

# Census Returns in the Virtual Treasury

## AGI Irish Census Records

The Virtual Record Treasury of Ireland (VRTI) was launched in 2022 to commemorate the centenary of the destruction of Ireland's Public Record Office (PRO). The VRTI is a free online resource ([virtualtreasury.ie](http://virtualtreasury.ie)) that attempts a virtual reconstruction of some of the archive that was lost in 1922. Amongst the multitude of manuscripts deposited in the PRO prior to 1922 were the returns from the 19<sup>th</sup> century statutory censuses of Ireland.

Irish census returns for the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are one of the record collections that was largely destroyed in 1922. Under Dr. Brian Gurrin, the VRTI has published or listed surviving fragments, copies and extracts of the lost Irish census returns.

The first statutory census of Ireland, enumerated in 1813-1815, was incomplete, and with some exceptions, only recorded population numbers. It was the 1821 census that first recorded names, ages and occupations.

Every decade between 1821 and 1911, a census was enumerated in Ireland. The early returns most useful for genealogists are those from 1821, 1841 and 1851 because they enumerated the entire household, recording ages and occupations and later, language and religion. The destruction of the returns from 1813 to 1851 in the Public Record Office fire obliterated records that enumerated 23 million people over four decades. What has been found and published or listed by the VRTI is only a drop in the ocean of what was lost, but if they relate to your area of interest, the findings could be significant.

For example, there are 4 surviving volumes of 1821 census returns, as well as some duplicate copies for 14 parishes in Co. Cavan. A complete copy of the 1831 census for Co. Derry was made by the Ordnance Survey of Ireland and escaped the 1922 fire. The original 1841 returns for the parish of Killashandra, Co. Cavan survived, along with volumes of 1851 returns for Co. Antrim, amongst others.

Details from the 1841 and 1851 census returns transcribed by the Public Record Office onto applications for certified copies of census returns, for use as proof of age for applicants for the old age pension after 1908 are available to search at [censussearchforms.nationalarchives.ie](http://censussearchforms.nationalarchives.ie).

While the surviving census returns in the possession of the National Archives can be accessed on the census page of the National Archives of Ireland genealogy website: [census.nationalarchives.ie](http://census.nationalarchives.ie), the VRTI has brought together additional census copies, transcripts and extracts found in other repositories and collections, making a more comprehensive collection.

Genealogists such as Gertrude Thrift, Philip Crossle, William Carrigan and others made abstracts of census returns which are preserved in their notebooks and papers. Copies of returns made by other bodies have also been tracked down. Not all of these substitutes have been transcribed, so a name search is not always the most productive approach. To date around 90,000 names from these substitutes have been transcribed and are searchable.

The VRTI have also published an interactive map of surnames and townlands extracted from the surviving 1821 census returns: <https://kg.virtualtreasury.ie/collection-map/census-gleanings>.

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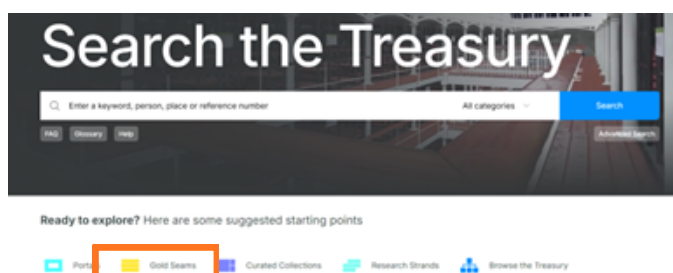


Accredited Genealogists Ireland (AGI) is the accrediting and representative body for professional genealogists on the island of Ireland (Ireland and Northern Ireland).

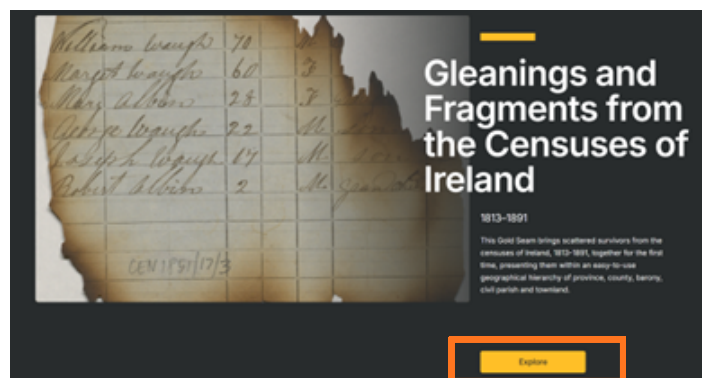
Find out more: [www.accreditedgenealogists.ie](http://www.accreditedgenealogists.ie)



The best way to explore this collection is to use the 'Gold Seam' and 'Browse' buttons on the VRTI website, [virtualtreasury.ie](http://virtualtreasury.ie). From the home page, select the 'Gold Seam' button:



Navigate to the 'Gleanings and Fragments from the Censuses of Ireland' section and select 'Explore'.



Rather than search for a name, choose the 'Browse this Gold Seam' button, where you can explore the various census collections, from different repositories, for relevant census returns.



By navigating down through these collection lists, it should be possible to determine whether there is surviving census material for a specific county, barony, civil parish and townland, and with luck, a long lost ancestor.

Alternatively, you can select 'Browse' on the home page, ([virtualtreasury.ie](http://virtualtreasury.ie)) and navigate to 'Virtual Record Treasury of Ireland' (under 'V'), where you will find 'VRTI CEN', which can be explored for listings for each census to 1891. These include a tiny smattering of townland returns for the 1861-1891 period.

There is much more to explore in the VRTI, including the published census reports with population statistics, which were organised by townland from 1841. The 1861 reports, include details from the 1841 and 1851 census, at townland level. These demonstrate the change in the population following the Famine. The VRTI has also published or listed what survives of the 1766 Religious Census of Ireland, Pender's 1659 Census and census substitutes, such as the Books of Survey and Distribution and the Civil Survey.

*Images are courtesy of the Virtual Record Treasury of Ireland, <https://virtualtreasury.ie/>*

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