



Access to Troubles Related Information at The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)

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PRONI



Public Records Act (Northern Ireland) 1923 ^{F1}

1923 CHAPTER 20

An Act to establish a Public Record Office of Northern Ireland for the reception and preservation of certain public records appertaining to Northern Ireland, and for purposes connected therewith. [22nd June 1923]

WHEREAS it is provided by sub-section (2) of section nine of the Government of Ireland Act, 1920 ^{M1}, as modified in its application to Northern Ireland by or in pursuance of the Irish Free State (Consequential Provisions) Act, 1922 ^{M2} (Session 2), that the Public Record Office of Ireland shall be for the purposes of the said Government of Ireland Act a reserved matter, but that nothing in the said sub-section shall prevent the Parliament or Government of Northern Ireland establishing a Public Record Office of Northern Ireland for the reception and preservation of public records appertaining to Northern Ireland which otherwise would be deposited in the Public Record Office of Ireland, and that, if a Public Record Office of Northern Ireland is so established, provision may be made by the Governor of Northern Ireland for the removal to that Office of such probates, letters of administration or other testamentary records granted or coming into existence not earlier than twenty years prior to the appointed day for the purposes of the said sub-section as in his opinion properly belong to Northern Ireland and can conveniently be removed to that Office:

Annotations:

F1 functions transf. by SR 1999/481

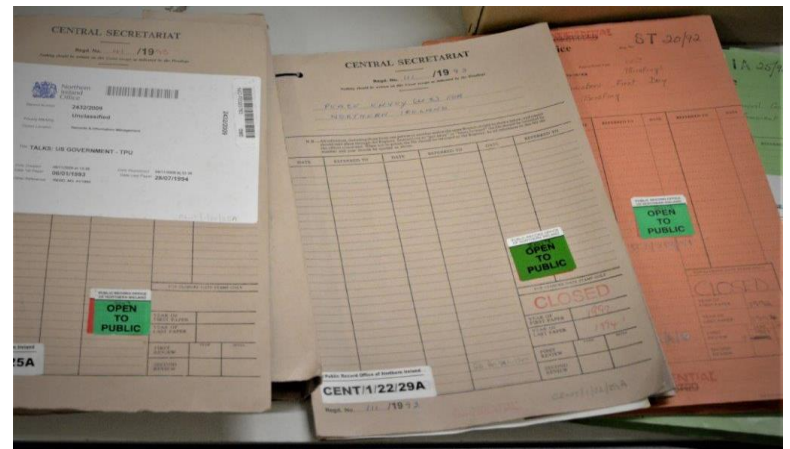
Marginal Citations

M1 1920 c. 67

M2 1922 c. 2 (13 Geo. 5 sess 2)

Official Archive of Northern Ireland

- Central government – 9 core departments
- County records – local authorities
- All public bodies / functions – court records, schools, hospitals

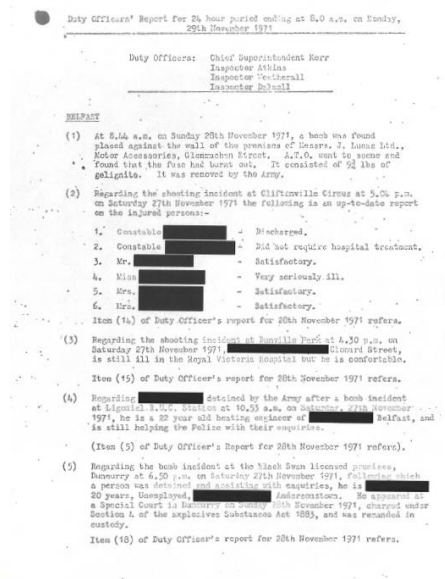


The Public Records Act (Northern Ireland) 1923

- PRONI is designated as the official place of deposit for all public records in Northern Ireland.
- This provided for records to be 'preserved' and for 'lists' or 'calendars' to be drawn up, but with no clear necessity to make them fully accessible.
- With the advent of the *Freedom of Information Act 2000* (FOIA), the Act was amended, and emphasis moved towards making our records more readily available to the citizen.

Troubles Related Records

- **Cabinet Secretariat Papers (up to 1972)**
- **Cabinet Minutes, Disturbance reports.**
- **Central Secretariat (1970 - 2000)**
Includes information concerning:
 - Overall security situation in Northern Ireland
 - Civil Rights Movement
 - Power Sharing Executive (Sunningdale)
 - Anglo-Irish Agreement
 - Talk Process in 1990s
 - Belfast / Good Friday Agreement
- **NIO Files**
 - Criminal Justice, Prisons, Internment



Troubles Related Records

➤ Court Records

- Belfast City Commission and Crown Court files (up to c.1998)
- Court of Appeal
- Kings / Queens Bench Judgement
- Criminal Injuries
- Coroner's Inquests (up to c.1998)



➤ Prisoner files and registers

➤ Public Prosecution Service Records – (1972-1983)

➤ Youth Justice records



Northern
Ireland
Office

➤ Hospital Records

Access to Information at PRONI (Reactive)

- Freedom of Information Act 2000
(c.600-700 requests a year)
- Data Protection Act 2018)
(c.350 requests a year)
- Court Files Privileged Access Rules (NI) 2016
Designed to enable anyone directly affected by the troubles to obtain information outside FOIA.
(c.30-40 requests per year)

Historical FOIA Exemptions

Bodies Dealing with Security Matters (S23)	National Security (S24)	Defence (S26)	International Relations (S27)
The Economy (S29)	Investigations and proceedings - Protection of Confidential Sources only (S30 (2))	Law Enforcement (S31)	Parliamentary Privilege (S34)
Prejudice to effective conduct of public affairs (S36)	Royal Family communications and the Awarding of Honours (S37)	Health & Safety (S38)	Closed subject to Environmental Information Regulations (S39)
Closed subject to the Data Protection Act 2018 (S40)	Commercial Interests – (S43) • Falls away after 30 years	Prohibitions on disclosure (statute bars) (S44)	

A word on 'historical records,' and the Right to Know...

- FOIA: 'Historical Record' as being a record of twenty years or older.
- Written requests for information may originate from anyone or anywhere in the world.
- Applicant blind.
- PRONI must state whether or not information is held.
 - If held, it is possible that some information may be protected by one or more FOIA 'exemptions.'
 - If so closed, we must clearly (in plain English!), explain why it cannot be released and importantly, extend the right to appeal.

Annual Sensitivity Review – Proactive Release

- Release of Departmental Files only
- 30 Year Rule introduced in 1976 amended to become the 20 Year Rule by the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010
- 10 Year transition phase began in 2012 (delayed by Pandemic)
- PRONI will be in step with the 20 Year Rule when files dating from 2005 will be released in December 2025
- NB: Departmental files due for release in 2027 will be born digital

Annual Sensitivity Review – Proactive Release (contd)

- FOIA s46 Code Part 2 – PRONI must consult the functionally Responsible Authority
- RA provides Access 'recommendation' + ***Public Interest Test ('PIT')***
- There is Presumption of 'openness' with Historical records – most sensitivities erode over the passage of time.
- PRONI can exercise a challenge function if it disagrees with any aspect of the access recommendation or the RA's more restrictive approach to release of information/SRG.
- Final decision on release of information remains with Minister.
- ASR releases files resulting in the, being Fully Open, Partial Closed on in some cases Fully Closed.

Historical FOIA Exemptions – example: protect *Personal Information* (s.40)

- Will the release of information from PRONI records in any way breach a citizen's rights as a data subject under the terms of the *Data Protection Act 2018*?
- **Medical** – diagnosis, inherited genetic disorders, survived injuries.
 - **Psychiatric / clinical psychology assessments**
 - **Social worker reports**
 - **Family circumstances**
 - **Religion**
 - **Sexuality**
 - **Politics** (in NI, this gets complicated FAST – may be linked to s.38 H&S)
 - **Financial** – benefits, national insurance, bank details
 - **Home address** (in context, not MPs)
 - **Education**
 - **Juvenile (borstal)**

Historical FOIA Exemptions – example: protect *Security* (including s.23, 24, 26, 30(2), 31)

- Will the release of information from PRONI records in any way affect our country's security and / or related matters?
 - '*Bodies dealing with Security Matters*' – MI5, RUC Special Branch, SOF but also certain historical 'covert action' units: MRF, FRU, SSU, etc.
 - Jeopardise the safety of the country (i.e. 'how to' construct and detonate a homemade bomb or 'VB / RC-IED'...)
 - Prejudice the defence of the country by undermining the operational effectiveness of the Armed Forces
 - Assist terrorists, criminals or foreign powers
 - Impair the work of police and other agencies by revealing intelligence gathering, forensics or crime detection techniques (i.e. firearms identifiers – the 'spider web')
 - Compromise effectiveness of 'human source' intelligence (informants)

Historical FOIA Exemptions – example: protect *Health and Safety* (s.38)

- Will the release of information from PRONI records in any way do harm to someone mentally or physically?
 - Security forces, prison / judiciary officers, other junior officials, suppliers / contractors – personal identifiers ('the threat level')
 - Identity of person supplying information to security forces (i.e. 'Supergrass' / 'converted prisoners')
 - Address of an innocent, uninvolved witness to a serious crime, especially where paramilitary organisations linked
 - Unsubstantiated allegations (paramilitary links, malfeasance, child abuse)
 - Graphic accounts of murder, manslaughter, abuse.
 - Traumatic sexual offences – family generational 'ripple effect' (HIAI)
 - Police photographs (from Post Mortem / scene of death)

Historical FOIA Exemptions – example: protect *Information provided In Confidence* (s.41)

- Will the release of information from PRONI records in any way breach the common law duty of confidence?
 - Last days of a dying person – blood tests, weight, last words, etc.
 - Medical procedures performed on a soldier mortally injured in an attack
 - Psychiatric treatment, medication, observations
 - Minutes of social work meeting on young people's care

Historical FOIA Exemptions – example: protect *International Relations* (s.27)

- Will the release of information from PRONI records in any way prejudice relations or damage goodwill between UK and other states?
 - US Embassy, Dublin – sensitive issues / negotiations
 - UK / ROI territorial waters and the land border
 - Dublin / Belfast / London *Anglo Irish Intergovernmental Conference*
 - One Government's possible views on reliability / integrity of another Government's security forces

What does the release of information look like at PRONI?

Files which have opened for public release by The ASR process or as a result of a FOIA request are displayed on PRONI's online catalogue as follows:

Display of Results on PRONI's online Catalogue

Search eCatalogue

 [Browse Archive: Overview](#)

 [Search](#)  [Browse](#)

 First  Previous [26 - 64] Next  Last 	
Repository :	Public Record Office for Northern Ireland
PRONI Reference :	NIO/10/11/16
Level :	Item
Access :	Closed
Title :	Security Categorisation of Prisoners. This ...
Dates :	1982-1983
Description :	Security Categorisation of Prisoners. This is the closed part of the file and is closed until 2067 - See NIO/10/11/16A which is the open part of the file.
Digital Record :	
 First  Previous [26 - 64] Next  Last 	

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 First  Previous [27 - 64] Next  Last 	
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PRONI Reference :	NIO/10/11/16A
Level :	Item
Access :	Open
Title :	Security Categorisation of Prisoners. Open ...
Dates :	1982-1983
Description :	Security Categorisation of Prisoners. Open part of file.
Digital Record :	
 First  Previous [27 - 64] Next  Last 	

Display of Results on PRONI's online Catalogue

provided by



Search eCatalogue

[Browse Archive: Overview](#)

[Search](#) [Browse](#)









First Previous [23 - 220] Next Last	
Repository :	Public Record Office for Northern Ireland
PRONI Reference :	BELF/6/1/1/37/20
Level :	Item
Access :	Closed
Title :	Coroner's Inquest relating to the deaths ...
Dates :	2 March 1972
Description :	<p>Coroner's Inquest relating to the deaths of Daniel Teggart, Noel Phillips, Joan Brigid Connelly and Joseph Murphy. Dates of death: 9 - 22 August 1971.</p> <p>This is the closed part of file. Please consult BELF/6/1/1/37/20A which is the open part of file.</p>
Digital Record :	Closed
First Previous [23 - 220] Next Last	

Display of Results on PRONI's online Catalogue

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 First  Previous [24 - 220] Next  Last 	
Repository :	Public Record Office for Northern Ireland
PRONI Reference :	BELF/6/1/1/37/20A
Level :	Item
Access :	Open
Title :	Coroner's Inquest relating to the deaths ...
Dates :	2 March 1972
Description :	Coroner's Inquest relating to the deaths of Daniel Teggart, Noel Phillips, Joan Brigid Connelly who died 9 August 1971 and Joseph Murphy who died 22 August 1971. Open part of file.
Digital Record :	
 First  Previous [24 - 220] Next  Last 	

PRONI Records on CAIN

- 'PRONI Records on CAIN' launched in October 2010
<http://cain.ulster.ac.uk/proni/index.html>
- Selection of public records drawn from NI government departments & relating to the 'Troubles' post 1968 – over 4,600 items
- Since 2021 funding from the Department for Communities has supported the work
- CAIN is recognised as one of the leading online resources on the Northern Ireland 'Troubles'
- Web user statistics – some 26 million visits and some 94 million page views

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland

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PRONI Records on CAIN

This section of CAIN contains a selection of public records that are held by Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI). The records selected by CAIN are ones which relate to the conflict and politics in the region. The records mainly cover the period 1968 to 2001. These digital copies have been made available on CAIN with the permission of the Deputy Keeper of the Records at PRONI. This section was first launched on 6 October 2010 (last update 20 December 2024).

The new PRONI building, Titanic Quarter, Belfast.
The building opened in April 2011.

Main updates to available public records since 2010:

- updated 7 Apr 2011 with files from 1980
- updated 28 Jun 2012 with files from 1981
- updated 26 Apr 2013 with files from 1982
- updated 12 Aug 2014 with files from 1983 and 1984
- updated 16 Oct 2015 with files from 1985
- updated 28 Jan 2016 with files from 1986
- updated 10 Aug 2016 with files from 1987
- updated 10 May 2018 with files from 1988, 1989, and 1990
- updated 19 Aug 2019 with files from 1991 and 1992
- updated 30 Jun 2021 with files from 1993 and 1994
- updated 17 Dec 2021 with files from 1995 and 1996
- updated 7 Dec 2022 with files (mainly) from 1997 and 1998
- updated 14 Dec 2023 with files (mainly) from 1999
- updated 20 Dec 2024 with files (mainly) from 2000 and 2001

See also:
[NAI Records on CAIN](#)
Public records from The National Archives of Ireland (NAI)

Ulster University | Department for Communities

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last update 20 December 2024

CAIN contains information and source material on the conflict and politics in Northern Ireland.
CAIN is based within Ulster University.

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Impact of Release of Information

- Greater awareness by public of archives
- Greater transparency of Government, decision making and this does help to demonstrate accountability
- PRONI's online catalogue allows the public and researchers the ability to locate information without having to ask what exactly is held (although a lot more work to be done)
- Implications for record keeping and archives –
- Public Records increasingly being created with less content or detail – sanitised view being presented and this applies to every area of archives that are preserved in PRONI

