



Surviving Irish Records

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

ALMOST 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 was lost forever.

Ernie O'Malley, author and IRA director of 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 its 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 ancestor's 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

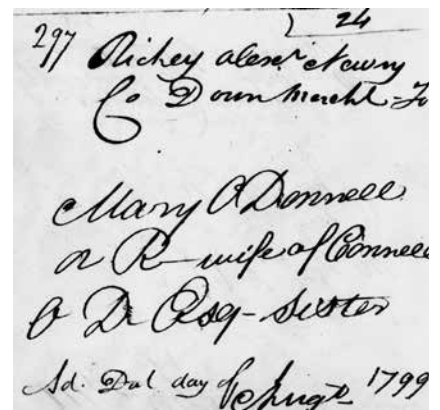
My 5x great grandfather Alexander Richey was born into a protestant family in 1750 in Newry, County Down, Northern Ireland. He worked as a merchant in Newry, probably in the linen trade like his sons, that were all involved in either the linen, silk and woollen trades in Dublin.

Alexander married Mary O'Donnell and had at least five children, probably more given the gaps between the boys 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

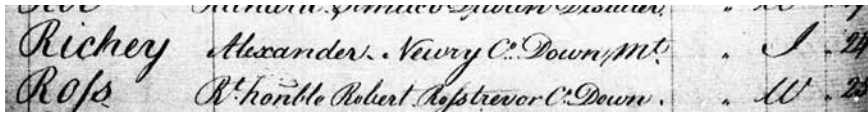
which helped me uncover more about their lives -

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)

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".



Index entry for Alexander Richey. (FamilySearch.org)

The Betham entry for his daughter-in-law's father Thomas Ridgely, gives the information that he was of Booterstown, Dublin, and that his will was dated on 11 March 1780, but proved on 12 May 1787, and that his beneficiaries were his wife Honory, and his son Thomas Ridgely. This is the only time I have seen mention of either of the wives' names.

Ireland Diocesan and Prerogative Wills & Administrations Indexes 1595-1858 can be found for free on Family Search at <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/3460908>. Although this is an index only document, it tells me that Alexander Richey was of Newry, County Down, and that he was a merchant, and that he died intestate (without making a will). I can also find Thomas Ridgely in the index, and that he did make a will.

To ensure the legality of a will of a deceased person, a grant of probate must be made by the courts. As part of this process, the original will is logged with the courts. If someone dies intestate, without having made a will, the courts can grant letters of administration for the disposal of the estate, which is what happened in Alexander's case.

You can also search the National Archives of Ireland Calendars of Wills and Administrations 1858-1922 www.willcalendars.nationalarchives.ie/search/cwa/index.jsp and the Ireland Diocesan and Prerogative Wills 1595-1858 on Find My Past at www.findmypast.co.uk.

Trinity College Registers 1769-1825 – the indexes to these Dublin

University registers can be found online at the Digital Collection database of Trinity College Dublin at <https://digitalcollections.tcd.ie>. They are indexed by surname, and then you can look up the full Admission Record in the chronological register once you find the year of admittance. I found Alexander's son James Richey admitted in 1814 at the age of 15 and he went on to train as a minister.

The full record provides the date of entry, name, age, religion, father's name and profession, county of birth, and place of previous



Trinity College Admission Records entry for James Richey. (<https://digitalcollections.tcd.ie>)

<p>RICHEY, ARTHUR, Pen. (Mr Jones), Nov. 2, 1829, aged 17; s. of Andrew, Mercator; b. Dublin.</p> <p>RICHEY, EDWARD, Pen. (P.T.), July 2, 1838, aged 17; s. of Andrew, defunctus; b. Dublin. B.A. Vern. 1843.</p> <p>RICHEY, JAMES, Pen. (Mr Gaven), Nov. 7, 1814, aged 15; s. of Alexander, Mercator; b. Down. B.A. Vern. 1821.</p> <p>RICHEY, RICHARD, Pen. (P.T.), July 1, 1833, aged 19; s. of Andrew, Mercator; b. Dublin. B.A. Vern. 1845. M.A. Vern. 1857.</p> <p>RICHEY (RICKY), WILLIAM, Pen. (P.T.), July 7, 1828, aged 15; s. of William, Mercator Sericarius; b. Dublin. B.A. Vern. 1834.</p>

Trinity College Registers Alumni Dublinenses 1924 edition for Alexander Richey, father of James.

education. James' entry gives the Latin form of his name 'Jacobus', religion 'Pr' (Protestant), age '15' and states his father is Alexander Richey, a merchant, born County Down, and his last schoolmaster's name 'Mr Gaven'. If we consult the 1924 published edition of Alumni Dublinenses on Find My Past UK we can also find his entry, and it gives additional information regarding his degree (BA - Bachelor of Arts) which he achieved in Vern (Spring) 1821. Two of Alexander's sons attended Trinity College, William a silk merchant in 1828 and James a minister of the Church of Ireland in 1814 and three grandsons, sons of Andrew, Arthur (surgeon 1829), Edward (minister 1838), and Richard (minister 1833).

Dublin Ireland, Probate and Marriage License Index 1270-1858 – This index, on Ancestry www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/2719, has been extracted from wills, letters of administration, and marriage licenses within the Diocese of Dublin. A fabulous resource and often the only place you will find reference to a marriage bond or will entry.

Several of Alexander senior's children and grandchildren appear in this index which gives the name of both parties, the year, and the source of the information e.g., M.L. (marriage license).

Newspapers can be a wonderful way to flesh out the bones of our ancestor's stories, and Find My Past has a great collection of newspapers and periodicals in its Irish Newspaper Collection which can be searched by a keyword or name, <https://search.findmypast.com.au/search/newspapers>. You can also search the Dublin Gazette 1750-1800 or the Belfast Gazette 1922-2018, Irish Marriage and Death



Name, Place, and Occupation.	Year.	Nature of Record.	Page.
Richardson, Thomas, Shoe-lane	1857	I.	320
" Thomas and Elizabeth Eleanor Armstrong ...	1813	M.L.	421
" Thomas and Julia Campbell	1828	M.L.	95
" Thomas and Ann Hopkins	1801	M.L.	117
" Thomas and Mary Anne James	1845	M.L.	216
" Thomas and Mary Anne Mackey	1829	M.L.	191
" Thomas and Henrietta Sixsmith <i>alias</i> Auden ...	1856	M.L.A.	—
" Thomas and Jane Smith	1833	M.L.	308
" Thomas and Ellen Walsh	1855	M.L.	435
" Thomas Verner and Elizabeth Robinson ...	1807	M.L.	189
" William, Ballyrogan, Arklow, co. Wicklow, farmer.	1831	W.	458
" William and Mary Anne Glose	1851	M.L.	131
" William and Susannah Davis	1808	M.L.	258
" William and Mary Doolan	1826	M.L.	384
" William and Frances Duffy	1832	M.L.	196
" William and Catherine Gibson	1816	M.L.	4
" William and Eleanor Kavanagh	1838	M.L.	276
" William and Mary Keegan	1812	M.L.	312
" William and Mary Marsh	1833	M.L.	273
" William and Maria Nelson	1823	M.L.	93
" William and Alice Parker	1804	M.L.	416
" William and Rachel Powell	1817	M.L.	302
" William and Susan Reynolds	1832	M.L.	214
" William and Sarah Saul	1828	M.L.	52
" William and Anna Maria Supple	1855	M.L.	451
" William and Harriet Taylor	1819	M.L.	83
" William Henry and Ann Mahon	1819	M.L.	40
" William Smyth and Frances Askins	1835	M.L.	521
Richey, Alexander and Matilda Browne	1827	M.L.	469
" Alexander and Nancy Warren	1804	M.L.	439
" Andrew (Richey) and Sarah Ridgley	1807	M.L.	147
" Charlotte and Valentine Gould	1849	M.L.	388
" Henry and Jane Chapman	1838	M.L.	265
" James (Rev.) and Elizabeth Bellett	1825	M.L.	239
" Louisa and John Shipton	1857	M.L.A.	—
" Mary and Robert Boyde	1804	M.L.	378
" Mary and George Sherwood	1819	M.L.	77
" Mary Anne and Thomas Bryan	1847	M.L.	208
" Mary Jane and Thomas Gillam Jenkins	1831	M.L.	30
" Robert and Catherine Smith	1803	M.L.	335
" William, Nerney's-court, servant	1817	I.	368
" William and Ann Phillips	1807	M.L.	191

Dublin Ireland Probate and Marriage License Index for Alexander Richey. (Ancestry.co.uk)

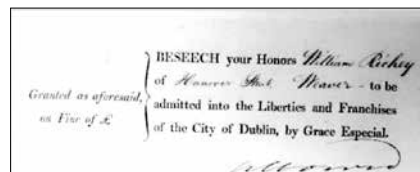
Notices in American Newspapers, and the Irish Newspaper Transcript Archive 1756-1850. Try searching for an address an ancestor lived at in the search field.

I found articles about two of Alexander senior's sons in the Dublin Evening Post. In November 1805 Mr Alexander Richey of Dame Street, Dublin and his brother had commenced business

selling linen drapery items in his large warehouse, with extensive vaults and wine bins to be let. Alexander junior was involved in supporting the building of an episcopal chapel in 1832 in connection with the Asylum for Penitent Females (where his nephew the Rev Richard J C Richey would be later be chaplain). Son Robert Richey advertised his Cap, Gown

and Surplice Warehouse in Grafton Street Dublin in 1827. Birth, marriage, and death notices are also extremely useful and may give clues that lead you elsewhere.

Freeman of Dublin City records 1774-1824 – If your ancestor worked in a trade in Dublin, these records can provide lots of information such as name, year, county, term and year of admittance, occupation, how they were admitted, whether by birth (signifying the eldest surviving son of a freeman), service (having duly served an apprenticeship to a Dublin freeman of the relevant trade), grace (by special request, favour or recommendation) or gratis (admitted by special arrangement and without payment of fees).



Entry for William Richey in Freeman of Dublin City records 1822. (<https://search.findmypast.com.au/search-world-Records/freemen-of-dublin-city-1774-1824>)

The medieval term 'freeman' meant someone who was not the property of a feudal lord, but who had the right to earn money and own their own land. People who were protected by the charter (rules) of their town or city were often 'free', hence the term 'Freedom of the City' and were therefore able to trade in the city without restriction.

One of Alexander's sons, a silk merchant was admitted as a Freeman in Midsummer 1822. The record advises that William Richey of Hanover Street, Dublin, a weaver, was admitted into the Liberties and Franchises of the City of Dublin, Midsummer 1822 by Grace (special recommendation).



Download free PDF images from the central civil repository in Dublin.

These records are also on Find My Past, <https://search.findmypast.com.au/search-world-Records/freemen-of-dublin-city-1774-1824>.

Irish Civil Records - The General Register Office in Dublin is the central civil repository for records relating to births, stillbirths, deaths, marriages, civil partnerships, and adoptions in Ireland. The Indexes cover Births 1864-1919, Marriages 1845-1944 and Deaths 1864-1969 with non-Roman Catholic Marriages recorded from 1845.

Download the free PDF images. Genealogically speaking the births give us the child's name, sex, place and date of birth, father's name and occupation and the mother's name. Sometimes they also include a baptismal name. The marriages include the parties and witnesses' names, bachelor/spinster/widow, residence, father's name and occupation, and the deaths are particularly informative providing the date, place, name, age, married/single, occupation, cause of death, and informant. I've found

the Irish death certificates to also include extra information such as 'wife of John Cullinan, labourer', etc., <https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/civil-search.jsp>.

You will also find some Irish church records on this website, but the coverage is limited to Dublin, and the Counties of Kerry, Carlow, Cork and Ross. Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland and some Presbyterian records are also included.

Catholic Parish Registers at the National Library of Ireland

These registers contain records of baptisms and marriages from most Catholic parishes in Ireland and Northern Ireland up to 1880. Unfortunately, the only way to search these records is by bringing up the parish by keying in a parish name, and trawling through the individual baptism, marriage, and burial registers year by year to find the entry you are seeking. You can select individual years to look through. See <https://registers.nli.ie>. You may find them indexed on Ancestry too.

Dublin City Council Library Records - This website houses a great number of free to search and download records for the county of Dublin. Some of the databases include graveyards, electoral lists 1908-1915, burial registers, Ancient Freeman of Dublin, plaques and memorials, Dublin Directories 1647-1706, parish registers, Dublin Guild Merchant Roll and many other obscure records. The whole database, or individual sets are searchable by surname and first name and/or location at <https://databases.dublincity.ie/index.php>.

Keying in my unusual surname of 'Richey' gives me three datasets to look at. The first, the Ancient Freeman of Dublin lists four records - one being my William in 1822. The others are for a 1762 cutler, 1743 shoemaker and a stationer in 1766. Clicking on the index record will display the full original document.

The database has also found William in a Jury List and an Electoral List. The Electoral lists give their full address, occupation, and a description of their property e.g., house and yard.

1901 and 1911 Ireland Census

- A systematic government census of the Irish population was taken every 10 years from 1821 until 1911. No census was taken in 1921, due to political unrest because of the War of Independence and Civil War, but the work of taking census resumed in 1926. Unfortunately, because of the fire at the Public Record Office, only the 1901 and the 1911 census survive. These are free to search at the National Archives of Ireland, <http://census.nationalarchives.ie>.

Ireland Census Search Forms 1841 and 1851 database - The Irish government used these forms



No. on Map.	Denominations.	Tenant's Names.	Gale Days.	Yearly Rent	Quantity of Land, Statute Measure.	Tenure of Tenant.	Observations.
2	No. 40, PEMBROKE ROAD	Alexander G. Richey, repve. of Alexander Richey.	Forward, 25th March and 29th September	£ s. d. 28 12 0 30 0 0	A. R. P. 0 0 16 0 0 16	Lease dated 26th November, 1827, from Charles La Grange to Alexander Richey, for 146 years, from 29th September then last, at the yearly rent of £50, payable 25th March and 29th September, above all taxes or other charges whatsoever, of house and premises in Lower Baggot Street, now known as No. 40, Pembroke Road. A fine of £400 was paid by lessee to lessor upon the execution of said lease. This Lease contains a covenant for the fining down of the rent of £50, and the lessee subsequently in pursuance of said covenant fined the said rent down to £30 a-year, by payment of a sum of £286 0s. 0d. The said lease reserves unto the Right	These premises will be sold subject to all such rights and easements as shall legally affect them at the date of the sale.

Entry from the Landed Estate Court Rentals of Dublin in 1827. (Accessible on www.findmypast.com or www.ancestry.com)

to search the 1841 & 1851 Census to prove the age of people applying for the Old Age Pension was over 70 years. Birth certificates did not exist because the person was born before Civil Registration had begun. The census search forms contain the applicant's name, address, residence in 1851 with county, barony, parish, townland and street as well as the parent's names and head of household in 1851. These forms can be a great substitute for the missing census, and if a descendant applied for the pension, they needed to provide information on their parents including their 1841 or 1851 address.

In the case of my ancestor Michael Fennessy, he applied to the Irish Government for the pension in 1916 and stated his mother Mary Conheady (giving me her maiden name), and his father Edmond Fennessy were living at Laccaroe in Lower Feakle, County Clare in 1851. The document includes a note that this information was drawn from the 1851 census.

These records are freely available on Familysearch at <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collect/ion/2346275>.

Landed Estates Court Rentals 1850-1885 – These documents were printed to facilitate the sale of bankrupt estates and include information about tenants, the lots

they rented, the terms of their tenancy, as well as a map specifying the boundaries. By the time of the Irish Potato Famine many Irish estates became insolvent as debts exceeded earnings. The Rentals are effectively printed sale-catalogues, which were circulated to prospective purchasers in advance of the sale. They were compiled with the intention of attracting purchasers and of providing information on the estate.

On the entry for Alexander Richey junior's property at 40 Pembroke Road, Dublin, there is a great long description advising of the sale of the property. The lease dated 26 November 1827 was from Charles La Grange to Alexander Richey for 146 years, with year rent payable of 50 pounds. Many covenants are also described. The property was now offered for sale for a term of 150 years with an annuity of 20 pounds. The tenement valuation is 103 pounds. These databases can be accessed on both www.findmypast.com and on www.ancestry.com.

So, using these online databases and records I discovered many details about Alexander Richey and his children. Where they were born, addresses they lived and worked, trade records, marriage, property rental and sales, electoral rolls, church officers, deaths and where they were buried.

Some of the Richey sons struggled with insolvency, as their linen drapery and woollen businesses were affected by imports. This too was reported in the papers.

The 1829 newspaper recorded son William speaking at a public meeting in Dublin, entitled "Distress in the Liberty of Dublin – regarding the present state of distress in the manufacturing districts of the city, in particular silks and other produce of the loom due to the free admission of foreign silks". William was a churchwarden and claimed an exemption from parish fees in 1841 because of his office.

One son James moved across to England and served as a parish curate, and a memorial plaque survives today at St George Nympton in Devon.

Unfortunately, the daughters of Alexander Richey are not mentioned, and without being able to look at a full copy of his will, may never be known. Nevertheless, do not give up if you have Irish Ancestors, as you can see, there is still plenty to find! ☺

MICHELLE DENNIS is a blogger, family historian and freelance writer living in Melbourne, Australia. She has been researching her own family history for the past 30 years.