

Stephen Lally Shares Why You Should Leave No Stone Unturned In The Search For Your Ancestors



There are many ways of enjoying family history research. Some people challenge themselves to grow their tree to hundreds, or thousands, of relations and some concentrate on only one branch. My interest is in delving deep into how my ancestors lived, what they did and what were the social, economic or political events that shaped their lives. My methods may seem extreme, focused in detail on one person, but they have brought such interesting results.

I've just published my second book on the lives of my Galway ancestors in the 1800s. Patrick Lally, my [gr.gr.](#) grandfather, died in the workhouse, Thomas Little and Eliza Lally (Patrick's sister) changed the world for the better but their stories are equally interesting. Both projects started with a lucky break, the sudden collapsing of a brick wall, and my advice to anyone who is that fortunate is to grab that luck with both hands and run with it. If not, just pick the one ancestor you find most interesting. But where do you start?

Births, marriages and deaths are easy but do you take them far enough? Look at your ancestor's neighbours to get an idea of his level in society. It might show that his family shared a house with people from far and wide as Victorian cities were as cosmopolitan as they are today with a babble of distinct accents. Even country neighbours tell you about local society. Who were the witnesses at his marriage and who was baptised at the same time as him – a relation, a friend? The big challenges and the big rewards come from places you may never have

considered at the start, outside normal genealogy sources. What are these?

Firstly, google everything, every aspect of that person that you know about, occupation, hobby, town or journey. Every piece of new information can lead to two more and so the story grows. Read about each new fact and ask yourself what it meant to your ancestor so you can develop his story, get into his mind. You will find an enthusiast in every subject under the sun and do not be afraid to email them. My research has involved contacting enthusiasts for Irish canals, the Great Exhibition of 1862, laundries, railways, and many more and they have all loved to hear from me as I am approaching their pet subject from a new and interesting angle.

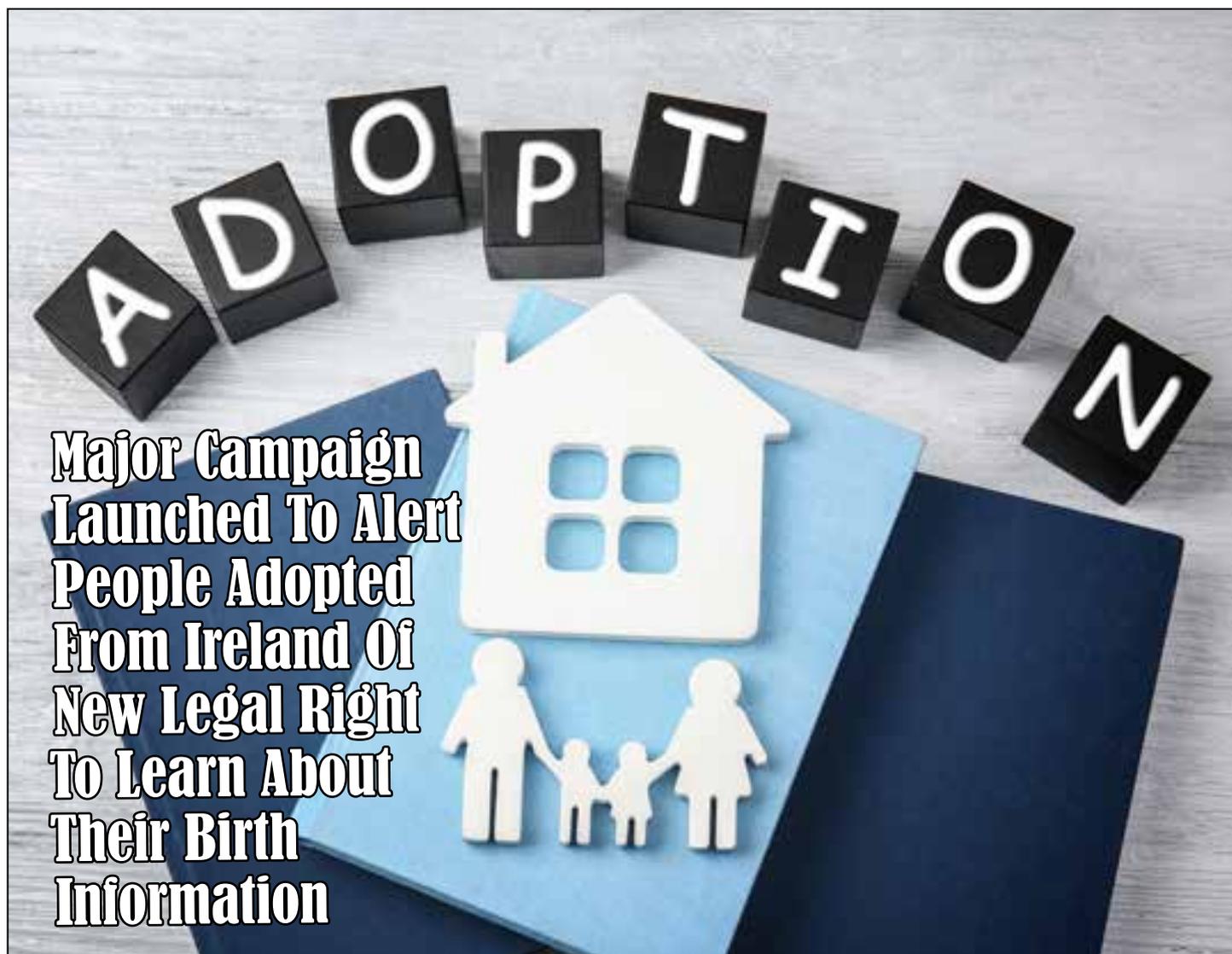
Take Irish canals. I needed to know how my relatives, girls from Loughrea Workhouse who were being sent to Australia under the Earl Grey Scheme, got from Loughrea to Dublin. My new internet friend supplied me with descriptions of canal barges, timetables, prices and pictures – and he loved it.

What was the prize my Irish ancestor

won for his wines grown in Australia? Two references said that Thomas Little won a medal at the Paris exhibition of 1862 but there was no such event in 1862. If he did win a prize it would be a big part of his story and I knew there had to be a grain of truth in this, but what? Don't give up, keep asking what part of this fact is wrong. Googling around 1862 kept bringing me back to the Great Exhibition in London. Surely not there. But I found, on-line, a list of all the prize winners, 7,000 of them, and there was Thomas. The enthusiast who had compiled this list couldn't wait to tell me more than I wanted to know about the exhibition, my relative's wine, the Western Australia stand and a mass of details relevant to my story. I couldn't get off the phone for fifty minutes but that was a small price to pay.

Contact relatives, even if you've not spoken since a wedding twenty years ago. They may be doing the same research and have new stories they can share. They may have photographs.

Contact local history societies who may have an article in a back issue



Major Campaign Launched To Alert People Adopted From Ireland Of New Legal Right To Learn About Their Birth Information

A global campaign was launched in July last by the Adoption Authority of Ireland (AAI) to raise awareness of landmark legislation which means that people who were adopted in, or from, Ireland are now entitled to know about their birth information.

More than 48,000 children were adopted in Ireland from 1953 to 2021. An additional 2,000+ children were sent from Ireland to other countries – mainly the United States – and adopted in these countries. In addition, an estimated 20,000+ children were ‘boarded out’ – sent to live with foster families at a time before 1953 when there was no legal adoption in Ireland.

The Birth Information and Tracing Act 2022, which took effect on 1 July, provides legal entitlement to full and unrestricted access to birth and early life information for any Irish person who was adopted, boarded out or had their birth information illegally registered, or who otherwise has questions in relation to their origins. This information service will be available from October this year.

The law also establishes a tracing service from October this year to facilitate contact between adoptees and birth parents and other birth relatives according to the

preferences they register on the new Contact Preference Register (CPR).

The Register, which is operated by the Adoption Authority of Ireland, is now open for applications. It forms a key part of the public information and awareness campaign which has been launched to inform people around the world of the important services to be provided under the Birth Information and Tracing Act.

The information campaign, which will run for three months, will use Ireland’s embassy network to reach adoptees and birth parents in other countries who are affected by the legislation. People can register at any time but are encouraged to register in the first three months, especially those who wish to record a preference of no contact.

Patricia Carey, CEO of the Adoption Authority of Ireland, said: “Thousands of birth parents left Ireland to rebuild their lives in other countries. We also hope to reach and engage with adult adoptees living abroad, in countries including

the UK, US, New Zealand, Canada, and Australia. The Adoption Authority wants to use the next three months trying to reach as many people as possible – at home and abroad – to let them know it is now possible for them to find out about their origins.

“We also want to encourage all those affected by the legislation to record their preferences on the Contact Preference Register in relation to contact with others and the sharing and receiving of information.

“The Birth Information and Tracing Act ensures that everyone is entitled to all their birth information held by the Irish state, however, the Contact Preference Register allows for different levels of contact. It might be that someone is willing to share background information, they might be willing to communicate by email or letter, they might be open to a telephone call, or they might be willing to meet in person. Others may wish no contact at all. It is up to each individual to make that choice.”

What's New?

Review

As Reading/Study Rooms get back to full capacity at most repositories and free face-to-face genealogy consultations become available once again at both the National Archives and the National Library in Dublin, there's a rumour that pre-Covid normality has returned for family historians.

By Claire Santry



As with many rumours, there's a thread of truth to the widely-held view that 'everything's back to pre-Covid normal now'. It may be true in some fields, but for those engaged in genealogy in Ireland, the scene is a bit more mixed. Certainly more records have been released as staff and volunteers returned to regular activities and completed projects stuck in the pipe during the pandemic lockdowns. This new flow of materials, plus the return of in-person events, public access to PRONI's Reading Rooms, and free face-to-face consultations at the National Archives and the National Library, has given the impression that 'normal' genie access to materials and services has been reinstated - it hasn't.

The new-normal typically rebuffs spontaneity. Apart from PRONI, where all pandemic restrictions have been lifted, and to some extent the National Library in Dublin where appointments are no longer necessary, access to most repositories now requires the researcher to book a visit and to order materials in advance. Local archives had gone down this route some years ago and after spending much of the pandemic closed to all visitors, they have returned to their appointment systems.

However, most of the major genealogy haunts – the Valuation Office, the Registry of Deeds, Dublin City Library & Archive, Military Archives, the National Archives and the RCB Library – always seemed to cope admirably without Reading Room appointments in the old-normal world. Unfortunately, having introduced them as transition steps to post-Covid freedoms, they now seem mighty reluctant to drop their booking procedures, never mind the inconvenience (and financial hit) they can cause professional genealogists who often need to access documents quickly, or the disappointment to members of the Diaspora who cannot be certain when they organise their trips to Ireland of getting an appointment in any research venue during their visit.

Pity the poor Canadian researcher who arrived in Dublin after a year or more of planning a mid-summer ancestral research trip only to find the General Register Office's Search Room closed. Having dropped their appointment system a few months ago, the GRO's managers have taken to chopping and changing opening hours on a weekly basis (they are posted on the website on a Monday for the week ahead) and even closed for two weeks in August without warning. This is not the way to run a public service.

I'm sure we can all understand that an appointment system helps under-resourced repositories to manage their staffing levels. Even so, they must show respect for those who want and need access, and not let this reliance on bookings to continue. Like it or not, appointment systems create barriers to research; this will limit the footfall in repositories, and since funding and footfall go hand in hand, such obstacles benefit no one in the long run.

Newspapers, Photos And Military Records

Moving on to new record releases, we have enjoyed a steady flow over the last several months. The digitisation of newspapers held in the British Newspaper Library's archives is continuing at a pace. In the last quarter, the rate cranked up to one million pages a month, so that the archive now holds more than 55 million pages of historical (and not so historical) news, features, advertisements, BMD announcements, and social and political comment. It also gave subscribers – both to the BritishNewspaperArchive.co.uk's dedicated website and the FindMyPast sites – access to four new Irish titles: The *Munster Tribune*, *East Galway Democrat*, *Carlow Nationalist* and the *Cork Weekly Examiner*.