Finding Irish Ancestors: A Guide to Civil and Church Records

Class 1: Understanding Civil Registration

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Civil registration is the government's system for recording births, marriages, and deaths in Ireland. Commencing in 1845 for non-Catholic marriages and in 1864 for all births, deaths, and Catholic marriages, these records have survived intact unlike many other Irish records. Public access to these materials is limited by privacy restrictions. The available years for Irish civil registration are as follows:

- Births: Records older than 100 years.
- Marriages: Records older than 75 years.
- Deaths: Records older than 50 years

Key Dates

- April 1, 1845 - Registration of non-Catholic marriages (including Protestant, Jewish, and registry office ceremonies)
- January 1, 1864 - Mandatory civil registration begins for all births, deaths, and Catholic marriages
- January 1, 1922 - Following the partition of Ireland in 1921, records were split between the General Register Office (GRO) in Dublin and the General Register Office of Northern Ireland (GRONI)

Who should use Civil Registration records?
- Researchers with ancestors who didn't leave Ireland until the late 19th century or later
- They can also be helpful for an earlier immigrant's relatives who remained in Ireland

What information is in Birth, Marriages, and Deaths records?

Birth Records (from 1864)
- Child's name
- Date & place of birth
- Parents' names (including mother's maiden name)
- Father's occupation
- Informant's name & residence

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<u>Marriage Records</u>

1845–1863: Only non-Catholic marriages
From 1864: All marriages

- Names & ages of bride and groom
- Occupations & residences
- Fathers' names and occupations
- Witnesses and officiant

<u>Death Records (from 1864)</u>

- Name of deceased
- Date & place of death
- Age at death
- Occupation
- Cause of death
- Informant's name & residence

Administrative Divisions Used in Civil Registration

Geographical areas were used to organize the civil registration system in Ireland. Officials organized the birth, marriage, and death records under the existing Poor Law Union administrative divisions. The Poor Law Unions (PLUs) were created because of the Poor Law Act of 1838 which established the workhouse system in Ireland.

These PLUs were renamed Superintendent Registrar's Districts (SRDs) and serve as the primary unit for civil registration. Each SRD was headed by a Superintendent Registrar and subdivided into several local districts, run by a local registrar.

How was your ancestor's birth, marriage or death recorded?

- An ancestor's parent or neighbor reports an event and it is recorded at the Local Registrar's office.
- The Superintendent Registrar received the register, created a copy, and sent it to the General Records Office in Dublin (before 1922); the original register was kept locally.
- The General Registrar Office created the National Index from these record copies.

<u>Civil Registration Indexes:</u>

- Until 1877, a single printed volume was produced for each year for each of the three events and arranged alphabetically.
- From 1878, the volumes were sub-divided into quarters, so there were four volumes for each year for each event.
- From 1845 to 1863, the marriage indexes (non-Catholic marriages only) were hand-written and arranged alphabetically; after 1863, the indexes were typed.
- Beginning in 1903, *only* the birth indexes are organized alphabetically in one book per year. The maiden name of the baby's mother is also recorded.

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- There is a section in each volume of the indexes for late registrations. These entries may have been registered just outside the six-week registration limit, or they may have been several years late.
- Beginning in 1879 there are separate pages for the registrations of overseas births and deaths for Irish soldiers and Irish civil servants.

Accessing civil registration indexes and records online

- IrishGenealogy.ie (free): Searchable indexes and many images, https://www.genealogy.ie
- FamilySearch.org (free): Civil registration indexes, 1845–1958 https://familysearch.org/en/united-states
- Ancestry.com ($$) has the same index as FamilySearch, https://ancestry.com
- Findmypast.com ($$) has the same index as FamilySearch, https://findmypast.com
- RootsIreland.ie ($$) has transcriptions of the local registrar copies. Not all the county heritage centers have a complete set online. Search the *Online Sources* for your ancestor's county before subscribing, https://www.rootsireland.ie
- General Register Office (GRO) of Ireland: Order copies ($$) and for more general information https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-social-protection/campaigns/general-register-office/
- Northern Ireland: Use GRONI Online (fee-based) https://geni.nidirect.gov.uk/

	Republic of Ireland https://www.irishgenealogy.ie/en/	*Northern Ireland* https://geni.nidirect.gov.uk/
Births	Indexes: 1864 to 1925 Images: 1864 to 1925	Indexes: registered from 1 January 1864 Images: records over 100 years old
Marriages	Indexes: 1845* to 1950 Images: 1870** to 1950	Indexes: non-Roman Catholic marriages from 1 April 1845; all other registered marriages from 1 January 1864 Images: records over 75 years old
Deaths	Indexes: 1864 to 1975 Images: 1871** to 1975	Indexes: registered from 1 January 1864 Images: records over 50 years old

*Non-Roman Catholic marriages are recorded from 1845; Roman Catholic marriages are recorded from 1864
**Images from earlier years (1864-1870) still to be added.