

**Welcome to the biannual ISA
Newsletter, Autumn 2018**

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Through the eye of the needle

The RTÉ Sound Archives and their acetate legacy

The last decade or so has been a difficult one financially for archive services everywhere. Whilst we have had to cut our cloth to measure in the RTÉ Archives, the BAI Broadcast Archiving Scheme has helped us to put into action a number of otherwise impossible preservation projects which saw both radio and television recordings being digitised. Here in the RTÉ Sound Archive, we have been able to begin digitising our earliest format, acetate disc.

Raidio Éireann, broadcasting since 1926, began recording in 1937 to 'acetate' disc.

This is a gramophone-type disc but instead of being a single homogeneous material with grooves formed by pressing, it consists of a laminate of a core material (here, mainly aluminium) and a softer lacquer coating that was cut to form a groove. This was a recordable format that allowed for stamps to be created for mass-produced gramophone discs or for the preservation of once-off recordings such as radio broadcasts.



Example of a disc label for a recording of Brendan Behan's The Quare Fellow

Most discs are coated in a nitrocellulose lacquer rather than acetate, so although we use the term 'acetate' to describe

these discs, they are often more accurately called instantaneous, transcription, or direct-cut discs.

Due to the necessary softness of the lacquer, acetate discs do not stand up to much repeated playing. For the most part, early recording was for the purposes of production rather than posterity, and discs often fell foul of their reputation for temporary usefulness. Despite the vicissitudes of care, many discs did survive and made it to Donnybrook in Dublin 4 where RTÉ Radio has been situated since the early 1970s. On the evidence thus far, it appears that disc cutting either ended before or very soon after the arrival in Donnybrook in 1972. This may have been part of a change to work practices and modernisation. Acetate discs had been used less and less as sound effects became more readily available from commercial sources and as magnetic tape had asserted its superiority for broadcasting from the mid 1950s.

When we returned to the collection in 2004 to put order on it and prepare it for future digitisation, it was an education for the archivists involved. The names of well-established broadcasters in their early years appeared alongside the names of unfamiliar ones. The varied work of Radio Éireann as the national broadcaster also became clear from examples of the important collecting work of the Mobile Recording Unit. The work of our predecessors in the archive was also visible. Once re-ordered, we were able to associate discs with a card catalogue that had sat idle for many years.



Presto 8N acetate disc engraver used by the Canadian Broadcasting Company, 1950 (Wikipedia Creative Commons)

Despite the obvious advantages of digital technology, there was still a surprising degree of wonder for the writer that a catalogue could sit undisturbed for many decades and yet still be instantly accessible when called upon.

Our approach to readying the discs for digitisation was simple. To begin the process of gaining control of the collection, we numbered the sides of every disc: each would produce an individual digital file at the end. Using a simple spreadsheet we collected title, transmission date, ownership details, notes on condition, replay speed, disc size, etc. for all of the discs. The use of a spreadsheet meant a limited training requirement for Ciara Fahy, the documentation assistant we hired for the project. She was instead able to focus her energies on the paleography,

context and handling of the discs. Once we had done this for every disc and side, a picture emerged of the extent of the collection and how we might approach digitisation.

As disc technology declined in use, the expertise within RTÉ to replay the discs faded. The official role of the 'disc man', who cued three machines and played discs back with no little skill and timing, disappeared. However, an expert sound engineer, experienced with acetate disc, is capable of coaxing the best possible transfer from this format and given the limited number of replays possible, this is crucial. Although we had some pretensions of being able to do the work ourselves initially, it has become abundantly clear that this format is altogether too remote from our knowledge in RTÉ. There are a limited number of engineers capable of this work and Paul Turney of Cirenound, Cirencester, UK won the contract after a tendering process. The discs are physically cleaned using a specialist machine and transferred to a professional turntable, and Paul also takes a photo of each disc. Every disc requires attention as to how it was recorded and as to its condition. Each requires such a degree of individual treatment that a more factory-style approach to digitisation would not be possible.

New acid-free and bleach free paper sleeves were purchased from Neoplastik GmbH for the discs, formerly in older cardboard and paper sleeves. We commissioned six flight-cases to securely transmit the discs to Cirencester from Dublin (and back

again). An initial dry-run with a test batch was carried out, allowing us to plan routes and times of year for travel, all of the discs to be transported by our staff. So far, the process has run smoothly. We have used a simple barcode scanner for ease and accuracy of inventory control on either end of the trip and this has proved a worthwhile investment at around €20.



First batch of discs delivered for digitisation in Cirencester

The spreadsheet used for accessioning had a number of subsequent uses. Initially we were able to generate barcodes for each of the discs which were fixed to the sleeves. XML was generated for ingest to the in-house production system. Once supplemented with data from the digital files, we were able to generate basic catalogue records and also to embed preservation metadata in the files in accordance with the Broadcast Wave Format (BWF) standard.

While space here is too limited for me to wax lyrical about the value of open-source tools, I will say that this project has provided useful validation for their use in the archive. Philosophically, there is much to recommend the open-source movement to the archivist, but often the practical realities of corporate

policy or technical know-how can be barriers. While graphically driven applications like *glabels* were useful for some specific tasks, it was the command-line driven tools that allowed for batch processing, accuracy and control. If I was to mention one tool it would be *ffmpeg*. After some practice, it allowed us to query files and extract structured technical metadata as well as batch process codec conversions (like many broadcasters, we preserve in WAV and use mp2 for production). Many other more fundamental commands were strung together to provide us with bespoke tools.



Broken glass core disc with evidence of delamination visible – hopefully not beyond repair

Conclusion

This project is still in train and progressing at a steady speed. It has served as a useful testing ground for practice and principles that we'll apply in future digitisation projects. We still have quite a bit of research to do on the creation of these discs and their history in RTÉ. However, being able to listen to the recordings, read the card index and supply the content to programme-makers has given us a fresh appreciation of the work carried out by our predecessors. The general public will be able to enjoy this perspective

themselves when the discs are published on www.rte/archives.ie in the near future.

Brian Rice (Archivist, RTÉ)

[Digital archives: Mapping the 1911 Irish census for two Dublin suburbs](#)

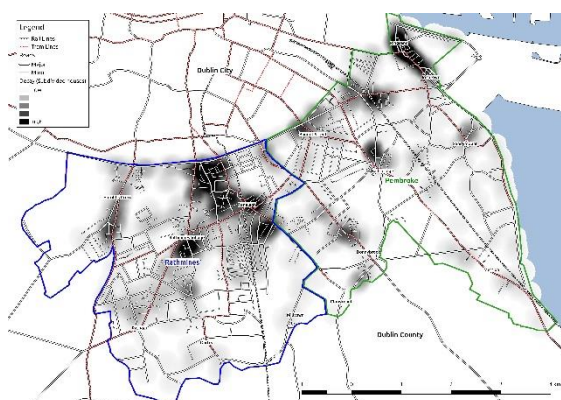
[The author linked digital data from the National Archives with GIS mapping to study the demographics of early 20th-c. Dublin for his MSc thesis](#)

Census data invariably includes a geographic element. A simple example is the total population of any county in Ireland with its defined boundaries. Modern census data is published at a range of levels including national, county, settlement, and the electoral divisions. In order to preserve anonymity, the lowest level geographical unit at which census data is published at is the 'small area'. Small areas vary in geographical size depending on population density and typically contain between 80 and 120 dwellings. Small areas were created by the National Institute of Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) on behalf of the Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSI) in consultation with the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

A great advantage for the researcher studying historical census data from the 1901 or 1911 census is that the complete data has been published down to the level of the individual. With the modern census you can at best find out how many people in your small area are in a certain age group or are employed in a particular sector;

when looking at the 1911 census you could perhaps find out exactly what age your grandmother was, what she was employed as and which county (if any) she was born in.

The 1901 and 1911 census returns were digitised and made available by the National Archives of Ireland. Individual household returns are arranged by county, district electoral division, and townland or street. For the 1911 census the house numbers for each household on a street are available. In this way it is possible to find out details of the inhabitants of an individual house in an urban area in 1911 if you have the address. For rural areas you can find details of each household in a given townland.



Map showing concentrations of subdivided houses between Rathmines and the Grand Canal

Difficulty however arises where addresses have changed or ceased to exist. A study carried out by UCD in 2011 found that one third of all addresses that existed in Dublin city (inside the canals) no longer exist as modern addresses. This is the result of redevelopment which led to the demolition of many houses and also to

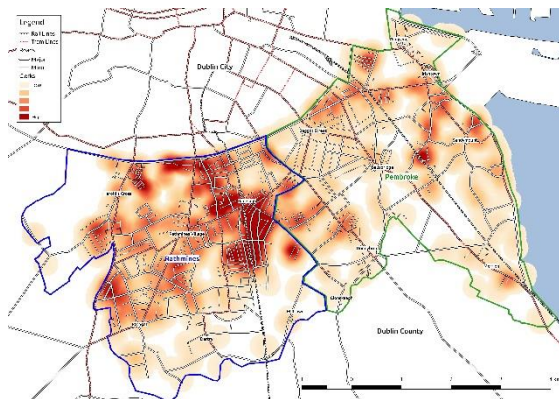
the renaming of many streets. This is less of an issue in suburban areas because there has been less redevelopment and because far fewer streets have been renamed.

Pembroke and Rathmines are two inner suburban areas of Dublin which were first settled as suburban areas in the 19th century. Each had its own local government until 1930; their borders respectively correspond roughly to the boundaries of Dublin 4 and Dublin 6. These two suburbs were chosen for this study because while they have many similarities their histories are very different. Both suburbs are a similar distance from Dublin city centre, ran to similar geographical areas and population numbers, had railway lines going through them, and contained large army barracks.

The development of Pembroke was tightly controlled by its single land owner, the Earl of Pembroke. This resulted in high levels of social segregation between wealthy residents living in high status housing and low income residents concentrated in older vernacular housing or public housing schemes. Rathmines, by contrast is characterised as following a piecemeal pattern of housing development driven by short-term commercial interests. After c. 1870 the chief market for new housing was the newly emergent class of white-collar workers.

Rathmines was less socially segregated than Pembroke with fewer residents at either extreme of the social spectrum. Both Pembroke and Rathmines had a

higher proportion of Protestants than the national or city average.



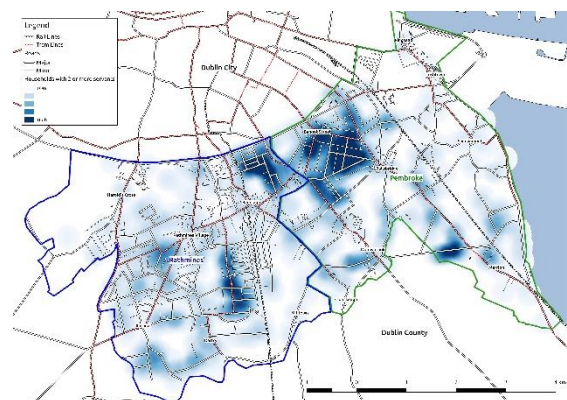
Map showing concentrations of individuals employed as clerks, concentrated in high density and subdivided houses

Indeed part of the impetus for the movement of people from the city within the canals to these new suburbs was for unionists to 'escape' the nationalist majority in the city. By 1911 both townships however had a Catholic majority. Other than a suggestion that particular religious groups may have been clustered around particular churches, there are no references to religious segregation in the literature.

The geocoding of addresses from the 1911 census was relatively time-consuming because while most addresses continue to exist many do not. This was particularly the case for labourers' cottages and other low income housing including early public housing schemes such as the Mount Pleasant Buildings. Using Thom's directory and 1st edition 25" ordnance survey maps it was however possible to geocode over 97% of households. During the course of the 20th century many of these houses were demolished and their inhabitants rehoused.

The most effective GIS technique for displaying information from the 1911 census on a map was found to be Kernel Density Estimation (KDE), commonly known as heat mapping. Kernel density estimation is based on the idea that a point pattern has a density at any location in a study area, not just the location of an event. This density is calculated by counting the number of points within a radius or kernel centered on the location where the calculation is made.

1911 census responses were not coded. Other than occupation, no questions relating directly to income or social status were included, and over 10,000 different occupations were returned for Pembroke and Rathmines. For higher income groups it was necessary to use another indicator: the number of live-in servants. Subdivision of properties can be seen as an indicator of decline in housing stock and the transition to from high status housing to tenements.



Map showing concentrations of households with two or more servants, a measure of higher income and social status

This visual representation of results suggests further avenues of research.

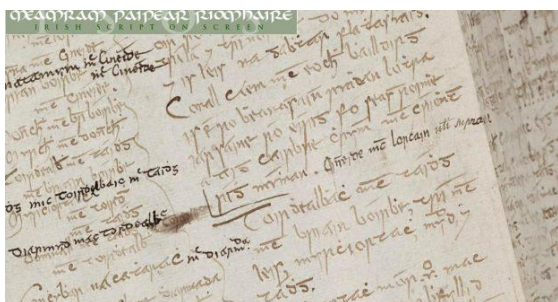
For example it was immediately evident that lower income residents were concentrated around villages which predated the sub-urbanisation of the area while high status households were concentrated in newly built areas. It was also evident that over time housing moved down the social scale: starting off as large single family homes and eventually being sub-divided, becoming sub-divided or becoming tenements.

This combination of digitised data with geospatial mapping is therefore highly useful for studying class, stratification, and the development of populations over time.

Fergus Fahey (Ordnance Survey)

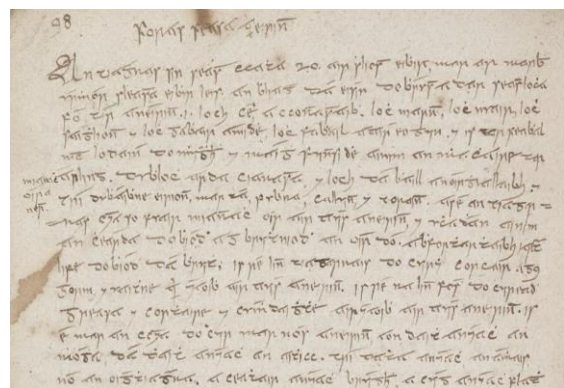
**[The Irish Jesuit Archives collaborate with ISOS](#)
Irish-language manuscript now online**

The Irish Jesuit Archives has recently collaborated with Irish Script on Screen (ISOS/ Meamram Páipéar Riomhaire), a project of the School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies to make available for research some of the Irish language manuscripts housed at Lower Leeson Street, Dublin.



From the annals: ISOS website (IL 1 [e] p.49)

The first manuscript of nine to be digitized (IL1) is now available from the ISOS website. Bound in leather, with the episcopal arms of John O'Brien, Bishop of Cloyne and Ross (1748-67), for whom it was likely compiled, this manuscript consists of a copy of Geoffrey Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, as well as poems, annals and genealogies related to the Uí Bhriain family, written by the scribe Mícheál Ó Longáin.



The beginning of 'Foras Feasa ar Éirinn' on the ISOS website (IL 1 [a] p.98)

The ISOS digitisation project allows for wider access to these 18th-century Irish language manuscripts, and reduces handling of some fragile material.

Digitisation is not the final act in the physical and digital preservation of the manuscripts, and accessibility will be an ongoing process.

More background to the manuscripts can be found on the ISOS website, Collections/ Irish Jesuit Archives, incorporating a full catalogue description by the late Fr Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, the Irish language scholar and professor of Early Irish in

Maynooth, originally published in 1980.

Damien Burke (Archivist, Irish Jesuit Archives)

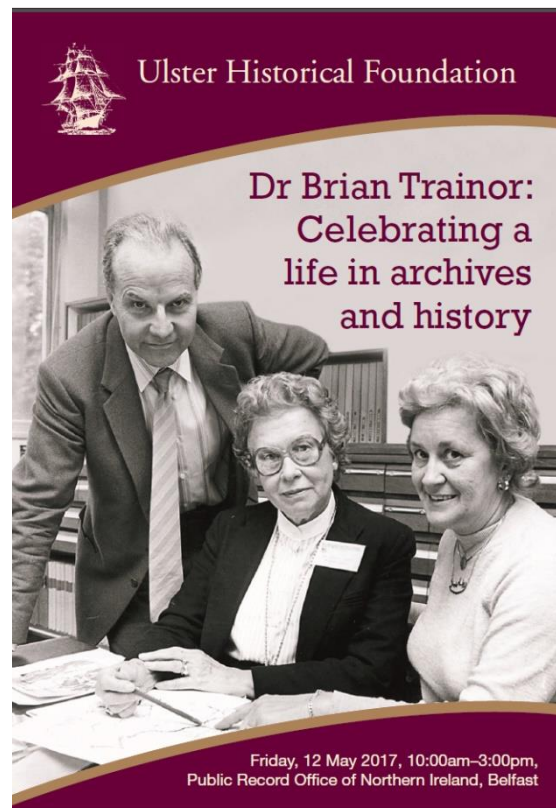
Brian Trainor: An Appreciation

Dr Brian Trainor, a former Director of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), died in August in his 91st year

Brian Trainor was the last of the ISA's honorary members, having outlived William O'Sullivan and Brendan Mac Giolla Choille. He will be remembered for his personal warmth, enthusiasm and generosity and for the encouragement which he freely offered to so many Irish archivists.

On 12 May last year the Ulster Historical Foundation celebrated Brian's 90th birthday with "A Day for Dr Trainor" when some of his friends, colleagues and collaborators were asked to speak about Brian. Here is the larger part of what I said:

One of the difficulties of framing something to say is that I have been warned to be brief and since few of my conversations and communications with Brian were brief that represents a challenge. For some reason it reminded me of the old Imperial Civil Service entrance examination, which many years ago, I ill-advisedly sat in the gloomy confines of Church House in Fisherwick Place. One of the exercises was a precis and so what follows is a condensing of a long and happy working relationship into a few short



A poster for the event

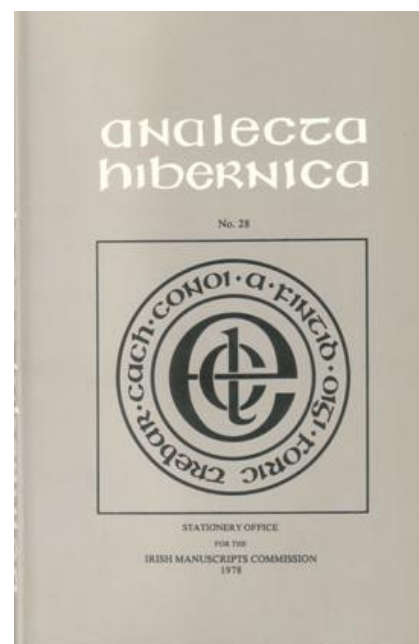
words.

As the archivist of the Church of Ireland from 1981 until 2016 much of my working life was concerned with the care and custody of parish records, and especially the often vexed matter of parish registers. As many of you will know, the older Church of Ireland parish registers of baptisms and burials up to 1870 and marriages up to 1845, are public records in Northern Ireland. As such, they are the property of the state and responsibility for them, irrespective of their place of custody, lies with the Public Record Office. And so, inevitably, I had much contact with PRONI in general and with Brian in particular.

However, my first contact with Brian was somewhat earlier. During the early

and mid-1970s I was occupied as a research student in the History School in Trinity. I had no aspirations to become an academic and thought that my abilities, such as they were, might be best employed if I became an archivist. I had mentioned this to my supervisor, Professor Louis Cullen, who evidently mentioned it to Brian, for one day in the old Record Office in Balmoral Avenue, I was wading through yet another tranche of the seemingly unending Foster-Massereene papers when one of the attendants came up to me. 'Mr Trainor wants to talk to you', he said. I was immediately filled with alarm. What had I done? Had I been making unreasonable demands on the staff? Had I inadvertently been exhibiting too much excitement at the contents of the papers, if such could be readily imagined? What was wrong? I was marched off to reception: Brian appeared and I have never forgotten my first sight of him. He was tanned, his greying hair had been carefully cut and he was dressed in a dark grey suit, black shirt and a white tie. For all the world he looked like someone who had swept off the set of the latest mafia movie leaving Al Pacino and Robert Duvall floundering in his wake. And we talked – Louis Cullen had mentioned my interest in archives, always looking for good people for PRONI, keep in touch – a firm handshake and he was gone. In one respect it was an inconsequential encounter but in another way it was significant for it introduced me to two aspects of Brian that I was to come across time and time again. First, of

course, was his innate kindness. He didn't need to come and talk to me; he could have written me a note but it was the personal touch which was significant and I and many archivists have cause to be grateful to Brian– for coming to our events, writing letters of congratulation on our achievements, offering sage advice, urging new projects on us. This too was my first experience of Trainor, the man of action, who I suspect had seen my name in the PRONI readers' register and decided, on the spur of the moment to act. So many times when I needed to do something, I have, in my head, heard his voice – 'For God's sake, Ray, can we not just get on and do something about this?' Sometimes I did and sometimes I didn't.



As Chairman of the Irish Manuscripts Commission, Brian Trainor edited four issues of Analecta Hibernica and oversaw the publication of seventeen primary source materials

Anyway, after a period working in the Manuscripts Room in Trinity, I was appointed archivist of the Church of Ireland and began work on 2 January 1981. One of the first letters I received, dated 9 January, was from Brian, and I can't resist reading the opening sentence which illustrates all too clearly another of Brian's attractive traits – a total absence of any pomposity.

'Dear Ray, I dictated a letter to you this morning to congratulate you on your new appointment and then stupidly erased part of the tape by dictating over it again. I enclose the final part of the letter which was possible to type.'

But what followed was three closely typed pages which turned out to be an agenda for the work on which we would collaborate over the succeeding years. There was to be consultation on new legislation for parochial records (Brian was always very conscientious in consulting the Church of Ireland about issues which might affect it), from time to time I was asked to intercede with difficult clergy, and then there was the potentially vexatious issue of search fees to clergy. When original registers were transferred to PRONI their usage was monitored and the fees which clergy might have levied when the registers were in local custody were calculated and the clergy were reimbursed. In some instances the sums were so small that it was not worth writing a cheque and we simply agreed to abolish the fees– I don't think that anyone noticed. But the biggest issue was the microfilming of parish registers and related records. The

registers had been filmed in the 1960s but there were gaps and Brian, not content with the statutory obligation to film the registers, also wanted to film the early vestry books. Then there were the parishes which straddled the border which had to be dealt with, and then, since the Public Record Office in Dublin had stopped microfilming, would it not also be a good idea to do the records in Donegal, Monaghan and Cavan? After all they were part of Ulster, and then, well you would also have to do Louth since it was part of the Diocese of Armagh. The logic may have been questionable but the enthusiasm was irresistible. And so the empire grew - but we were delighted as Brian arranged for the RCB Library to have copies of the films which greatly enhanced our holdings and made the Library more attractive to the growing band of genealogists that were beating a path to our door.



A portrait of Brian Trainor (courtesy of the Irish Manuscript Commission)

And of course the collaboration did not cease when Brian retired and moved to

the Ulster Historical Foundation, exploring new ways to bring the wealth of information on Church of Ireland parish records to the wider world. Assistance was sought with new publications, encouragement was offered to expand the RCB Library's parish register series, and there were visits to the Library often in the company of the formidable American genealogist, Donna Hotaling and her busloads of researchers. They were what the educationalists call, mixed ability groups, that is, some knew what they were doing and others did not. Inevitably therefore some needed a lot of attention and Brian ensured that they got it, enthusiastically directing their research, and dealing with the practicalities of transportation and hospitality.

This activity usually reached almost volcanic proportions before the annual visit to the States. One year I received a long letter from Brian detailing further forms of cooperation where he signed off 'This is just a holding letter that I want to get off before we depart.' He was leaving for the US the next day!

And so when I think of Brian I think of Eva Wilt. Eva is the wife of Henry Wilt, the hero of Tom Sharpe's comic novel, *Wilt*. Henry is a mild mannered man who is tortured by the apprentice butchers and bricklayers to whom he is obliged to teach English Literature in a College of Further Education, and by his wife, Eva, who is a whirlwind of activity – Henry deals with this by going to the pub. In one scene he and a pal are having a quiet drink and

discussing Eva's latest initiative. The pal asks Henry, 'Would you say that Eva is a forceful woman?' Henry thinks for a moment and replies, 'No', he says, 'Eva is not a forceful woman, Eva is a force'. Well, throughout his long working life Brian Trainor has been a force and without a shadow of doubt a force for good.

Dr Raymond Refaussé (Chairman, ISA)

[Irish Archives Resource \(IAR\) News](#) New blog about to be launched

To coincide with the Archives and Records Association (ARA)'s Explore Your Archive Campaign (17-25 November) the IAR will be launching a blog.



The IAR is an online database containing searchable descriptions of archive collections across the island of Ireland. The goal of the site is to highlight the wealth of archival resources available in Ireland and to assist users in locating records that are relevant to their research. Aside from disseminating information about collections the IAR undertakes outreach work and has so far produced two educational packs aimed at the Leaving Certificate and A-Level history

curriculum, taking Irish archive collections as its basis.

The introduction of a blog will not only complement the descriptions that are held online but it is also intended to raise awareness of what is happening in the archive community as a whole, from the perspectives of both practitioner and researcher. We are only too aware of how much effort is required to impart the value of archives to the wider public and the archive community is grateful for organisations like the Irish Society for Archives, and campaigns like the *Explore Your Archive*, that maintain the momentum for archival awareness. The remit of the blog is to discuss Irish archives and to highlight the wider issues affecting the sector which we hope will contribute to the larger conversation about our heritage. The IAR would welcome guest posts related to the field of archives and if you have any topic you would like to write about feel free to contact me via email at Natalie.J.Milne@gmail.com.

Please do visit our website for our first posts which will go live in November: <http://iar.ie/>.

Natalie Milne (Archivist, Irish Archive Resource)

[Dublin City Hall history lectures](#)

The Dublin City Hall Lunchtime Lectures were established by Dublin City Archives in 2001 to support our standing exhibition, *The Story of the Capital*, and to offer a means for people who carry out research into our

archives, to communicate their findings. The lectures have been going ever since and take place twice-yearly, on every Tuesday in April and in October. The venue is the Council Chamber, with its impressive design, comfortable seating and state-of-the-art microphones and A/V system, which is always being updated. The Lord Mayor of Dublin usually chairs one lecture in each series, and each series is built around a theme – recently we have highlighted the Decade of Commemoration, with series about the First World War and the 1916 Rising. The lectures are very popular and the Council Chamber is usually full to its capacity of 110 people.



Léachtaí Am Lóin - Halla Na Cathrach
Gach Máirt Le Linn
Mhí Dheire Fomhar 2018

Theme: Dublin Port and Dublin Dockers



Seomra na Comhairle, Halla na Cathrach,
Sráid an Dáma, Baile Átha Cliath 2

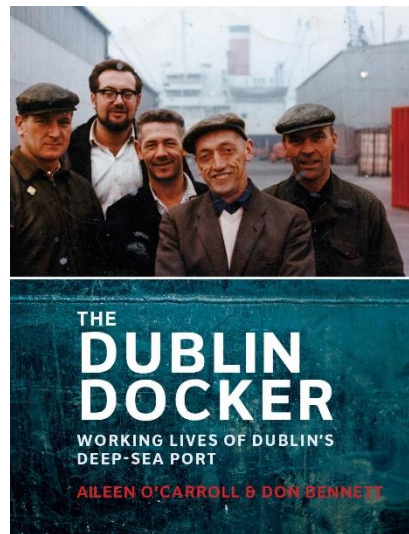
Saor cead isteach
Fáilte roimh chích, spásanna don té is tuise
Spás do 110 duine i Seomra na Comhairle
Tóg do chláisín féin leat chun éisteacht níos ghéire a fháil
Doirse oscailte ag 12.30 p.m.

The 31st series of City Hall Lectures took place in October 2018 on the theme of 'Dublin Port and Dublin Dockers' and the guest curator of the series was the labour historian Francis Devine. We chose this topic because the

photographic collection of the Dublin Dock Workers Preservation Society (DDWPS) is now at Dublin City Library & Archive, where it is curated by my colleague, Senior Librarian Dr Enda Leaney. This collection was painstakingly assembled by the DDWPS, calling on former dock workers and their families to donate photographs. Two of the talks were given by members of the DDWPS: Declan Byrne spoke about the Liffey Ferry, while John 'Miley' Walsh talked about the containerisation of Dublin Port, a process which, while it meant that many dock workers lost their jobs, those who remained acquired new skills which proved to be transferable. Lar Joye, formerly of Collins Barracks and now Heritage Director at Dublin Port, opened the Collins Barracks and now Heritage Director at Dublin Port, opened the series and spoke about the history of Dublin Port since 1707. He also shared with the audience some of the exciting plans that the Dublin Port Authority has to promote and share its heritage collections. Aileen O'Carroll is the Policy Manager at the Digital Repository of Ireland and with Don Bennett, she is the author of the best-selling book *The Dublin docker: working lives of Dublin's deep-sea port*.

This was also the topic of her lecture, which revealed that the Port operated independently, almost as a second city, and that the dockers even had their own argot which outsiders could not understand. The other speakers were Joe Mooney, of the East Wall History Group, with a virtual tour of Docklands' Monuments and Plaques,

and Francis Devine, who spoke about 'Dublin Port and Trade Unions'.



A O'Carroll & D Bennet (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2017)

Anyone who knows Francis will know that a song is always included in everything he does, so after every lecture a different strong singer performed a ballad about various Dublin Dockers, while the story of the ship, The Ouzel Galley, whose pirated fortune was the basis of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce, was recounted in song after the first lecture by Luke Cheevers.

The 32nd series of City Hall Lectures is planned for April 2019 and is on a completely different topic – 'The religious guilds of medieval Dublin'. No booking is required, and all are welcome on a first come, first served basis.

*Dr Mary Clark
(Dublin City Archivist)*

ISA EVENTS FOR THE DIARY

- Frances McGee, will lecture on 'The Archives of the Valuation of Ireland, 1830-1865', Tuesday, 6 November 2018, 6.30, Dublin City Library and Archives (DCLA), Pearse Street, Dublin 2.
- The ISA Journal *Irish Archives* (with articles arising from the Gate Theatre seminar in October 2017) will be launched on Thursday, 6 December 2018, at Dublin City Hall (time TBC).
- John Gibney will lecture on the centenary of Irish foreign policy, Tuesday, 5 February 2019, 6.30, also at the DCLA.

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Antoinette Doran,
Membership Secretary
National Archives of Ireland
Bishop Street, Dublin 8

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Irish Society for Archives

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