



## Surviving Irish Records

Michelle Dennis looks at records that survived the 1922 fire and explosion at the Public Record Office of Ireland

**A**LMOST 100 YEARS AGO, IN APRIL 1922, THE LARGEST EXPLOSION ever seen in Dublin occurred in the Public Record Office of Ireland. Unbelievably the Anti-treaty forces had stored their mines and ammunition in the building. Two days into the Civil War hundreds of years of Irish history exploded into flames and were lost forever.

Ernie O'Malley, author and IRA director of the organization, and a member of the garrison stationed there, wrote of the event in his book *The Singing Flame*: "A thick black cloud floated up about the buildings and drifted away slowly. Fluttering up and down against the black mass were leaves of white paper; they looked like hovering white birds."

In those precious papers, were the records of our ancestors. Census records from 1821-1851, wills and probate, military records, church registers and legal court records, transportation registers, land transfers and Church of Ireland parish records dating back to the 17th century – all gone up in smoke.

But it's not all bad news if you have Irish ancestry. There are many other sources of records that did survive, such as the 1901 and 1911 census records which were held at the Registrar General's Office. Land revenues, civil births, marriages and death records, many parish registers, Griffith Land Valuation and property records, indexes to wills and probate bonds, muster rolls, and poll tax records all survived to help us research our ancestors' lives. A new project called *Beyond 2022 – Ireland's Virtual Record Treasury* research project has sought to retrieve as many documents as possible through duplicates in other archives.

[*Editor's Note: See the article on Beyond 2022 directly after this article for a recent update by Internet Genealogy author Joe Grandinetti.*]

### Let the Search Begin

My 5x great grandfather Alexander Richey was born into a protestant family in 1750 in Newry, County Down, Northern Ireland. He worked as a merchant in Newry, probably in the linen trade like his sons, that were all involved in either the linen, silk or woolen trades in Dublin.

Alexander married Mary O'Donnell and had at least five children, probably more given the gaps between the boy's birth years – Alexander b 1770, William b 1771, Robert b 1779, Andrew b 1780, James b 1799.

Given so many of the Irish records were destroyed by fire, what evidence could I find for him and his family? Several documents survived

which helped me uncover more about their lives -

**Betham Genealogical Abstracts for Ireland** were created by Irish herald Sir William Betham, whose notebooks are a substitute for some of the records lost in the 1922 Public Record Office fire in Dublin. Some of these records give clues to spouses, occupations, will beneficiaries, dates, and locations. They are available online at <https://search.findmypast.com.au/search-world-records/betham-genealogical-abstracts>.

Record for Andrew Betham of Newry, Down Northern Ireland. ([FindMyPast.com.au](https://www.findmypast.com.au))

Andrew's Betham record states he is of Newry, Down, Northern Ireland, and mentions his probate of August 1799 and that his beneficiaries were his wife Mary O'Donnell, and a sister "a wife of Mr Connell Esquire."