

Claire Bradley shines some light on Church Records and what you need to know to successfully research them online



Until 1864, there was no civil registration in Ireland, except for non-Catholic marriages, beginning in April 1845. Before then, we use church records to find older ancestors. Parish registers can pre-date civil records by about 100 years, and some cases, go back to the 1600s.

You will, however, find that parish registers often have gaps in their records, which may have occurred due to neglect or damage, or loss when records were moved. These records, regardless of denomination, are not comprehensive. Each parish was at the mercy of the man in charge of records and they vary greatly in content, handwriting and quality.

In order to use church records, two pieces of information are needed, otherwise, you will be looking for a needle in a haystack! You must know what denomination your family was and where they came from. A county is too broad but if you know that your family is from, say, Thurles, you can narrow it right down. These two pieces of information are often the stumbling block for the diaspora. It's also important to know your surname variants, as spelling was not fixed until the 20th century and families used whichever spelling they felt like on a given day!

The majority of people will be looking at Catholic parish registers for their ancestors. The National Library has online images of most Catholic parish registers up to 1880 or 1900 in some cases. There are three other online sources for parish registers as well which cover Catholic and Protestant records,

which I'll discuss later in this article. It's important to remember that none of these sites are infallible and, because there's a great deal of repetition, it's worth running searches on all the sites for comparison.

If you're lucky, the register will be a pre-printed book with details like mother's maiden name and address of parents/sponsors, but some remote parts of the country, like Donegal, will only have parish records from after civil registration began, so they are largely superfluous for earlier 19th century ancestors.

	Catholic Baptisms	Catholic Marriages
	Name, date of baptism, names of parents, incl. mother's maiden name, address, godparents	Names, date, names of all four parents, incl. mother's maiden name, address, witnesses
Occasional extras	Address of godparents, date of birth	Address of witnesses/parents, whether parents are deceased

Catholic registers are often recorded in Latin and there's a lot of abbreviations but you'd be surprised how easy it is to work out the meanings. You don't need to understand every word to get the gist. The surname is usually given in English and it's easy to scan down a page and only stop at the relevant name.

Both the main denominations required banns to be read out 3 Sundays in a row before a marriage could take place. This was to stop fraudulent marriages. However, a special licence could do away with the requirement. This would be done in cases where people needed to get married in a hurry or could afford to pay the extra fees for privacy. Dispensations could be granted for a variety of reasons like consanguinity (to allow first cousins marry - *tertio consanguineo*).

Addresses and surnames of the witnesses and godparents allow you to make inferences about their relationship to the couple or baby but always remember to verify rather than presume a familial connection.

Burial records for Catholics are rare. The Catholic church doesn't consider death or burial a sacrament. Catholics

also didn't have their own graveyards until the middle of the 19th century but you will find them (unindicated) in CoI burial registers.

The fire in the Four Courts in 1922 destroyed a lot of Church of Ireland registers. Records from before the 1870 disestablishment of the church were public records and only 2/5 survived. The National Archives has a list on their website of what they have on microfilm. Most other surviving registers are in the Representative Church Body library, Braemor Park, Dublin as well as local custody in the original parishes. The RCBL has a comprehensive list of which parishes survive on their website as well as a nascent transcription project. See www.ireland.anglican.org/about/168.

	Col Baptisms	Col Marriages	COI burials
	Name, date of baptism, names of parents, address	Names, date, names of fathers, address, witnesses	Name, address, date of burials
Occasional extras	Occupation of father, date of birth	Occupations	Date of death, age, location in graveyard

Despite the loss, CoI records that do survive often go back into the 17th century with gaps. From about 1900, these registers are still in local custody. PRONI has copy registers for all the relevant Northern Ireland dioceses.

Non-Church of Ireland Protestant denominations include Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist and other small groups. You will also get records of these groups in COI registers. Most of their own registers begin in early 19th century and you get much the same information as in CoI registers. Both the Presbyterian and Methodist churches have historical societies, based in Belfast and you should refer to their websites as a starting point. Rootsireland (further details below) has a large collection of Protestant records, the originals of which are almost all in local custody, though PRONI does have copies for their jurisdiction. The IGRS has also got a unique database of 10000 Dublin Presbyterians from 1875.

The Society of Friends has recently launched a database of their extensive records in conjunction with Findmypast. Most Quaker families are related because marrying outside the Society meant disownment. Their records begin in the mid-17th century and include records of moving Meeting, membership, persecution and information on people who left the Society and the reasons why.

The Irish Jewish Family History Database, compiled by Stuart Rosenblatt, is comprehensive and should help

uncover any Jewish ancestors. It starts around 1700. The site will allow you to browse names and you can request the full information by email.

The Main Online Resources

The National Library's site covers their entire collection of RC records. It has a nice clear homepage with a searchable map or name box. When you begin typing, it suggests locations. Select the right parish and the page lists its registers in date order, itemised by marriage or baptism. The map on the right-hand side, which shows the parishes surrounding yours, is helpful if you don't find people in the expected location. Filters help change the visuals or go to a specific date.

Database Links

registers.nli.ie

www.irishgenealogy.ie

www.rootsireland.ie

www.ireland.anglican.org/about/168

www.presbyterianhistoryireland.com/our-services/family-history

www.findmypast.ie

www.irishancestors.ie/?page_id=6861

www.methodisthistoryireland.org

www.ancestry.co.uk

www.irishjewishroots.com

The search box is basic on the home page but go into the county page to get a more detailed search. The transcription links to the National Library's collection where relevant.

Happy searching!

Claire Bradley is a Dublin-based professional genealogist. She holds a Certificate in Family History from UCD and is the current chairperson of the Irish branch of the Irish Genealogical Research Society.

www.cbgenealogy.ie

Findmypast and Ancestry recently launched a transcribed database of the NLI collection. The database was a collaborative effort so the same information is on both sites, and therefore the same transcription errors!

The main difference is that Findmypast's version is free, whereas Ancestry's requires a subscription. To use the FMP version, you must register and then search under a variety of options with comprehensive transcriptions and images.

www.irishgenealogy.ie's church section covers Dublin city, Cork & Ross diocese excluding the city, Carlow, Kerry for Catholics, Protestants and a small subset of Presbyterian records with images of most records. Therefore, if you get what looks like a transcription error, you can check. After your initial search, the filters are excellent and it also recognises either Latin or English names.

Rootsireland.ie holds an extensive collection of transcription-only records for all denominations. A subscription (starting at €25 p/m) is necessary to use the site. I advise users to take screenshots or print each record as a back-up as terms and conditions change on this site, and if you're an occasional user, it may not be possible to access previously purchased images without a subscription.

What's New?

Review



With Ireland's official 1916 centenary programme in full swing by early March, it's been a Revolutionary few months for Irish family historians. Key record collections – most of them gathering dust and closed to researchers for 100 years—have gone straight from a classified and off-limits status to global online publication. As a result, genealogists now have at their disposal an exceptional package of sources to test the truth of handed-down family tales or learn more about their ancestors' involvement in the Easter Rising and its aftermath.

Revolution, Execution And Compensation

[Ancestry](#) released two collections on a permanently free-to-access basis: the Courts Martial files, 1916–1922, and the Intelligence Profiles, 1913–1922. The Courts Martial files hold nearly 2,000 searchable names, not just of the leaders of the Rising, but also of individuals suspected of being involved with the Nationalist movement in Ireland. Each file contains evidence against the defendants, their statements and proclamations. The Intelligence Profiles opens up the records of the British Intelligence Forces who were keeping an eye on the movements and meetings of Irish Nationalists, and these files, which include more than 22,000 browsable images, relate to activities across the whole island.

[FindMyPast.ie](#)'s new collection comprises 75,000 records which reveal the impact of the conflict, from the Easter Rising to the War of Independence, on ordinary citizens. Within the collection are some 25,000 Search-and-Raid files recording the efforts of the military and police to discover weapons, ammunition

and revolutionary literature through thousands of raids. There are eye-witness accounts, interviews with civilians, and reports of the trials of the leaders and their executions.

The National Archives of Ireland also released a new collection – the Property Losses Compensation Claims – and it is now available, free, on a dedicated section of its website at <http://centenaries.nationalarchives.ie>.

Fully indexed and searchable by surname, location or business name, the files consist of applications for compensation from individuals and businesses for damage to buildings and personal property, sustained as a result of the Easter Rising fighting or subsequent fires and looting. Most of the claims are from individuals who lost personal belongings or whose homes were damaged; among them are personal effects belonging to chambermaids working in city centre hotels, jewellery left for repair in one of the jewellery shops near the GPO, and similar small items. [MilitaryArchives.ie](#) also launched a new record set, the Medals Series, which

forms the fourth tranche of releases from the Military Services (1916–1923) Pensions Collection (MSPC). The new free database contains the names of 47,554 applicants who claimed for the 1916 Medal, which recognised those who were engaged in active service during the 1916 Rising, and the Service Medal (1917–1921), which recognised those who served during the years indicated. The files themselves can be accessed only at the Military Archives' Reading Room in Dublin by appointment, but the online entries are very well catalogued to give some detail of what each file holds.

And speaking of the Reading Room, the President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins, opened a brand-new Reading Room and state-of-the-art storage facility at Cathal Brugha Barracks at the end of April.

Testing Times For Roman Catholic Records

As expected, FindMyPast launched its index to the National Library of Ireland's online image-only collection of Roman Catholic parish registers (1740s to 1880/1) of baptisms and marriages. So, too, did Ancestry. The two companies