed under Recommended Reading below—Helferty and Refaussé's *Directory of Irish Archives* (5th ed) and O'Neill's *Irish Libraries: Archives, Museums & Genealogical Centres: A Visitors Guide*—provide information on these major Irish archives as well as hundreds of local Irish archives and libraries.

### General Register Office (GRO) – *An tSeirbhís um Chlárú Sibhialta*

- [gov.ie/gro](http://gov.ie/gro)
- Werburgh Street, Dublin
- Government registration of births, marriages, and deaths
- Historical registers digitized and indexed, available online, for free, courtesy of the Department of Culture, Heritage, and the Gaeltacht ([civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie](http://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie)):
  - Births: 1864–1919
  - Non-Roman Catholic marriages: 1845–1863
  - All marriages: 1864–1944
  - Deaths: 1864–1969 (images of registers 1864–1877 to become available soon)
- See also [birthsdeaths marriages.ie](http://birthsdeaths marriages.ie)
- Local civil registration services retain original registers potentially more complete than national records ([www2.hse.ie/services/births-deaths-and-marriages/contact-a-civil-registration-service.html](http://www2.hse.ie/services/births-deaths-and-marriages/contact-a-civil-registration-service.html))

### General Register Office of Northern Ireland (GRONI)

- [nidirect.gov.uk/gro](http://nidirect.gov.uk/gro)
- Colby House, Stranmillis Court, Belfast
- Civil registration of births, marriages, and deaths
- Pre-1922 certificates available from both the GRO and GRONI for Northern Ireland counties

### Linen Hall Library

- [linenhall.com](http://linenhall.com)
- Donegall Square, Belfast
- Local history, family history, pedigrees, and newspapers

### The National Archives (of the United Kingdom) (TNA)

- [nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://nationalarchives.gov.uk)
- Bessant Drive, Kew, Richmond
- Many Irish archives, including records of Irish militia (e.g., county militia lists, muster books, and payrolls), Irish poor relief (e.g., Relief Commission papers), Irish tontines (1770s), Irish war reparations (e.g., Irish Distress Committee files, Irish Grant Committee files), Irish government employment (e.g., Royal Irish Constabulary service and pensioner registers), and much more

### National Archives of Ireland (NAI) – *Cartlann Náisiúnta na hÉireann*

- [nationalarchives.ie](http://nationalarchives.ie)
- Bishop Street, Dublin
- Guidebook: [nationalarchives.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Family\\_History\\_Sources\\_NAI.pdf](http://nationalarchives.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Family_History_Sources_NAI.pdf)
- Genealogical advisory service for visitors: know beforehand your ancestor's parish of origin
- Massive collection of manuscript materials of genealogical value, including census, probate, land valuation, Anglican parish registers (microfilm), national school, landed estate papers, etc.
- Many records digitized, indexed, and available for free: [nationalarchives.ie/genealogy](http://nationalarchives.ie/genealogy)

### National Library of Ireland (NLI) – *Leabharlann Náisiúnta na hÉireann*

- [nli.ie](http://nli.ie)
- Kildare Street, Dublin
- Genealogical advisory service for visitors: know beforehand your ancestor's parish of origin
- Catholic parish registers (microfilm), newspapers (microfilm), landed estate papers, and the manuscripts of the Genealogical Office
- Images of Catholic parish registers: [registers.nli.ie](http://registers.nli.ie), indexes on Ancestry and Findmypast

### Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland

- [presbyterianhistoryireland.com](http://presbyterianhistoryireland.com)
- Congregational records such as baptisms, marriages, kirk session minutes, and communicant rolls

### Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)

- [nidirect.gov.uk/proni](http://nidirect.gov.uk/proni)
- Titanic Boulevard, Belfast
- PRONI publishes a free reference guide to their holdings of church parish registers: [nidirect.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Guide-to-Church-Records-October-2019.pdf](http://nidirect.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Guide-to-Church-Records-October-2019.pdf).
- Townland valuation, school registers and rolls, workhouse registers (admissions, discharges, indoor relief, outdoor relief, births, marriages, and deaths), landed estate papers (rentals, leases, maps, surveys, and valuations), and parish registers of all denominations (on microfilm)

### Registry of Deeds – *Clárlann na nGníomhas*

- [www.prai.ie/registry-of-deeds-services](http://www.prai.ie/registry-of-deeds-services)
- Henrietta Street, Dublin
- Memorials, deeds, conveyances, and wills
- Transcripts of memorials, 1708–1929, microfilmed by FamilySearch

### Representative Church Body Library (RCBL)

- [ireland.anglican.org/about/rcb-library](http://ireland.anglican.org/about/rcb-library)
- Braemor Park, Churchtown, Co. Dublin
- Church of Ireland parish registers, vestry minutes, additional manuscripts, and published works
- “The List of Church of Ireland Parish Registers,” with date ranges of baptism, marriage, and burial registers, original and microfilmed copies; also includes details registers destroyed in 1922 ([ireland.anglican.org/cmsfiles/pdf/AboutUs/library/registers/ParishRegisters/PARISHREGISTERS.pdf](http://ireland.anglican.org/cmsfiles/pdf/AboutUs/library/registers/ParishRegisters/PARISHREGISTERS.pdf))

### Trinity College Library – *Leabharlann Choláiste na Tríonóide*

- [tcd.ie/library/manuscripts/collections](http://tcd.ie/library/manuscripts/collections)
- Family and landed estate papers, deeds, local history, and more

### Ulster Historical Foundation

- [ancestryireland.com](http://ancestryireland.com)
- Gordon Street, Belfast
- Databases of births, baptisms, marriages, deaths, burials, gravestones, and city directories

### Valuation Office of Ireland – *Oifig Luachála*

- [valoff.ie](http://valoff.ie)
- Irish Life Centre, Abbey Street Lower, Dublin
- Land valuation records, 1850s–1990s, including revision books and valuation maps
- Records for many counties digitized and available in the Valuation Office in Dublin
- Early records (1824–1856) moved to the National Archives of Ireland; many now digitized

### Local “Treasure Chests”

Thousands of parish churches and dozens of local archives and libraries across Ireland and Northern Ireland house collections of manuscripts and published works detailing the rich history of individual Irish families and local Irish society. In addition, a few dozen county heritage centres provide genealogical research services accessible remotely or in person, with access to key genealogical databases.

### Anglican Parish Churches

- Many parish registers and vestry minutes deposited at the RCBL, some remain in local custody
- For genealogical inquiries, consider contacting the RCBL first ([library@ireland.anglican.org](mailto:library@ireland.anglican.org))

### Catholic Parish Churches

- 1,153 Roman Catholic parish churches, some with multiple chapels
- Parish priests hold original baptismal, marriage, and burial registers in local custody
- Some parish registers deposited in diocesan archives
- 92% of early parish registers (most through 1880, some through 1900) microfilmed and digitized
- Contact information: [catholicbishops.ie/dioceses](http://catholicbishops.ie/dioceses)

### City and County Archives, Libraries, and Museums

- Local genealogical records
- Board of Guardian minute books, county council archives, district council minute books, newspapers, registers of electors, estate papers, school registers, and local histories

### County Heritage Centres (Irish Family History Foundation)

- Fee-based research and database look-ups; often best arranged remotely rather than in person

## Households

- Contact your Irish relatives before you travel to Ireland; arrange to meet and share your stories
- Ancestral photos, stories, and family records, as well as potential DNA contributions

## Genealogical Treasures of Ireland

A wide variety of historical records provide valuable insights and information about Irish ancestors and their families. A dozen categories of records, listed below, are especially plentiful and rich in genealogical details.

### Census Returns

- National censuses are stored at the National Archives of Ireland
  - Fragments and abstracts of nineteenth-century censuses, 1821–1891
  - 1901 and 1911 censuses: [www.nationalarchives.ie/genealogy/1901-1911-census/](http://www.nationalarchives.ie/genealogy/1901-1911-census/)
  - Forthcoming 1926 census of Ireland (available January 2027)
  - Per the National Archives, “The returns for 1926–1946 and part of those for 1951 are held in the National Archives, but they remain under the control of the Central Statistics Office, to the extent that the staff of the National Archives are not permitted to examine them for any purpose. The more recent returns are still held by the Central Statistics Office. The 1926 Census Returns will be released to public inspection in January 2027.”
- Old-age pension claims include abstracts of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century censuses
- Religious censuses
  - 1749 Elphin diocesan census, Church of Ireland
  - 1766 Church of Ireland census—with many surviving transcripts
  - 1834 O’Connell census (portions of Co. Kerry survive)

### Church and Cemetery Records

- Roman Catholic Church
  - Parish registers of baptisms, marriages and (very few) burials
  - Most registers begin about 1820 or 1830
  - Original registers retained in local custody by the parish priest
  - Some registers transferred to the corresponding diocesan archive
  - 19<sup>th</sup>-century registered microfilmed by the National Library of Ireland
    - 92% of pre-1880 registers and some through 1900 microfilmed and digitized
    - Images available for free at [registers.nli.ie](http://registers.nli.ie)
    - Indexed by Ancestry and Findmypast
  - Registers and indexes available for free on [irishgenealogy.ie](http://irishgenealogy.ie) for parishes in the Diocese of Kerry, Dublin City, and portions of the Diocese of Cork and Ross
- Church of Ireland
  - Also known as the Anglican, Episcopal, or Established Church
  - Registers generally began between 1770 and 1820
  - Parish registers of baptisms, marriages, and burials
  - Vestry minutes detail activities and finances of the church and may also contain baptismal, marriage, and burial entries
  - Records from over 1,000 parishes now deposited at the Representative Church Body Library
  - Burial registers may also include entries for Catholics, Presbyterians, and those of other faiths
  - Many original records were destroyed in 1922
  - Surviving parish registers: Connaught: 39%, Leinster: 50%, Munster: 39%, and Ulster: 63%
  - Some 350 microfilms at the National Archives of Ireland cover the pre-1870 parish registers
  - PRONI has copies of registers for Ulster countries as well as for Counties Leitrim and Louth

- Parish registers available for free on [irishgenealogy.ie](http://irishgenealogy.ie) for County Kerry, Dublin City, and County Carlow
- Presbyterian Church
  - Congregational records typically include baptismal registers, marriage registers, kirk session minutes and may also include communicant rolls, burial registers, congregational censuses, emigrant lists, transfer certificates
  - Records are found in local custody, in the possession of the local minister
  - Copies of registers also may be found at PRONI and at the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland in Belfast
  - The Ulster Historical Foundation has indexes to many Presbyterian congregational records, particularly for Belfast: [ancestryireland.com/search-irish-genealogy-databases](http://ancestryireland.com/search-irish-genealogy-databases)
- Gravestone inscriptions
  - Visit local cemeteries and transcribe gravestone inscriptions yourself
  - Many individuals and societies have transcribed tombstone inscriptions in years past that are now otherwise illegible
  - Local churches and governments may have burial registers (e.g., [kerrylaburials.ie](http://kerrylaburials.ie))

### Civil Registration

- Birth, marriage, and death records for Ireland are available from the GRO for Ireland and from GRONI for Northern Ireland; see the GRO and GRONI listings above for further details
- Also, note that local health boards have original registers of births, marriages, and deaths, possibly including records not available in the national collection compiled from the local registration districts (e.g., the marriage record of the author's great-grandparents does not appear in the national copy of civil marriage registers, nor in the index; however, the local health board had their marriage record)

### Court and Criminal Records

- Petty Session court registers (1828–1912) document approximately 22 million minor criminal and civil cases; these records are available on Findmypast and FamilySearch
- Outrage reports (1835–1852) filed by the Royal Irish Constabulary summarize county by county a large variety of crimes and civil incidents including arson, assault, religious intolerance, murder, rape, robbery, theft, trespassing, and vagrancy; the records housed by The National Archives in Kew, United Kingdom, are on Findmypast while many more are available in manuscript at The National Archives of Ireland
- Other records held by the National Archives of Ireland pertaining to convicts and criminals include:
  - Convict reference files (1836–1922)
  - Crime index files (1840–1922)
  - Criminal index registers (1741–1752)
  - Penal servitude files (1881–1927)
  - Transportation of convicts to Australia (1852–1854)

### Electoral and Voter Registers

- Electoral rolls and voter lists identify the names, addresses, and other details about eligible voters
- Electoral registers held by county archives, public libraries, NAI, PRONI, and NLI and published online
- Some electoral rolls are available on Findmypast as well

### Land and Property Valuation

- The Registry of Deeds is a repository of leases, wills, marriage settlements, mortgages, bills of discovery, and rent charges from 1708. Transcripts of memorials of deeds, conveyances, and wills, 1708–1929, were filmed by FamilySearch and subsequently digitized and published online. The original 2.2 million memorials of deeds often include significant additional records beyond what is available on the transcripts.
- Tithe applotments, 1823–1837, identify heads of household on land subject to the tithe of the Church of Ireland; these records serve as a census substitute for the 1821 and 1831 censuses

- Townland and tenement valuation books and maps surveyed and valued property uniformly across Ireland during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. From these manuscripts, the government produced the Primary Valuation of Tenements, also known as Griffith's Valuation. The manuscripts name far more people than the publication of Griffith's Valuation, 1847–1864, given the earlier decades they covered, spanning the social upheaval, death, and migration caused by the Great Famine.
- Revision books—also known as cancelled books—carried forward the revision of property valuation year by year after the publication of Griffith's Valuation. Each year's updates were made in different colors of ink. After about a decade, a book would be cancelled, with the latest entry for each property carried over into the subsequent volume. These manuscripts, beginning in the 1850s and continuing until the 1990s, are held at the Valuation Office.

### Landed Estate Papers

- Landed estates were the local economy of rural Ireland. Many estate papers provide details of small tenant-farmers via financial records of the estate such as rentals, leases, lease books, maps, surveys, and valuations. Landlords of estates kept land and property valuation records similar to the documents maintained by the central government. County archives, NAI, NLI, PRONI, and Trinity College Library are among the institutions holding estate papers.

### Military Records

- Each county in Ireland maintained militia lists beginning in 1793 and continuing through 1878, with some of the best material documented in the 1790s. These muster books and pay lists are held by The National Archives at Kew. Other Irish militia records are held at PRONI and the Genealogical Office.
- Yeomanry regiments were established in 1796, with some yeomanry lists held at PRONI and later muster books held at The National Archives at Kew.

### Pre-1800 Census Substitutes

- Many early name lists now function as census substitutes. Some of the more significant census substitutes created before 1800 include:
  - 1612–1613: Undertakers (landlords) of Cavan, Donegal, and Fermanagh
  - 1630: Ulster Muster Rolls
  - 1641: Books of Survey and Distribution
  - 1654–1656: The Civil Survey
  - 1659: Pender's Census
  - 1662–1666: Subsidy Rolls
  - 1664–1666: Hearth Money Rolls
  - 1703–1838: Convert Rolls (Catholic to Anglican)
  - 1740: Protestant householders
  - 1749: Elphin (Anglican) Diocesan Census
  - 1766: Church of Ireland Census
  - 1796: Flaxseed Premiums
  - 1798: Persons who Suffered Losses in the 1798 Rebellion

### Relief for the Poor

- The Church of Ireland took care of the poor, with meticulous records kept in the parish vestry minutes
- The Irish Relief Commission established the Irish Reproductive Loan Fund to grant loans to industrious but poor farmers and laborers. Records for 1824–1846 are held at The National Archives at Kew for Counties Cork, Clare, Limerick, Tipperary, Galway, Mayo, Roscommon, and Sligo. Security notebooks, installment books, loan ledgers, and defaulters' books name each borrower and his sureties, including addresses, occupations, and occasional notes on health, poverty, emigration, or death.
- Poor Law Unions were to care for the most destitute of the poor in Ireland, offering temporary housing, meals, and clothing in the local workhouse. The registers of greatest value for family history research include admission and discharge registers, indoor and outdoor relief registers, and the

infrequent birth, marriage, and death registers. Additional details about life and death in the workhouse may be gleaned from the Board of Guardians minute books.

### School Registers

- PRONI holds National School registers for the five school districts of Northern Ireland
- The National Archives of Ireland holds National School registers for some fifty schools across Ireland
- These registers provide the name, age, address, and father's occupation for each child, sometimes adding birth date, the location of the previous school, or whether the family emigrated

### Wills and Administrations

- Although many probate records were destroyed in 1922, many indexes and transcripts of earlier records survive, as well as some of the more recent records
- The National Archives of Ireland and PRONI have wills and will calendars, including online indexes
- The National Archives of Ireland has these online indexes of wills:
  - Calendars of Wills and Administrations, 1858–1922
  - Soldiers' Wills, 1914–1918
  - Will Registers, 1858–1900
  - Prerogative and diocesan Wills and Indexes, 1596–1858

### Recommended Reading

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