



General Register Office Northern Ireland

Family History Research Guide



General Register Office

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Office Opening Hours

Monday-Friday 9.30am – 4.00pm
(Except first Tuesday of each month when the office
opens at 10am)
Closed Public, Bank & NI Government Holidays

Where to start?

Starting with yourself, document as much information as possible on names, dates and places relating to your immediate family, working back methodically generation by generation. Once you have done this, identify where the gaps in information are. Gathering this information before you visit the General Register Office can save a great deal of time.

How can the General Register Office (GRO) help with my research?

Civil registration of all births, deaths and marriages began in Ireland on 1 January 1864. The registration of non Roman Catholic marriages began on 1 April 1845.

The **General Register Office NI** administers the registration of births, still-births, adoptions, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships and maintains the historic registers. GRO retains registration records following registration at one of the 26 District Registration Offices. The registers themselves are not open to inspection, but indexes of all entries have been created and may be searched in the GRO.

The office does not engage in genealogical research but provides a public search facility to enable the public to carry out searches of the register indexes. There are a small number of spaces available within the public search room and bookings must be made in advance to secure a space.

What information is available within the GRO public search room?

The search room contains a number of computer terminals where computerised indexes of registrations can be accessed. The indexes are presented in a format similar to a telephone directory and the information given on each index differs depending on the year of registration.

Index information

Birth Indexes

1864-1902	child surname, child forename, district of registration, year of registration
1903-1921	child surname, child forename, mother's maiden name, date of birth & district of registration
1922-1973	child forename, child surname, year of birth, district of registration
1973-present	child forename, child surname, mother's maiden name, date of birth & district of registration

Marriage Indexes

1845-1921	forename, surname, date of marriage, year of marriage, district of registration & place of marriage
1922-2003	forename, surname, year of marriage & district of registration
2004-present	groom forename, groom surname, bride forename, bride surname, date of marriage, year of marriage & district of registration

Death Indexes

1864-1921	deceased surname, deceased forename, age, district of registration & year
1922-1973	deceased forename, deceased surname, year of death & district of registration
1973-present	deceased forename, deceased surname, date of death, district of registration & date of birth

Planned enhancements to the current indexes

A project is underway to digitise GRO paper records. The project includes the creation of new indexes. The new indexes will provide the same information for all years for each life event type. The format of the birth and death indexes will be the same as those currently shown for registrations from 1973 onwards.

Once an index entry has been found which appears relevant to your research, a verification of the entry may be requested from a member of staff. The staff member will locate the register and read out all information recorded at the time of registration. Unfortunately it is not possible to verify entries in marriage registers prior to 1922 as those registers are held off-site. Verification of marriage entries will be posted out following your visit. A fee is charged for use of the GRO public search room and verification of entries in registers. The current fees are shown on the family history section of the GRO website.

Please note: Northern Ireland consists of counties Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone. Registrations in all other counties are held by General Register Office Ireland (full address details on page 9).

What information do birth, marriage and death certificates contain?

Birth certificates

Birth certificates record the date and place of birth of the child. Normally the name of the child is also given but in some cases only the sex is given. This may be because the birth was registered before the child was given a name. The name and residence of the father is given. The father's occupation may also be given. The mother's maiden name is provided as well as her first name. Finally, the name and address of the informant is given, together with his or her qualification to sign. This may be the father or mother or someone present at the birth, such as a midwife or other family member.

Marriage certificates

Marriage certificates show information on the individuals getting married, including their name, age, status, and occupation. The names and occupations of their fathers are also given. The church, the officiating minister and the witnesses to the ceremony are named. In most cases the exact age of the parties is not given, and the entry will simply read 'full age' (i.e. over 21) or 'minor' (i.e. under 21).

Death certificates

The name of the deceased is given together with the date, place and cause of death, marital status, the age at death, and occupation. The name and address of the informant is also given. In some cases the informant may not be a family member, perhaps a hospital worker. For registrations after 1973, the certificate will provide the date and place of birth.

Research tips

Names

Check for variations of spelling of surnames especially for older records, examples include:

- Smith or Smyth
- White or Whyte
- Brown or Browne
- Davison or Davidson
- Jamieson or Jamison
- McDonald or MacDonald

If an entry cannot be found under the known surname, try searching using the mother's maiden name as the surname.

You should also be aware of discrepancies in the spelling or forenames, there are many different versions of the same name, for example:

- James & Seamus
- John, Jack or Jackie
- Mary, Maureen, Marie or Maria
- Nancy & Agnes
- Peggy, Margaret & Maggie

In some cases, a person may not have been registered in the name they have been known as. A person may be known by their middle name. If you cannot locate an entry under the name you have, try searching for any other forenames you have.

Dates

For events occurring during the last few months of the year, try searching using the following year as the registration may not have taken place until several weeks after the event.

Searching for a birth entry with little or no information

Births are recorded in the Registrar's District where the birth took place or where the mother normally lives.

If the person is married, the marriage registration will give the father's name of the bride and groom and the address they were resident at the time of the marriage. The registration may also include the age or D.O.B of the bride and groom (in some cases it will state 'full' which indicates that the parties were of the legal age to marry).

If the date/year of death is known for an individual, the death registration will give the age at death. You can then subtract the age from the date of death to obtain an approximate year of birth. Please note that the information contained in the death registration is provided by the informant who may not be a close relative and the age may not always be correct.

If the parent's names are known, a search for their marriage registration may provide a starting point for years of birth of children of that marriage and it will also provide the mother's maiden name to help narrow the search results to the relevant family.

Searching for a death entry with little or no information

Deaths are recorded in the Registrar's district in which the person died or in the district where the person normally lived.

If other members of the family are deceased, check headstones as it may be recorded on the headstone or it may give you a clue on the period to search. Also, do you know if the person was alive at the time of birth of the last child or when a member of the family got married? This may help to narrow the search years.

Searching for a marriage entry with little or no information

Marriages are recorded in the Registrar's District where the marriage took place.

Check when the first child was born from the marriage and go back from that date to trace the marriage registration.

Other sources of information which may assist in your research

Northern Ireland

Microfilm copies of the 1901 census for Northern Ireland are available at the Public Records Office NI (PRONI). The information in the census is listed under the following headings: name; relationship to the head of the household; religion; literacy; occupation; age; marital status; county of birth (or country if born outside Ireland); and ability to speak English or Irish. The 1911 census additionally includes the number of years a wife was married, the number of children born and the number still living.

PRONI also hold some church records of events prior to the introduction of civil registration, records from National Schools and wills, more details can be accessed at www.proni.gov.uk.

Republic of Ireland

The General Register Office of Ireland has copies of births, deaths and marriages for all Ireland from 1845 to 1921 and for the Republic of Ireland from 1922. Further information, including opening hours and fees, can be accessed on their website: www.groireland.ie.

The National Archives of Ireland and the National Archives of Canada are working jointly on a project to digitise and make freely available, online, the 1911 and 1901 censuses for the island of Ireland. The 1911 census is available online for all counties of Ireland and may be accessed at www.nationalarchives.ie, work on the digitisation of the 1901 census is ongoing.

The first census was held in Ireland in 1821 and thereafter every ten years until 1911. Unfortunately, the earliest census that survives in its entirety for the whole of Ireland is the 1901 census. Census returns 1821-51 were almost entirely lost in 1922 in the destruction of the Public Record Office in Dublin. Census returns 1861-91 were completely destroyed by government order. The original returns of the 1901 and 1911 censuses are deposited at the National Archives in Dublin.

Great Britain

The General Register Office for England and Wales holds information on events registered in England and Wales from July 1837. Further information can be accessed on their website:

<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/Registeringlifeevents/Familyhistoryandresearch/index.htm>

The Scotland's People Centre provides access to records held by the General Register Office for Scotland and the National Archives of Scotland. Further information is available on their website: <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/index.html>

Useful addresses

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND
66 Balmoral Avenue
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Website: www.groireland.ie

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF IRELAND
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