

The Team and Our Work

As the Now We're Talking project enters its seventh month, we thought that it is certainly about time we introduced ourselves and showed you more about the work we do in PRONI. You may have seen us appear in photos in previous blogs and you've seen us in vlogs.

So far in the Now We're Talking blog series we have focused on Michael J. Murphy and his intricate collection of papers but this time the spotlight will be on the team here in PRONI so you can learn more about us and exactly what it is we do.

The Team

Firstly, to introduce myself, I'm Seán Hayes I have been writing the blogs so far and you'll have heard my voice narrating the vlogs. I am the project archivist for the Now We're Talking project. I have been working in PRONI for just over two years and recently graduated from the Archives and Records Management master's programme in UCD. Since April 2025, I have been responsible for carrying out and coordinating the cataloguing work for the Now We're Talking project. It has been a rewarding challenge to work on such a rich and diverse collection as the Michael J. Murphy papers.



Seán Hayes

Lorraine Bourke is the project manager for the Now We're Talking project. Lorraine has worked as Head of Private Records at PRONI for over 12 years. Together with the Nerve Centre's Niall Kerr, Lorraine compiled the application for the Archives Revealed Consortium grant and drew together the many partners who are helping us to deliver this project. Lorraine makes sure that resources are in place to deliver the project and keeps track of project progress.



Lorraine Bourke

Avril Loughlin has been part of the Private Records team for 13 years. Avril began working on the Now We're Talking project in April 2025 and has taken care of the majority of paginating (numbering of documents). Without Avril's neat and diligent work, we would not have been able to catalogue and digitise so much of Michael J. Murphy's collection.



Avril Loughlin

Sam Turtle began working on the project as a student placement over the summer of 2025 and is now working with PRONI part time while he finishes his degree in History and Politics

at Queen's University. He has helped to number most of the research files of D4642/11. Sam's work has meant that the approximately 435 research files collected by Michael J. Murphy over his life will be available to the public.



Sam Turtle

What is cataloguing?

So, you will have noticed I mention the word “cataloguing” quite a lot and you may have been asking yourself “what does that mean?”. Well in a nutshell, cataloguing in an archive means placing documents into a comprehensible order that can be represented in a catalogue. In PRONI we have the [PRONI eCatalogue](#) which is used to view all documents or as we call them “items” that are available to the public. Each item is given a unique reference number which corresponds with its place in the catalogue.

The Michael J. Murphy papers are given the overall reference number of D4642 as this is, in theory, the 4,642nd privately deposited collection in PRONI's catalogue. The collection is then broken down into constituent groups which we call “series”. This helps us to organise the collection when dealing with a large amount of material such as with Michael J.'s papers. Each series is essentially a group of documents which are all related to each other thematically or functionally. So far, we have arranged the Michael J. Murphy papers into 11 series as follows:

1. Personal Papers
2. Notebooks
3. Diaries
4. Idioms, Expressions and Placenames
5. Questionnaires and Returns
6. Books
7. Plays
8. Articles, Short Stories and Poems
9. Radio and Television Scripts and Broadcasts
10. Correspondence
11. Research Files

When creating our unique reference numbers, we use the numbers as listed above. Therefore, any items in the first series will have a reference number beginning with D4642/1 and the second series will have numbers beginning with D4642/2 and so on. Each of these series is then broken down into sub-series which help to organise the archival material further.

Sub-series are useful when we have a lot of material that is of a similar nature. We can divide sub-series in various ways such as by date or in the case of correspondence we can create sub-series based on correspondent. When the sub-series is decided on and we have created them on our cataloguing software we can start to arrange the items within the sub-series.

The most useful way to arrange items is chronologically starting with the oldest items and working from there. This is most useful when we are cataloguing dated correspondence. Some parts of an archival collection may be presented in the order intended by the creator. In the case of Michael J. Murphy's research files, we were able to distinguish an order for the files from the index he kept for them. By following this order, we were able to leave spaces in the catalogue for any missing files which may turn up as we continue working through this collection.



Example of PRONI reference numbers labelled on document enclosures.

When everything has been arranged like this, we are then able to give each item a unique reference number which must be carefully written in pencil on each page. This is done for document security and identification. If a page gets misplaced, we will be able to know exactly where it belongs. As this work carries on the catalogue continues to grow. Since the beginning of this project, we have been able to add approximately 1,000 new items to the catalogue.

How do we preserve documents?

Every item held in PRONI's care is a valuable historic document and must be treated with respect. These documents must be preserved for future generations to view and learn from. Whilst we are cataloguing we are also taking steps to ensure the longevity of the documents in the Michael J. Murphy collection.

To start, all items are stored in archival standard boxes. These are simple boxes made from stiff cardboard that can withstand a certain amount of water damage which creates the first protective layer around the documents. The boxes are also acid-free, this is very important as

acid which is often in materials like cardboard and paper can over time erode and damage documents. We use acid-free materials in all of our preservation.



Standard archival boxes.

The next layer of protection comes from the acid free enclosures we use to house the archival documents. These come in a variety of shapes and sizes to accommodate the various types of documents that we care for. There are white envelope enclosures which we can use to group together items that are a single page or similar. We also use these to house small scripts, for example in the Michael J. Murphy collection we have placed most of his research files in this type of enclosures.



A selection of preservation materials used by the team.

The other main type of enclosures are blue/grey enclosures with four sides which can be opened flat on the table. We call these enclosures 'four flaps' as they require folding from four sides to create a secure housing for the document. Like the envelopes they come in various sizes. These enclosures are ideal for storing books, large manuscripts, or large bundles of correspondence. We fold these enclosures to fit the specific items they are housing, and we always tie them closed with archival tape (acid-free of course).



Documents housed in archival standard enclosures.

All enclosures will have the reference number on the outside which ensures that the correct item is placed in the corresponding enclosure. If you ever come to PRONI to view documents, you may be presented with these enclosures and now you will know their purpose. Hopefully this blog has given you an idea of the work that goes on behind the scenes to make documents available to the public. In next month's blog, I will show you how to go about ordering documents in PRONI and viewing digital records at home.

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