

Irish Roots

Discover The Fascinating Family Histories of 1916

Leaders:- Thomas MacDonagh,
Seán Mac Diarmada,
Joseph Plunkett &
Éamonn Ceannt



Celebrating
Irish Ancestry



**In This Issue:- Tracing Your County CARLOW Ancestors.
How Tracing A House History Can Open The Door To Your Ancestors.
Sacred Sites Of Ireland - Loughcrew - The Hill Of The Witch.
The Usefulness And Limitations Of Family Letters For Your Research.
News From The World Of Irish Genealogy And Lots Lots More!**

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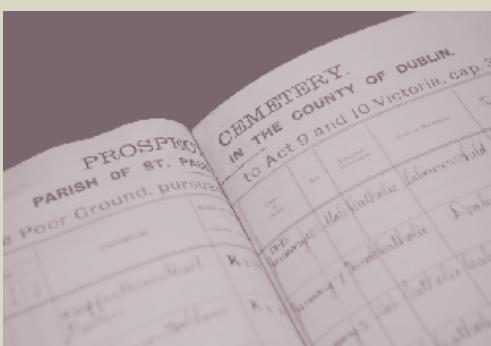
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 for accuracy lies with those who have submitted the material.

A few words from the editor

Welcome to our spring edition of Irish Roots. As we sleepily emerge from the hibernation of winter, the distant drums and alluring sounds of St. Patrick's Day beckon excitedly on the horizon, followed closely by Easter Sunday on March 27.

Easter Sunday means that my birthday is never too far away. It always makes me smile as I think of the confusion my poor father must have felt after a long cycle on his old bicycle to register my birth as a civil record. Upon arrival the poor man realised that he had forgotten my middle name, and boldly took the liberty of registering me as Josephine instead!! My baptismal record trumpets my arrival into this world as Mary Brigid Esther while my birth certificate marks the occasion as Mary Josephine Esther. (Esther was a popular name for girls born in Ireland around the Easter period). While it always makes for an amusing anecdote around the kitchen table, I pity the frustrated family history researcher who unwittingly encounters a similar tale!

This year, Easter Sunday will be deeply layered with extra sentiment as we commemorate the centenary of the '1916 Rising' through various events across the Island. Among the numerous events and exhibitions taking place include a new exhibition centre due to open in the General Post Office, O'Connell Street, Dublin in March. See www.gpowitnesshistory.ie for more details.

In this issue, Sean J. Murphy continues his series on the family histories of leaders of the Easter Rising on page 6. Co. Carlow features in our 'Tracing Your County Ancestors' column by James G. Ryan on page 10. Raymond Keogh stirs further sentiment in this issue as he looks through family letters and peruses their 'usefulness and limitations' in family history research on page 20. Judith Eccles Wight focuses on records of '19th Century Care of the Poor in the United States' on page 22 while Jennifer Harrison connects us with newspaper editors making 19th century headlines on page 26.

These are just some of the articles brought to us by our wonderful contributors as well as our much valued regular features. Don't forget that we would love to hear from you or your society in our 'Letters' page, 'Society Notes', 'Readers Experience' or 'A Question of Genealogy' column. We wish you all a very happy, joyous and delightful double St. Patrick's Day and Easter celebrations.

Maureen



Easter Rising leader Thomas MacDonagh and his wife Muriel Gifford MacDonagh with baby Donagh MacDonagh.
Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

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NEWS

Findmypast And Ancestry.com To Launch Indexed Irish Parish Register Records

Findmypast recently announced plans to launch 10 million Irish Catholic Parish Records, one of the most important Irish collections to date, in March 2016.

Covering over 200 years from 1671-1900 and over 1,000 parishes, Findmypast has worked to transcribe the National Library of Ireland's online image collection of 3,500 baptism and marriage registers. The collection has been indexed with the images linked online, making the search much easier and the records more accessible for researchers. Family historians will now be able to make all important links between generations with the baptism records and between families with the marriage registers. These essential records cover the entire island of Ireland, both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

Ancestry.com announced that it has also indexed the same collection and aims to make these records available in March.

Major €8m Expansion Works Of National Archives Planned

In January last, the then Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Heather Humphreys TD, visited the National Archives of Ireland to launch the design and construction phases for the major €8 million expansion works which will begin at Bishop Street later this year. As part of her visit, Minister Humphreys met with members of the design team, representatives of the Office of Public Works (OPW) and staff at the Archives.

Approximately four million files, containing an estimated 100 million pages will be stored in the new Archives building once it is completed. The National Archives stores a huge range of public material, including Government papers, Census records and files dating from the revolutionary period, including Secret Polices files and compensation claims made after the 1916 Rising.

Minister Humphreys commented that "These major expansion works at the Archives, made possible by the economic recovery, will transform the Bishop Street building into a state-of-the-art archival storage facility. By safeguarding our documents and records, the National Archives helps to preserve our history and tell our national story. The importance of the Archives is being underlined through the 1916 commemorations; the Archives hold a wealth of material which sheds light on that fascinating period".



The Easter Rising 1916 Sean Sexton Collection

Sean Sexton immigrated to London from County Clare in 1963. Since then, he has amassed approximately 20,000 early Irish photographs, the most significant collection of such material outside the National Library of Ireland.

To mark the centenary of the 1916 Rising, The Photographers' Gallery, London, presents The Easter Rising 1916, an exhibition drawn from Sean Sexton's photographic collection and curated by Luke Dodd.

National Library Of Ireland Partners With Google To Create 1916 Virtual Experience

On the 12th of January last the National Library of Ireland (NLI) announced its partnership with the Google Cultural Institute's 1916 virtual tour 'Dublin Rising 1916-2016', as part of the Ireland 2016 centenary programme. Dublin Rising 1916-2016 is a virtual city streets tour exploring the iconic places, people and stories of 100 years ago, narrated by actor Colin Farrell and featuring exhibitions from six prestigious cultural institutions.

As well as bringing viewers worldwide to parts of Dublin synonymous with the Rising, the interactive Google Street View tour also offers unique access to important historical and cultural resource material. The visitors will stop at city centre locations as they are today, hear what happened there and click to explore photos, stories and witness statements from the Dublin of 2016. The aim of the experience is to enable anyone, anywhere to participate in the 1916 Centenary.

This exhibition investigates the significant role played by photography in informing the national consciousness that led to Irish independence, using the 1916 rebellion as a central focal point. It features approximately eighty rarely seen photographs and ephemera including souvenir postcards, albums, stereoscopic views, press and military photographs.

The exhibition runs until April 3rd 2016. For further details visit: www.thephotographersgallery.org.uk

*Above image:- Sackville Street ruins, 1916.
© Sean Sexton Collection, courtesy of the Sean Sexton Collection.*

Google's new virtual experience has been created in partnership with leading Irish cultural institutions, including the National Library of Ireland, Military Archives, Glasnevin Cemetery Museum, the Abbey Theatre, the Royal Irish Academy and Trinity College Dublin Library alongside Century Ireland.

The Dublin Rising 1916-2016 Tour can be accessed at: <https://dublinrising.withgoogle.com>.

RootsIreland.ie Add Over 51,000 New Catholic BMDs For Belfast And County Down

RootsIreland.ie have recently added over 51,000 new birth, marriage and burial records for Belfast and County Down. The majority of these records relate to baptisms and marriages in Roman Catholic churches in Belfast from 1900 to 1930 which are not available online elsewhere.

Further family history research records for Monaghan were recently added to the online site also. For more details visit www.rootsireland.ie.



oo and another thingooo

One hundred and twenty years later,
Steven Smyrl is still crossing paths with his
ancestors.

At the time of writing, the BBC adaptation of Leo Tolstoy's epic saga, *War and Peace*, has just concluded its broadcast. Over six episodes we followed the lives and loves of three Russian aristocratic families, along with innumerable minor characters, as they criss-crossed paths with each other during the time of the Napoleonic wars. The intrigue and machinations occasioned through chance meetings and bizarre events, from the royal court to the battlefield, were astounding and the results were far reaching on the lives of those involved. By the end of episode six viewers were left quite exhausted: one family was in financial ruin, another was devoid of men at a time when society was male-dominated. All but one of the main male characters was dead, joined along the way by wives, daughters and lovers!

Admittedly, few families are aristocratic, own castles or sit atop vast fortunes, but what struck me most about Tolstoy's story was how, when all the glitter is stripped away, it was just a tale of human lives being lived out. Lives full of misjudged economics, dodgy alliances, bad choices and destructive loves affairs.

Genealogy is of course the story of who begat whom, while family history is the in-depth tale of lives interlinking with each other over generations. Interest in family history has increased greatly in the past decade and has been particularly responded to - and promoted - through articles in family history magazines. Such publications, including *Irish Roots*, began as guides on how to search records, locate wills and identify parish registers. But the growth in the numbers pursuing genealogy has had the effect of stimulating interest in the actual lives of our forebears: what they did for a living, where they lived and why, what caused them to migrate to urban areas or even overseas, and the cause of their economic failure or success etc.

The most recent aspect of this new curiosity about our ancestors' lives has been through the rediscovery of old photographs. There is much to be learnt about family history through photography. Many genealogy magazines now have space set aside for photographic experts who, with what seems little enough to go on, can divine the age of the photograph, the social class of those depicted, their ages, where it was taken and even who they might be. It is fascinating to see how the merest clue can reveal so much detail.

When my great grandmother's brother died in the early 1990s I inherited a large box of assorted Victorian photographs, many dating back to the 1870s. Two were of a very handsome elderly couple, a bewhiskered man and bonneted woman, each with a first name and date written on the back. An expert advised me in more recent years that perhaps the dates were those of death. So I set about checking the Death Index under various

'Genealogy is of course the story of who begat whom, while family history is the in-depth tale of lives interlinking with each other over generations.'

family surnames...and bingo! I found matching death records for George and Maria Herbert whom I knew to be my great-great-grandparents, born in the 1820s.

I knew about the lives of George and Maria, where they came from, their religious background and social standing, and George's occupation. One hundred and twenty years later I found myself astounded to be staring into the faces of those very ancestors. Our paths had crossed through genealogical detective work!

Modern technology can now so easily facilitate the crossing of paths of searcher and ancestor. Bung a name into Google and you can have your own Tolstoy moment, when search results throw up links to websites for resources such as census, newspapers, parish registers and wills. Century-old relationships are instantly revealed, causes of death explained, migration patterns mapped.

It's not just the dead that the 'Net can allow us to cross paths with, but the living too. There was a delightful story published recently about an 88-year-old lady from England (Joyce Morris) who had migrated in the 1950s to Australia. A widow for many years, she took a notion to see what had been the fate of a young American soldier (Norwood Thomas) she had dated during the last war. He had asked her to marry him, but some misunderstanding had led them in different paths along life's way.

Joyce's son set about searching the Internet and soon found that her former beau, aged 93, was not only alive and well, but had never forgotten his wartime sweetheart, often reflecting on what might have been. Both, given their great ages, assumed the other was dead, but now they have enjoyed a wonderful and most unexpected reunion when Norwood flew out to Australia to look upon a face he hadn't seen for over 70 years... proving of course that Tolstoy's saga of human life is still being written daily!

Steven Smyrl is President of Accredited Genealogists Ireland

www.accreditedgenealogists.ie - and Chairman of the Irish Genealogical Research Society.

www.irishancestors.ie

1916



Thomas MacDonagh and Séan Mac Diarmada



Joseph Plunkett and Éamonn Ceannt



This is the second in a series of four articles in which Sean Murphy details the family histories of leaders of the 1916 Rising

Thomas Stanislaus MacDonagh was born on 1 February 1878 in Cloughjordan, County Tipperary, the fourth of eight children of Joseph MacDonagh and Mary Parker. Joseph MacDonagh was a native of County Roscommon, while Mary Parker was the daughter of English parents and converted from Unitarianism to Catholicism before her marriage.

Thomas attended Rockwell College in County Tipperary, run by the Holy Ghost Fathers, and for a time studied for the priesthood. Abandoning his clerical studies in 1901, MacDonagh took up a teaching post in St Kieran's College, Kilkenny. Joining the Gaelic League, he improved his command of Gaelic and at the same time began to produce poetic work and some plays.

MacDonagh taught at Patrick Pearse's St Enda's School in Dublin and having secured a BA and MA from University College Dublin, he took up a lectureship in English there in 1911. In 1912 MacDonagh married Muriel Gifford, a Protestant whose mother Isabella did not approve of the marriage, and whose sisters Grace and Sidney were also active in the national cause. Thomas MacDonagh and Muriel Gifford had two children, Donagh born in 1912 and Barbara born in 1915.

MacDonagh joined the Irish Volunteers on their formation in 1913 and reflecting his growing political radicalism, was sworn into the conspiratorial Irish

Republican Brotherhood (IRB) in 1915. He was a member of the military council that plotted the Easter Rising of 1916 and was a signatory of the Proclamation. MacDonagh commanded the rebels in Jacob's biscuit factory during the Rising and agreed to surrender only with great reluctance. Muriel MacDonagh did not manage to see her husband before he was shot in Kilmainham Gaol on 3 May 1916 and she herself would die tragically while swimming off Skerries, County Dublin, in 1917.

Séan Mac Diarmada (John MacDermott) was born probably on 26 January (baptised 30th) 1883 in Corranmore, near Kiltyclogher, County Leitrim, the eighth of ten children of Donald McDermott and Mary McMorrow. Donald was a carpenter, while Mary died in 1892 when the children were still young.

Séan Mac Diarmada had hoped to be a schoolteacher but in 1904 he failed the final test known as the King's Scholarship, primarily on account of weakness in mathematics. He worked at various jobs but having gravitated towards republicanism and joined the IRB, he was appointed that body's national organiser in 1908. Mac Diarmada was also a member of the open Sinn Féin organisation founded by Arthur Griffith and toured the country recruiting for both Sinn Féin and the secretive IRB. He was to the fore in infiltrating cultural organisations such as the Gaelic Athletic Association and the Gaelic League in order to further IRB aims.

In 1911 Mac Diarmada contracted polio which left him with a limp and obliged him to use a stick thereafter. Within the IRB Mac Diarmada was particularly close to Tom Clarke and supported him in making plans for a rebellion, using their influence within the Irish Volunteers. Mac Diarmada too was instrumental in bringing James Connolly and the Irish Citizen Army into their plans. During the rebellion Mac Diarmada served in the GPO and was one of the signatories of the Proclamation. Mac Diarmada and James Connolly were the last of the rebel leaders to be executed, being shot in Kilmainham Gaol on 12 May 1916. Mac Diarmada was unmarried, but was close to Josephine Mary ('Min') Ryan, who was allowed to visit him before his death.

Joseph Mary Plunkett was born on 21 November 1887 in Dublin, the eldest son of George Noble Plunkett, a papal count and relative of Sir Horace Plunkett, and Mary Josephine Cranny. The Plunketts were a wealthy family, and Joseph's paternal and maternal grandfathers were building developers in the south suburbs of Dublin.

Joseph Plunkett, who suffered poor health from childhood, was tutored at home and attended several Jesuit schools. A common interest in literature led Plunkett to develop a friendship with Thomas MacDonagh, who assisted him in the publication of his poetry.