

Irish Genealogical Research - A Short Guide

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IRISH RESEARCH CHALLENGES

Irish genealogy is a complicated business, mainly because of the poor survival rate of many of the historic records. The destruction of the Public Records Office of Ireland in 1922 is of course the most famous archival disaster in Irish history. However, there is a long history of the destruction of historic Irish records, including a fire in the Custom Office in 1711, and another in the Bermingham Tower in Dublin Castle in 1758.

For researchers, the problem of these earlier disasters is that the records were not comprehensively indexed, and so we do not know exactly what was lost - broadly speaking we know that the main classes of records stored there were the legal, financial and administrative records of the 13th to the 17th Centuries, marking the transition from the medieval Irish Lordship to the Irish Kingdom.

Conversely, we have a much clearer idea of the extent of destruction in 1922. Records destroyed include the Census of Ireland returns, between 1821 and 1851; more than half of all parish registers of the Anglican Church of Ireland which were deposited there after 1869; the majority of wills and testamentary records proved in Ireland to that date. Other records destroyed included the pre-1900 records of local government, pre-1900 legal records from the Irish courts and the majority of all Irish export and trade records from the 18th Century onwards which were transferred from the Customs House to the Public Records Office shortly before 1922.

Yet archival disasters alone do not fully explain the huge gaps in Irish historic records - there is also the legacy of Ireland's colonial past. The Tudor re-conquest of Ireland in the 16th Century, and the Cromwellian and Williamite confiscations (1650s-90s), undermined civil society in Ireland and badly affected both the creation and survival of many records.

By the early 18th Century, probably more than 75% of all land in Ireland had been transferred to a new ruling class. This new protestant ascendancy was underpinned by the Penal Laws that restricted the civil rights of Catholics, and Presbyterians and other religious dissenters (including Quakers and Baptists, etc.). The Penal Laws also acted as a disincentive among these groups to keeping records. To the researcher the sorry result is that in Ireland the vast majority of all Catholic and Presbyterian registers of baptisms, marriages and burials that have survived, date only from the 19th Century.

Another way in which Ireland's colonial past affected the destruction or survival of historic records, were the small but significant differences between Ireland and Great Britain, in how records were made and kept. A good illustration of this is that in 1914 the British government ordered the Census of Ireland returns 1861 to 1891, should be pulped to create paper for the war effort. The order was given on the mistaken assumption that census records in Ireland were collected in the exact same way as in England, Scotland and Wales, whereby a second enumerator's copy of the census returns had been made. This was not the case in Ireland.

However, my main purpose in outlining the challenges of Irish research is not to discourage researchers, but to show how to work around these huge gaps in the records, and get a result.



DEVELOPING A RESEARCH PROFILE

The key to all successful research is to first gather as much information as possible on your immigrant ancestor(s), to create a 'profile' of the individual or family that left Ireland. **Draw up a search strategy to keep your research focused, and remember to keep full notes of all your sources.** At the outset of your search the main information you want to establish are names, places and dates of key events in the lives of your emigrant ancestors from Ireland.

Probably the best way to proceed, is to first talk to your oldest living relatives - almost everyone can spontaneously 'take their family back' two generations on both sides, and will even know both grandmothers' maiden names. Family photographs are a great way to start conversations on family history, and to 'unlock' older people's memories of the past.

You should also examine any surviving family documents - ranging from civil records of births, marriages and deaths, to deeds of property, memorial cards, letters, or a family bible, etc.

To complete the profile, you should also research official records in your own country, relevant to your immigrant ancestors. The most useful sources are census records, civil and church records of marriage or death for all your family that were born in Ireland, newspaper obituaries and gravestone inscriptions for all family members born in Ireland.

There are also some electronic sources available that you may find useful. The available electronic records do, however, vary a great deal in quality. As a rule of thumb, the involvement of history professionals in compiling records provides some guarantee that a source is complete and the information is reliable. We at Eneclann and Irish Origins are producing electronic datasets on CD-ROM and on-line which are driven by the knowledge of professional genealogists, historians and archivists. For this reason researchers should check to see whether the source they need to examine has been published on irishorigins.com or on CD-ROM by [Eneclann](http://eneclann.com) first.

We have included some of the main sources that can be examined:

Ireland

- www.irishorigins.com Including the definitive publication of Griffith's Valuation.
- www.eneclann.ie A list of Eneclann's CD-ROM titles, with detailed information about each.

U.S.

- www.archives.gov/genealogy/immigration Lists immigration records compiled by the National Archives in Washington.
- www.ellisland.org Lists immigrants processed through Ellis Island.

Australia

- www.nationalarchives.ie/ Transportation of convicts from Ireland after 1836, compiled by the National Archives of Ireland.
- www.records.nsw.gov.au For information about people who received assisted passage to Australia, see the NSW state archives Family History web site.

England, Scotland & Wales

- www.originsnetwork.com

Contains marriage records from the 16th to 19th Centuries, wills 18th & 19th Century, apprentice records 15th to 19th Centuries

- www.nationalarchives.gov.uk The 1901 Census for England and Wales on-line
- www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk Census returns and parish and civil registers for Scotland.



STARTING DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH: THE BASICS

Once you have completed the profile of your ancestor(s), you should have the following information for all individuals you want to trace in Ireland: the individual's full name; their place of origin (to a townland or parish); approximate dates of birth or marriage, or of other key events such as the years in which their children were born in Ireland. With this information you are ready to develop your research using the Irish documentary sources.

Ireland is a small country, and most of the historical records are centralized which is an advantage to the researcher. Records that relate to the Irish Republic are held principally in archives and libraries in Dublin; records that relate to Northern Ireland are held principally in Belfast. A small number of records, mainly parish registers, are held locally.

The first sources that you will probably need to examine will be the civil register of births, marriages and deaths; Griffith's Valuation (available at www.irishorigins.com); and relevant parish registers. As a rule of thumb, it is possible to take most Irish families back to the 1840s. It is more difficult to take research earlier than this date, because the rate of survival of records is poor.

- **Civil registration of births, marriages and deaths** was introduced into Ireland in 1864. Prior to this date, civil registration of non-Catholic marriages only was practiced in Ireland from 1845. It is estimated that 10 to 15% of births and marriages were not registered between 1864 and c. 1900. However, the actual rate of non-registration is probably half this, and between 5 to 7% of civil records that are not found in the national index, can be found by examining the original index kept by the local registrar. These records are not available in electronic format. The index to civil registration can be examined in the General Register Office on Lombard Street East, Dublin 2. There is a special research room for family researchers, but allow plenty of time as service can be very slow. Researchers are charged a search fee and also for each copy of every record ordered.

SCHEDULE G, 1 & 2 Vols. cap. 21, and 22 Vols. cap. 22.		Registrar's District of <i>Rathdown</i>						
1897. Marriage solemnized at <i>St. Michael's Church</i> in the <i>Town</i> of <i>Blackrock</i> in the <i>County of Dublin</i>								
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Residence.	Rank or Profession of Father.
12	<i>March</i>	<i>George Blackmore / son</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>Crackpot</i>	<i>Brookstown 9 Maltington Rd</i>	<i>Thomas Saunders</i>	<i>Master</i>
	<i>28</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>28</i>
	<i>1895</i>	<i>Susanna Stephens</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>Spinster</i>	<i>Admiral's Quay, Blackrock</i>	<i>John Stephens</i>	<i>Sailor</i>
Married in the <i>Church</i> of <i>St. Michael's</i> according to the <i>Usages</i> of the <i>Methodist Church</i> by <i>licence</i> by us.								
This Marriage was solemnized between us,		<i>George Blackmore Saunders</i>		In the Presence of us,		<i>George Hatcher</i> <i>Elizabeth Cameron</i>		
		<i>Susanna Stephens</i>				<i>H. (Rochester)</i> Official Minister.		

Example of an entry in the civil marriage register

- **Griffith's Valuation** provides information on all property holding in Ireland between 1847 and 1864. The source was compiled for taxation purposes and includes 1.4 million distinct landholdings including over 400,000 householders. It provides a snap-shot of who lived on the land in the mid 19th Century. The definitive set of Griffith's Valuation has published by Origins and Eneclann in partnership with the National Library of Ireland and is available at www.irishorigins.com

PARISH OF ABBEYSTROWRY.							
No. and Letters of Reference to Map.	Name.		Description of Tenement.	Area.	Rateable Annual Valuation.		Total Annual Valuation of Rateable Property.
	Townships and Geographies.	Immediate Tenors.			Land.	Buildings.	
	CORONEA—continued						
	TOWN OF KILMUCKREEN (part cd.)						
	NEW-NUM.—continued.						
17		John Sullivan, . . .	House and yard, . . .	—	—	1 5 0	1 5 0
18		Patrick McCarthy, . . .	House, offices, & yard, . . .	—	—	1 5 0	1 5 0
		Margaret Leary, . . .	Same, . . .	—	—	1 5 0	1 5 0
19		Unoccupied, . . .	House and yard, . . .	—	—	1 5 0	1 5 0
20		Timothy Crenin, . . .	House and yard, . . .	—	—	1 5 0	1 5 0
21		Catherine Driscoll, . . .	House and yard, . . .	—	—	1 0 0	1 0 0
22		Timothy Carey, . . .	House and yard, . . .	—	—	1 5 0	1 5 0
23		Thomas Roche, . . .	House and yard, . . .	—	—	1 10 0	1 10 0
24		David Walsh, . . .	House and yard, . . .	—	—	1 10 0	1 10 0
25		John Sullivan, . . .	House and yard, . . .	—	—	1 5 0	1 5 0
26		Callaghan McCarthy, . . .	House and yard, . . .	—	—	1 10 0	1 10 0
27		Jeremiah Murphy, . . .	House, office, and yard, . . .	—	—	2 0 0	2 0 0
28		William Roberts, . . .	House, smithy, & yard, . . .	—	—	1 10 0	1 10 0
29		Catherine Murray, . . .	House and yard, . . .	—	—	3 0 0	3 0 0
30		Reps. Alex. Driscoll, . . .	House, office, and yard, . . .	—	—	5 10 0	5 10 0
31		William Roberts, . . .	House, offices, and yard, . . .	—	—	1 10 0	1 10 0
32		Reps. Alex. Driscoll, . . .	House and yard, . . .	—	—	1 10 0	1 10 0
33		Edmond White, . . .	House, office, and yard, . . .	—	—	1 5 0	1 5 0
34		Timothy Sullivan, . . .	House and yard, . . .	—	—	1 5 0	1 5 0
35		Daniel Sullivan, . . .	House and yard, . . .	—	—	1 5 0	1 5 0
		William Sullivan, . . .	House and yard, . . .	—	—	1 5 0	1 5 0

Example of a page from the Griffith Valuation

- **1901 & 1911 Census** - The first complete census to survive for Ireland is the 1901 census, the others having been destroyed in 1922 or by administrative oversight. Both the 1901 and the 1911 census returns for the entire island of Ireland are available for consultation at the National Archives in Dublin. If your ancestors remained in Ireland until this time, these sources are essential for genealogical research. Bear in mind that even if your ancestor had left Ireland, their parents or siblings may not, and therefore will appear in the census returns.

CENSUS OF IRELAND, 1901.
(See Examples of the mode of filling up this Form on the other side.)

FORM A. No. 011 Form B. 7

RETURN of the MEMBERS of this FAMILY and their VISITORS, BOARDERS, SERVANTS, &c., who slept or abode in this House on the night of SUNDAY, the 1st of MARCH, 1901.

No.	NAME and SURNAMES	RELATION to Head of Family	RELIGIOUS PROFESSION	EDUCATION	SEX	AGE	MARRIAGE	SINGLE BORN	IRISH LANGUAGE	If Spoken (English or Gaelic) at Home
1	Henry Slattery	Head	Roman Catholic	None	M	59	Married	Single	Speaks English	Speaks English
2	Maria Slattery	Wife	Roman Catholic	None	F	26	Married	Single	Speaks English	Speaks English
3	Joseph Slattery	Son	Roman Catholic	None	M	21	Married	Single	Speaks English	Speaks English
4	Michael Slattery	Son	Roman Catholic	None	M	18	Married	Single	Speaks English	Speaks English
5	Thomas Slattery	Son	Roman Catholic	None	M	16	Married	Single	Speaks English	Speaks English
6	Patrick Slattery	Son	Roman Catholic	None	M	14	Married	Single	Speaks English	Speaks English
7										
8										
9										
10										
11										
12										
13										
14										
15										

I hereby certify, as required by the Act 62 Vic, cap. 6, s. 6 (1), that the foregoing Return is correct, according to the best of my knowledge and belief.

I believe the foregoing to be a true Return.

John Thomas Carr (Signature of Enumerator) Henry Slattery (Signature of Head of Family)

Example of a 1901 census return

- **Parish Records** - Parish registers are organized by denomination.

Catholic Parish Registers - Microfilm copies of almost all Catholic parish registers for Ireland are available in the National Library of Ireland. Catholic parish records are organized by Diocese. Approximately half of the catholic registers date from the 1840s, when parish boundaries were reorganized shortly after the introduction of Catholic Emancipation in Ireland.

Church of Ireland Registers - The surviving Church of Ireland (Anglican or Episcopalian) registers are mainly held in the Representative Church Body Library (R.C.B. Library) in manuscript. Microfilm copies of many of these registers are held in the National Archives of Ireland, which may save a trip out to the R.C.B. Library in Churchtown, Dublin 14.

Some registers relating to parishes in Northern Ireland, are available on microfilm in the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (P.R.O.N.I.) Belfast.

There are also some registers that only survive in manuscript form and are held in local custody by the rector. A genealogist will be able to advise you whether the records that you are searching for still survive, and if so, where the records are held.

Methodist records between 1747 and 1817-18 are usually entered without distinction in the Church of Ireland parish registers. Between 1817-18 and 1878 a split in the Methodist church meant that the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion maintained separate registers. The best account of where Methodist records may be found is Steven Ffearry-Smyrl's 'Irish Methodists', No. 1 in the Exploring Irish Genealogy series.

Presbyterian Parish records for the counties of Northern Ireland are kept mainly in P.R.O.N.I., although some records are also available on microfilm in the Presbyterian Historical Society in Belfast. Records for congregations in the Republic of Ireland are usually held locally by the minister.

Note: There is no one finding-aid that records all Presbyterian congregations in Ireland, from the 17th to 21st Centuries. Consequently, it will require research simply to identify whether records for a specific congregation and timeframe survive, and where they can be accessed.

The Religious Society of Friends (popularly known as Quakers), records are held in two repositories, in Dublin and Lisburn. Records extend from the second half of the 17th Century to the present.

Jewish records have in the main, been centralized in Dublin, and can be accessed through the Irish Jewish Museum. A Jewish community existed in Dublin from the 1660s, and there were cemeteries in Dublin and Cork from the early 1700s. However, the majority of records date from the late 19th Century onwards. Note: You will need to consult with a professional genealogist to identify and access church records relating to any other denomination.

Heritage Centers: Church records are also available through the local Heritage Centers. The centers have prepared computerized databases of church records in their catchment areas. Many of the Heritage Centers

provide an excellent value for money service, but you will need to know your ancestor's county of origin in Ireland, their approximate date of birth, and the name of one or both of their parents in order to avail of this.

If there is one criticism to be made of this excellent service, it is that the majority, though by no means all, of the Heritage Centers have only indexed Catholic records and have ignored extant records for all other denominations. If we consider that in the 18th Century alone, one third of the Irish population was not Catholic, then it becomes apparent that the exclusion of Protestant and other denominational records, excludes a significant proportion of the Irish population.

For further information see www.irishgenealogy.ie



DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH: THE NEXT STEP

The church records, Griffith's Valuation and the civil register of births, marriages and deaths are the easiest records to access, and to search successfully. Once you move beyond these records, you are moving into the realm of historical research. The range of sources that you will find can provide a wealth of information, not found in any other class of records, although these sources are not generally known to the amateur genealogist, and are not always as easy to use.

Cancelled Books The Cancelled Books are the manuscript revisions of Griffith's Valuations, held in the Valuation Office. Although very rarely used except by the professional genealogist or historian, they are one of the richest sources for Irish family history.

As previously mentioned, Griffith's Valuation was compiled for taxation purposes between 1847 and 1864, to record all landholding in Ireland. The Cancelled Books, also known as the Revision Books, were updated from the initial date of compilation, on average every 12 to 18 months, to ensure that everyone in Ireland paid the correct amount of local taxation. These regular revisions continued to the 1970s, when the rates system of local taxation was abolished. As the records were updated so frequently, they can be used as a census substitute, to determine how long the head of household remained at a particular address, but also, how long a holding remained in the family.

The main use of the Cancelled Books to the genealogist, is to establish the specific time-frames within which to search for relevant documents for an individual or family. For example, it is possible to use the Cancelled Books to identify the head of household's approximate year of death, and this can help focus follow-on research in the civil register of deaths, or the printed Calendar of Wills and Administrations. Likewise, the Cancelled Books will show whether or not a family remained resident in an area, so that the researcher knows whether to search for the family in the 1901 or 1911 Census returns.

The Cancelled Books will also show whether the land-holder ever bought out the land they occupied under the Land Reform schemes of the early 20th Century, and this information will help to trace associated land records relating to an individual or family.

The research room in the Valuation Office is very small, and space is limited, so researchers are advised to arrive early.

Address as they are	Tenants and Occupiers	Tenants Name	Tenants	Area	Land	Ratings	Tenants	Tenants
1	Booneganagh	Booneganagh	Booneganagh					
2	Booneganagh	Booneganagh	Booneganagh					
3	Booneganagh	Booneganagh	Booneganagh					
4	Booneganagh	Booneganagh	Booneganagh					
5	Booneganagh	Booneganagh	Booneganagh					
6	Booneganagh	Booneganagh	Booneganagh					
7	Booneganagh	Booneganagh	Booneganagh					
8	Booneganagh	Booneganagh	Booneganagh					
9	Booneganagh	Booneganagh	Booneganagh					
10	Booneganagh	Booneganagh	Booneganagh					
	Booneganagh	Booneganagh	Booneganagh					
	Booneganagh	Booneganagh	Booneganagh					

Example of a Valuation Office Cancelled Book

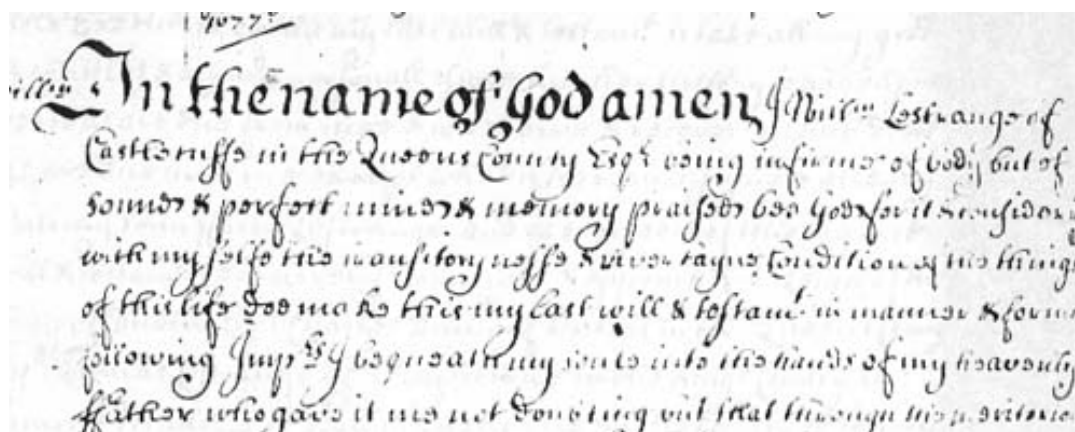
Wills As previously mentioned, the majority of wills and testamentary records for Ireland prior to 1922, were destroyed in the fire at the Public Records Office. However, there are a number of surviving records and Calendars which go some way to filling in the gaps left in 1922.

In 1859 a new registry system was established in Ireland for the first time, and the administrative structure by which wills were recorded, proved and administered changed. From 1859 a Calendar of Wills and Administrations was published annually, and these Calendars still survive, even where the original documents do not. The Calendars are arranged alphabetically, and each record contains: the name, address and occupation of the deceased; the place and date of death; the value of the estate; the name and address of the person(s) to whom probate or administration was granted.

What makes the Calendars a particularly useful source, is that from the second half of the 19th Century a much wider section of the Irish population began to leave wills, and from the early 1860s, abstracts of wills for small farmers, shop-keepers, publicans and even laborers can be found.

The Calendars of Wills & Administrations are held on the open shelf in the reading room of the National Archives of Ireland.

In addition to these Calendars, Eneclann has produced a comprehensive index to all the surviving Testamentary Records held by the National Archives from 1484-1858. This *Index of Irish Wills, 1484 - 1858* is available at the Eneclann shop.



Example of a surviving will at the National Archives

Petty Sessions Records Petty Sessions were the lowest level of the courts in Ireland in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and were the equivalent of the modern District Court. Perhaps following the model of Petty Sessions in England, justices in Co. Cork began the practice of meeting regularly to deal with minor criminal cases in the 1820s. The idea spread to other areas, was adopted by government, and led to the establishment of Petty Sessions throughout the country.

The Petty Sessions (Ireland) Act, 1851, consolidated and amended the Acts regulating proceedings at Petty Sessions, and provided for the formation of Petty Sessions Districts. The National Archives holds Order Books for most Petty Sessions Districts in the twenty-six counties of the Republic of Ireland for the period 1858-1924. The real value of these records to the genealogist is that although the information provided on specific cases can be limited, the Petty Sessions Books provide a real window into the past in a way that few other sources do.

Date of Order	Name of Names of Justice or Justice to whom Order made, and if made out of Petty Sessions, or if entry in this Book made from a Certificate, name to be here stated	PARTIES—COMPLAINANT AND DEFENDANT (The Christian and Surname, Rank, Occupation, or other addition, and Residence, stating Parish and Township, to be given, and the parties to be distinguished by prefixing their appellation—Complainant or Defendant)		Name of Witness examined, and whether for Complainant or Defendant	CAUSE OF COMPLAINT as set forth in Summons
		Complainant	Defendant		
1976		John Baker	John Baker	John Baker	That on the 11th of August 1876 at Enghenore...
1977	John Baker	John Baker	John Baker	John Baker	That on the 11th of August 1877 at Enghenore...

Example of a Petty Sessions Page

Registry of Deeds The transfer of the greater proportion of land in Ireland in the 17th century, mainly from the native ruling class to the new protestant ascendancy, meant that the new establishment needed to regulate and establish clear legal title to land in case of dispute. By an Act of the Irish Parliament, 1708, the Registry of Deeds was established for this purpose. Over the next two centuries, it became the central registry for all land transactions in Ireland, until the establishment of the Land Registry in the late 19th Century. Until the early 19th century, these records deal almost exclusively with the middle classes, landed gentry and aristocracy, and so their use is limited. Transactions are mainly concerned with sales, mortgages and leases; family settlements, marriage settlements, wills, and some business transactions.



Example of a deed at the Registry of Deeds

Additional Sources In addition to the sources listed above, there are also many regional specific sources, and sources relating to specific professions and occupations, which can be searched separately. The best single source guide to records held in Irish archives and repositories is Hayes *Guide to Manuscript Sources for Irish Civilization*, published up to 1975. There are also smaller pocket guides such as the *Directory of Irish Archives* (4th edition) published by Four Courts Press in 2003, and the excellent *Irish Libraries, Archives, Museums & Genealogical Centers* by Robert K. O'Neill, published by the Ulster Historical Foundation in 2002. But possibly the most valuable reference works for the researcher are John Grenham, *Tracing Your Irish Ancestors* (3rd ed., 2006) and Jim Ryan, *Irish Records* (1997). In addition, it is always advisable to examine the individual archive/repositories own accessions catalogues.



RECORD REPOSITORIES IN IRELAND

The General Register Office is open Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm.
GRO Joyce House, Lombard St. East, Dublin 2

The Irish Jewish Museum is open May to September, on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday between 11am and 3.30pm; Winter opening times (October to April) Sunday only, 10.30am to 2.30pm. Curator, Mr. Raphael V. Siev.
Irish Jewish Museum 3 Walworth Road, South Circular Road, Dublin 8

The National Archives of Ireland is open Monday to Friday 10am to 5pm.
NAI, Bishop Street, Dublin 8

The National Library of Ireland is open Monday to Friday 10 am to 5pm; Saturday morning 10am to 1pm; late night opening to 9pm on Monday & Tuesday.
NLI, Kildare Street, Dublin 2

The Presbyterian Historical Society, is open Monday to Friday 10am to 12.30pm, and Wednesday 2pm to 4pm.
Presbyterian Historical Society, Room 218, Church House, Fisherwick Place, Belfast BT1 6DW,

Public Records Office of Northern Ireland is open Monday to Friday 9am to 4.45, late opening on Thursday to 8.45pm. For further details their website is available at www.proni.gov.uk
PRONI 66 Balmoral Avenue, Belfast BT9 6NY, Northern Ireland

The Representative Church Body Library is open Monday to Friday 10 to 1, and 2 to 5
RCB Library, Braemor Road, Churchtown, Dublin 14

Registry of Deeds, is open Monday to Friday 10am to 4.30pm.
Henrietta Street, Dublin 1.

Society of Friends Library, is open, Thurs morning 10.30am to 1pm
Meeting House, Swanbrook House, Morehampton Road, Donnybrook, Dublin 4.
Friends Meeting House, 4 Magheralove Road, Lisburn BT28 3BD, Co. Antrim, Postal Enquiries only

The Valuation Office is open Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm.
Irish Life Center, Abbey Street Lower, Dublin 1.