

Tracing Your Family Tree at PRONI: Useful Sources

PRONI holds so much material that it can be very confusing for the first time user. This handout is designed to give a general overview of the most useful sources available. Individual information leaflets on a vast array of sources are available in the Search Room free of charge, including all of the following:

Street Directories

These are printed books containing the names and addresses of every householder in Belfast. They also give the names of principal citizens in some of the larger towns in Northern Ireland. The earliest book is dated 1809, and they continue, with some breaks, up to the year 2000. They are not wholly accurate as, by the time they were printed, the information was already out of date. They are available on the Search Room shelves. The pre-1900 directories will shortly be available on the PRONI website.

1901 Census

This is available in the Self-Service Microfilm Room. This gives the names, ages, religion, marital status and various other details on every individual in Northern Ireland. The information is usually very reliable. Census forms are listed by county, then alphabetically by district electoral division within the county. Check the **MIC/354** catalogue to find the relevant microfilm reel. Plans are well advanced to put the 1901 and 1911 census for Ireland online. For details, see www.census.nationalarchives.ie.

Griffith's Valuation

Compiled between 1856 and 1865 for taxation purposes, this gives the name of the house- or lease-holder, the name of the landlord, the size of the holding and the rateable value. It also gives the relevant Ordnance Survey map reference number. Listed by county and then within Poor Law Union by barony, parish and townland, Griffith's Valuation is available on the Search Room shelves.

Landed Estate Records

Landowners were major employers during the 18th and 19th centuries and their estate papers are a very useful source for family tree research. Typical contents of estate archives include leases, rent rolls, rentals, wage books, maps and correspondence. The *Guide to Landed Estates*, available on the Search Room shelves, gives an alphabetical list of major landowners by county.

Church Records

These are organised alphabetically by name of church, with a code for the various denominations (eg, P = Presbyterian, CI = Church of Ireland, RC = Roman Catholic). Usual information includes: baptisms, marriages and burials and, occasionally, vestry minutes or similar material. PRONI does not hold records for every church – some are in local custody – nor are the dates consistent either over time or between churches. Consult the *Guide to Church Records*, available on the Search Room shelves, for the relevant reference number. Most of the church records held by PRONI are available on microfilm in the Self-Service Microfilm Room.

School Records

School registers usually provide the following information: name, address and age of child, name and occupation of father, religion and, sometimes, previous address. Some also give additional comments, e.g., 'died', 'emigrated', 'now working for Harland & Wolff.' Check the alphabetical School Index to find the reference number for the school that interests you and then consult the appropriate grey-coloured calendar (labelled **SCH/**) on the Search Room shelves for details.

Wills

From 1858 probated wills became a matter of public record. A list of all wills probated is arranged firstly, by the year of probate (NOT the year of death) and then alphabetically by name of the deceased. As probate can take anything from six months to twenty-five years or more, it is best to start with the year of death and work forward. The will calendars and copy wills from 1858-1919 for the three District Probate Registries of Armagh, Belfast and Londonderry have been indexed and digitised. The index is now available on the PRONI website; the next stage will be to link the index to the images of the actual wills. Some earlier wills, which are classified as private records, are also available (see the pre-1858 wills index in the

Search Room). Wills are extremely useful in tracing collateral branches of the family tree as bequests are often made to married daughters, grandchildren, cousins, nephews, etc., and give the names of the beneficiaries in full.

Board of Guardians

The Board of Guardians looked after the 28 workhouses in Northern Ireland. The admission books give the name, former address, occupation, marital status and religion of the inmates. Most of the records are closed for 100 years. However, conditional access may be possible (write to the Head of Access in the first instance). The records begin around 1838 and continue until the introduction of the Welfare State in 1948. Look in the brown catalogues labelled **BG** on the Search Room shelves.

Pedigrees/Genealogies

Many people have carried out research into their family tree and there is a slim chance that these may interlink with your own tree. As these records, the result of private research, were donated by private individuals, PRONI has no control over their accuracy and cannot be held responsible for any inconsistencies. They may, however, be a useful starting point, though there is no substitute for carrying out your own research. Of particular interest are **D3000**, **T1075** and **T808**. Check these catalogues, available on the Search Room shelves. Also available on the shelves is a (by no means complete) alphabetical list of pedigrees

Electronic Catalogue

The Electronic Catalogue is now available both on-site and on the internet. This is perhaps the easiest way to start your research. It allows a search of the catalogues to be carried out using keyword, phrase or reference number. Approximately 60% of our catalogues are available in this way, with more being added as they become available.

Remember, this leaflet is simply a guide to some of the more accessible sources in PRONI.

There are many other sources available, both in PRONI and elsewhere, including the birth, death and marriage certificates that are held in the General Register Office, Chichester Street, Belfast.

