

RESEARCH GUIDE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES UK & IRELAND

The national archives seemed like a fitting place to start these research guides. While most archives are specialists in certain subjects, places or themes, national archives hold collections relating to a particular place and records relating to that place. They explore their history and the people who have lived there. The UK has four national archives; The National Archives, based in Kew, London; National Records of Scotland, in Edinburgh; The National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), based in Belfast. Ireland also has its separate National Archive, which is based in Dublin.

National archives are a valuable resource for researchers, historians, genealogists, and anyone interested in the UK and Ireland's past. This guide provides an overview of the services and resources offered by the five National Archives and provides tips for using the archives effectively.

At the end of this guide you will find step by step information regarding how to access each national archive and what to be aware of.

1- Why use this guide?

This guide provides an overview of the national archives in the UK and Ireland and their collections. The national archives are separate institutions, each holding records related to their specific country or region. They are a valuable resource for researchers, historians, genealogists, and anyone interested in the UK and Ireland's past. This guide provides an insight into what each archive holds, its history, and the services they offer to help researchers make the most of their visit.

2- History and establishment of each national archive

The National Archives, based in Kew, London, was established in 1838 and holds over 11 million historical government and public records dating back over 1,000 years.

National Archives Ireland, based in Dublin, holds records of the government of the modern Irish state from its foundation to approximately 1988.

National Records of Scotland, based in Edinburgh, was established in 2011 as a merger of the National Archives of Scotland and the General Register Office for Scotland. It holds records from the 12th to the 21st centuries related to Scottish life.

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), based in Belfast, was established in 1923 and holds millions of documents, including genealogical sources such as church registers, landed estate records, court records, and wills.

The National Library of Wales, based in Aberystwyth, is the national legal deposit library of Wales, meaning it is entitled to receive a copy of every book published in the UK and Ireland. It holds the largest collections of archives, portraits, maps, and photographic images in Wales.

3- The Who and the What of the Archive

The National Archives, Kew London:

The National Archives holds records spanning over 1,000 years of history. The UK government sends records that have been deemed worthy of permanent preservation to this archive. Their collection includes records from the World War One era, such as army service records, merchant navy service records, and army war diaries. Other

records available include poor law records and many more. However, it's important to note that The National Archives does not hold or issue copies of birth, marriage or death certificates.

National Archives, Dublin:

The National Archives for Ireland contains collections of files from state departments, courts (including wills), and public bodies such as the Central Statistics Office, the Ordnance Survey, and the Valuation Office. It also contains private collections, including family and estate papers, solicitors' collections, hospital collections, and business records.

National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh:

The National Records of Scotland houses records of births, deaths, marriages, divorces, civil partnerships, dissolutions, and adoptions. It also holds Scottish government records from the 12th century to the present day. Additionally, it has records created by courts of law, churches, businesses, landed estates, and other corporate bodies, as well as Scottish census enumeration books and the National Health Service Central Register.

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), Belfast:

PRONI's collection includes public and private records, primarily dating from the formation of Northern Ireland in 1921 to the present day. The term "public record" generally refers to any document created by official sources such as government departments and non-departmental public organisations such as the courts, schools, and hospitals. PRONI's collection also includes a diverse range of privately deposited records, such as letters, journals, diaries, photographs, and albums.

The National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth:

The library's collections cover a broad range of subjects related to Wales, including Welsh literature, history, culture, and politics. It also holds significant collections related to the Celtic languages and culture, as well as manuscripts, archives, maps, and photographs. In addition to its physical collections, the National Library of Wales also provides access to a large number of digital resources.

4- Where to Begin:

- Before delving into archives, it's important to contextualise your research by consulting secondary sources. These can include existing publications and their bibliographies, which may lead you to previously used sources and reference codes. Take ample time to prepare before heading to the archives or using their online collections.
- Getting Started:
- Register for an account to book a workspace, request documents, and save your research.
- Familiarise Yourself with the Collections:
- National archives hold a vast array of records, including government documents, maps, photographs, and films. Use the online catalogue to search for specific

collections and make a list of the records you would like to see. Spend some time searching different terms to familiarise yourself with terminology.

- Plan Your Visit:
- Check the opening times and plan your visit in advance, and book a place to work if you need access to the original documents. While some national archives have parts of the collections digitised, many are not, so you'll need to request the items you want to view.
- Request Documents in Advance:
- To view original documents, you must request them in advance. This allows the archives to retrieve the documents and have them ready for you when you arrive.

5- Visiting the Archives

When visiting a national archive, it's important to be prepared. You should plan your visit in advance, check the archive's opening times, and read their guidelines for visitors. You may need to register for a reader's ticket, which will give you access to the archives' reading rooms. There is information about this at the end of the guide.

You should also think about what records you want to look at and prepare a list of references or record series numbers. It's a good idea to check whether the records you're interested in are available online, as this may save you time when you visit. Staff at the archive will be able to help you locate the records you want to look at and can offer advice on using the archive's facilities.

6- Searching the Archive and Using the Collections

The vast collections in national archives can be overwhelming, but the advanced search tool can help narrow down your search. Use dates to restrict your search. National archive collections are divided into different collections, which vary from archive to archive, so it's important to explore their collections online.

Keep Notes of Your Research:

Record the documents you have seen and make notes on what you have learned. This will help you avoid duplicating your efforts and will make it easier to pick up where you left off on your next visit.

Get Help from Staff:

The staff are knowledgeable and can help you find the information you need. Don't hesitate to ask for help if you're having trouble!

Each national archive mentioned in this guide has materials on its website to help with certain collections. These resources are an excellent way to help you understand the context of the records you're researching.

7- Online Resources

All the national archives offer a range of online resources that you can access from home or anywhere with an internet connection. These resources include online catalogues and indexes, digitised records and documents, and research guides.

The National Archives:

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/>

The National Archives website offers a range of research guides on a variety of subjects,

including family history, military history, and records of government departments. They also provide access to their catalogue and a range of digitised records, including census records, wills, and military service records.

National Archives Ireland:

<https://www.nationalarchives.ie/online-resources/>

National Archives Ireland provides access to their online catalogue, digitised records, and a range of research guides, including guides to genealogy and house history.

National Records of Scotland:

<https://www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk/>

National Records of Scotland provides access to Scotland's official family history website, ScotlandsPeople, which offers access to a range of digitised records, including census records, birth, marriage, and death records, and wills. They also provide access to their catalogue and a range of research guides.

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI):

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/proni>

PRONI provides access to their online catalogue, which includes a range of digitised records, including wills and probate records, court records, and church records. They also offer a range of research guides and online exhibitions.

The National Library of Wales:

<https://www.llgc.org.uk/>

The National Library of Wales provides access to their online catalogue, digitised records, and a range of research guides, including guides to family history and local history.

8- Conclusion

National archives are a fantastic resource for anyone interested in UK and Irish history, whether you're a professional researcher or just curious about your family's past. Each archive is different, but all offer a wealth of records and resources that can help you explore the past and gain a better understanding of the present.

By following the tips and resources in this guide, you should feel confident and comfortable in using the archives effectively and making the most of their collections. Whether you're looking to research your family history, explore the history of your local area, or study a particular aspect of UK or Irish history, the national archives are a great place to start.

National Archives, Kew

Before Your Visit:

- First, visit the National Archives website at <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/> and create an account.
- Once you have an account, click on the "Plan Your Visit" tab on the website's homepage.
- You need a readers ticket to access the reading rooms and to view documents. This can be done via the link, <https://secure.nationalarchives.gov.uk/login/reader-register>
- You will be directed to a page where you can fill out an application form for a Reader Pass. Complete the form with your personal information, including your name, address, and date of birth.
- Next, you will need to provide two forms of identification. Acceptable forms of identification include a passport, driving license, or utility bill. Please note that the documents must show your name and current address.
- Once you have completed the application form and have your identification documents ready, you can either bring them to the National Archives in person or submit them online.
- If you choose to submit your documents online, you will be asked to upload digital copies of your identification. The National Archives will review your application and, if approved, will send you a temporary reader pass via email.
- You can then choose which documents to see. You have the following options:
 - standard advance document order (up to 12 documents plus three reserves) – a one-day visit.
 - bulk advance document order (if you want to see 20-40 documents all from the same series) – a one-day visit.
- There is more info via the following link
<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/visit-us/about-the-book-a-reading-room-visit-service/>

On Arrival:

- When you arrive at the National Archives, you will need to present your temporary reader pass and your original identification documents. The staff will then issue you with a permanent reader pass.
- Search Room Guidelines:
- When you arrive at the National Archives, go to the registration desk to collect your reader pass.
- Once you have your reader pass, you will need to store any bags, coats, and other personal belongings in the lockers provided. However, you may bring in a notepad, pencils, and a laptop without a case.

During Your Visit:

- The National Archives provides clear plastic bags for you to carry in your belongings. Please use these bags to transport your items around the search room.
- Photography is allowed in the search room, but you must complete a copyright declaration form before taking any photographs. You cannot use flash photography or tripods.
- Food and drink are not allowed in the search room. However, there is a cafe on site where you can purchase refreshments.
- If you have any questions or concerns, the search room staff are available to assist you.

PRONI

Before Your Visit:

- Bring photographic identification for registration purposes.
- Check out the National Archives Northern Ireland website for information leaflets and useful links: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/information-leaflets>, <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/getting-proni-and-opening-hours>, and <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/registration-and-preparing-visit>.

On Arrival:

- Complete a registration form and have your photo taken (approximately 10 minutes process).
- Receive a visitors card which lasts for 10 years. If lost or forgotten on your next visit, a £10 charge applies to get a new one printed.
- Place all bags, luggage, and overcoats in lockers. You can bring your laptop, camera, phone (on silent), and purse with you in a PRONI clear plastic bag available at Reception.
- Make your way upstairs to the Search Room where staff are available to offer advice and guidance.

During Your Visit:

- No photography is allowed in the Search Room.
- Use of mobile phones in the Search Room is prohibited but can be used in the Reading Room to take photos of records you have ordered. Alternatively, you can use your camera, iPad or buy credits to use the self-scanner.
- The Search Room has internet terminals, ordering terminals (used for ordering PRONI documents to view in the Reading Room), microfilm readers/printers, will/probate/admin calendars, and a small library.

National Archives Ireland

Before Your Visit:

- Check the National Archives Ireland website for more information on planning your visit: <https://www.nationalarchives.ie/visit-us/plan-your-visit/>.
- To consult records in the Reading Room, you will need a valid Reader's ticket. You can apply for a Reader's ticket online before your visit using the link: <https://www.nationalarchives.ie/visit-us/readers-tickets/apply-for-readers-ticket/>.
- You will need to submit two forms of identification, which you can now upload with your online application.

During Your Visit:

- The Reading Room is open Monday to Friday from 10 am to 5 pm, with closure for lunch between 1-2 pm.
- Walk-ins are now available, so no appointments are required.
- To consult records in the Reading Room, you will need to present a valid Reader's ticket.
- If you applied for a Reader's ticket online, the ticket will be ready for collection in person when you visit.
- If you have not uploaded the required documents as proof of address and identity during your online application, you will be required to present them before your Reader's ticket is issued to you.

For more information about the National Archives Ireland and their services, visit their website at <https://www.nationalarchives.ie/visit-us/plan-your-visit/>

National Records of Scotland

Obtaining a Reader's Ticket:

- Visit the website for information on how to obtain a reader's ticket: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/visit-us/historical-search-room/readers-ticket>.
- The ticket is valid for up to three years.
- To obtain a reader's ticket, you must personally apply in the Historical Search Room and provide the following:
 - Photographic proof of identity
 - Proof of your current address (e.g., utility bill in original form, not scanned or mobile phone viewable; handwritten addresses are not accepted)
 - Two passport-sized colour photographs
- Once issued, the reader's ticket is valid in the Historical Search Room but not the Legal Search Room. However, you can consult catalogues and indexes in the Legal Search Room.
- Important notes:
 - Present your ticket when entering the General Register House.
 - Report any loss of your ticket or changes in recorded details immediately.

Visiting Advice:

- Visit the website for advice on visiting: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/visit-us>
- The main entrance to the General Register House (GRH) is currently closed for specialist work on the Adam Dome.
- Visitors to the Historical Search Room and Scotlands People Centre should use the Garden Entrance, following the signage.
- All other visitors should go to the main reception area or the accessible reception at New Register House.
- It is recommended to read the following pages before your visit:
 - [Safety Measures in our buildings](#)
 - [Historical Search Room](#) (including access to [Maps and Plans](#))
 - [Legal Search Room](#)
 - [ScotlandsPeople Centre](#) (for family history research)
 - [Disabled access and facilities](#)

Research Guides available on the website:

<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/research-guides>.

- Browse the A-Z list of research guides or read the overview of the range of records held in historical records.
- Researching People: Find out which records are useful for researching people, including family history and biography.
- Researching Places: Discover information about researching places and how understanding administrative geography can enhance your search.

Visitors to the Historical Search Room and Scotlands People Centre should report to the relevant search room via the Garden Entrance. Signage is in place to direct customers and visitors. All other visitors should go to the main reception area or the accessible reception, both at New Register House.

National Library of Wales

Here is the process of visiting the North Reading Room at the National Library of Wales.

Register for a Reader's Ticket:

- All readers must register online for a reader's ticket.
- To register in advance, complete the form available at:
<https://www.library.wales/visit/before-your-visit/readers-ticket>

Identification Requirement:

- Remember to bring two forms of identification, with one including your current address.

Arrival and Registration:

- Upon arrival at the Library, proceed to the Reception area.
- Your documents will be checked, and a photograph will be taken.
- A reader's card will be issued, which is valid for 3 years.

Storage and Prohibited Items:

- Before entering the Reading Room, you must store your bags, coats, food, drink, etc., in the provided lockers.
- Clear bags will be provided to carry any necessary items into the Reading Room.
- No payment is required for the lockers.

Greetings and Assistance:

- In the Reading Room, a staff member will greet you upon arrival.
- They will inquire if you have requested any specific items.
- Feel free to ask any questions regarding the use of the Reading Room.

Reader's Card Scanning:

- Before entering the Reading Room, you will be asked to scan your reader's card at the security gate for entry.

Attached to this guide is a copy of the Terms and Conditions of Use of the Reading Room.