

PRESS RELEASE

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National Library of Ireland Announces its Most Significant Ever Digitisation Project for Irish Genealogy

– Project will make almost 400,000 images of Catholic parish register microfilms available online for free –

The [National Library of Ireland \(NLI\)](#) has today (01.12.14) unveiled details of its most ambitious digitisation project to date. The project will see the Library's entire collection of Catholic parish register microfilms made available online – for free – by summer 2015.

The records are considered the single most important source of information on Irish family history prior to the 1901 Census. Dating from the 1740s to the 1880s, they cover 1,091 parishes throughout Ireland, and consist primarily of baptismal and marriage records.

Commenting today, Colette O'Flaherty, Head of Special Collections at the NLI, said: "This is the most ambitious digitisation project in the history of the NLI, and our most significant ever genealogy project. We believe it will be of huge assistance to those who wish to research their family history. At this stage, we have converted the microfilm reels on which the registers are recorded into approximately 390,000 digital images. We will be making all these images available, for free, on a dedicated website, which will be launched in summer 2015.

"Anyone tracing Irish family history will be able to access this site – from anywhere in the world – and search for the parish in which they are interested. They will be able to see a list of registers for that parish, and will be able to click on whichever registers they like to browse through the images contained within.

"The information in the registers varies from parish to parish but, typically, includes the dates of the baptisms or marriages, and the names of the key people involved, including godparents or witnesses. Obviously, such information is extremely valuable for both amateur genealogists and professional researchers.

"The microfilms have been available to visitors to the NLI since the 1970s. However, this project means that, for the first time, anyone who likes will be able to access these registers without having to travel to Dublin."

Contribution of the Catholic Church

Ms. O'Flaherty said the registers are a wonderful legacy of the Catholic Church to Ireland.

"The role of the Catholic Church in creating and maintaining these records during some of the most turbulent times in Irish history must be acknowledged and praised," she said. "Most census records from this period were destroyed in the Four Courts fire of 1922, so these parish registers are the most comprehensive surviving source of information on Irish families in the 1700s and 1800s.

"The NLI has worked with the Catholic Church to preserve these registers since the 1950s, when we were initially invited to make microfilm copies. Now, in the 21st Century – and in keeping with our aim of enhancing accessibility through making our collections available online – we are delighted to embark on this major digitisation project."

What Type of Information Will be Available?

The 390,000 digital images due to be published by the NLI will be searchable by parish location only. They will not be transcribed or indexed by the NLI, and the images will be of the microfilms of the original registers, which – in some cases – were in poor condition when the microfilming took place. The images will be in black and white.

"Anyone who has traced their family history knows it can sometimes be frustrating due to illegible handwriting on original records or poor-quality reproductions or transcriptions," said Colette O'Flaherty. "Unfortunately, we do not have the resources to transcribe or index the images we are making available.

"We are fortunate, though, that the network of local family history centres throughout the country holds indexes and transcripts of parish registers for their local areas. We would envisage direct access to the digitised registers will complement the work of these local centres by enabling researchers to cross-reference the information they uncover, and assisting them in uncovering wider links and connections to their ancestral community."

Further details of this digitisation project will be announced by the NLI in the coming months.

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Contact: Martina Quinn, DHR Communications, Tel: 01-4200580 / 087-6522033

Notes to Editors:

The mission of the National Library of Ireland is to collect, preserve, promote and make accessible the documentary and intellectual record of the life of Ireland and to contribute to the provision of access to the larger universe of recorded knowledge. It is open, free of charge, to all those who wish to consult the collections for material not otherwise available through the public library service or an academic library. The Genealogical Office, the Office of the Chief Herald in Kildare Street, and the National Photographic Archive in Temple Bar are all part of the National Library.