

PRONI put Victorian Street Directories online

Overview

Business problem

- Valuable original documents
- Excessive usage leading to deterioration

Solution

- Sequential scanning, digitisation, OCR and indexing
- Centralised web-based Digital Asset Management System

Benefits

- Powerful online search
- Global accessibility
- Better management of archive
- Better customer service

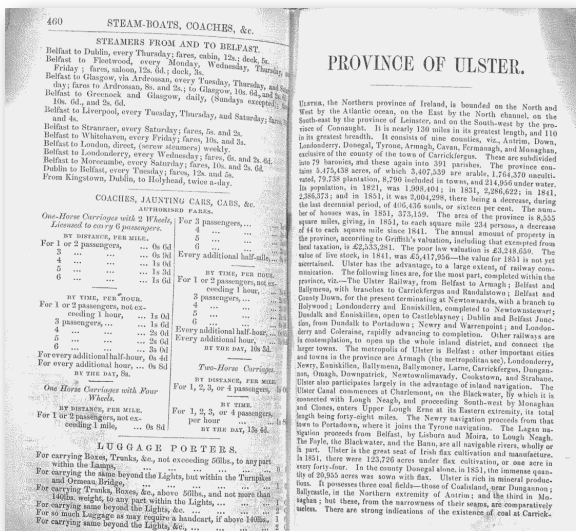
The Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) is the official archive for Northern Ireland. It's role is to preserve records of historical, social and cultural importance and make them available for the information, education and enjoyment of the public.

One of their most overused resources is the Street Directories from 1819 to 1900. These are valuable old books containing a listing of the names, addresses and occupations of the inhabitants of Northern Ireland as well as lists of commercial establishments operating in the cities and town lands, and so are a vital resource for historical and genealogical researchers.

In 2008 PRONI embarked on a project to digitise every page in the directories (approximately 20,000) and put them online, allowing researchers to search on every single word. The site was launched in 2009 (<http://streetdirectories.proni.gov.uk>). It uses MediaCore, a Digital Asset Management (DAM) system from Belfast-based software company Aetopia (www.aetopia.com).

The site contains over 29 directories, and covers Belfast and provincial towns in Northern Ireland and in counties Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan from 1819 to 1900. Users can search the Street Directory contents by a number of criteria. Pages from the directories are available either as PNG format images or DjVu documents.

Speaking at the launch, the DCAL Minister Nelson McCausland said, "Tracing your family tree has become increasingly popular with programmes such as 'Who do you think you are?', sparking the public interest. Everyone wants to know who their ancestors were, where they came from and what they did for a living and these online street directories will make finding out a whole lot easier. An increasing number of PRONI visitors come from outside the UK and one of my Department's key goals is to digitise key cultural resources and make them easily available to the worldwide audience. This service will prove valuable for those visitors who prefer to start their research in the comfort of their own home."



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Nelson McCausland
Minister, DCAL

Street directories contain a wide range of information about people, places and organisations and are an extremely useful source for all kinds of research such as tracing the location of a particular person or checking when a firm was in business. Genealogists can search for an address to find out who lived there many years ago.

According to PRONI:

“The street directories featured on this website consist of original volumes held by the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) covering the years 1819 to 1900. These volumes, which were previously on open access in the Search Room in PRONI, were very heavily used and the paper in some of the volumes is very fragile. They were therefore at risk as pages or parts of pages had already been lost or damaged and further handling would have endangered their long term preservation. As such, it was decided to scan the directories and to provide a search facility which would enable users to find key words in a section of a directory, in a particular directory or in any of the directories.”

The Street Directories online system complements the existing databases and records which are available electronically, such as the Ulster Covenant, the Freeholders Records and the Wills Indexes. The next chapter in the continuing work of PRONI is to make more of its resources available online”.

For more information contact:
Aidan McGrath, Aetopia;
aidan.mcgrath@aetopia.com
M +44 7803 008 035

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ECIT Institute
Queen’s Road
Belfast BT3 9DT
T +44 28 9099 8767
F +44 28 9099 8065
www.aetopia.com
skype: aetopia

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