



## An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí Department of Social Protection

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### **Ministers Varadkar and Humphreys launch millions of historic birth, death & marriage records on [www.irishgenealogy.ie](http://www.irishgenealogy.ie)**

The Minister for Social Protection, Leo Varadkar T.D., and the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Heather Humphreys T.D., have today (Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2016) announced that 2.5 million historic records of Births, Marriages and Deaths from the General Register Office (GRO) are now available online for the first time.

The images, which include over 12.5 million individual records dating back as far as 1864, will add considerably to the large volume of historical data already accessible on [www.irishgenealogy.ie](http://www.irishgenealogy.ie) free of charge.

Among the records are the birth, marriage and death register entries for Tom Crean, the Antarctic explorer, whose grandson Brendan O'Brien joined the Ministers for today's event in the National Library. The online database also includes death registers for the Leaders of the 1916 Rising, including James Connolly, Thomas Clarke, Pádraig H Pearse and Eamon Ceannt.

**Speaking today Minister Varadkar said: "These records give us a new insight into our past and our forebears. We are delighted to launch this incredible set of online records, which will help people in Ireland and around the world to reconstruct their own family histories. It is a triumph of exploration, because the records allow us all to explore our own past, and discover new things about our ancestors. What used to require weeks and months of research in dusty archives can now be done online in a matter of minutes.**

**"Given the theme of exploration, it's fitting that we are joined at this launch by the grandson and great-grandson of one of the greatest polar explorers of all time: Tom Crean. For the first time, the original register entries of Tom Crean's birth, marriage and death are now available to view. These records also provide an incredible insight into the 1916 Rising which helped to create the modern Irish State. We can view the death registers for its leaders, including James Connolly, Patrick Pearse, and Thomas Clarke. It helps to bring the past alive, and we can piece together fragments to create a whole story."**

**Speaking today Minister Humphreys said: "This is the first time that this huge volume of records is being made available online and it is a very important development in family history research for Irish people and Irish descendants both at home and abroad. Anyone wishing to research their family history will have a veritable treasure trove of records available at the click of a button and I've no doubt that these records will help unlock many mysteries that people have been trying to solve for years.**

"I am delighted that through the cooperation of our two Government Departments, Minister Varadkar and I can expand the range of records available online for those wishing to find out more about their family history. Genealogy is becoming increasingly popular, and is an important source of tourism. By providing as much information as possible free online, the Irish Government is leading the way internationally and encouraging the Diaspora to come to Ireland to explore their roots.

"The website [www.irishgenealogy.ie](http://www.irishgenealogy.ie) has grown to be an invaluable resource for historians, researchers and those interested in looking into their family tree. We have re-engaged with our history throughout this centenary year in an unprecedented way, and I am committed to further developing this online resource in the years ahead."

ENDS

#### Notes to Editors:

[www.irishgenealogy.ie](http://www.irishgenealogy.ie) is a genealogy website run by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Following today's launch, the website now contains over 12.5 million Index records linked to 2.5 million historic registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths. This is the first time that these registers have ever been opened to the public. The historic records of Births, Marriages and Deaths now available cover the following years:

Births:	1864 to 1915
Marriages*:	1882 to 1940
Deaths*:	1891 to 1965

*\*The Images of the registers of Marriage (pre 1882) and Deaths (pre 1891) are being updated by the General Register Office (GRO) and further years going back to when registration commenced will be added to the website in due course.*

#### **What information can be found on the historic register of Births, Marriages and Deaths?**

Early birth registers contained the date and place of birth, name and sex of the child, name, surname and dwelling place of father, name, surname and maiden surname of mother, rank or profession of father, signature, qualification and residence of the informant, when registered and the signature of the registrar.

Early marriage registers contained the date when married, name and surname of the spouses, their age, condition (meaning marital status) rank or profession and residence at time of marriage, their fathers' names, surnames and ranks or professions, where the marriage took place and by whom the marriage was witnessed and solemnised.

Early death registers contained the date and place of death, name and surname of deceased, sex, condition (meaning marital status), age last birthday, rank, profession or occupation of the

deceased, certified cause of death and duration of illness, signature, qualification and residence of informant, when registered and the signature of the registrar.

In total the website contains over 15 million Index records covering the following years:

Births: 1864 to 1915

Marriages\*\*: 1845 to 1940

Deaths: 1864 to 1965

\*\*Roman Catholic Marriages were only recorded from 1864 onwards.

**Other records on the website:**

The website also contains over 3 million church records from Dublin, Cork and Kerry. Most of those records pre date civil registration. In addition, the website contains a web portal that allows people to do one search which will scan a range of records. The range of records includes the 1901 and 1911 Census Records, Tithe Applotment Records, Military Archives and Ellis Island records and Castle Garden Records (New York).

## Check against delivery

### **Speech by Minister for Social Protection Leo Varadkar at the launch of 2.5 million historic birth, marriage & death records National Library of Ireland, 8 September 2016**

I'm really pleased to be at the launch of this important set of historical records of Births, Marriages and Deaths with Minister Humphreys.

If we don't understand the Ireland of yesterday, then we have no chance of imagining the Ireland of tomorrow. Today we are delighted to launch an incredible set of online records, which will help Irish people in this country and around the world to reconstruct their own family histories.

It is a triumph of exploration, because the records allow us all to explore our own past, and discover new things about our ancestors, and the people who lived in this country before us. What used to require weeks and months of research in dusty archives can now be done online in a matter of minutes, and we can explore areas of our history that were previously hidden or blocked off.

Given this theme of exploration, it is appropriate that we are joined at this launch by the grandson and great grandson of one of the greatest polar explorers of all time.

Tom Crean spent more time in the Antarctic than either Scott or Shackleton and has been rightly described as a 'modern icon'.

I have long admired him for his heroism, and greatly enjoyed a pilgrimage to his South Pole Inn in Annascaul.

On an expedition in 1912 Crean described how he had travelled 'along the crossbar to the H of Hell'. In 1916, after the wreck of the 'Endurance', he kept the spirits of the men alive on the perilous journey to South Georgia by singing the same song over and over again. Describing the song, Shackleton later said that 'somehow it was cheerful'.

Crean's determination helped save many lives, and it is right that his life is remembered.

This project means that for the first time, the original register entries of Tom Crean's birth, marriage and death are now available to view. It is a great honour to welcome Crean's grandson and great-grandson to this event, and I would like to thank Brendan O'Brien, his wife Kay, and their child Scott for coming this evening to mark the occasion. It is a pleasure to meet you.

Crean's older brother was in the RIC and was killed during the War of Independence. It is a reminder in this decade of commemorations of the complexity of our past, and the different traditions and legacies that must be remembered. It is precisely because it is not simple that resources like this are so important.

These records provide an incredible insight into the most dramatic events of that period. The 1916 Rising was the event that helped create the modern Irish State, and here we can view the death registers for the Leaders of the 1916 Rising, including James Connolly, Patrick Pearse, and Thomas Clarke.

It helps to bring the past alive, and we can piece together fragments to create a whole story. This will be an invaluable resource for schools and libraries, researchers, and members of the general public.

The success of the recent centenary celebrations shows just how meaningful these records are for Irish people both in this country and across the world. And here Minister Humphreys deserves enormous credit for steering the official commemorations through potentially dangerous waters with enormous skill and ability. Even Tom Crean could not have steered a better course! There was no controversy, despite the attempt by some quarters to create some, and the centenary was a moving and respectful commemoration.

As Minister for Social Protection I am delighted to celebrate the launch of this resource. My Department has an interesting connection with these records. Civil registration was introduced in Ireland in 1845 with the enactment of the Marriages (Ireland) Act 1844. This Act provided for registration of Protestant marriages and civil marriages. The system was extended to registration of births, deaths, and Catholic marriages in 1865.

When Saor Stát Éireann was established in 1922, the Adaptation of Enactments Act ensured that registration would continue in the new State. Responsibility was transferred from the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to the Minister for Local Government and Public Health, and later to the Minister for Health, when the Department of Health was established as a separate entity in 1946.

Registration was then transferred to the Department of Social & Family Affairs in 2008. And so – thanks to that long and complicated route - I am delighted to be here to represent my Department.

I want to acknowledge the hard work of officials in both Departments, the Registrar General, and GRO staff in making this happen.

I also want to thank the Director of the National Library of Ireland, Dr Sandra Collins and her staff for making this wonderful building available to us.

And I want to thank Dr Collins for permission to reproduce the photograph of Sean Mac Diarmada which now hangs in a prominent position in the foyer of my Department's Headquarters building, Áras Mhic Dhiarmada.

I hope that many people on this island and beyond will use this resource to research their family history and make that unique personal connection with the past.

Thank you.

**ENDS**