

Parish Registers (Ireland)

Civil Registration began in Ireland on 1st January 1864, although non-Catholic (Protestant or Registry Office) marriages were registered from 1845. Now, this is good news if you are looking for evidence of your ancestors' birth, marriage or death through certificates after those dates, but not good news if you are trying to track them down prior to this. That's where parish records may help you.

A Bit of History

Although the **Church of Ireland** was declared to be the official church in 1536, the registration of births, marriages and deaths did not become a requirement until 1617. However, this edict still went widely ignored until 1634 when copies were required to be sent to the Bishop of each Diocese.

The entries were very mixed up – baptisms being intermingled with marriages and burials - until an agreed format was introduced in 1807. By 1820, formal registers had been introduced so that the required information for each parish was the same.

In 1875, an Act was passed, stating that these were 'public records' and therefore had to be deposited at the Public Record Office in Dublin. This also applied to the copies that had been sent to the Bishops.

On 21st June 1922, during the Irish Civil War, the Public Records Office was destroyed by fire following an explosion. Many records were destroyed. Those that survived have been – or are in the process of being – digitised and so saved for posterity.

Although those in the towns and cities started earlier, **Catholic** records in the countryside areas were not really kept until the 1820s. These are kept at the Church to which they relate.

What is in them?

Church of Ireland Parish Registers

Baptisms

You should find the name of the child, date of baptism, father's name and mother's *first* name. Sometimes the father's occupation is noted, as with the place of residence, but not in a great deal of detail.

Marriages

Before 1845, just the date plus the names of the bride and groom were recorded. After that date, there was also the place of marriage, the couple's marital status, occupation, and place of residence, both fathers' occupations and the names of witnesses.

Burials

These usually took place in the deceased's parish within just a few days of their death. Early records just show their name and the date of burial, but later ones also include their age, their address, the cause of death and occupation.

Catholic Registers

Baptisms

These took place as soon as possible after the baby was born and usually include the date of the baptism and the names of the child, the father, the mother (including her maiden name), and those of the Godparents. It is always worth noting the names of the Godparents

as they were often relations and may help your research – even if you do have to move sideways to go backwards! Some baptism records also include the birth date and place of residence

Marriages

These will normally provide the date of the marriage, the names of the bride and groom, and the names of the witnesses. Sometimes, places of residence are listed as well, but not always.

Burials

These records will provide the person's name and date of burial. Sometimes, you will also find a place of residence, which might only be the name of the townland, and a brief mention of an occupation. Later records may also include the deceased's age and, if it was a child who was being buried, the names of their parents. The Catholic Clergy had restrictions imposed upon them regarding burials and so remember to check the records for the Church of Ireland as well if you are having problems finding a specific burial.

One very important thing to remember is that many of these Catholic records were written in Latin, rather than English.

Where can they be found?

Many existing records for both the Church of Ireland and Catholic Church are being collected into heritage centres around the country. These are then being digitised and may be viewed (and downloaded for a fee) from Roots Ireland.

Original Catholic Parish Registers are held by the Church to which they belong. It is always worth contacting the Church Office or Parish priest to see if they would be prepared to check the registers for you.

Irish Genealogy, a website that is sponsored by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, has some records and is adding to them all the time.

~~~~~

If you are after a second opinion of a record that you have found or are too far away to check the original registers, someone else might be able to help you. Register for FREE at <http://www.genealogy-specialists.com/> and post details of your ancestor and which record(s) that you are looking for. The members will do their utmost to help you find what them!

If you would like to discover more about Irish Parish Registers, understanding what was written and the best ways of finding your elusive forebears, listed below are some products that will certainly help you along your way and all of them are available from [www.parishchest.com](http://www.parishchest.com). Just pop the reference number in the website search box to see the details.

- A Latin Glossary Ref: FHP-128
- Ireland Ancestors 2014 Edition Ref: OSG-05
- Irish Church Records (Paperback) Ref: FLP-12

Also, Parish Chest has a complete section dedicated to Parish Registers, which is broken down by county and country. Take a look on [www.parishchest.com](http://www.parishchest.com) to find the area in which you are searching.