



Your Family Tree: 3

CHURCH RECORDS



(All church records on microfilm are available in the Self Service Microfilm Reading Room)

Church records are of particular value to anyone interested in tracing their family tree as they usually contain the registers of baptisms, marriages and burials, many of which pre-date civil registration (see *General Register Office* leaflet). Communion rolls, vestry minutes, account books, etc. can be equally useful, especially as they often pre-date the registers. Most of the Church records are on microfilm (PRONI reference **MIC**), available in the Self Service Microfilm Reading Room. Others, however, are not available on microfilm (usually those with the **CR** reference) and these can be ordered via the computer terminals in the Search Room and consulted in the Main Reading Room. In many cases only those Church records pre-dating 1900 have been copied or deposited.

The *Guide to Church Records* is an easy way to identify what churches are in a parish, what records exist for each church, the covering dates for each series of records and what the PRONI reference number is. Normally, there will be churches relating to more than one denomination in each parish and these can be identified in the Guide in alphabetical order by the following codes:

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| B. = Baptist Church | C. = Congregational Church |
| C.I. = Church of Ireland | M. = Methodist Church |
| MOR. = Moravian Church | N.S.P. = Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church |
| P. = Presbyterian Church | R.C. = Roman Catholic Church |
| R.P. = Reformed Presbyterian Church | R.S.F. = Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) |

Problems: There are, however, a number of problems associated with church records. For example, there can be gaps in the record where the registers did not survive or where the ink is so badly faded that the entries are impossible to read. Due to certain laws peculiar to Ireland, several denominations have no records pre-dating 1800. Changes in church or parish structure have resulted in some churches changing name – or even parish – thereby making it difficult to trace the records. Where

records have neither been copied by, nor deposited in, PRONI, but remain in local custody (that is, held by the church), this is indicated in our *Guide to Church Records* (available on the Public Search Room shelves). If you wish to consult these records, you will have to make an application to the person in charge of the church.

Church of Ireland: The Church of Ireland was the Established Church in Ireland until disestablishment in 1871. Their baptism and burial records up to that date, and marriage registers before 1845, are public records and, as such, individual pages can be copied. Registers after that date, and all other types of records, remain the property of the Representative Church Body (RCB) and, while copies can be made of individual pages, complete reels of microfilm or entire volumes cannot be copied under any circumstances. Church of Ireland baptism records will often record the child's name and the father's full name as well as the mother's maiden name. The majority of Church of Ireland clergymen also recorded burials as well as baptisms and marriages. Burial registers usually give the name and date of burial, the residence (normally only the townland) and the age of the deceased.

It is important to note that Church of Ireland registers often include local families of different denominations. PRONI also holds records for some churches in Cos Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan. (PRONI ref **MIC/1/** and **CR/1**)

Roman Catholic Church: Roman Catholic registers do not start until the 1820s. Indeed many start much later than this. The registers are almost entirely of baptisms and marriages and those on microfilm relate to churches both within Northern Ireland and most of those in Cos Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan but only up to 1880. Roman Catholic baptism records usually include the date of baptism, the child's name, the father's name in full, the mother's maiden name, the name of any godparents and the residence of the parents. Although some death or funeral entries do occur, these generally only record the name of the deceased and the date of death. As some of the entries in these registers are written in Latin, a separate leaflet on Latin terminology used in Roman Catholic Church registers is available in the Self-Service Microfilm Reading Room. Permission to copy must be obtained from the individual church (PRONI ref **MIC/1D/** and **CR/2**)

Presbyterian Church: Presbyterianism came to Ulster from Scotland in the 17th century but, like the Roman Catholics, Presbyterians were restricted by law from fully practising their religion. This religious and civil persecution meant that some early baptisms, marriages and burials of Presbyterians will be found in the registers of the Church of Ireland, a practice that continued well into the 18th century. Burial registers for Presbyterian churches are uncommon as there were few Presbyterian burial grounds. Most records date from the early 19th century and those copied by PRONI cover most of the churches in Northern Ireland and in Cos Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan. Individual pages in registers of baptisms, marriages and burials can

be copied but permission must be obtained from the individual Presbyterian church to get a copy of a complete reel of microfilm or an entire volume or to copy any record other than baptisms, marriages and burials that is less than 50 years old. (PRONI ref **MIC/1P/** and **CR/3**)

Methodist: Methodism, as a separate denomination, did not emerge until 1816. The earliest baptism registers, therefore, date from then although the majority do not begin until the 1830s. Marriages registers generally only start in 1845. An important record is **MIC/429/1**. This is a microfilm copy of a large volume of baptism entries dating from 1815 to 1840 for Methodist churches throughout Ireland. This may have been an attempt to compile a central register of baptisms and, although incomplete, the baptisms recorded often pre-date existing individual church baptism registers. There are few Methodist burial registers because most Methodist churches did not have their own burial grounds. Permission to copy must be obtained from the individual Methodist Church. (PRONI ref **MIC/1E/** and **CR/6**)

Baptist Church: There are few records before 1900. The earliest begin in the 1860s and consist of marriages and minute books. As the Baptist Church does not practice infant baptism, there are no infant baptism registers but details of those who came into membership of the church are to be found in the minute books. The Baptist Church doesn't have separate burial grounds so there are no burial registers. The documentary record is, therefore, relatively scanty, and what exists is held mainly by the individual churches or by the Baptist Union of Ireland in Belfast, although PRONI has copied the records of Coleraine Baptist Church. Permission to copy must be obtained from the individual Baptist Church. (PRONI ref **MIC/1H/**)

Other Denominations: Although PRONI holds records relating to other denominations, the quantity and quality vary depending on the particular church:

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) records are excellent and in most instances are continuous from the late 17th century. PRONI has copied those of the Meeting Houses at Lisburn, Lurgan, Ballyhagen, Richhill, Grange, Charlemont and Cootehill. Permission from the Society to copy is only necessary for records that are less than 50 years old. (See **MIC/16** and **CR/8**)

Moravian Church records copied by PRONI include those of congregations at Gracehill, Kilwarlin, Ballinderry, Belfast and Dublin, most dating back to the mid-18th century. Permission to copy must be obtained from the Moravian Church. (PRONI ref **MIC/1F** and **CR/9**)

Congregational Church records date mainly from the 1880s, though there are a few earlier than this, and consist of baptism and marriage registers and minute books for churches in Northern Ireland and in Dublin. Permission to copy must be obtained from the individual Congregational Church. (PRONI ref **MIC/1G** and **CR/7**)

Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church records include one of the earliest session minute books, that of Templepatrick, dating from 1646, and PRONI has copied other records. Permission to copy must be obtained from the individual Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church. (PRONI ref **MIC/IB** and **CR/4**)



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Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
2 Titanic Boulevard, Belfast, BT3 9HQ

Tel: (028) 9053 4800 Fax: (028) 9053 4900

Web-site: www.nidirect.gov.uk/proni

e-mail: proni@communities-ni.gov.uk