

**NATIONAL ARCHIVES
IRELAND**

**SOME FACTS ABOUT THE
NATIONAL ARCHIVES**

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SOME FACTS ABOUT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

1. ESTABLISHMENT

The National Archives was established on 1 June 1988. It is an amalgamation of the Public Record Office of Ireland (founded in 1867) and the State Paper Office (founded in 1702).

2. ACTS AND REGULATIONS

The following are the main Acts and Regulations concerning the National Archives:

- National Archives Act, 1986;
- National Archives Act, 1986, Regulations, 1988;
- National Archives Act, 1986 (Authentication of Documents) Regulations, 1988;
- National Archives (Fees) Regulations, 1988.

3. MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR ARCHIVAL MATTERS

The National Archives Act assigned ministerial responsibility for the National Archives to the Taoiseach. However, on 20 January 1993 the National Archives was transferred from the Department of the Taoiseach to the new Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht, which in 1997 was renamed the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands.

On 18 June 2002 the National Archives was transferred to the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism. Consequently, most of the functions conferred on the Taoiseach by the National Archives Act are now performed by the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, but

the Taoiseach continues to perform certain functions relating to the retention by Departments of Departmental records which are more than 30 years old and the withholding of such records from public inspection.

Three other members of the Government have powers concerning archival matters. The Minister for Finance may, under the National Archives Act, make regulations concerning the proper management and preservation of records held by Departments and, under the Freedom of Information Act, 1997, make regulations providing for the management and maintenance of records by public bodies in general. The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government may, under the Local Government Act, 1994, give advice or directions to local authorities in relation to local records and local archives. Similarly, the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources may, under the Harbours Act, 1996, give advice or directions to harbour companies and authorities in relation to their records and archives.

4. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES FOR DEPARTMENTAL RECORDS

The National Archives Act is primarily concerned with Departmental records (the records of Government Departments, the Courts, and the other state bodies listed in the Schedule to the Act). The main provisions of the Act with regard to Departmental records may be summarised as follows:

- All Departmental records must be preserved, unless their destruction is authorised in writing by the Director of the National Archives or another officer of the National Archives designated by the Director for the purpose.

- In general all departmental records which are more than 30 years old must be transferred to the National Archives to be made available for inspection by the public. Particular records may be retained by Departments and / or be withheld from public inspection only if they are covered by certificates stating either:
 - that they are in regular use by a Department or are required in connection with its administration, or
 - that they should not be made available for public inspection on one of the grounds specified in the Act.

5. RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHER RECORDS

The National Archives Act enables the National Archives to give advice to state sponsored bodies, local authorities and other public service organisations on records under their control, and to acquire records from them. It also provides that the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism may, at the request of a public service organisation, declare its records to be Departmental records. [The latter provision does not now apply either to local authorities or harbour companies and authorities, as the Local Government Act, 1994 and the Harbours Act, 1996 have made it a function of each local authority and each harbour company or authority to make arrangements for the custody, care, conservation, management and public inspection of its own records.]

The National Archives also has overall statutory responsibility for Church of Ireland parish registers of marriages which pre-date 1 April 1845 and baptisms and burials which pre-date 1 January 1871 since they were declared to be public records by Acts of 1875 and 1876. Until recently almost all the surviving registers were still held by the parish clergy, though most of them have now been transferred to the Representative Church Body Library, Churchtown, Dublin 14.

The National Archives Act also permits the National Archives to acquire records from private sources.

6. FUNCTIONS WITH REGARD TO ARCHIVES IN THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

The records acquired by the National Archives are referred to in the Act as archives. The functions of the National Archives with regard to archives in its custody include the following:

- the preservation, conservation, arrangement and description of archives;
- the preparation of guides, lists, indexes and other finding aids to archives;
- the making of archives available for public inspection;
- the making and providing of copies of archives;
- the publication of archives, finding aids and other material relating to archives;
- the provision of educational services relating to archives.

7. ARCHIVES HELD BY THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Sadly, almost all the archives accessioned by the Public Record Office of Ireland before 1922 were destroyed by fire and explosion at the beginning of the Civil War in June 1922. Consequently, the archives now held by the National Archives date mainly from the 19th and 20th centuries, although some date back as far as the 13th century. They may be summarised as follows:

- archives of Government Departments relating mainly to the period 1922- ;
- archives of the Chief Secretary's Office and its associated offices for the period 1790-1922;

- archives of the Courts and Probate Registries dating mainly from the late 19th and 20th centuries, but including a few items dating back to the 14th century;
- archives of other state agencies operating mainly in the 19th and 20th centuries, but including some archives from the 17th and 18th centuries;
- archives acquired from other sources, including Church of Ireland parishes, business firms, charities, estate offices, harbour boards, health boards, hospitals, schools, solicitors' offices, trade unions and private individuals, relating especially to the 19th and 20th centuries but including material for the 17th and 18th centuries;
- abstracts, calendars, indexes and transcripts of archives dating from the 13th to the 19th century which were destroyed in 1922.

8. NATIONAL ARCHIVES PREMISES AT BISHOP STREET

In 1989 the Government assigned premises at Bishop Street in Dublin to the National Archives. The premises of the former State Paper Office in the Record Tower at Dublin Castle were vacated in August 1991, and the headquarters of the National Archives moved from the Four Courts to Bishop Street in September 1992. At present just over 40% of the archives held by the National Archives are stored in the front block of the building at Bishop Street. A further 25% of the archives are in temporary storage in the warehouse to the rear of the premises. The remainder are stored in the former Public Record Office building at the Four Courts.

Sanction in principle has been given for the provision of a new building for the National Archives on the site of the warehouse. The new building will replace all existing buildings, and should meet the storage needs of the National Archives for several decades to come.

9. THE NIALL McCARTHY READING ROOM

The Reading Room at Bishop Street was opened in January 1992 and won a major architectural award later in the year. In July 1993 it was dedicated to the memory of the first Chairman of the National Archives Advisory Council, Niall McCarthy, in a ceremony carried out by the President of Ireland, Mary Robinson. A bust of Niall McCarthy by Marjorie Fitzgibbon was unveiled on that occasion and is on display in the Reading Room.

The Reading Room is open from 10.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays, the three-day media preview of 30-year old Departmental records in December and the period from 12.30 p.m. on Christmas Eve until 10.00 a.m. on the first working day in the New Year). Archives are produced to readers between 10.00 a.m. and 4.30 p.m. daily. When a reader orders archives which are held in off-site storage, they are normally produced in the Reading Room at Bishop Street at 10.00 a.m. on the following working day.

10. READER'S TICKETS AND THE RULES FOR READERS

The Reading Room may be used by any member of the public who holds a current Reader's Ticket. Members of the public may apply for a Reader's Ticket on the day of their first visit to the National Archives provided they have photographic identification. They must obey the Rules for Readers, which they must sign before a Reader's Ticket will be issued to them. Failure to observe the Rules for Readers may result in the cancellation of the individual's Reader's Ticket.

11. GENEALOGY SERVICE

Since January 2003 the National Archives has provided a Genealogy Service where members of the public may speak to an accredited, professional genealogist about possible sources relating to their family history. There is no charge for this service. The Genealogy Service operates the same opening hours as the Reading Room.

12. USE BY THE PUBLIC AND SIZE OF HOLDINGS

An average of 70 members of the public inspect archives in the National Archives each day. About 40,000 items are inspected per year, including records and microfilms.

The National Archives holds the equivalent of about 300,000 boxes of archives. Each box has a capacity of about 0.67 cubic feet, so the holdings of the National Archives amount to about 200,000 cubic feet or about 5,700 cubic metres.

13. BUDGET AND STAFF

The financial allocations made to the National Archives now amount to about €4,000,000 per year. About half of this is spent on pay and other staff costs.

The National Archives has a total staff of 45. The Director of the National Archives is Dr David Craig who was appointed to the post of Director in April 1989.

14. THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES ADVISORY COUNCIL

The National Archives Advisory Council was established in January 1987. Its principal function is now to advise the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport in the exercise of her powers under the National Archives Act and on all matters affecting archives and their use by the public. Under the Local Government Act, 1994 and the Harbours Act, 1996 the Council may also advise the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Minister for Communications Energy and Natural Resources on matters affecting local archives and harbour archives respectively.

At present there is no National Archives Advisory Council. The immediate past Chairman was Mr Justice Bryan McMahon. His predecessors were Mr Justice Niall McCarthy, who was Chairman from January 1987 until his death in October 1992, Mr Justice Hugh O'Flaherty, who was Chairman from October 1992 until January 1997, Dr Margaret MacCurtain, who was Chairman from May 1997 until May 2002. Mr Justice Bryan McMahon was Chairman from November 2002 until November 2007.

15. ANNUAL REPORTS OF THE DIRECTOR AND COUNCIL

Section 21 of the National Archives Act provides for annual reports by the Director of the National Archives on the work of the National Archives, and annual reports by the National Archives Advisory Council on the activities of the Council. Following submission to the Minister responsible for the National Archives, these reports are laid before each House of the Oireachtas, and are subsequently published.

The reports of the National Archives Advisory Council have been published for the period 1987-2005.

Commencing with the report for the year 1997, the reports of the Director of the National Archives for the years 1997-2001 have been published at approximately the same time as the reports of the National Archives Advisory Council.

16. WEB SITE

Further information concerning the National Archives and its holdings will be found on its web site:

www.nationalarchives.ie.

17. CONTACT DETAILS

National Archives, Bishop Street, Dublin 8.

Tel. (01) 407 2300 (from abroad + 353 1 407 2300)

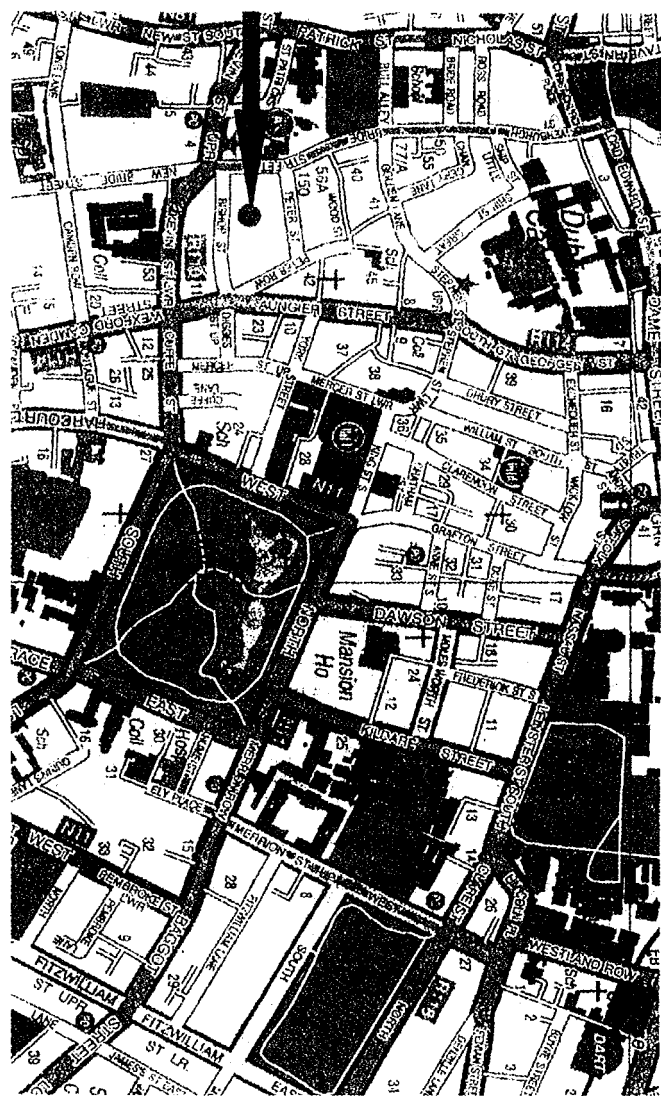
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LOCATION OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES

NATIONAL
ARCHIVES



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