Message from the ISA Committee 2020-2021

We are pleased to inform our members that the ISA Committee for 2020-2021 has now been formed. Due to public health considerations, we suspended our lecture series and journal publication between March and October 2020. However, as we adapt to Living with Covid-19, we are now planning our 2020-2021 activities. This will include a virtual lecture and seminar programme, along with a celebratory edition of the ISA journal to mark the 50th Anniversary of our organisation.

We would like to warmly thank Dr Raymond Refaussé who has now resigned his role as chair of the ISA after 19 years of service.

The ISA owes a huge debt of gratitude to Dr Refaussé for his commitment, leadership, and most valuable contribution to the organisation during this time period.

As promised in the Spring, this issue sees the first article in a new series about former colleagues and friends that left a mark on the profession.

Heroes of Irish Archives 1

Last year, before I was invited to write this, I was asked to referee an article for a scholarly journal.

Heroes 1: Robert Dudley Edwards 1
The Cong Abbey Estate 4
Tea Chests and County Archives: The Fawsitt Papers 6
Making headway in the Irish Jesuit Archives 9
The Irish Railway Archives 11
The An Post Museum and Archive 15
A new suite of videos from the National Archives 17
ISA News 20

RDE seated at his desk in the History Boardroom, Earlsfort Terrace April 1957 (Photo courtesy of UCD Archives LA221444)
The article was titled ‘Coming to terms: The limits of the Irish Historical Revolution of the 1930s’ and it was an attack on what the author saw as the undeserved reputations of Robert Dudley Edwards and T.W. Moody, founders of the Irish Historical Society and its journal *Irish Historical Studies*. The piece was devoid of background and context and it came to mind again when I started to think about what I would write for the ISA Newsletter, because understanding the background and context does much to underline the achievements of both men. In the early 1970s I worked part-time for RDE at the UCD Archives Department until I left in 1975 to pursue postgraduate studies at Cambridge. It was a fruitfully busy time: the ISA had been founded in 1970, the Archives Department opened its doors a year later, first in Earlsfort Terrace and then around the corner at 82 Stephens Green.

When I went there for an interview in early summer 1972, I remember the imposing room on the first floor, which became RDE’s study, was empty but for a kettle and a jar of coffee on the carpet. The Diploma in Archival Studies started shortly afterwards.

Teaching and researching Irish history at second and third level in the latter half of the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth was extraordinarily divisive in a period of escalating political discontent which culminated in a world war, rebellion, war of independence, partition and civil war. History textbooks became ideological battlegrounds. RDE was born in 1909 when Ireland was still part of the United Kingdom and during his first fifteen years he lived through these events. In June 1922 the Public Record Office was blown up at the start of the civil war. The horror of that event, with fragments of charred, irreplaceable documents dating back to the 12th century blowing around the city as far as Ringsend, imprinted itself on generations of historians and archivists, none more so than Eoin MacNeill who was RDE’s teacher and mentor at UCD until his death in 1945.

For MacNeill and RDE historical and archival studies went hand in hand and both men devoted much of their professional careers to the work of the Irish Manuscripts Commission which grew out of the Four Courts disaster. From its foundation in 1928 MacNeill’s vision was that the IMC would make the source materials of Irish history widely available to scholars and the general public alike and thus the IMC would promote history as a discipline in Ireland and allow it to grow and prosper. MacNeill told the Commission...
in 1929 that ‘we owe it to ourselves and to those who are to come after us to learn and know and make known the records of our country’s past.’

That article which I was refereeing for publication made not a single reference to the destruction of the PRO and its effect on the development of Irish history and archives.

The destruction of 1922 hung like a pall over the new state and its archives past and present. It was enough to make other historians burrow into their own historical comfort zones but the fact was the history and administration of the new state was arising from the ashes of the Four Courts and needed urgent supervision. Conditions at the State Paper Office and the rebuilt Public Record Office were dismal: at the SPO in Dublin Castle researchers huddled around a large table which often had a bucket in the middle to catch the rain from the leaking skylight. The PRO was right beside the Liffey and the basement sometimes flooded besides being filthy, as I can testify from a summer job I had there in 1971.

In the SPO, PRO and National Library many cartons of documents were packed away uncatalogued offsite due to chronic lack of staff and space. They were inaccessible to researchers, often for decades.

So RDE’s concerns increasingly focused on repositories and archival training.

Bust of RD Edwards at UCD Archives (courtesy of UCD Archives)

He promoted an awareness of archives among county librarians and served on two IMC sub-committees on Local and Family Archives and on Vatican Archives. He also organised regular workshops for religious archivists but despite progress in these and other areas no new archives legislation had been passed since independence. There had been decades of fitful government interest but mostly apathy. However, by 1988, the year he died, change was in the air. The long awaited archives legislation was finally enacted and there was the publication of the first edition of the Directory of Irish Archives.

RDE was critical of many of his fellow historians for their failure to understand how evidence came about. He was very meticulous about analysing documents and sources, not just the usual what, why, where and when but also the other, much more intriguing ones, such as what is NOT there. This is a question too few students ask themselves today, treating
documents like a slab of dead fish on the counter – lifeless, meaningless. It’s background and context again. Historians are custodians as well as interpreters of sources. The world wide web was invented the year after RDE died and while he would have been thrilled with the cornucopia of source material which the web offers, he would be scathing about the lazy and unreflective way it is often used.

The UCD Archives Department moved to custom built premises in Belfield in 1985. By then it had become the pre-eminent research centre for the Irish Revolutionary period and for post-independence Irish history. He played no small part in persuading donors to deposit their papers, issuing almost a royal command. His own papers are there and are used regularly. Ironically, RDE never liked Belfield, his own memories were around Earlsfort Terrace and Stephens Green and I still see his spirit striding there.

Deirdre McMahon (Historian, retired from Mary Immaculate College, Limerick)

The Cong Abbey Estate

Composite sources brought to life in a couple of new publications

Two publications documenting the history of the Cong Abbey estate, located on the border between Counties Mayo and Galway, in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, will be published this autumn. This year’s edition of Archivium Hibernicum will contain a substantial article about the records from three different archives relating to the history and management of the estate and its associated families from 1608 to 1756. The article contains a detailed introduction, an archival list of the records of the estate in the Gerard Collection in the Lancashire Archives; transcriptions of some letters and accounts from this collection; a transcription of the journal of Thomas Tasburgh SJ 1726-1727 in a New Zealand archive, and transcriptions of some relevant documents from the Twigge Collections in the British Library. A history of the life of George Macnemara, a local folk hero and tenant of the Cong Abbey estate from 1722 until his death in 1760, will also be available from County Mayo bookshops. It was launched on 21 October by Prof Nicholas Canny.

Floor plan of Cong Abbey (HG Leask ‘The Augustinian Abbey of St Mary the Virgin…’, JGAHS 19, 3-4, 1941)

In the twelfth century the Augustinian monks were established in Cong by Turlough Mór O’Conor and over time the monks were gifted lands in the vicinity by various persons. Following
the Reformation their estate was confiscated and in 1608 James I granted it and the associated tithes to John King and John Bingley who three years later assigned it to Robert Cressy.

It was inherited by a branch of the Tasburgh family of Flixton in Suffolk and in 1749 passed to Sir Thomas Gerard 8th Baronet of Garswood, Lancashire, following his marriage to the heiress Maria Clare Tasburgh. In 1756 the Gerards sold the estate to Stephen Creagh Butler of Kilmoyler, Co Tipperary, brother-in-law of George Macnemara. Ellis or Elizabeth Lynch of Lydacan, Claregalway, Co Galway, was first married to Peregrine Tasburgh, who in the mid 1690s became agent to the estate and in 1702 its tenant. Peregrine died in 1711 and in 1721 his widow married George Macnemara, a native of Ardcloony, near Killaloe, Co Clare. Elizabeth had held the lease herself after Peregrine’s death but following her marriage to George he became the tenant in April 1722.

Throughout his tenancy George, supported by his wife Elizabeth until her death in 1736, was continually tied up in legal disputes over the payment of his rent with his landlord Henry Tasburgh and after Henry’s death in 1737 with Henry’s widow and their daughter Maria Clare.

George Macnemara and Henry Tasburgh, both Catholics, were also involved in court cases with the local clergy over the possession of the estate’s tithes and with the Eustace family over a claim they had to the estate. George’s second wife was Helen Creagh, a sister of Stephen Creagh Butler, and they had three daughters together. George also had a number of sons and daughters by his third wife Honora.

The ‘Irish Estate’ papers in the Gerard Collection contain approximately 600 items. Many were used to prove the Gerards’ title to the estate when it was sold in 1756. These papers trace the transfer of the estate from its two original grantees to Sir Robert Cressy and onto his Tasburgh nephews. In 1692 it was inherited by Henry Tasburgh who took a greater interest in the estate than some of his predecessors appointing his first cousin Peregrine as agent. In 1726 Henry sent his brother Thomas Tasburgh over to Ireland to
find out what was happening in the various courts with regard to George Macnemara’s suits. On 1 July 1726 Thomas arrived in Dublin and for the following year, almost up to the time of his death in July 1727, kept a journal of his activities and movements which included a journey to Galway and onto Cong where he stayed for three months. This journal gives a fascinating account of the personalities of George, his wife Elizabeth and documents many of their associates and activities, however nowhere is it apparent that its author was a Jesuit priest. Miraculously this journal has survived a journey to New Zealand where it is preserved in the Hocken Collections Archives and Manuscripts Section of the University of Otago, Dunedin. The Twigge Collections, containing copies of chancery proceedings no longer extant, add substance to some aspects of the life of George and Elizabeth Macnemara and Elizabeth’s three Tasburgh daughters.

Collectively these sources document the religious and social history of the Cong Abbey estate and its management over 150 years and give an insight into the lives of members of the associated families of Tasburgh, Lynch and Macnemara.

Full reference for the article: ‘Cong Abbey Estate Papers (1608-1756) and the Catholic families of Tasburgh, Lynch and Macnemara’ by Brigid Clesham, Edward King and John Bergin, Archivium Hibernicum 73 (2020)
deposits, such a situation is neither ideal nor sustainable from the point of view either of archives or the library service. Readers of ISA Newsletter will be aware that only 14 or so local authorities (beginning with Cork in 1974) have established county archives, so more needs to be done. The Meath Archaeological and Historical Society - along with the Meath History Workshop - have been campaigning for a Meath County Archives for several years, consulting with archivists and historians, visiting archival institutions, making submissions to the Meath Development Plan, writing to local representatives, and meeting with Meath County Council and the Library. This work is ongoing and there are hopeful indications that the Council is moving towards the establishment of a County Archives. It is of course essential that the right funding is put in place from the beginning, that a suitable building is found and that the County Archives are properly equipped and staffed from the outset - so our campaign will continue.

Julitta Clancy and some of the sorted files (courtesy of Ann Fawsitt)

A personal story - the Diarmaid Fawsitt Papers

Archivists are excited by finds such as mentioned above, but rarely does an archivist have the doubly exciting experience in relation to their own family. This happened for me in March 2018 when I was notified by my cousin Ann Fawsitt in West Cork that - during an inspection of the old family farmhouse - 3 tea chests and 2 suitcases crammed with documents were found by her brother Danny in the closed-off loft.

My cousins believed these might be the remaining part of the papers of our late grandfather Judge Diarmaid Fawsitt (1884-1967), to complement a collection I had been sorting and arranging at my late aunt’s home at Laurelmount (Dunmanway) at intervals since 2002. Apart from personal material, that earlier collection had contained records of some of our grandfather’s activities during the ‘Revolutionary period’ and the early years of the State, but there were ‘curious gaps’, given that he was a meticulous record-keeper.

Hearing the news I headed to West Cork immediately! Over the next fortnight the chests etc. were brought to Laurelmount, their contents examined and lightly cleaned, files and related documents placed together in piles, and an interim inventory made. Remarkably, most of the documents were found to be in good condition, but there was evidence of dampness, mould, rodent and insect infestation on some.

Contents

The new collection contained material relating to Fawsitt’s long and varied career and his personal and family life,
dating from 1905 to 1967. Here were files, reports and letters documenting his work as Secretary of the Cork IDA (1911-19), an account of the inaugural meeting of the Cork Volunteers in 1913 (he was a co-founder), his activities in New York during his deportation by the British (1915) and as the Republic’s first Consul to the USA (1919-21), his work as an economic adviser in the Treaty negotiations (1921-22), as a civil servant in the early State (1922-23), as an inspector with the Irish IDA (1925-28), and later as a barrister and a Circuit Court judge.

Among the material was a fascinating record of the 'special mission to Belfast' which Fawsitt undertook on behalf of the Dáil Cabinet during the Treaty period - letters, instructions, notes on meetings, and reports submitted to Cabinet (an article on the mission is forthcoming in 2021). Here also was a letter from Michael Collins written just 3 days before his death, diaries (1920-1966), writings, speeches and broadcasts, photos, newspapers, memoirs and extensive correspondence - many from the USA and Australia (he had briefly emigrated to Melbourne in the early 1900s and revisited in 1962 at the age of 78).

**Archival work and deposit**

Intense archival work was conducted integrating the papers with the earlier collection, arranged into the series 'Public Life' and 'Personal and Family Life'.

The documents were rehoused, the interim list was updated, and an index compiled. The remainder of the work was best left for an archival institution, and this is where the Cork City and County Archives comes in. The preservation of the Papers and their opening to research had been discussed by the Fawsitt family over the years. While several archival institutions were considered, Cork seemed the ideal place, a meeting was held with the senior archivist Brian McGee, an agreement was drawn up, and on 20 August, 2019, the papers were handed over to Cork Archives by Alice Fawsitt, SC, on behalf of the family.

The handover was marked by Lord Mayor John Sheehan on 24 September...
in City Hall and was attended by many of Diarmaid Fawsitt's descendants.

Meanwhile the Fawsitt Family Research Group - cousins who had come together in late 2016 - presented a seminar for historians in NUI in July 2019, followed later in the year by a paper of the writer at a history seminar, University College Cork.

Diarmaid L Fawsitt Public Life Papers (1905-1956) are currently being processed in Cork and hopefully will be open for research in the Spring of 2021. The Personal and Family Life series is temporarily closed to the public - this situation will be reviewed by the family at regular intervals.

When I blogged in 2018 on the Irish Jesuit website, on the influenza of 1918/19 and the Jesuits in Ireland, it was just another article, to commemorate a centenary event. And now look at us, in the throes of another pandemic! I dare not write about the night of the Big Wind in 1839! The archives closed in March 2020 - reopened in mid-Summer - closed again...you get the drift. So what has happened in the interim period?

Working with Offaly Archives in 2019 in making the papers of St Stanislaus College, Tullabeg, County Offaly, available via their archival platform, gave impetus to the decision to put the catalogue of the Jesuit archives online. Using the open source cataloguing software, AtoM, and with the help of Systemivity, planning envisaged the site to go live by late 2020. COVID-19 provided the opportunity for this to happen earlier. You can see the progress we have made at www.jesuitarchives.ie

Working from home, I created a skeleton for the catalogue, known as
authority records, which link people, places and subjects. A side benefit to creating authority records has led to the creation of a digital biographical dictionary for Irish Jesuits.

Biographical dictionary sample

2% of the catalogue, roughly 2,000 records, is now accessible, with material on the Isle of Man, Zambia, and the Irish Jesuit Colleges in Europe before the Suppression of the Society in 1773. The process of cataloguing on AtoM shines a light on material which had rudimentary descriptions ascribed to it.

The note on the reverse of this photograph by Fr Fergal McGrath SJ (1895-1988), which depicts Kevin Barry (1902-1920) in the courtyard of Belvedere College, Dublin, 1919, gives greater context to the legacy and meaning of the photograph.

The archival pathway is not always smooth, and the catalogue is not an end in itself. Understanding barriers to accessibility, and balancing transparency with issues of confidentiality and consent, will be addressed by a commitment to collaborate and network. Even Pope Francis has our back:

Yours is a work carried out in silence and far from clamour; it cultivates memory, and in a certain sense it seems to me that it may be compared to the cultivation of a majestic tree, whose branches stretch skyward, but whose roots are firmly anchored in the ground...With your patient efforts you archivists work on these roots and help to keep them alive, in such a way that even the greenest and youngest branches of the tree may draw good sap for their future growth.

Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to officials of the Vatican Secret Archive, Clementine Hall, 4 March 2019.

Damien Burke (Archivist, Irish Jesuit Archives)
The Irish Railway Archives

Photographic Print Collection

The archive of the Irish Railway Record Society (IRRS) comprises thousands of records, photographs, maps, drawings and artefacts, which document the development of railways throughout Ireland. Located in the grounds of Heuston Station, Dublin, one of the archive’s most valued assets is its photographic collection, which was accumulated for the Society since its establishment over 75 years ago by a group of railway enthusiasts, many of whom were accomplished photographers. It is only in recent years that the photographic records have been fully appreciated, due in the main to the volunteer work I have undertaken on the conservation, cataloguing and subsequent digitisation of parts of the collection. This article focuses specifically on my work on the IRRS’s ‘Print Collection’.

IRRS Photographic Collection

The Society is fortunate in that its photographic collection largely comprises of original analogue formats, such as film negatives, slide transparencies and glass-plate negatives, as well as lantern slides. These photographs span a period of more than a 100 years and illustrate many aspects of Irish railway operations and infrastructure. For the majority of my ten years volunteering in the IRRS, I have always prioritised work on the slides and negatives in the collection.

Co-existing within the IRRS photographic archive is the ‘Print Collection’. As the name implies, this part of the collection is made up entirely of photographic prints, usually of postcard size and in monochrome format. These primarily originate from photographers whose donation did not include the relevant negatives. Frequently, the originals exist in other archival repositories or personal collections.

The majority of the Print Collection was not ‘stored’ in an archival sense, but was spread across 13 large A2-sized homemade albums. On each page there were approximately 20 photographs glued to the page.

Each of the 13 album were arranged according to railway company or subject, as there was for example one album illustrating tramway systems throughout Ireland. There was, however, no clear sub-arrangement of subjects within the albums themselves. There was no accompanying finding aid and no accession list or catalogue. In addition, the prints were arranged ‘ad hoc’ on unnumbered pages, owing to the different times the photographs were acquired.

Example of the IRRS Print Album ‘Belfast Corporation Transport’ prior to processing
There was a number of problems with this format, including the fact that searches for specific picture were very time-consuming; that requests came in using a schematic of the album page leading to much confusion; that many prints had been removed over the years and not returned, and having no accession records nobody knew what was missing; that good quality digital copies could not be made without removal; finally, that the A2 size made consultation hazardous, causing more damage to the pages.

It was the IRRS’s participation in the Culture Night and Heritage Week events between 2016 and 2019 which prompted me to seriously assess the state of the print albums. During such events, the albums were frequently browsed by visitors because while it is undesirable to facilitate direct access to original and delicate photographic records, the print albums offered an alternative and practical means of showcasing historical photographs of Ireland’s railways. I concluded therefore that if the Print Collection was properly arranged and catalogued, it would be an excellent asset to the Society which could be used by the public and IRRS members in general.

In 2018, I embarked upon this project. There were eight principal tasks: carefully remove all prints from the albums; re-arrange the prints in an order conducive for research purposes; develop a new system for accessioning the prints; mark each print to indicate it belonged to the ‘Print Collection’, as well as the railway company the photograph pertained to; remove any prints which are duplicate or containing low historical value; insert the prints into A5-sized polyester sleeves (two per-sleeve), placing them neatly into bound folders; create a digital catalogue of the Print Collection; recording the accession numbers, railway company, subject, location, date and photographer.

For this new system of arrangement, I created an individual accession code for each railway company; the three letters of the company’s initials, followed by a series of numerical codes. There were usually four numerical codes in the series for the railway company concerned, each indicating a specific subject depicted in the photographs. I developed these subject criteria based on the pattern of queries received previously from researchers. The four subjects were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cavan &amp; Leitrim Railway [CLR]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CLR/01 Trains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLR/02 Locomotives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLR/03 Rolling Stock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLR/04 Infrastructure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The four subject-based series applied to the whole Collection*

This system therefore allowed photographs similar in nature to be grouped together, without disrupting the overall physical arrangement of the prints, and allowing for new accruals.

To process the album prints, I had obtained a large quantity of boxes, kindly donated by other archives, which acted as temporary holdings for the prints before accessioning. Each box was labelled according to the planned catalogue structure. These boxes acted
like pigeon holes as I worked my way through sorting and grouping several thousands of prints.

Boxes used to temporarily segregate and arrange prints according to Railway Company and subject (courtesy of author)

I started accessioning the smaller railway companies first which tended to have less prints due to the size of their rail network and the shorter time period time they were operating. Once one batch of prints was processed, it subsequently freed up boxes which afforded extra flexibility when segregating and sorting prints from the larger companies, so this method, in effect, involved working from smallest Irish railways up to the largest ones.

As I began to process the larger railway companies, there was a predictable increase of prints, necessitating an expansion of the accessioning criteria.

For these larger railways, additional subseries were added, reflecting the need to arrange prints in an order that would retain their geographical placing on the railway network.

As an example, a small self-contained railway system with a single line operating from one point to another, such as the Waterford & Tramore Railway, had a small geographical spread, while the Midland Great Western Railway had lengthy main lines with numerous branches spread across the midlands and Connacht. It was desirable therefore to arrange prints in geographical sub-series for each main line and branch line.

Album for the former Clogher Valley Railway, in bound A5-polyester sleeves: ‘CVR/01’ indicating trains (courtesy of the author)

A further sub-series was created to segregate prints of trains depicting either steam or diesel traction. This will be of particular use to researchers into steam and diesel technology as developed by different railway companies. For instance, the Great Northern Railway was a pioneer of efficient and cost-effective diesel-engined railcars, and as such, prints depicting these subjects have been segregated from those illustrating services operated by steam locomotives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Great Northern Railway [GNR]</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GNR/01 Steam Trains;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNR/01/01 Steam Trains; Dublin – Dundalk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNR/01/02 Steam Trains; Newry – Belfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNR/02 Steam Trains;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNR/02/01 Diesel Trains; Dublin – Dundalk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNR/02/02 Diesel Trains; Newry – Belfast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Great Northern Railway [GNR]

| GNR/01 Steam Trains;                                            |
| GNR/01/01 Steam Trains; Dublin – Dundalk                        |
| GNR/01/02 Steam Trains; Newry – Belfast                         |
| GNR/02 Steam Trains;                                            |
| GNR/02/01 Diesel Trains; Dublin – Dundalk                       |
| GNR/02/02 Diesel Trains; Newry – Belfast                        |
To date, approximately 9,000 prints have been arranged, accessioned and fully catalogued, and have been physically placed into polyester sleeves and bound folders, meaning individual photographs can now be consulted, retrieved and digitised as required.

Already this has enabled me to publish photographs from the collection for the first time in the Society’s journal, as well as disseminating images to the public via the IRRS’s Twitter and Facebook platforms, as well as the website which I have developed. Some prints that I have discovered have also been used to assist Iarnród Éireann in developing an online exhibition illustrating 75 years of CIÉ, the Irish Transport Company.

In addition, valuable information has been gleaned from the reverse of the prints, up to then hidden while pasted into albums. Whilst the locations depicted were easily identifiable, there was a lot of contextual information, including the specific date and the photographer, as well as an explanation for why the picture had been taken.

So far, 62 individual railway, tramway, and industrial companies have been registered in the Print Collection’s accession database. One of the largest railway systems mentioned above, the Great Northern Railway, necessitated 7 series, with 39 subseries to accommodate its diverse operations and geographical spread, featuring steam, diesel, tram and horse traction. Their network culminated in 356 miles of railways, from Dublin to Belfast, Dundalk to Bundoran, and Omagh to Warrenpoint and Derry, with many branch lines in between. The company’s complexity epitomises the challenges encountered during the project.

With this system now in place for managing the Print Collection, recent donations of photographs have been conveniently slotted into the accession list, without the constant need for re-arranging prints. This method will hopefully serve the collection as it continues to grow, as there are thousands of prints still to be added.

The collection may contain over 15,000 photographs when the work is completed, which will be made

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**Print Catalogue of the Great Northern Railway in Excel, showing the accession list for photographs**

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**Table:**

| GNR/03 | Hill of Howth Tramway |
| GNR/04 | Rolling Stock; Carriages |
| GNR/04/01 | Rolling Stock; Wagons |
| GNR/04/02 | Infrastructure; Amiens Street (Connolly Station) |
| GNR/05 | Infrastructure; Dublin – Belfast |

*Illustration of the series applied to the Great Northern Railway*
available in due course to researchers at the IRRS premises and on the website.

_Ciarán Cooney (Hon. Photographic Archivist, Irish Railway Records Society)_

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**The An Post Museum & Archive**

**An overview of the Archive**

With roots in the 16th century the Post Office is one of the oldest institutions in the State. Archival material, in the sense of paper-based records, from early years is rare and what there is, is held in various libraries throughout Ireland and Britain. Later material is also scarce because of the two disasters that befell our archives, the destruction of the GPO in 1916 and subsequently of the Public Record Office, to which some Post Office material had been transferred towards the close of the nineteenth century. Soon after the establishment of An Post in 1984, non-current files created by the Department of Posts & Telegraphs were transferred to the National Archives. Material that related to the telecommunications and engineering branches of the Post Office was assigned to Telecom Éireann and museum items, like old telephones, were subsequently transferred to the National Museum. Broadcasting, which was also the responsibility of the Post Office for a period, also created an archival record but little of this remained with the Post Office after Radio Éireann left the GPO for its Montrose premises.

When we were planning the creation of our postal museum a dozen years ago, I also put forward a plan for a distinct Post Office archive to collect and preserve the remaining historical records. This was agreed, the Company acknowledging its obligation to safeguard the historical record of an organisation that, more than any other, had helped to shape the development of Irish society. While the archive and its related museum and philatelic collections are not open to the public, our aim was to preserve, document and make available the history of the Post Office, to promote education, culture and the conduct of research and to support the business needs of the Company. Commercial and other pressures naturally influence the resources that can be directed to this type of work and enthusiasm at senior management level does wax and wane but the place of the GPO in the Irish mind and the Post Office’s local connections have ensured that what we do is appreciated by the public. Very recently, the collections had to be moved for operational reasons to a new home and the impetus of that move...
provides an opportunity to say a little about what we have.

The An Post Museum & Archive operates in line with a collecting policy that was drawn up to allow us to focus on primary source material and artifacts that relate to: the historical development of the Post Office in Ireland; business policies, principles and processes; staff welfare and working life; publicity and marketing; philately and postal history; and prominent figures in Post Office history.

The GPO already held a small amount of archival material that had been collected in the late 1920s, not long after Irish independence, and it also built up gradually a collection of postage stamps, not just Irish but also those issued by other countries and received through our membership of the Universal Postal Union. To this material has been added records held at local level in Head Post Offices and other Company premises. This has been gradually accomplished over several years through site visits and assessment of the material held locally.

What has been judged of historical importance has been brought back to Dublin and accessioned in the central archive. What has survived is a matter of luck, some offices having kept material back to the nineteenth century and some having destroyed almost everything old. Ironically, it is often in the offices run by diligent and rule-keeping postmasters that little is to be found whereas those officers content to dump stuff in a basement cupboard have inadvertently preserved items of value!

Our collection dates from the early nineteenth century but the bulk of material is twentieth century. It is an important archive both for Irish social history because of the sheer span of Post Office activity and for genealogical research since there are records here that do not exist anywhere else. The material held includes: Establishment
books; Disciplinary records; Operational files; Postage stamps; Property records; Sub-office records; Artefacts such as letter boxes, bicycles and date-stamps.

Mail recovered from a raid, stamped Director of Intelligence, 1923 (courtesy of the author)

Most of the records and artefacts collected have been created by the Post Office itself but donations of material that falls within the general scope of our collection policy are accepted with gratitude and the occasional acquisition, funds permitting, can add something of special interest.

The current pandemic crisis has made things very difficult for all cultural institutions but there are additional pressures within those commercial companies which also strive to safeguard their particular cultural heritage. At a time when staff cuts and operational changes have necessarily curtailed heritage work here, it is worth bringing to light a few treasures that can lie hidden in institutions like the Post Office.

Post delivered by Zeppelin, 1933 (courtesy of the author)

It is also during times of enforced isolation and darkness that people can seek reassurance in childhood hobbies like stamp collecting, family history or letterbox-spotting. For them it is important that the An Post Museum & Archive and other similar specialist archives throughout the country continue to exist.

For context regarding the above photo of officers on the Holyhead and Kingstown Packet PO, see the author’s Sorting letters on the Sea – Holyhead mail boats and the Leinster tragedy (Dublin, 2018).

Stephen Ferguson (Assistant Secretary & Curator, An Post)

A new suite of videos from the National Archives

Culture Night Dublin goes online

When Culture Night premiered as a relatively modest Dublin-only event back in 2006, its founders probably didn’t anticipate its evolution over the next decade or so to become a permanent and much-loved fixture in Ireland’s cultural calendar. Inspired by Copenhagen’s Kulturnatten, Culture Night has since become an all-island celebration of arts, heritage and culture and a wonderful opportunity for
everyone to explore for free, the diverse riches held in our galleries, museums and creative spaces.

It’s fair to say though that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Culture Night 2020 will not be forgotten anytime soon. Public health restrictions introduced in March challenged many culture and heritage organisations to re-think their annual Culture Night contributions and to reimagine in-person events in alternative online environments.

The National Archives first engaged with Culture Night in 2009 and its increasingly popular involvement reflected the growth of the event nationwide. In 2019, the NAI welcomed over 300 visitors across its threshold and was already developing plans for Culture Night 2020 when it became clear by late spring that this year’s celebration could not be business as usual. A far-sighted decision by management to adapt to the ‘new normal’ and to transfer our annual offering online resulted in the commissioning of a suite of five videos to be released on Culture Night itself. The videos’ raison d’être would be to bring virtual visitors behind the scenes and give them an insight into the work done by the NAI to preserve and make publicly available the documentary heritage of the State and its contribution to the cultural life and memory of Irish society.

Each of the five videos – available to view online in both Irish and English at www.nationalarchives.ie/our-archives/stories-from-the-archives – has a distinct theme detailing some of the core functions of the NAI. In the ‘Safeguarding Ireland’s archival legacy’ video, Director Orlaith McBride introduces the National Archives and the wide-ranging services it provides to government and the general public, as mandated under its founding legislation, the National Archives Act of 1986.

In ‘Caring for the archives’, Senior Conservator Zoë Reid discusses the theory and practice of conservation which runs the gamut of proper storage of records to treatment methods for damaged documents and these are amply illustrated by footage showing her repairing archives in our conservation studio in Bishop Street.

The National Archives holds manifold collections of records which can be used for family history research and in the ‘Exploring your genealogy using the archives’ feature, professional genealogist Nicola Morris of Timeline Research outlines relevant sources (census returns, valuation records, wills and testamentary material etc) and offers helpful tips and guidance on embarking on your genealogy journey.
Digitisation of records for preservation and public consultation is a key function of the NAI as is carefully storing the nation’s archives in correct environmental conditions to ensure their use long into the future and these processes are described by Senior Archivist Hazel Menton in the ‘Building the archives’ video.

For those wishing to visit the NAI for personal or professional research, in the ‘Accessing the archives’ segment, Senior Archivist Brian Donnelly explains how to obtain a reader’s ticket, use the finding aids, order documents from repository storage and consult records in the Reading Room.

Interspersed throughout the videos are fascinating and often little-known stories related by the speakers about some of the record collections held in the National Archives. Such examples include the poignant background to some of the wills left by Irish soldiers who died in the First World War (‘Building the archives’) and the care by a mother of her baby son in the Dublin Union workhouse before he was fostered out to a family aged just two years (‘Accessing the archives’).

The five individual videos form the full-length ‘The National Archives of Ireland: the legacy and the future’ film. Their collective purpose is to engage with online visitors and to expand public awareness of the role of the NAI in safeguarding the nation’s records and the vital work that such a responsibility entails. It’s also intended that the video suite will be used as a teaching tool and resource for educators at all levels.

Culture Night 2020 has come and gone but an ambitious project to mark this annual event has left a tangible legacy for the NAI in the form of a new video suite.

It has already been really well received and it’s hoped that virtual visitors will enjoy and engage with this film and its fresh focus on the National Archives as the nation’s official record keeper.

Elizabeth McEvoy (Archivist, Education & Outreach, National Archives)
ISA NEWS

- The Committee has a vacancy for the role of social media officer – to find out more about the role, please email sec.societyforarchives@gmail.com.
- The Annual General Meeting did not take place this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We will issue a written report from each ISA officer to all members in lieu of this, and will hold an online AGM in the Spring of 2021.
- The Committee is organising a 2020-2021 lecture programme, to include monthly lectures and a special seminar to celebrate the ISA’s 50th anniversary.

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How to become a member
Please apply to the honorary membership secretary Hanne Sheeran at ISAsubscription@gmail.com or by post c/o National Archives, Bishop Street, Dublin 8

Rates
Individual €30
Institutional €45
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