Irish Roots

Celebrating Irish Ancestry

Printed In Ireland

Discover The Many Local Family History Resources Now Available For Tracing Your COUNTY WESTMEATH Ancestors.

A Landmark Exhibition To Open At The National Museum Of Ireland.

How To Use Artificial Intelligence As A Tool For Your Genealogy Research.

Find Family History Treasures In The Guinness Archive Personnel Files.

News From The World Of Genealogy, Keep Up To Date With The Latest Irish Genealogical Record Releases, Your Ancestral Research Queries Answered, Books Selections And Lots Lots More!

Using The dippam Archive

Documenting Ireland: Parliament, People and Migration

About DIPPAM   EPPI Collection   IED Collection   VMR Collection   Search All Databases   Ethical Use Policy   Links

DIPPAM is an online virtual archive of documents and sources relating to the history of Ireland, and its migration experience from the 18th to the late 20th centuries.

EPPI — Enhanced British Parliamentary Papers on Ireland

IED — Irish Emigration Database

VMR — Voices of Migration and Return

dippam®

VMR: Voices of Migration and Return

VMR comprises over 90 life-narrative interviews conducted with returned and non-returned migrants from Ulster (9-counties) gathered during the course of two studies on contemporary migration (2004-2008). The study participants represent a range of geographic origins within Ulster, class backgrounds and religious denominations.

By Dr. Mary Hatfield

This digital archive is an excellent resource for anyone researching Ireland's historical emigration patterns and diaspora communities, particularly if you wish to gain a wider perspective on government policies, trace regional migration patterns or explore the experiences of migrants in their destination countries.

As more archival collections have come online in the twenty-first century it has become much easier to conduct genealogical research without leaving your home. Most public and private archives have dedicated significant resources to bringing their collections online and making them searchable and accessible. However, much like the wider internet, the challenge in the last decade has become one of information overload rather than scarcity. With so many different historical sources coming online, it can be difficult to know where to begin your search, or indeed conduct searches using the plethora of different online archives.

In 2009 DIPPAM, short for Documenting Ireland: Parliament, People and Migration, was an early project to collate key archival databases for history of Irish migration and present them in a format that was more intuitive to use for researchers.

This digital archive is particularly useful for genealogists and family historians seeking to understand the broader context in which their ancestors lived and migrated. DIPPAM offers rich contextual material that can illuminate the social, political, and economic environment of the time. For example, someone tracing an ancestor who left Ireland during the Famine might find government reports on relief efforts in their home county or personal letters describing conditions on the emigrant ships and in the receiving communities abroad. Equally, the emigrant letters provide rich and enticing details about concerns of Irish people and their relationships to family and friends at home.

The archive was developed through a collaborative effort led by Queen's University Belfast, with significant contributions from the University of Ulster and Libraries Northern Ireland. It was funded and supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council

(AHRC) in the UK. The aim was to bring together key historical documents from institutional archives, public records, and private collections, and digitse them into a freely accessible online resource.

Scope of the Collections

DIPPAM brings together three major collections under one digital platform, making it one of the most comprehensive resources for understanding Irish emigration in the round. The three main components of DIPPAM are the Enhanced Parliamentary Papers on Ireland (EPPI), the Irish Emigration Database (IEMC), and the Voices of Migration and Return oral history archive. Each of these collections provides unique insights into the Irish experience both at home and abroad.
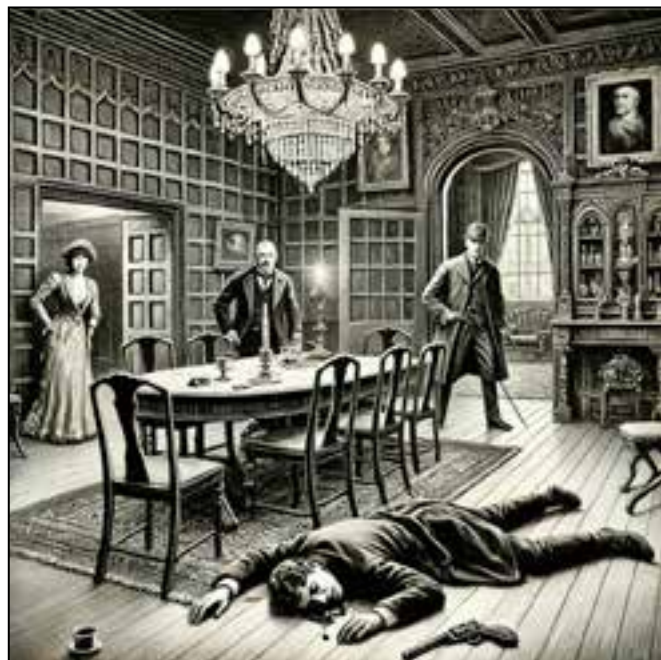
The Enhanced Parliamentary Papers on Ireland, or EPPI, is a digitised collection of British Parliamentary Papers that relate specifically to Ireland between

AI for Genealogy:

Unlocking the Past with Artificial Intelligence

By
Donna Rutherford

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming nearly every industry, and genealogy is no exception. What might have once taken countless hours of poring over archives, writing correspondence, and manually transcribing documents is now being streamlined by intelligent tools designed to support family historians. But while some of these AI applications are hidden within the platforms we already use, others are at the cutting edge and offer new ways of interpreting and preserving our past. This article explores the evolution of AI in genealogy, highlights current tools, and offers a practical look at how to integrate them into your research.

Understanding AI And LLMs: A Quick Primer

AI refers to the ability of a machine to mimic human-like tasks, such as reasoning, problem-solving, and language understanding. A subfield known as natural language processing (NLP) enables AI to interpret and generate text. This is where Large Language Models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini come in.

LLMs are trained on massive datasets of text (books, websites, and documents) so they can recognise patterns and produce meaningful responses. Think of them as an ultra-advanced form of predictive text. When you type a query into an AI chat interface, the model analyses your request and provides answers based on statistical likelihoods drawn from its training data. Importantly, LLMs do not "know" facts like a human does. Instead, they predict what should come next based on patterns.

AI In Genealogy—You May Already Be Using It

You do not have to be a tech wizard to be receiving help from AI in genealogy. In fact, many of us are already using it without realising.

Optical Character Recognition (OCR) is a foundational AI technology that converts printed or handwritten text into digital text. Platforms like Ancestry, FindMyPast, and FamilySearch use OCR to transcribe and index old records.

Automated hints and smart indexing are also AI-driven. When a family tree system suggests a record or relative, it is using algorithms and pattern recognition to make that connection.

Photo enhancement tools such as those on MyHeritage use AI to sharpen faded images, add colour, and even animate faces in vintage photographs.

Tools That Are Shaping The Future of Genealogy

Let's take a closer look at some of the standout AI tools currently available to genealogists, many of which are especially useful for UK and Irish based research.

1. Transkribus

Designed specifically for historical document transcription, Transkribus can read old handwriting and turn it into editable, searchable text. It's particularly valuable for wills, court records and letters.

2. ChatGPT & Claude

These general-purpose LLMs can help you draft narratives, summarise research, interpret tricky documents, and even brainstorm questions to ask when hitting a brick wall. You can paste text in and request a summary or ask for it to be rewritten in plain English.

3. LM Notes

An AI-powered research notebook, LM Notes lets you upload and annotate documents, organise notes, and generate summaries. It's ideal for managing large case files or keeping track of clues across multiple sources.

4. Google's Gemini

Google's AI chatbot is particularly good at fact-finding and contextualising data. For example, if you are researching a place, it can quickly provide historical context or compare census data over time.

5. Co-Pilot (Microsoft)

Integrated with Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and Excel, Co-Pilot can help generate family stories, format research reports, and even summarise spreadsheets of data like parish burial entries.

6. Perplexity

This AI tool excels at source-based answers, providing citations as it responds. It's excellent for preliminary research or exploring the historical context around a surname, place, or occupation.

How AI Can Help In Day-To-Day Research

With these tools in hand, let's look at how AI can help with everyday genealogy tasks.

Research Assistance: AI can answer broad questions (e.g. "What did a mariner do in 1830s Scotland?") or analyse specific documents. It can also extract key dates and relationships from long texts.

Local Resources For Family History Research

County Westmeath

By James G. Ryan

This article deals with researching Westmeath ancestors, but with an emphasis on the resources specific to the county, or only available within the county. Westmeath was historically ruled by the Southern O'Neill clan and the major Gaelic families in the county include O'Flanagan, MacAuley, Mac Geoghegan, O'Melaghlin and O'Daly. When Ireland was invaded by the Normans in 1169 the Kingdom of Meath, which included Westmeath, was given to Hugh de Lacy. His followers in the county included many Norman families whose names are now common, including Plunkett, Nugent and Dalton. The major towns in the county are Athlone, Mullingar, Moate and Kinnegad. Like most parts of Ireland, the county suffered the ravages of the Great Famine. In 1841 the population was 141,300, but with deaths and emigration the numbers declined to only 90,000. In 2022 the population was 96,000.

For family history research, Westmeath has all of the major national records: Civil records of birth, death and marriage start in 1864 (see www. groireland.ie); Griffith's Valuation (a major listing of land occupiers) was conducted in 1851/2 and is available on many websites; and the 1901 and 1911 census returns are available on-line at www.nationalarchives.ie.

If you are beginning your search and do not know where your family was located, these are useful starting points. Some useful county-specific sources include:

- **County Libraries:** Westmeath has 4 libraries and those in both Mullingar and Athlone have local history collections. The library system has an extensive collection of books, journals, maps, newspapers, lists of voters and freeholders, and other material of local interest. It also has a digital collection of national and local journals.

- **Westmeath Archives:** This contains the records created in the local administration of the county over several centuries. It is located in the Athlone Library. The collection includes records of Grand Juries (from 1800), Boards of Guardians of the Poor Law Unions (from 1849) Athlone; and some records of Athlone Borough Corporation, and Mullingar Town Commission. They are accessible by prior arrangement with the library.

- **Westmeath Culture Website**: Genealogy - Westmeath Culture, https://westmeathculture.ie/library/local-history-and-archives/local-studies/genealogy), a comprehensive source of information on all aspects of local social, environmental, archaeological and industrial culture.

- **The Dún na Sí Heritage Centre:** (https://rootsireland.ie/westmeath) in Moate offers a fee-based search service on the wide range of local sources which they have indexed. The centre can be contacted by email – dunasimoate@eircom.net.

- **Ask About Ireland**: https://www.askaboutireland.ie This website is a portal to many sources of information, but also contains down-loadable books of local relevance, including the '*Annals of Westmeath*' (a history of the county), and '*The Grand Juries of the County of Westmeath*' which is an account of the major gentry families.

- **County Westmeath Genealogy Page:** (IGP) is also worth exploring as it provides (free) records contributed by volunteers: it has a good collection of abstracts of gravestones, as well as limited court records; newspaper extracts and land-owners. County Westmeath Ireland, IGP Genealogy Archives (https://www.igp-web.com/IGPArchives/ire/westmeath)

Church Records: Catholic records are good in comparison to many counties. There are 30 parishes of which 9 have records that start in the 18th century including Clonmellon (1759), Mullingar (1742) and Castlepollard (1763). Almost all have been indexed by the local Dún na Sí Heritage Centre (see below) and can be searched through www.rootsireland.ie. The earliest of the Church of Ireland parish records is Killucan which starts