

## Thinking about a 1916 ancestry project?

Primary and post-primary schools are invited to engage in a project that traces a family tree back to 1916. This is intended to give students a real experience of researching archival material and to afford them an opportunity to find out more about the conditions in which people lived in 1916. This project has links to a number of curricular areas, including SPHE (primary), CSPE (post-primary), History and Geography.

Schools are invited to trace a family tree back to 1916. This can be a family tree of a student, group of students, past student, teacher, principal, a local community figure or anyone else considered appropriate. It is a matter for schools and teachers to determine which figures are appropriate for selection. Some students have already been working on some family or local stories in this way, e.g. for the All-Island Schools History competition, or perhaps a local history or Education Centre competition. In this event, they may of course use some of the same material for this ancestry project, as it is not a rival competition in any way.

As this is not a competition, it is not vital that teachers or students work to a particular deadline date. Ideally, we hope to get and upload (to Scoilnet) examples of ancestry projects throughout 2016, but if the work needs more time, there is still great value to be gained from engaging with the project, at any stage, and there will be more guidelines and resources available from [www.irishgenealogy.ie](http://www.irishgenealogy.ie) later in 2016 too. That site is operated by the National Archives, under the auspices of Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

This is not a race and good genealogical research does take patience and time. Nor is it essential that a student undertakes research on his or her own family, or that the family 'tree' which is developed include every branch of the family. The intention is to ensure that the ancestry project helps students to engage with varied methods of finding out about the past, and that they enjoy the search.

## Making a Start

The following are just some ideas which may be helpful to teachers and students. For those who have the time and inclination to get into ancestry research now, the website portal at [www.irishgenealogy.ie](http://www.irishgenealogy.ie) is well worth a visit, already. When starting out in search of a family tree, there is excellent advice within that site which can be located under 'Research in Ireland: Starting Your Family History' or at the link: [www.irishgenealogy.ie/en/irish-genealogical-research-getting-started/how-to-start-your-family-history](http://www.irishgenealogy.ie/en/irish-genealogical-research-getting-started/how-to-start-your-family-history).

In addition, the two national cultural institutions which provide significant advice and online supports are the **National Archives** (main site at [www.nationalarchives.ie](http://www.nationalarchives.ie)) and **National Library** ([www.nli.ie](http://www.nli.ie)), each of which have designated genealogy research sections. There are lots of other websites and publications which specialise in family history research and genealogy, but it is important for student researchers to make sure that teachers or parents assist and advise in any such research. It is also important to watch out for any services which could involve having to pay a fee.

Among the very good advice at [www.irishgenealogy.ie](http://www.irishgenealogy.ie) is to start by talking with older **family members**, some of whom will be able to provide information and clues about ancestors. This is as true for ancestors who lived in Ireland, but also for those who may have lived abroad a century ago. Other family members may also be able to provide information on the whereabouts of **graves and headstones**, or other details that could provide information. Some large cemeteries, particularly Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin, even have databases which record details of those buried there.

A very good resource in Ireland is the online **census returns** for 1901 or, better still, 1911. This can be accessed free of charge via the web addresses mentioned in the previous paragraphs, or even more simply at [www.census.nationalarchives.ie](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie). There is a search facility, so if you know the name of an ancestor or other person from 1916 whom you want to research, provided he or she was alive in 1911 you should be able to locate details of the person, their family, home, occupation and other details. Sometimes, the search using a person's name does not come up with a 'hit'. However, by searching for the home town, street or townland instead, a record may be found that way instead. This happens because name spellings can vary, or the original census information was recorded differently to how we think today. Searching, and using different ways of searching, is part of the fun and part of the learning process too.

Students whose families originally came from outside of Ireland may wish to trace their family's roots back to where they were living in 1916. Many important historical events were happening in 1916 in Europe and around the world. This project has the potential to highlight the importance of those wider historical events outside of Ireland that may have affected students' families.

Depending on the country of birth of an ancestor who lived in 1916, there may well be census returns and other sources of information available online. It is impossible in the space here to list the main national archives and libraries of every country but a 'search' using an ancestor's name, or town of origin, can work well for many countries. Do be prepared for difficulties, as the language of the foreign archives may not be familiar, or material may not be available online. Finding out what is not available can be as important as what is available, sometimes.

### **Going into more Detail**

The National Archives is developing a resource for schools that will provide information on how to engage in ancestral research and how to use the many public resources that are available to support this research. This particular resource will be hosted on [www.Irishgenealogy.ie](http://www.Irishgenealogy.ie) and will go live later this in 2016. Already, there are other possible areas to research on this site, apart from the census returns previously mentioned. There are, for example, the **wills** made by soldiers who died in World War 1, and details of how to check **parish registers or church records** for possible ancestors. You may, or may not, find information through these resources, but again the fun of the search, and the research skills you will be developing, make it all valuable work.

Schools are encouraged to make links to **local historical societies, active retirement groups**, relatives of people who lived during 1916 and other local groups

to help inform their research. A list of local historical societies, under the Federation of Local History Societies, can be accessed at [www.localhistory.ie](http://www.localhistory.ie) and a list of active retirement groups at [www.activeirl.ie](http://www.activeirl.ie). Sometimes, people in these groups or organisations can be really knowledgeable about people's ancestors, or about the place and times they lived in.

It is worth bearing in mind too that the vast majority of schools in Ireland, primary or post-primary, existed a hundred years ago too. There may well be old **school roll books** containing details of ancestors from long ago, hidden away on some dusty shelves. Obviously, permission to look through such records would have to be obtained in advance.

Some students may have had ancestors who were involved in the independence struggle in Ireland between 1916 and 22, and gave **witness statements** about their experiences. If so, a further resource worth checking out is at the Bureau of Military History, [www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie](http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie). Here anyone can search for an ancestor, or any person from a particular locality, using the search facility and either the surname or the place name they are associated with.

Whether searching for an ancestor or someone else, it is always important to understand the time they lived in. Old **newspapers**, and sources like **trade or commercial directories** (e.g. Thom's) can be very useful for doing just that. Many public libraries have digital collections of old local newspapers that can be accessed in the branches or sometimes online on a personal computer. Most county and city libraries now also have their catalogues available on the internet – see [www.askaboutireland.ie/libraries](http://www.askaboutireland.ie/libraries). The National Library of Ireland also has a huge collection of **photographs**, from the Lawrence Collection and other archives, which can be searched by place name online at [www.nli.ie](http://www.nli.ie). Many of these date from the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century and can give a great idea of what a student's home town, street or area looked like a century or so ago.

## **In Conclusion**

Hopefully, some of the ideas outlined above will inspire and assist students interested in engaging with ancestry research. As other resources become available, including the exciting work being undertaken at the National Archives, this guide will be updated on Scoilnet too. May the search be interesting, educational and fun in equal measure.

When ready, students' 1916 ancestry projects can be uploaded to Scoilnet by any teacher using a Scoilnet Account - <https://www.scoilnet.ie/scoilnet-services/scoilnet-accounts/> - available to all teachers registered with the Teaching Council. In order to upload, the projects need to be saved as either a PDF or a PowerPoint and there is a file size limit of 50mb. As the projects will be universally accessible on the web teachers need to be mindful of copyright - especially in relation to the use of images. There is no school limit to the number of projects that can be uploaded and all projects will be searchable by school or roll number at [www.scoilnet.ie/duchas](http://www.scoilnet.ie/duchas).