

**The Commercialisation of Genealogy –  
Is it ethical for commercial businesses to charge  
money for access to genealogical records?**

Dissertation submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of

MSc. Information and Library Management

at Dublin Business School

Lyndsey Riddall

10026706

# Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| List of Tables and Figures .....                 | 4  |
| Tables .....                                     | 4  |
| Figures.....                                     | 4  |
| <br>   |    |
| Declaration.....                                 | 5  |
| <br>   |    |
| Acknowledgements .....                           | 6  |
| <br>   |    |
| Abstract.....                                    | 7  |
| <br>   |    |
| Chapter 1: Introduction.....                     | 8  |
| 1.1 Background .....                             | 8  |
| 1.2 Research Question .....                      | 10 |
| 1.3 Rationale for Topic.....                     | 11 |
| 1.4 Practical Benefits.....                      | 11 |
| <br>   |    |
| Chapter 2: Literature Review .....               | 13 |
| 2.1 Literature Introduction .....                | 13 |
| 2.2 Theme One: State Approach to Genealogy ..... | 13 |
| 2.2.1 <i>Irish Genealogy Project</i> .....       | 13 |
| 2.2.2 <i>Tourism Agencies</i> .....              | 17 |
| 2.2.3 <i>Heads of State</i> .....                | 17 |
| 2.2.4 <i>Certificate of Irish Heritage</i> ..... | 21 |
| 2.2.5 <i>The 1901 and 1911 Census</i> .....      | 22 |
| 2.2.6 <i>IrishGenealogy.ie</i> .....             | 22 |
| 2.3 Theme Two: Genealogy in the Media.....       | 23 |
| 2.3.1 <i>Who Do You Think You Are?</i> .....     | 23 |
| 2.3.2 <i>Finding Your Roots</i> .....            | 24 |
| 2.3.3 <i>Heir Hunters</i> .....                  | 25 |
| 2.4 Theme Three: Commercial Websites.....        | 27 |
| 2.4.1 <i>Ancestry.com</i> .....                  | 27 |
| 2.4.2 <i>Findmypast.ie</i> .....                 | 28 |
| 2.4.3 <i>Rootsireland.ie</i> .....               | 29 |
| 2.5 Literature Conclusion .....                  | 30 |
| <br>   |    |
| Chapter 3: Methodology .....                     | 32 |
| 3.1 Methodology Introduction.....                | 32 |
| 3.2 Research Design .....                        | 32 |
| 3.2.1 <i>Research Philosophy</i> .....           | 32 |
| 3.2.2 <i>Research Approach</i> .....             | 33 |
| 3.2.3 <i>Research Strategy</i> .....             | 34 |
| 3.3 Sampling – Selecting Respondents .....       | 35 |
| 3.4 Data Collection.....                         | 36 |
| 3.5 Data Analysis.....                           | 37 |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 3.6 Research Ethics .....                                | 37        |
| 3.7 Research Limitations.....                            | 38        |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>Chapter 4: Data Analysis.....</b>                     | <b>40</b> |
| 4.1 Stakeholder Interviews .....                         | 40        |
| 4.1.1 Brian Donovan .....                                | 40        |
| 4.1.2 Ciara Kerrigan.....                                | 40        |
| 4.1.3 Tom Quinlan .....                                  | 41        |
| 4.2 Questionnaire .....                                  | 42        |
| 4.2.1 Question 1.....                                    | 42        |
| 4.2.2 Question 2.....                                    | 43        |
| 4.2.3 Question 3.....                                    | 44        |
| 4.2.4 Question 4.....                                    | 46        |
| 4.2.5 Question 5.....                                    | 46        |
| 4.2.6 Question 6.....                                    | 47        |
| 4.2.7 Question 7.....                                    | 48        |
| 4.2.8 Question 8.....                                    | 48        |
| 4.2.9 Question 9.....                                    | 49        |
| 4.2.10 Question 10.....                                  | 50        |
| 4.2.11 Question 11.....                                  | 51        |
| 4.2.12 Question 12.....                                  | 52        |
| 4.2.13 Question13.....                                   | 52        |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>Chapter 5: Discussion .....</b>                       | <b>53</b> |
| 5.1 Demographics .....                                   | 53        |
| 5.2 Experience.....                                      | 57        |
| 5.3 Genealogical Resources .....                         | 58        |
| 5.4 Ethics.....  | 60        |
| 5.5 Conclusion.....                                      | 62        |
| 5.6 Recommendations .....                                | 64        |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>Chapter 6: Reflection.....</b>                        | <b>67</b> |
| 6.1 MSc. Information and Library Management Course ..... | 67        |
| 6.2 Dissertation.....                                    | 69        |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>Bibliography .....</b>                                | <b>73</b> |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>Appendix .....</b>                                    | <b>78</b> |
| Item 1 – Questionnaire .....                             | 78        |
| Item 2 – Consent Form.....                               | 80        |

## List of Tables and Figures

### Tables

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>Table 1</b> | Trend in Overseas Genealogy Tourism 1999-2003   |
| <b>Table 2</b> | Genealogy Tourism Visitors 1999-2004            |
| <b>Table 3</b> | Website Comparison                              |
| <b>Table 4</b> | RootsIreland.ie Subscription Options            |
| <b>Table 5</b> | Countries of Residence List                     |
| <b>Table 6</b> | Age Categories                                  |
| <b>Table 7</b> | MSc. Information and Library Management Modules |

### Figures

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| <b>Figure 1</b>  | Research Onion                             |
| <b>Figure 2</b>  | Inductive Method Diagram                   |
| <b>Figure 3</b>  | Age Categories Bar Chart                   |
| <b>Figure 4</b>  | Gender Ratio Pie Chart                     |
| <b>Figure 5</b>  | Countries of Residence Column Chart        |
| <b>Figure 6</b>  | Genealogical Research Experience Pie Chart |
| <b>Figure 7</b>  | Resource Familiarity Word Cloud            |
| <b>Figure 8</b>  | Research Starting Point Word Cloud         |
| <b>Figure 9</b>  | Willingness to Pay for Resources Bar Chart |
| <b>Figure 10</b> | Used Resources Word Cloud                  |
| <b>Figure 11</b> | Resource Awareness Pie Chart               |
| <b>Figure 12</b> | Payment Reasons Word Cloud                 |

## Declaration

I, Lyndsey Riddall, declare that this research is my original work and that it has never been presented to any institution or university for the award of Degree or Diploma. In addition, I have referenced correctly all literature and sources used in this work and this work is fully compliant with Dublin Business School's academic honesty policy.

**Signed:** Lyndsey Riddall

**Date:** 21 August 2017

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family and friends for their support during the course of my research and my supervisor Mark Farrell for his vital help and encouragement throughout the entire process. I would also like to extend my gratitude to all the people who took the time to fill out my questionnaire both manually and online and the following individuals and groups for their invaluable assistance:

- Brian Donovan of Eneclann
- Ciara Kerrigan of National Library of Ireland
- Tom Quinlan of National Archives of Ireland
- Claire Santry of Irish Genealogy News
- Mary Choppa of The Irish Ancestral Research Association
- Michael Merrigan of The Genealogical Society of Ireland
- Irish Genealogical Research Society
- Genealogy Addicts UK & Worldwide

## Abstract

The discipline of genealogy entails the study of family history. Ancestry was, until fairly recently, chronicled exclusively through paper records housed in physical repositories. The advent of the internet allowed records to transition into the digital realm and several commercial companies now offer online access to them for a fee. Debate exists in the modern genealogy community about the ownership of genealogical records. Some argue these records belong to the public and should be freely accessible. They disapprove of commercial companies making profit from them. Others feel these businesses provide a valuable alternative to the need to actually visit a repository in order to access records.

This dissertation posed the question of whether or not it is ethical to charge money for access to such information. A questionnaire was formulated and distributed to a core sample group consisting of members of the general public who have conducted or are currently conducting family research and those who have not undertaken any research yet but would be interested in doing so in the future. The survey revealed the majority of participants do not consider it unethical for companies to charge money for access to genealogical records. These people acknowledged the time, effort and money needed to digitise and index records. Many felt they were paying for the service these companies offer, that is the ability to search through huge volumes of records quickly and easily, rather than simply paying for access to the information. In conclusion, the majority of people involved in genealogy do not have an issue paying for such resources per se but many feel the fees charged by these companies are too expensive.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The term “genealogy” stems from the Greek words for “generation” and “knowledge” (**Matthews and Sandberg, 2012, p. 1**) and can be defined as “*the scholarly study of a family’s line of descent from its ancestors, during which one develops an understanding of the family’s historical context and documents its history and traditions*” (**Morgan, 2012, p. 3**). The decision to research family history can be motivated by a variety of reasons. An adopted person may seek to find out about their biological parents. An individual may require a medical history of their family or need information to verify a legal issue. A child may be undertaking a school project or a specific society may require confirmation of lineage for membership. Sometimes an individual is simply interested in where they came from or hopes to find a sense of identity or belonging by knowing more about their ancestors.

There is significant historical evidence indicating that the desire for knowledge about our families is an innate aspect of human nature (**Osborn, 2012, p. 106**). Genealogy has been recorded in a number of different formats over the course of thousands of years. The Bible chronicles a number of genealogies, including two differing versions of the lineage of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Luke (**3:23-38**) begins with the figure of Adam and traces the lineage of Jesus’ mother Mary, while the Gospel of Matthew (**1:1-17**) begins with the patriarch Abraham and traces the line down to her husband Joseph.

Many Celtic cultures are believed to have passed down genealogical knowledge as part of an oral tradition. British heralds of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries formulated family trees to confirm an individual’s ancestry as the right to bear arms was based on appropriate lineage, while the Elizabethan era was filled with social climbers who wanted to prove their pedigree in order to be admitted into the elite circles of the time. These genealogies must be treated with caution however as many heralds were not averse to accepting payment to forge a family tree filled with desirable ancestors (**Osborn, 2012, pp. 106-108**).



Family histories continued to be produced throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in Britain but many were based on bloodlines still in existence at the time and as a result contain a number of errors or outright falsifications as the authors did not want to offend the living family members. It was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that a systematic approach to genealogy was widely adopted. English scholars G. E. Cockayne and J. Horace Round were critical of the previous generations of genealogical work and encouraged the use of documentary evidence to verify facts **(Osborn, 2012, pp. 108-109)**.

Genealogy has remained a popular pursuit across the world into the modern age. Much of this popularity, particularly in America, relates to the writings of Alex Haley. Haley published the story of his family, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*, in 1976 and it went on to win the Pulitzer Prize. A television mini-series was produced based on the book and drew an audience of 135 million in the United States and 20 million in the UK **(De Groot, 2009, p. 84)**.

The advent of the internet also played a substantial role. Genealogy carved out a niche for itself online from the very early days of the web and this helped ensure its continued presence in the public imagination. The news group net.roots was set up in 1983 and its companion mailing list ROOTS-L was launched in 1987. At this point it was not possible to actually access digital records but newsgroups and discussion forums allowed participants to talk about their own research with like-minded individuals and offer each other advice. Some dedicated users wrote their own software as a means of locating and presenting genealogical information **(De Groot, 2009, p. 74)**.

When the web expanded during the early 1990's, a number of important records began to make their way online. These included census records, parish registers, wills, civil registrations (births, marriages, deaths), property records and newspapers. Although this was a huge step forward, these websites only supplied a transcription of the record. If a person wanted to see the actual copy they would have to visit the physical repository it was located in. Later many records were digitised and made available online, enabling the researcher access to the primary source itself. These types of websites were generally unrestricted to begin with but it soon became clear that profit could be made from this type of information **(De Groot, 2009, p. 75)**. Commercial businesses began to spring up charging for access to their databases and a fierce debate within the heritage sector was ignited.

This debate centres around the ownership of genealogical records and the ethical implications involved with expecting people to pay money for access to them. On the one hand, supporters of the “free to view” approach believe genealogical records should be accessible to all across the board and to charge to view them would put economically challenged people at a disadvantage when it comes to researching their family history (**Murphy, 2015, p. 11**). The National Archives of Ireland and the National Library of Ireland, two of the major stakeholders in the Irish genealogical landscape, offer access to genealogy resources at no cost. Not all heritage organisations are against the charging of fees however. The Irish Family History Foundation, local libraries and historical groups support the introduction of even a nominal payment because they rely on this money to financially support the service they offer (**Murphy, 2015, p. 11**).

Scholar Jerome De Groot argues in favour of charging, claiming “*History can actually be valued, rather than be part of a circulating set of meanings and values. Information is a product, something created by the labour of history, which can be paid for*” (**De Groot, 2012, pp. 75-76**). Some individuals do not want to be restricted by the need to visit a certain repository to find the information they are looking for, even if that information would be available to them for free. They want to be able to conduct their research at their own convenience.

Subscription based websites, such as Ancestry.com and MyHeritage.com, provide a gateway to a massive collection of records which can be accessed anywhere in the world. The commercial sector of the genealogy industry feel justified in charging money for this information. They argue putting a monetary value on these records is international best practice and people are willing to pay for the convenience they are offering (**Murphy, 2015, p. 11**). Interviews were conducted with stakeholders on both sides of the debate and will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

## 1.2 Research Question

Is it ethical for commercial businesses to charge money for access to genealogical records?

### 1.3 Rationale for Topic

The argument surrounding the commercialisation of genealogy rages between professionals but research has never been conducted on how the general public feel about the topic. The aim of this dissertation is to investigate this ongoing debate from the perspective of regular people who have researched, are currently researching or intend to research their family history. These are the individuals who are directly impacted by whether or not this information is freely available or placed behind a paywall and so their opinions on the matter should be taken into account.

### 1.4 Practical Benefits

Catherine Murphy, TD for Kildare North, wrote a report on behalf of the Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and The Gaeltacht in March 2015 entitled “*Maximising Our Cultural and Genealogical Heritage*”. It offers an overview of the current state of genealogy in Ireland and lays out the opinions of the major players involved (the Government, commercial organisations, heritage institutions, etc.) and provides a list of 37 recommendations on how the genealogical sector can be improved (**Murphy, 2015, pp. 4-37**).

One stakeholder that is conspicuous in their absence is the general public wishing to utilise the available resources to research their family history. The report does acknowledge the needs of these users but does not consider how they feel about the topic or express a desire to investigate. The findings of this dissertation should be beneficial in that they will offer this neglected stakeholder a voice in the ongoing debate.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Literature Introduction

Three major themes will be explored in the following chapter to help further establish a backdrop for this research. The first theme relates to the attitude and approach of the Irish Government towards genealogy. The second theme is the popularity of genealogy in the media. The third theme is the rise of commercial websites charging money for access to genealogical records.

### 2.2 Theme One: State Approach to Genealogy

#### 2.2.1 Irish Genealogy Project

In the 1980s, a network of heritage centres was set up around the country. These centres were coordinated by the Irish Family History Foundation (IFHI) and contained genealogical records relevant to their specific location. Smaller counties had one, while some of the bigger counties had two. Dublin had three centres – Dublin North, Dublin South and Dublin City. Many had taken it upon themselves to manually compile and index genealogical records to help make family history research easier (**Purcell, 1996, p. 12**).

In the latter half of the decade, it was noted that there had been significant growth in visitors from America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. All of these countries contain a substantial number of people with Irish heritage. It was suggested that by promoting familial connections with Ireland, more tourists would consider visiting the country. The Irish Government undertook several ventures to encourage tourists to visit Ireland through the promotion of genealogy. These attempts were generally unsuccessful as, according to the agencies involved, they were trying to promote a product (that is simple and affordable genealogical research) that was either badly provided or did not exist at all (**Purcell, 1996, p. 3**).

In 1988 a Government Task Force on Genealogy and Tourism was formed in order to recommend ways in which genealogy could be utilised as a means of increasing tourism prospects. The Task Force revealed family history research services, with the exception of a

small number of professional and amateur genealogists offering assistance to people attempting to trace their roots, were limited. It was determined that this needed to change if genealogy was to play any significant role in boosting tourism (**Purcell, 1996, p. 3**). Consequently, the Irish Genealogical Project was established in 1988 (**Purcell, 1996, p. 4**).

The IGP was headed by the Department of the Taoiseach and received funding from several organisations, including Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS), Bord Fáilte Éireann, Shannon Free Airport Development Company and the International Fund for Ireland. Several local authorities and public-sector agencies in Northern Ireland also contributed (**Purcell, 1996, p. 8**). The aim of the project was to develop existing genealogical research services in Ireland in order to entice tourism. The intention was to create a computerised database made up of Irish records relevant to family history which would facilitate easier access to information for visiting tourists (**Purcell, 1996, p. 4**).

The IFHI heritage centres were tasked with the compilation of the database. They employed individuals taking part in publicly-funded training and work experience programmes. These workers, mainly from FÁS, entered the physical records held by their assigned centre into a database. It was envisaged that each centre would complete and store their own records. They would then be linked to an umbrella system operated by a central agency (**Purcell, 1996, p. 1**). A tourist would contact the agency and explain what they were looking for. It would then direct them to the specific genealogical centre/s which held information relevant to their particular family history (**Purcell, 1996, p. 4**).

The IGP endured many issues throughout its existence. A review of its progress and expenditure was undertaken in December 1996 by John Purcell. Purcell, the Comptroller and Auditor General at the time, found that between the establishment of the project in 1988 and July 1996, funding by Irish public sector agencies involved came to approximately IR£15 million (**Purcell, 1996, p. 8**). Despite the money spent, just under 30% of the 29 million records to be included in the database had been computerised. None of the participating centres had reached their individual targets (**Purcell, 1996, p. 11**). A variety of reasons were put forward to explain why the project was floundering.

The database was meant to be completed by 1993 but progress had stalled. The figure of 29 million included records for all heritage centres throughout the country but not every

centre had elected to take part in the IGP. Twenty-eight centres took part but approximately 13% of the target records related to areas not involved with the project (**Purcell, 1996, p. 12**). Not all centres started compiling their databases at the same time so they were at different stages of the process. A number of centres had problems gaining access to certain types of records relating to their locale which were not already in their possession, while some lacked the necessary computer equipment and workers to proceed with the project (**Purcell, 1996, p. 11**). Purcell's report also criticised the poor overall management of the venture, citing in particular the lack of budgetary planning, use of measureable targets for each centre (**Purcell, 1996, p. 31**) and different motivations of the stakeholders involved (**Purcell, 1996, p. 28**).

Although the computerised database was only partially completed, it seems reasonable to expect a rise in the annual business of the heritage centres due to its availability. Around 6,800 commissions for genealogical research were received by heritage centres throughout the country in 1989. These commissions produced revenue of IR£122,000 (about IR£18 per request). It was estimated that commissions would increase to around 15,000 per year by 1995, generating revenue of IR£750,000 (about IR£50 per request) for the centres. This did not turn out to be the case. Roughly 6,700 commissions were received in 1995 with an estimated value of IR£140,000 (about IR£21 per request) (**Purcell, 1996, pp. 24-25**). The aim of the IGP was to promote genealogy as a means of encouraging more tourists to visit Ireland but Purcell concluded that the effectiveness of the project could not be properly established as no format in which to measure its impact had been put in place (**Purcell, 1996, p. 32**).

The project passed from the Department of the Taoiseach to a private company called Irish Genealogy Limited in August 1996 (**Purcell, 1996, p. 4**) and lumbered on but as time passed the project had to contend with the rise of the internet and changes to the way people conducted genealogical research (**Purcell, 2004, p. 66**). Prior to the advent of the internet, a significant proportion of tourists coming to Ireland visited the country for the purpose of researching their family history. At this time, the only way to access records was to do it in person (**Heinlen, 2007**).

The emergence of the internet as a household facility and the birth of three major online genealogical resources – Ancestry.com in 1998, The Church of Latter-Day Saints in 1999 and the Ellis Island records in 2000 – had a devastating effect on Ireland's heritage

tourism. Online access made it much easier for people to find the genealogical information they required and undermined the need to physically travel to find a record or document (Heinlen, 2007). The following tables (Table 1 and Table 2) illustrate the significant drop in foreign visitors coming to Ireland specifically for genealogical purposes:

|               | 1999    | 2000    | 2001   | 2002   | 2003 <sup>13</sup> |
|---------------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------------------|
| Visitors      | 107,000 | 118,000 | 88,000 | 36,000 | 53,000             |
| Holidaymakers | 102,000 | 102,000 | 81,000 | 29,000 | 47,000             |

**Table 1: Trend in Overseas Genealogy Tourism 1999-2003**  
(Purcell, 2004, p. 66)

| <b>Overseas Visitors (000's)</b> | <b>1999</b> | <b>2000</b> | <b>2001</b> | <b>2002</b> | <b>2003</b> | <b>2004</b> |
|----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Britain                          | 32          | 26          | 20          | 11          | 11          | 9           |
| M Europe                         | 2           | 2           | 1           | 1           | 2           | 0           |
| North America. USA               | 61          | 74          | 49          | 20          | 37          | 26          |
| Australia/New Zealand            | 11          | 14          | 18          | 4           | 3           | 10          |
| Total                            | 106         | 116         | 88          | 35          | 63          | 45          |

**Table 2: Genealogy Tourism Visitors – 1999-2004**  
(Heinlen, 2007)

Purcell produced a follow-up report on the IGP in 2004 and did not note much significant improvement. The Irish economy had experienced a boom in the intervening years (a period often referred to as the Celtic Tiger) and this resulted in less people undertaking FÁS training programmes. With less workers available, the records were being entered into the database at just 1% per year (Purcell, 2004, p. 67). The Irish Family History Foundation decided to withdraw from the project and Irish Genealogy Limited was dissolved soon after. The IFHF continued work on the computerised database and it eventually came to fruition when it was made available online through the website RootsIreland.ie (Genealogical Society of Ireland, 2013, p. 1). Although the website was ultimately launched, it still provoked controversy. This will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter.



### 2.2.2 Tourism Agencies

There are two main government sponsored tourism agencies in Ireland - Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. The objective of Fáilte Ireland is to support tourism as a significant component of the Irish economy (**Fáilte Ireland, 2017**). Fáilte Ireland's commercial website is called *DiscoverIreland.com* and offers information on accommodation, events, activities and attractions for visitors. Under its "Things to Do" tab, there is a section entitled "Heritage and History" which offers a list of genealogical resources (**Fáilte Ireland, 2017**).

Tourism Ireland is responsible for promoting Ireland as a holiday destination to overseas markets (**Tourism Ireland, 2017**). Tourism Ireland's website, *Ireland.com*, provides a section also entitled "Things to Do" and names "Genealogy and Ancestry" as one of its top suggestions. The section offers a list of 15 of the most helpful cultural institutions and groups for genealogical research in Ireland and information on genealogy related events and other resources (**Tourism Ireland, 2017**). The fact that Ireland's two main tourism agencies strongly promote genealogy on their websites indicates the Government continue to view it as an important facet in attracting potential visitors.

### 2.2.3 Heads of State

The Government has utilised genealogy as a publicity tool in the promotion of high profile individuals with Irish ancestry for decades. President John F. Kennedy's 1963 trip to Ireland is considered a legendary moment within modern Irish history, especially as it took place just months before his assassination in Dallas, Texas. Ireland had stagnated somewhat following independence from Britain and the birth of the Irish Republic in 1949. In the early 1960s approximately 1 million Irish people had departed for England, leaving only 2.9 million citizens in the country (**Tubridy, 2010, p.45**).

When Seán Lemass became Taoiseach (Prime Minister) in 1959, he knew changes needed to be made in order to entice the younger generation to remain at home. The strict censorship rules that had dominated the country during the tenure of the previous Taoiseach Éamon De Valera began to be relaxed. In the early 1950s, around 600 books were censored annually due to what was deemed controversial content. By the end of the decade this number had dropped significantly. The launch of the State broadcaster, RTÉ, in 1961 also

had an enormous impact in terms of the dissemination of information to the populace. Ireland was slowly but surely being dragged into the modern age (**Tubridy, 2010, p.46**).

Lemass wanted to carve out a position for Ireland on the world stage or at the very least increase its visibility. He determined one way to achieve this would be to draw attention to Ireland's connection to the most powerful man in the world at that time. John Fitzgerald Kennedy entered the White House in 1961 and his family could be traced back to a paternal great-grandfather born in Wexford and a maternal great-grandfather from Limerick. Lemass immediately asked the Irish Ambassador to Washington, Dr. Thomas J. Kiernan, to figure out a way to convince the new president to come to Ireland (**Tubridy, 2010, p.48**). Kennedy was keen to visit on a personal level but, as Ireland was not a major political player, he had to have a concrete reason in order to justify such a trip to Congress. Although both his advisors and the US media maligned the idea, he scheduled a brief stop-over as part of his upcoming European tour in June 1963 (**Tubridy, 2010, p. 55-59**).

The visit provided excellent publicity for Ireland in the United States. In July 1963, Time Magazine featured Seán Lemass on its front cover and praised his leadership, stating “... *there is a new sense of purpose and push, a mounting awareness that Ireland has begun to make its way in the world*” (**Tubridy, 2010, p. 263**). Lemass paid a visit to Washington four months after Kennedy's departure from Ireland and when he left there was a genuine sense that Ireland and America had cemented a special bond which all came about by forging a connection with Kennedy through his Irish roots (**Tubridy, 2010, pp. 265-266**).

Prior to Kennedy's trip to Ireland, the Irish still faced a certain level of prejudice in America. Irish people often faced discrimination for employment, jobs and housing (**Tubridy, 2010, p. 282**). Kennedy himself had endured such prejudice. Although he came from a wealthy family, he was denied entry to several schools as a child. Even when he was eventually admitted to the prestigious Choate boarding school in Connecticut, he was banned from joining many of the school's elite societies due to his Irish Catholic background (**Tubridy, 2010, p. 11**).

Kennedy's visit to Ireland had an enormous impact on both the people of Ireland and how the Irish were perceived in America. His endorsement of his Irish roots helped the people of a stagnant nation feel proud of their country again and Americans with Irish ancestry to embrace their heritage. Suddenly Irish blood in America was deemed desirable

and not a stigma. This new perception resulted in Americans beginning the tradition of travelling to Ireland to research their Irish ancestry (**Tubridy, 2010, p. 282**).

John F. Kennedy was not the only American president to visit Ireland and publicly claim his Irish heritage. Many of his successors followed suit. Ronald Reagan had substantial Irish connections as his great-grandfather Michael was baptised on September 3 1829 in a church in the tiny village of Ballyporeen in County Tipperary. Michael's future wife, Catherine Mulcahey, was also born in Ireland. The couple left the country during the Great Famine (1845-1852) and lived in London for a few years where Reagan's grandfather was born. They then decided to emigrate to Canada around 1858 and subsequently settled in America. The obscure Irish village was delighted to discover this link and used it as a means to attract tourists. They sold merchandise and local pub owner John O'Farrell changed the name of his establishment to *The Ronald Reagan* (**Borders, 1981**). The facade of the building was later transported to *The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library* in California and remains there today (**Deignan, 2011**).

Reagan paid a visit to Ballyporeen in June 1984 and thousands turned out to get a glimpse of him. During his speech, Reagan stated "*Of all the honors and gifts that have been afforded me as President, this visit is the one that I will cherish dearly. I didn't know much about my family background – not because of a lack of interest, but because my father was orphaned before he was six years old. And now thanks to you and the efforts of good people who have dug into the history of a poor immigrant family, I know at last whence I came. And this has given my soul a new contentment. And it is a joyous feeling. It is like coming home after a long journey*" (**Deignan, 2011**).

Ronald Reagan served two terms as president of the United States between 1981 and 1989. By the time he visited Ireland in 1984, he was happy to acknowledge his Irish roots publicly but during his election campaign (1979-1980) he was keen to keep these roots quiet. A documentary entitled *Fáilte Mr President* covers a meeting between Reagan and former Irish Ambassador to America Sean Donlon in California during his campaign. Donlon asked Reagan about his Irish heritage given his surname. Reagan insisted he was English rather than Irish (**The Independent, 2004**).

When Donlon persisted that he must be Irish due to his surname, Reagan relented and admitted this was true but asked Donlon to keep the information to himself as it may damage his chance of getting elected. He was a conservative candidate attempting to appeal to right-wing Republican voters and had portrayed himself as coming from an English Protestant background. The Irish had an association with the Democrats and Reagan feared this may lose him votes. Donlon agreed to keep Reagan's 'secret'. Once Reagan secured the presidency, he was happy to embrace his Irish heritage and attended the Irish embassy on St. Patrick's Day 1981 where he was presented with his family tree (*The Independent*, 2004).

Bill Clinton famously played a vital role in the establishment of the peace process in Northern Ireland. He was the first sitting president to visit the region in November 1995 and has visited the country many times since. Clinton and his wife Hillary were always met with enthusiastic crowds during their time in Ireland and, similar to his predecessors, attention was drawn to his Irish connections. It was determined that Hattie Hayes, his paternal great-grandmother, had Irish parents and his mother Virginia Cassidy can trace her ancestry back to a Zachariah Cassidy. Zachariah was born in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century most likely in South Carolina. The name of his father is unknown but researchers have claimed he is likely to have been an Irish immigrant from Ulster (**Murphy, 2016, pp. 3-4**).

In 2007 Canon Stephen Neill received a tip that Barack Obama may have Irish lineage and he decided to research its validity. He soon discovered Obama's great-great-great grandfather, Falmouth Kearney, was born in Moneygall, Co. Offaly, in 1829 and emigrated to America in 1850. Further research uncovered an even older relative, Obama's seventh great-grandfather Joseph Kearney born in 1698 (**Tourism Ireland, 2011**). Obama's Irish connection was heavily emphasised during his trip to Ireland. As a result, it was reported by media outlets all over the world. Fáilte Ireland offers a breakdown of the publicity generated, stating President Obama's visit produced 11,586 print and online articles and 4,416 separate broadcast pieces - 3,493 in the US and 923 in the UK (**Fáilte Ireland, 2011**).

According to the Irish Central Statistics Office, the number of foreign visitors to Ireland jumped from 603,700 in 2010 to 650,500 in 2011 (**Central Statistics Office, 2016**). Both Fáilte Ireland and Leo Varadkar (then Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and current Taoiseach) publically stated the advertising generated by Obama's visit (as well as the visit of Queen Elizabeth II the same year) played a significant role in boosting Ireland's

appeal as a tourist destination and encouraging the recovery of the Irish tourism industry following the economic recession that had plagued the country since 2008 (**Fáilte Ireland, 2011**).

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is the most recent Head of State to visit Ireland. Mr. Trudeau arrived in July 2017 and during his trip attended the Epic Irish Emigration Museum and Irish Family History Centre. The museum and centre are run by the genealogical company Eneclann and CEO Brian Donovan presented the Prime Minister with a full account of his Irish heritage dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century (**Cullen, 2017**). When all of these individual visits are taken into account, it is fair to conclude that as far back as the 1960s the Irish Government recognised the potential for generating publicity for the country by promoting its connection to Heads of State with Irish ancestry. The more recent visits of Barack Obama and Justin Trudeau prove this potential is still considered a valuable asset today.

#### 2.2.4 Certificate of Irish Heritage

In September 2011, the Department of Foreign Affairs launched the “Certificate of Irish Heritage” scheme which offered a Government certificate to individuals who don’t qualify for Irish citizenship themselves but have Irish ancestry. The idea behind it was to foster a sense of connection between Ireland and the Irish diaspora across the world by officially recognising their Irish roots. The scheme was promoted by presenting these certificates to famous personalities and world leaders (**Kenny, 2015**).

In 2013 Hollywood actor Tom Cruise visited the country as part of a media tour for his science fiction film *Oblivion*. Tourism Ireland were aware he had some Irish connections and commissioned two genealogists to research his family history. They uncovered his ancestors were Knights of Strongbow that settled in Ireland in the 12th century. Cruise was presented with a Certificate of Irish Heritage at Iveagh House by then Tánaiste Eamon Gilmore and this generated much publicity (**McGreevy, 2013**). Almost 300 certificates were presented to high-profile recipients as part of this scheme. In addition to Cruise, other examples include Barack Obama, Bill Clinton and Olympic athlete Sebastian Coe (**Kenny, 2015**).

Ultimately the scheme did not prove successful. The cost of a certificate was €40 on its own and €120 with a frame. From its launch to 2015, only 2,925 certificates were purchased and the application procedure was heavily criticised. Genealogist Paul Gorry argued the Government had “dumbed down” the process as applicants were only required to submit a document verifying one of their ancestors was Irish. They did not, however, need to provide evidence to confirm they were actually related to this claimed relative. As a result, he felt the certificate was “valueless”. The scheme ceased in 2015 due to lack of uptake. When announcing the discontinuation, a spokesperson stated the concept had been intended as “*a practical expression of the importance the Government attaches to recognising people of Irish descent and encouraging people to trace their roots*” (Kenny 2015).

### 2.2.5 The 1901 and 1911 Census

Many people still consider themselves Irish or of Irish descent even if their ancestors emigrated several generations before they were born. These individuals tend to feel a special connection with the country despite the passage of time and geographical distance and the Government has seized on this as an opportunity for the promotion of tourism. The success of the recent 1901 and 1911 census digitisation projects is a perfect illustration (Murphy, 2012, p. 4). These census records were made available online in 2009 and marketing campaigns were launched to make UK and US residents with Irish ancestry aware these records were now freely available in the hopes they would access them and consequently be encouraged to come to Ireland to trace their roots in person (McGreevy, 2010).

The website has received 940 million hits and 19 million visitors. Only half of these online visitors were based in Ireland, indicating the records were of huge interest to people living abroad (Murphy, 2012, p. 4). The question of whether or not these individuals accessing the census records translated into actual visits to Ireland is uncertain but the project itself again demonstrates the Government considers the promotion of genealogy to be a useful marketing tool for tourism purposes.

### 2.2.6 IrishGenealogy.ie

The development of a dedicated Irish genealogy online portal is another example. This project experienced both funding and staffing issues but was ultimately launched by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in 2016 under the name

IrishGenealogy.ie. It is free to use and provides digital access to a number of important records, including: Records of births, marriages and deaths from the General Register Office; Church records; 1901 and 1911 census; Soldiers' wills. The objective of the website is to entice individuals to "*conduct a vast amount of their research from wherever they are based eventually leading that person to organised and informed trips to the relevant repositories to source the original documents or piece together the full story of their ancestry*" (Murphy, 2015, p. 5). It is, again, another way of encouraging people to visit Ireland and discover their ancestry in person.

## 2.3 Theme Two: Genealogy in the Media

A substantial amount of the public interest in genealogy stems from its high profile within the media. A number of television programmes relating to family research have been developed over the years and attract significant viewing figures. Most of these shows aim to inspire people to research their own family history but some have unintentionally brought ethical dilemmas surrounding the genealogy sector to the attention of the public. Three examples are discussed in detail here but this list is by no means exhaustive.

### 2.3.1 Who Do You Think You Are?

This UK show involves high profile individuals such as actors, musicians, comedians, athletes, and politicians, attempting to find out more about their family history with the help of genealogical experts. The first season aired in 2004 on BBC2 and attracted an average viewership of 4.7 million viewers. The second season was also aired on BBC2 but it proved to be so popular it was subsequently moved to BBC1 from series 3 onwards and has since run for an impressive 13 seasons. The format has been bought by several international television companies who have created their own versions (De Groot, 2009, p. 77).

The original intention of the show was to encourage people to conduct their own family research. The BBC did not rely on the programme alone to achieve this aim however. A radio campaign was launched and 1.3 million leaflets were distributed through the Radio Times. A detailed website was designed containing "How To" guides, tips and information on how to carry out research. Links to the National Archives and other organisations were

offered and access to specific genealogical software was also provided. A dedicated phone line was set up and a companion magazine was launched in 2007 (**De Groot, 2009, p. 77**).

Family History roadshows were also organised, the most recent of which took place at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham in April 2017. This event was sponsored by AncestryDNA (the DNA testing branch of Ancestry.co.uk) and representatives were present to promote the service. Other exhibitors included the free to join organisation The Society of Genealogists and subscription websites The Genealogist and Family Tree DNA (**Immediate Media Company, 2017**). In addition to these roadshows, other genealogy related events were held in association with the Archives Awareness Campaign (**De Groot, 2009, pp. 81-82**).

This multi-platform approach was hugely successful. Television presenter Jeremy Clarkson starred in an episode of the first season and after it aired 530,000 hits were registered on the website. The National Archives saw a 77% increase in traffic to their website. The phone line received 29,375 calls from interested individuals wanting further information. As of 2009, 40,000 people attended the roadshows and there was a 36% rise in the number of visitors to events held by the Archives Awareness Campaign (**De Groot, 2009, p. 82**). It is fair to say that this programme exemplifies the keen interest in genealogy that exists within the public sphere.

### 2.3.2 Finding Your Roots

Finding Your Roots is an American programme hosted by Harvard Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr and is aired on the PBS network. It began in 2012 and three seasons have been produced so far. The show features celebrity guests and ordinary people interested in finding out more about their family history. The researchers investigate their genealogy through a combination of traditional methods and DNA testing. All the information they uncover is collated into a “Book of Life”. Gates explores the contents of it with the individual and the book is given to them to keep when the episode concludes (**PBS, 2015**).

This show experienced an ethical controversy surrounding an episode featuring Hollywood star Ben Affleck when researchers discovered one of Affleck’s ancestors was a slave owner. The actor was concerned this revelation would damage his reputation and requested it be omitted from the episode when it aired which it was. The incident only came to light during the Sony e-mail hacking scandal in 2015. An e-mail between Gates and Sony



executive Michael Lynton was released, in which Gates asks Lynton his advice on how to handle the situation. In the e-mail, Gates says he thinks it would be unethical to omit the discovery but this raised the question as to why the information was ultimately left out of the episode. Gates claimed he did not include it because Affleck had other more interesting ancestors to focus on. The third season was postponed while an investigation was conducted but has since been aired (**Steinberg, 2015**).

Finding Your Roots receives corporate support from a number of companies, one of which is the subscription website Ancestry.com (**PBS, 2015**). The show's website provides a visual link to Ancestry.com and in turn the Ancestry.com website promotes the show, stating "*Ancestry is proud to support this inspiring family history series*" (**Ancestry.com, 2017**). It is natural that the show's website highlights Ancestry.com given its role as an official sponsor but it also supplies a comprehensive list of online resources in its "Genealogy Resources" section (**PBS, 2015**). This list is made up of both free and subscription websites so the show does not solely promote Ancestry.com or other commercial companies simply because it is directly sponsored by one. It draws attention to many free resources to ensure visitors know what is available.

### 2.3.3 Heir Hunters

Heir Hunters is a BBC show that follows various genealogical companies based in the UK. When a person dies, the ideal scenario is to find they drafted a will during their lifetime and this document stipulates who they want to inherit their assets. If a will was not made, the assets will legally go to the next of kin. There are, however, several instances where an individual did not organise a will and their direct next of kin is unknown. This is where the 'heir hunters' come in. The Government Legal Department (formerly known as the Treasury Solicitor's Department until 2015) is headed by the Treasury Solicitor and provides legal advice to the majority of central government departments in the UK (**Treasury Solicitor's Department, 2015**). They are also in charge of dealing with '*Bona Vacantia*'. This is a Latin phrase meaning 'vacant goods'.

If a person dies intestate (without having made a valid will) and with no identified relatives, their property is held by the State. The Bona Vacantia Division publishes a list every Thursday on the GLD website which offers potential heirs the opportunity to come forward and seize an unclaimed estate. If a claim is submitted within a 12-year period from

the date administration of the estate in question was finalised, the heir/s will receive interest on the funds held. A verified claim will still be accepted up to thirty years after the date of death however if it is submitted after the 12-year term has elapsed no interest will be paid. If an estate is never claimed, it is retained by the State. Genealogy companies check the list each week and attempt to track down any living relatives liable to inherit from the deceased individual (**Shoffman and Rickard Straus, 2015**).

A discovered heir is contacted and asked to sign a contract confirming the company will be entitled to a percentage of the inheritance for their services. This can be anything from 10% at the lower level up to 40% at the highest. The average would typically be 20%. The heir-hunting business is not regulated and experts have questioned whether or not people are being ripped off by some companies expecting to be paid such a substantial portion of the windfall. There have also been ethical concerns raised over attempts to strong-arm heirs into signing contracts (**Cavaglieri and Knight, 2009**).

Some companies have been known to contact an individual to tell them they are due to inherit an undisclosed sum of money from a deceased relative but will give them very little information about this relative or their supposed relationship until they sign the contract. This means an heir may be unaware how much money they are handing over to the company because they don't know the total value of the estate before signing and there is no cooling-off period. This is in stark contrast to almost every other form of financial agreement. The above tactic also makes it difficult for an heir to figure out who this relative is on their own. Unscrupulous companies want to avoid an individual doing their own research and going straight to the Government Legal Department to submit an inheritance claim themselves. If this was to happen, the company would lose out on their potential fee (**Cavaglieri and Knight, 2009**).

Interestingly Bona Vacantia Division make reference to commercial genealogy companies on their website, stating “*Genealogists are private companies who trace potentially entitled relatives for commercial gain. They do not work for, on or behalf of, BVD but often make enquiries for relatives after BVD advertises an estate. You do not have to use a genealogist's services to make a claim to BVD if you do not wish to do so, and such a decision does not affect any entitlement you may have to share in an estate. If you are contacted by a genealogist, it is up to you whether you use their services and BVD will not advise you in this respect*” (**Bon Vacantia, 2013**).

## 2.4 Theme Three: Commercial Websites

### 2.4.1. Ancestry.com

Ancestry.com is perhaps the most well-known of the commercial genealogical websites. Even people who do not have any interest in genealogy are aware of its existence, probably due to its heavy marketing campaign. The company located their European headquarters in Dublin and employ 80 people in the city (**Murphy, 2015, p. 11**). The website is subscription based and offers access to a huge variety of content, including records relating to births, marriages and deaths; census and electoral rolls; immigration and travel registers; legal records and military documentation.

The UK branch, Ancestry.co.uk, offers two packages. The premium membership costs £13.99 per month/£119.99 per year and offers access to 1 billion records and all new Irish and UK records subsequently made available on the site. The worldwide membership costs £19.99 per month/£179.99 per year and offers access to the entire library of 16 billion records and all new releases. It is not currently possible to pay in Euro so any Irish customers must pay in Sterling (**Ancestry.co.uk, 2017**). They claim over 40 million searches are conducted on their website on a daily basis (**Murphy, 2015, p. 13**).

The development of genetics has had a significant impact on the discipline of genealogy. While genetic information regarding men is found in the Y-chromosome, genetic information from the female line is found in mitochondrial DNA (**De Groot, 2012, p. 86**). Mitochondria are found in every cell of the human body (with the exception of red blood cells) and are often referred to as the powerhouse of the cell. Food is consumed to produce energy but humans cannot process it in its existing form. Mitochondria transforms the energy contained in food molecules into a form the body can use known as adenosine triphosphate (ATP). When energy is required, ATP is broken down within the mitochondria and used to generate the majority of cell functions (**Tucker, 2015, p. 23**).

Mitochondrial DNA changes over time. As a consequence, genetic testing can demonstrate that every human is essentially related to one of 36 ancestral mothers. These ancient women can be traced back themselves to an original “Eve” figure who lived 150,000 years ago (**De Groot, 2012, p. 87**). If genetic testing can help us reach back in time this far, it

is an undeniably useful tool for those wishing to reconstruct their family trees. This notion has been picked up by commercial entities and DNA testing is now another element of the genealogical journey that has been commodified.

Ancestry.com have developed their own testing service called AncestryDNA which claims to predict genetic ethnicity and according to the company website has been used by over 3 million people. The results offer information about an individual's ethnicity across 26 regions/ethnicities and identifies potential relatives through DNA matching to others who have taken the test. AncestryDNA involves microarray-based autosomal DNA testing of a saliva sample. This type of analysis surveys a person's entire genome at over 700,000 locations (**Ancestry.co.uk, 2017**).

The sample is sent to a lab and typically takes between 6-8 weeks to process. The results can then be used for further family history research. At present, the cost of AncestryDNA testing is €95. The company's terms and conditions state they retain all information and DNA submitted for testing but an individual can request to have their data deleted and physical sample destroyed at any time. It also confirms they do not sell genetic data to insurers or employers and will only grant access to law enforcement if legally obliged (**Ancestry.co.uk, 2017**).

#### 2.4.2 FindMyPast.ie

FindMyPast.ie is a combined venture between the research company Eneclann and the UK based website FindMyPast.co.uk to help customers connect with their Irish heritage. The enterprise is based in Dublin and there are two subscription packages available. The Irish membership costs €9.95 per month/€114.50 per year and entitles the customer to full access to all Irish records. The World membership costs €14.95 per month/€179.50 per year and entitles the customer access to the entire library of over 2 billion records from all over the world (**FindMyPast.ie, 2017**).

There is also a 'Pay As You Go' system, in which a customer can purchase credits. Records are valued between 5 and 60 credits. It costs €9.50 for 60 credits, €33.50 for 300 credits and €73.50 for 900 credits. All credit purchases are valid for 90 days (**FindMyPast.ie, 2017**). They have 70,000 registered users from Ireland, indicating the huge interest in

genealogy that exists in this country (Murphy, 2015, p. 13). The following table (Table 3) offers a comparison between the subscription packages available from Ancestry.co.uk and FindMyPast.ie. Ancestry does not offer a ‘Pay As You Go’ option.

| Website               | Standard Subscription   | Standard Access  | World Subscription  | World Access                           |
|-----------------------|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Ancestry.co.uk</b> | <b>Monthly:</b> £13.99<br>(€15.63)<br><br><b>Yearly:</b> £119.99<br>(€134.11) | Access to 1 billion records & all subsequent Irish and UK releases | <b>Monthly:</b> £19.99<br>(€22.34)<br><br><b>Yearly:</b> £179.99<br>(€201.17) | Access to 16 billion worldwide records |
| <b>FindMyPast.ie</b>  | <b>Monthly:</b> €9.95<br><br><b>Yearly:</b> €114.50                           | Access to all Irish records  | <b>Monthly:</b> €14.95<br><br><b>Yearly:</b> €179.50                          | Access to 2 billion worldwide records  |

**Table 3: Website Comparison**  
(Conversion rates correct as of 30 July 2017)

It is interesting to note that Ancestry.co.uk offers a substantial discount if a person signs up for a yearly subscription for either package as opposed to the monthly option. A yearly standard subscription will save the user £47.89, while a yearly world subscription will save them £59.89. FindMyPast.ie also offers a small discount for the yearly standard subscription in comparison to the monthly option (a saving of €4.90) but the yearly world subscription works out at 10 cent more than the monthly equivalent (€179.50 annually versus €179.40 if you pay monthly). Although Ancestry.co.uk is more expensive than FindMyPast.ie, the user receives access to a much larger collection of records which justifies the price difference.

#### 2.4.3 RootsIreland.ie

RootsIreland.ie, as previously mentioned earlier in this chapter, is run by The Irish Family History Foundation and hosts the database of records began by the Irish Genealogy

Project. It offers online access to a huge variety of records, including parish church records of baptisms, marriages and deaths, civil records, census returns and gravestone inscriptions. RootsIreland.ie began using a pay-per-view model (i.e. paying individually for each record viewed) and this was heavily lambasted by users over the years. It eventually followed in the steps of Ancestry.co.uk and FindMyPast.ie by adopting a subscription model (**Paton, 2014**).

Table 4 displays its current payment options:

| Subscriptions       | Cost |
|---------------------|------|
| <b>Yearly Pass</b>  | €225 |
| <b>6 Month Pass</b> | €125 |
| <b>1 Month Pass</b> | €25  |
| <b>1 Day Pass</b>   | €10  |

**Table 4: RootsIreland.ie Subscription Options  
(Irish Family History Foundation, 2017)**

The fact that there is a charge for accessing these records has provoked criticism in some quarters. Caitriona Crowe, Head of Special Projects at the National Archives of Ireland, pointed out in an interview with RTÉ podcast *The History Show* in May 2012 that all of the records now available on RootsIreland.ie were transcribed by individuals undertaking FÁS training schemes. As FÁS is funded by the public, she argues the records should be available for free as the public has already paid for them through their taxes (**Paton, 2012**).

## 2.5 Literature Conclusion

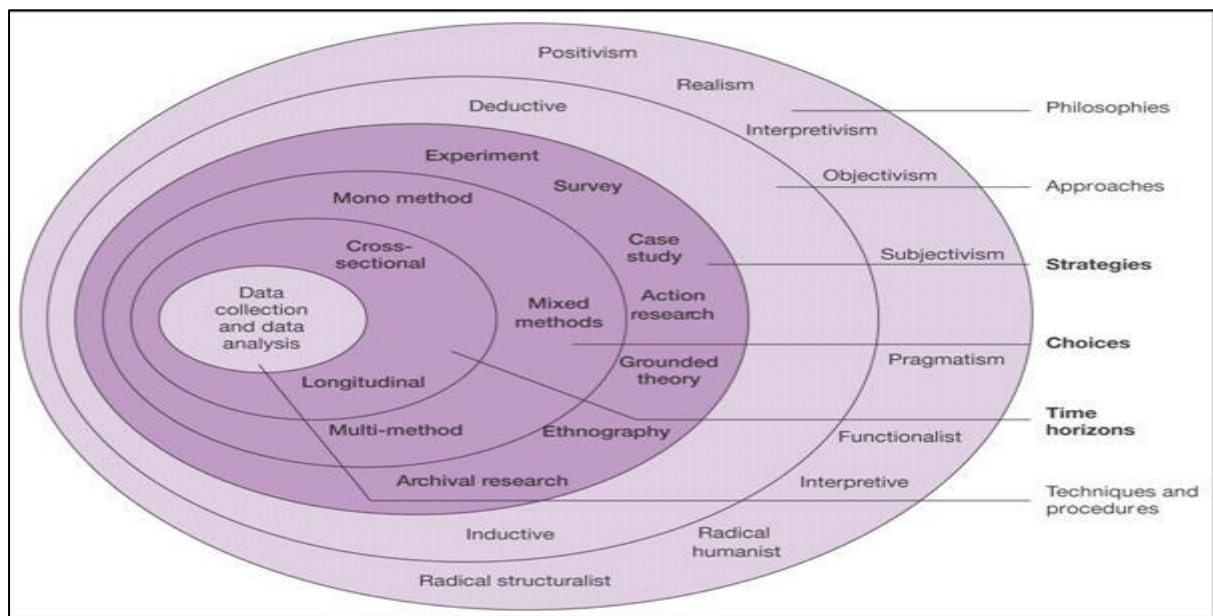
This literature review has attempted to illustrate the incredible popularity of genealogy in the public sphere and how this interest has translated into various economic opportunities for different stakeholders. The Irish Government regards genealogy as a significant avenue for the promotion of tourism. The media produces a variety of television shows all over the world focusing on family history because they know they will attract large audiences. Commercial businesses have set up subscription websites and offer access to

records for a price. It is undeniable that the pursuit of genealogy has captured the public imagination but is commodifying history and in particular genealogical records ethical?

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 Methodology Introduction

A carefully crafted methodology plan is essential when undertaking any research project. This chapter describes in detail the research methodology that was employed to complete this dissertation. The approach is based on the “Research Onion” concept. This framework (visually represented in Figure 1 below) begins in the outside layer and proceeds inwards, encapsulating the various stages a researcher must traverse in order to formulate a viable methodology.



**Figure 1: Research Onion**  
(Saunders *et al*, 2016, p. 124)

### 3.2 Research Design

#### 3.2.1 Research Philosophy

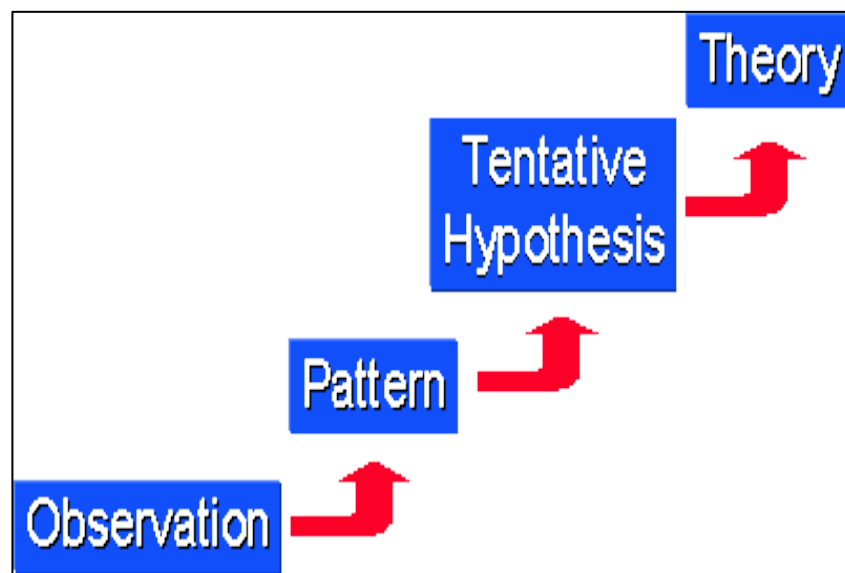
The philosophy of Interpretivism was adopted for this research question. Interpretivism postulates that a person or group makes sense of situations based upon their individual experiences, memories and expectations (Saunders *et al*, 2016, p. 140). The process of researching family history can be an intensely personal journey depending on the



circumstances of the particular family in question. This philosophy, therefore, proved the most suitable as it takes into account that different people will have different opinions based on their own individual experiences.

### 3.2.2 Research Approach

An inductive approach was undertaken as this method encourages the researcher to disregard any preconceived notions and approach the research with an open mind (Saunders *et al*, 2016, p. 147). The diagram below (Figure 2) illustrates the steps involved in the inductive approach:



**Figure 2: Inductive Method Diagram**  
(Research Methods Knowledge Base, 2006)

- **Observation** - Genealogy is a popular hobby all over the world.
- **Pattern** - Several commercial genealogy businesses exist and offer access to genealogical records for a fee.
- **Tentative Hypothesis** – The majority of people interested in genealogy believe it is ethical/unethical for commercial businesses to charge money for access to genealogical records.
- **Theory** – The majority of people interested in genealogy do not regard charging money for access to genealogical records as unethical.

### 3.2.3 Research Strategy

The research strategy for this dissertation was two-fold. The first facet involved interviewing some of the major stakeholders in the Irish genealogy landscape to provide a valuable backdrop for the research question. Three of these stakeholders were contacted via e-mail to request meetings and included:

- **Tom Quinlan** – Keeper of the National Archives of Ireland
- **Ciara Kerrigan** – Head of Genealogy and Heraldry at the National Library of Ireland
- **Brian Donovan** – CEO of genealogy company Eneclann

All three parties agreed to an interview which were recorded by taking written notes with the consent of the participants. These meetings took place at the premises of each respective organisation and lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour in length. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured style with a mixture of open and closed questions. A semi-structured interview involves the researcher formulating a list of themes and some central questions they would like to discuss but at the same time allowing the individual being interviewed the freedom to offer their thoughts on the general topic (**Saunders *et al*, 2016, p. 391**). An open question encourages the individual to explain/describe something or elaborate on a previous answer, while a closed question requests a definite response (**Saunders *et al*, 2016, p. 389**).

The second strategy employed was a questionnaire aimed at a core sample group. Questionnaires possess a number of advantages. They are relatively straightforward to carry out, there are little or no costs involved and it can be distributed to a large number of people at one time. It is simple to condense data into easy to understand graphs and charts. It also must be noted that the general public often put a substantial amount of faith in information generated from this kind of research strategy (**Saunders *et al*, 2016, p. 181**). This sense of authority can be helpful in terms of establishing confidence in the findings of the dissertation.

A first draft of the questionnaire was formulated on paper comprised of 10 questions. The aim was to make it short and concise as people rarely enjoy doing surveys and a longer survey would be likely to dissuade them from taking part. An equivalent online version was created using the website SurveyPlanet. A pilot test was then carried out. A pilot test is essentially a preliminary run of the survey with a small group and is an excellent way to refine the questionnaire and ensure all the questions are clear and easy to understand (Saunders *et al*, 2016, p. 473).

The link was sent out to a group of 12 people similar to the selected sample group. Each person was asked to fill out the questionnaire and provide feedback on how the questions were worded, if they were easy to understand, the length it took to complete the questionnaire, if there were any questions they would add/remove and any other opinions that came to mind. A few minor adjustments were suggested for clarity but the general consensus seemed to indicate the questions were straightforward and the survey did not take long to complete.

The finished version (Appendix Item 1) was made up of 13 questions and encapsulated mixed method research by combining quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (written) questions (Saunders *et al*, 2016, p. 165). The questions involved factual and demographic variables such as age group, gender, nationality and country of residence (Saunders *et al*, 2016, p. 445). These questions were included to determine if any patterns were visible in relation to certain opinions, for example if there was a divide between the perspective of younger and older people or different nationalities.

### 3.3 Sampling – Selecting Respondents

The type of sampling employed for this research project was purposive sampling. This approach involves the intentional selection of respondents who can best answer the specific research question (Saunders *et al*, 2016, p. 301). In this case, there would have been little point simply asking the general public because there are many people out there who have no experience or interest in genealogy and would therefore have had little opinion on it. Consequently, the target audience of this questionnaire was adults aged 18 years and over

who have previously researched their family history or may have an interest in researching their family history in the future.

### 3.4 Data Collection

This study was carried out within a three-month window, making it cross-sectional in nature. Cross-sectional research captures a snapshot in time as opposed to a substantial period (**Saunders *et al*, 2016, p. 200**). An online and paper version of the questionnaire were produced. The online version was formulated on the website SurveyPlanet. This website was selected as it is user friendly and does not place a limit on the number of questions contained in a survey. It was published on 19 June 2017. The deadline was set for four weeks, finishing on 14 July. The link was sent to the administrator of the following online channels:

- Irish Genealogy News – Blog
- The Irish Ancestral Research Association (TIARA) – Newsletter
- Irish Genealogical Research Society – Facebook group
- Genealogy Addicts UK & Worldwide – Facebook group

The aim of the research was explained and permission was sought to publish the survey on their respective forums. Each administrator kindly agreed to promote the survey.

Paper versions were distributed to:

- The National Archives of Ireland
- The National Library of Ireland
- Genealogical Society of Ireland

The paper versions for the National Archives and the National Library followed the delivery and collection model (**Saunders *et al*, 2016, p. 440**). Permission to place surveys within each institution was sought when interviewing Tom Quinlan on 5 July and Ciara Kerrigan on 28 June respectively. Both Tom and Ciara gave their permission and 25 copies were handed over to each, with the intention of providing more if they should be required. The completed questionnaires were then collected when the deadline expired.

Paper surveys were also handed out to members of the Genealogical Society of Ireland at a meeting in the Royal Marine Hotel on 28 June 2017. The topic of the dissertation was explained to the members in attendance and they each filled out the form and returned them at the conclusion of the meeting. As the paper versions were distributed later than the online version, the deadline for both was extended from 14 July to 21 July.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

SurveyPlanet offers a variety of options for analysis upon completion of a questionnaire. It is possible to export the results into a Microsoft Word file, a Microsoft Excel file or a PDF file. The decision was made to export the results into a Microsoft Excel file and add the results of the paper surveys to the spreadsheet manually. Excel was chosen as it is user friendly and is suitable for the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative results. A variety of formulae can be utilised in order to assess large amounts of quantitative data quickly, ascertain percentages and create charts in order to display the findings. The availability of filters assists the process of reviewing qualitative data. In addition to Excel, the website WordItOut.com was used to create word clouds. Word clouds take information and produce a chart which displays the frequency of certain words. The larger the word, the more often it was mentioned. Word clouds proved to be an excellent tool for picking out themes present in the data.

### 3.6 Research Ethics

The questionnaire targeted individuals with an interest in genealogy over the age of 18 and as a result did not require detailed ethical consent. The paper questionnaires contained an information sheet (Appendix Item 2) explaining what the dissertation was about and assured the respondent their answers would be anonymous, confidential and only retained for the purpose of the dissertation. It then asked the respondent to confirm they consented to their answers being used as part of the study by ticking a box. The online version began with the same information and consent was confirmed if they clicked to continue forward to the questionnaire (Saunders *et al*, 2016, p. 252).

### 3.7 Research Limitations

One of the major potential limitations involved in this dissertation was the possibility of a small sample size. It is vital to have a reasonable number of replies to a questionnaire if anything is to be gleaned from it. It would make little sense to make generalisations based on a miniscule group (**Saunders *et al*, 2016, p. 281**). Many people dislike filling out surveys so the final number of replies was certainly a concern prior to releasing the questionnaire. Fortunately, any anxiety about the response rate proved to be unfounded. The original target was set at 250 respondents but expectations were significantly surpassed. The online survey received 1,506 replies and 35 people completed the paper version. Not all of the responses were useful however. Some participants did not fill out all the questions properly and as a result were disregarded. This left a final total of 1,536 viable participants.

Another pressing issue relates to the nature of the answers provided. It must be taken into account that some of the individuals who did take the time to complete the questionnaire may not have given it a huge amount of thought or attention. This is unfortunately a potential pitfall of any questionnaire regardless of the topic and all that can be done is to take this into account when assessing the results. The findings, therefore, have been presented as a (hopefully) interesting insight into how the general public feel about the commercialisation of genealogy but any attempts to provide a definitive conclusion were purposefully avoided.



## Chapter 4: Data Analysis

This chapter will outline the content of the interviews conducted with relevant stakeholders and the basic findings of the questionnaire distributed to the core sample group – people who have researched their family history, are currently conducting research or who are interested in doing so in the future. The following chapter will discuss these results in detail in relation to the research question.

### 4.1 Stakeholder Interviews

In order to provide an adequate backdrop for the research question posed in this dissertation, it was deemed necessary to talk directly to some of the major players in the Irish genealogical landscape. Consequently, three of the main stakeholders were contacted via e-mail. The aim of the dissertation was explained and an interview requested. Each organisation was willing to partake in a discussion and a timeslot was arranged.

#### 4.1.1 Brian Donovan

An interview with Brian Donovan, CEO of Irish genealogical company Eneclann and the popular subscription website FindMyPast.ie, was conducted on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017. The meeting took place at the Eneclann office located on Aungier Street in Dublin's city centre and lasted about 45 minutes. Donovan offered an insight into the perspective of the commercial sector of the genealogy industry in Ireland. He stated he personally had no particular objection to the concept of genealogical records being free to access but questioned the feasibility of such an endeavour. He pointed out the digitisation and indexing process is expensive and argued that unless the Government would be willing to foot the bill, the money must be generated from the people wishing to access the records.

#### 4.1.2 Ciara Kerrigan

An interview with Ciara Kerrigan, head of Genealogy and Heraldry at the National Library of Ireland, was conducted on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2017. The meeting took place on the premises



of the NLI which is located on Kildare Street in the city centre of Dublin and lasted approximately an hour. Kerrigan stated the NLI is committed to providing free access to the genealogical records in its collections as part of its statutory role as a public institution. She did however acknowledge that the NLI may, in order to make collections of genealogical interest more widely available, engage in a partnership with commercial genealogy publishers. Presently the NLI has not partnered with any commercial company to fund the digitisation and indexing of collections but Kerrigan stated it may be something they might pursue in the future.

#### 4.1.3 Tom Quinlan

Tom Quinlan is the Keeper at the National Archives of Ireland and an interview was conducted on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2017. The meeting lasted an hour and took place at the NAI which is situated on Bishop Street in Dublin's city centre. The NAI provides a dedicated genealogy advisory service for visitors. Quinlan stated the NAI is a huge resource for individuals attempting to trace their family history but genealogy is not actually a core element of its mandate. The main purpose of the NAI, governed by the National Archives Act 1986, is the preservation of State records. Some of these records will have genealogical value and others will not, making genealogical research an advantageous by-product as opposed to a key component of their remit.

The institution is evaluated based on footfall and digital hits to its website. Physical and online visits are encouraged by the offer of unrestricted access to the resources held there. The staff digitise collections in-house as much as possible. In addition to providing greater access to the public, a high-quality digital copy of a record means the original record does not have to be handled as much and its preservation is not threatened to the same degree. Quinlan acknowledged the institution does not always have the time and/or resources to digitise and index records however.

The NAI has previously joined forces with commercial companies to assist in the process of making records with genealogical value available online and may do so again in the future if deemed necessary. These partnerships tend to involve a compromise between the two parties. The NAI will give the records over to the company for digitisation and indexing.

The company will be given permission to host the records on their website behind a paywall for a specific period, typically five years. During this time, the company will provide unrestricted access to their website from NAI computers so individuals will be able to view the records for free when visiting the archives. This allows the NAI to maintain its free access policy and the company in question to recoup the money it invested in the digitisation and indexing process. When the agreed period has elapsed, the NAI can create their own website and allow people to access the records for free.

## 4.2 Questionnaire

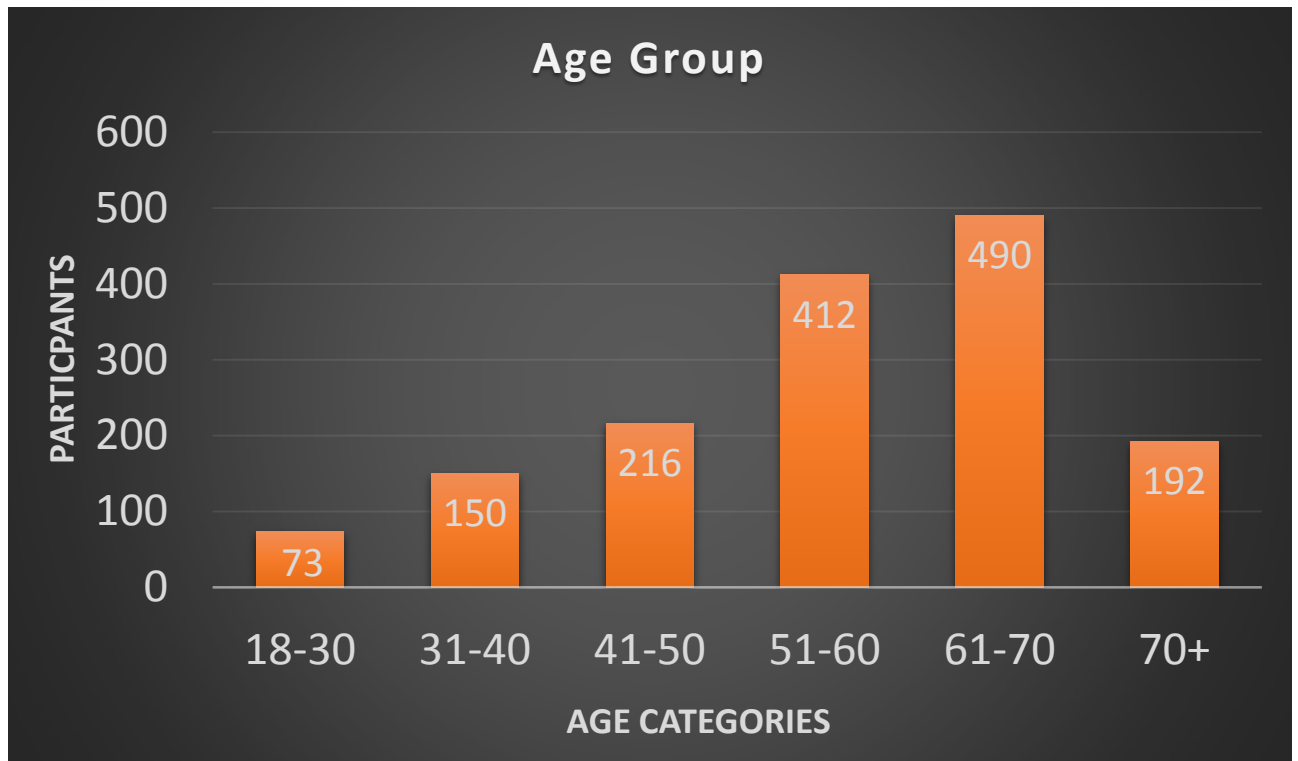
The questionnaire, as previously mentioned, was released on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2017. A paper version was distributed to the National Library, the National Archives and the Genealogical Society of Ireland. An online version was generated through the website SurveyPlanet and published to a variety of online genealogical forums. The deadline was originally set for 14<sup>th</sup> July 2017 but was later extended to 21<sup>st</sup> July. The online results were exported from SurveyPlanet into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and the results of the paper questionnaire were added to the file manually. Participation numbers were high, producing a final total of 1,536. The following section outlines the results of the questionnaire.

### 4.2.1 Question 1: What is your age group?

Participants were asked to confirm their age group. They were given six categories to choose from:

- 18-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61-70
- 70+

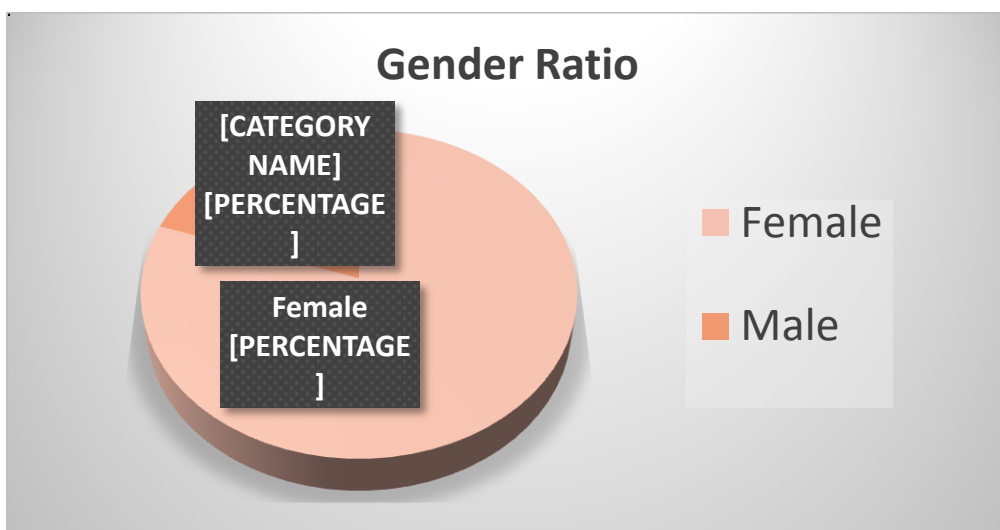
The following bar chart (Figure 3) offers a visual representation of the results and reveals the majority of respondents were from the 61-70 category, followed by the 51-60 age bracket. The 18-30 group received the smallest number of participants.



**Figure 3: Age Categories Bar Chart**

#### 4.2.2 Question 2: What is your gender?

The participants were asked to confirm their gender. They were given three options – female, male and other. As can be seen by the pie chart below (figure 4) the majority of respondents (80%) were female and only 20% were male. No one opted to use the ‘other’ option.



**Figure 4: Gender Ratio Pie Chart**

#### 4.2.3 Question 3: What country do you live in?

Participants were asked to state what country they live in. This question was left open as it would not have been practical to list every country in the world on the questionnaire and only listing some may have inadvertently caused offense. The following results (displayed in Table 5) were provided:

|             |                     |
|-------------|---------------------|
| Argentina   | Netherlands         |
| Australia   | New Zealand         |
| Britain     | Northern Ireland    |
| Bulgaria    | Norway              |
| Canada      | Pakistan            |
| Chile       | Republic of Ireland |
| England     | Scotland            |
| France      | South Africa        |
| Germany     | Spain               |
| Greece      | Switzerland         |
| India       | The Bahamas         |
| Isle of Man | United States       |
| Italy       | Venezuela           |
| Luxembourg  | Wales               |
| Malaysia    |                     |

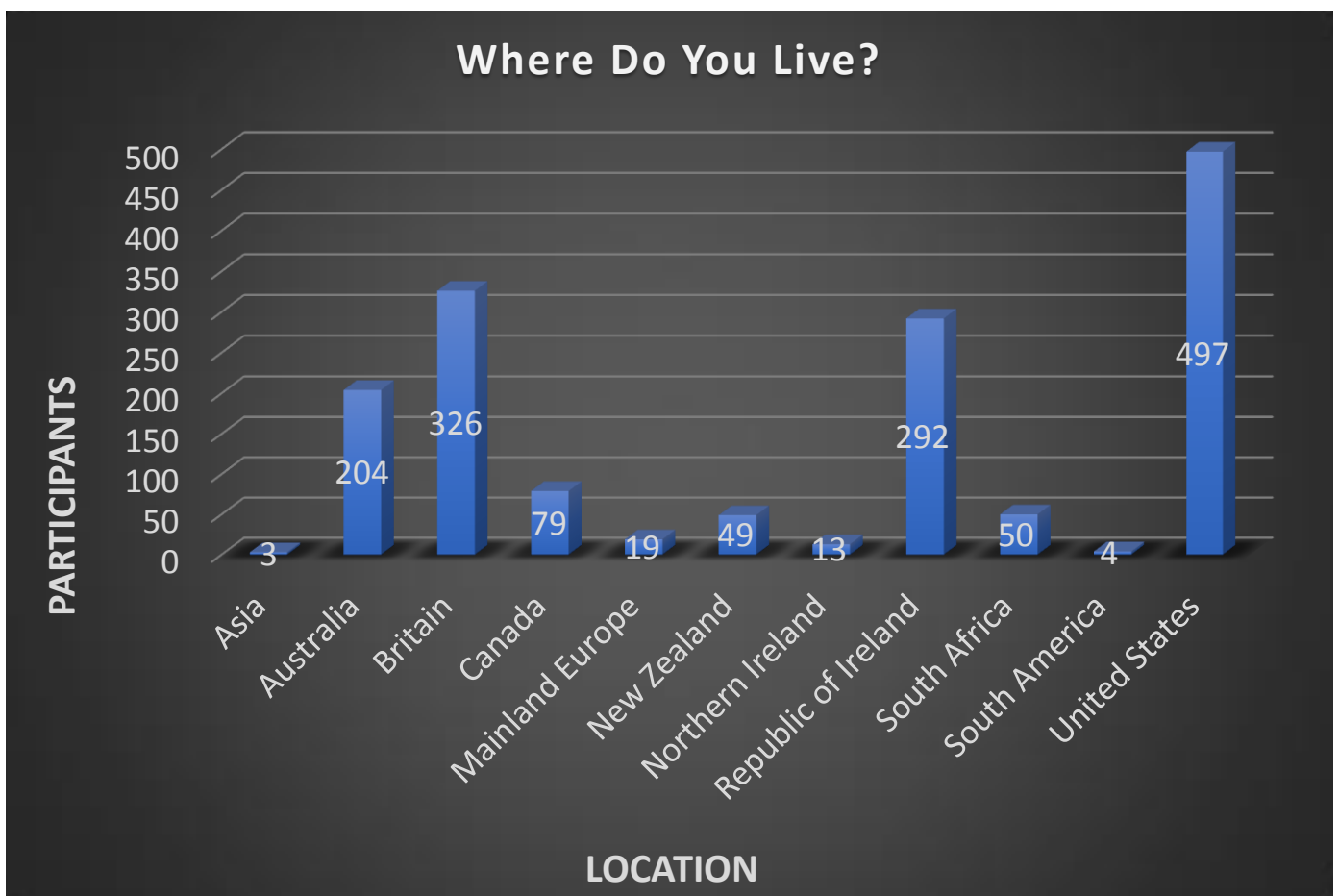
**Table 5: Countries of Residence List**

It would be difficult to fit all of these countries onto one chart so for the sake of brevity those that could be grouped together or had only one or two respondents were placed into appropriate broader categories in the following manner:

- **Asia** – India, Pakistan, Malaysia
- **Australia**
- **Britain** – England, Wales, Scotland, Isle of Man, The Bahamas (The Bahamas was included under Britain simply because it is a member of the Commonwealth and did not fit with any of the other broader categories)

- **Canada**
- **Mainland Europe** – Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Switzerland
- **New Zealand**
- **Northern Ireland**
- **Republic of Ireland**
- **South Africa**
- **South America** – Argentina, Chile, Venezuela
- **United States**

The column chart below (Figure 5) shows the greatest number of participants live in the US, (32%), followed by the UK (22%), Republic of Ireland (19%) and Australia (13%). There were also a moderate number of respondents from Canada (5%), South Africa (3%) and New Zealand (3%) and a small percentage from Asia (0.2%) and South America (0.3%). The response from Northern Ireland (1%) and Europe (1%) was lower than expected.



**Figure 5: Countries of Residence Column Chart**

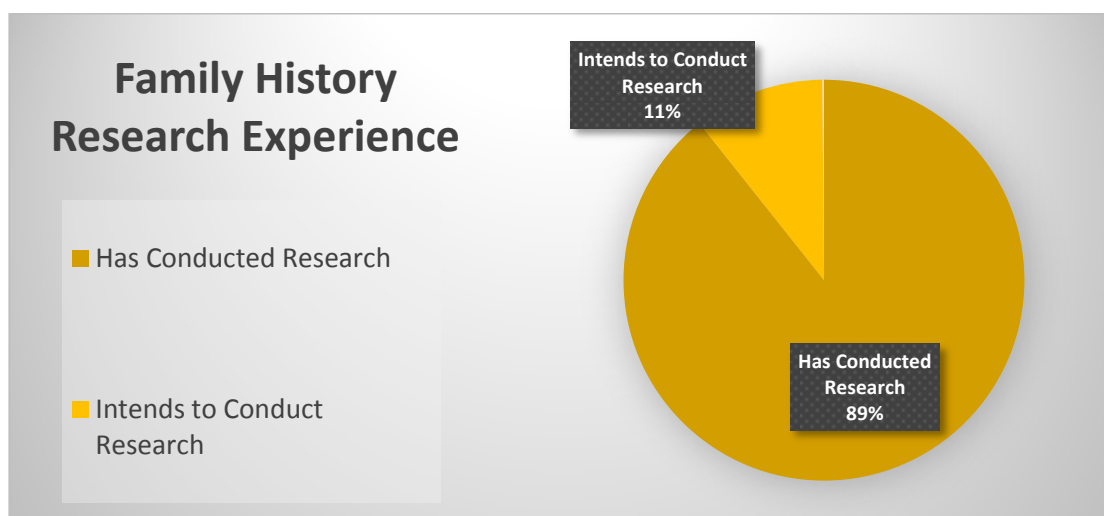
#### 4.2.4 Question 4: What is your nationality?

The question of nationality was also left open. It was assumed that people would simply state their official nationality, that is nationality of the country in which they are a citizen. Unfortunately, there seems to be differing interpretations of what nationality means. Some people offered one answer (e.g. Irish, American, French), others provided dual nationalities (e.g. Irish-American) and many gave an entire history of their ancestors and where they came from (e.g. maternal Irish/paternal Italian or 1/3 Spanish and 2/3 Bulgarian).

As a result, it was exceptionally difficult to narrow these results down into neat percentages. One could assume a person calling themselves Irish-American is an American person with Irish heritage as many individuals with this background often refer to themselves using this term. It is impossible to be sure however. Perhaps the participant is an Irish person who gained American citizenship and this is why they call themselves Irish-American. Consequently, there are no exact figures for this question because it is simply not possible to collate the results when the participants have approached the question differently.

#### 4.2.5 Question 5: Have you previously researched your family history or do you intend to research your family history in the future?

The participants were asked to state whether they had previously researched their family history or plan to research it in the future in an attempt to gage their level of experience with genealogy. The results, illustrated by the pie chart below (Figure 6), reveal the majority of respondents (89%) have conducted research.



**Figure 6: Genealogical Research Experience Pie Chart**









**Figure 9: Willingness to Pay for Resources Bar Chart**

4.2.9 Question 9: If you have paid for genealogical records within the last year, please list the organisations/companies/websites you used and approximately how much you paid to use them (i.e. one-off payment, monthly/yearly subscription fee, etc.)

The majority of respondents used more than one resource in the course of their research but the most consistent answer was, as illustrated by the word cloud (Figure 10) on the following page, various geographical versions of Ancestry which was referenced 909 times in total. The second most popular answer was various geographical versions of FindMyPast, which was mentioned 446 times.

In terms of how much people had spent, this varied based on the number of resources they used. About 20% of participants stated they had only spent small amounts (e.g. less than €100) in the last year for copies of records or one subscription for a short period, while approximately 80% had paid anything between €100 at the lower end and over €1000 at the very top end for various website subscriptions and the services of a professional genealogist. The average was approximately €350 per year.



The donut chart (Figure 11) reveals the internet was the most popular choice at 66%, followed by word of mouth (23%). The participants who utilised the ‘Other’ option mentioned gaining knowledge about available resources through:

- Membership of genealogical societies and organisations
- Attending classes, lectures and conferences
- Genealogical publications and magazines
- Family members

#### 4.2.11 Question 11: If you have/are willing to pay for genealogical records, what is the main reason

The participants who stated they would have or would be willing to pay for access to genealogical records were asked to explain the main reason why they would pay. The results, displayed on the word cloud (Figure 12) below, reveal four core reasons:

- **Access** – Sometimes it is the only way to gain access to the information they require
- **Usability** – They make it easy to search through huge amounts of records
- **Convenience** – They can conduct research from wherever they choose
- **Expense** – It is ultimately less expensive than travelling to view a record



Figure 12: Payment Reasons Word Cloud

#### 4.2.12 Question 12: Do you feel it is ethical for commercial businesses (e.g. Ancestry.com) to charge money for genealogical records?

The main crux of this dissertation has been to explore if people feel there is any ethical dilemma surrounding commercial businesses making money from genealogical records. This question was put to the participants and approximately 75% do not feel there is an issue with a business charging money for access to records.

#### 4.2.13 Question 13: Do you feel it is ethical for cultural institutions (e.g. public libraries, public archives, etc.) to charge money for genealogical records?

Cultural institutions generally only charge fees to recoup their costs but participants were asked how they would feel if these organisations introduced charges for access to their genealogical resources. The results reveal two dominant schools of thought. The majority (roughly 80%) argued against cultural institutions charging money for access to genealogical records as they are funded by tax money but had no issue with the organisation covering their own costs by charging for photocopying or specialised staff assistance. A smaller but vocal contingency (approximately 20%) stated they would be willing to pay to access genealogical records in a public institution as they appreciate how much it costs to provide such resources and would be happy to support them financially.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The previous chapter outlined the basic results of the questionnaire. This chapter will offer an in-depth discussion of these results and how they can be interpreted in relation to the research question posed.

### 5.1 Demographics

It seems like a reasonable assumption that the popularity of genealogy in the media in recent years would have increased the number of younger people (18-30) conducting their own family research. The results of the survey, detailed on table 6 below, indicate that despite its prominence in the public eye, genealogy remains a pursuit predominantly enjoyed by older people. The 18-30 age group made up just 5% of participants, while by comparison the 61-70 age group consisted of 32%.

| <b>Age Group</b> |            |
|------------------|------------|
| <b>18-30</b>     | <b>5%</b>  |
| <b>31-40</b>     | <b>10%</b> |
| <b>41-50</b>     | <b>14%</b> |
| <b>51-60</b>     | <b>27%</b> |
| <b>61-70</b>     | <b>32%</b> |
| <b>70+</b>       | <b>13%</b> |

**Table 6: Age Categories**

This makes a certain amount of sense. The majority of people under 30, generally speaking, are most likely studying or employed in some capacity. Some may have young families to care for. Of those that possess an interest, many may not have the time to devote to researching their family history as it can be a time-consuming endeavour. They also may not have the money to spend on website subscriptions.

The majority of older people are probably retired and consequently will have more time to pursue genealogical research. They may also be more likely to have funds available if they wish to pay for genealogy resources. Additionally, it is possible older people are simply more interested in researching their families than a younger person. This could be for a number of reasons. As we get older, we often tend to reflect on our lives more. This may inspire a person to want to learn about their past. Younger people are typically more focused on the present.

Societal changes may also play a part. Most countries, Ireland especially, were very conservative in nature until the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century introduced a more open era. Prior to this anything deemed controversial was often brushed under the carpet and ignored for fear of “what the neighbours may think”. As a result, many people knew very little about their own families because their parents simply did not speak about certain relatives or what happened to them. Young Irish women who fell pregnant out of wedlock is a perfect example.

These women were often sent away to institutions to give birth in secret to avoid shaming their family. The Magdalene Laundries, run by four different religious orders and supported by the Irish Government, is the most famous example of this within Ireland. Thousands of unmarried women were forced to stay in these institutions until they gave birth. Mother and child would then be separated and the child would be put forward for adoption without the mother’s consent. These children often ended up with American families. Sometimes the woman would be allowed to return to her family but often the family did not want her back. In cases like this, she would remain in the institution and essentially spend the rest of her life as a slave, physically and mentally abused and forced to carry out intensive labour for no payment (**McCarthy, 2010, pp. 211-213**).

It is only in recent years that the barbaric treatment of these women came to light and an investigation was finally launched. The aim of the McAleese Report, published in February 2013, was to establish what had occurred in these institutions but it was heavily criticised for excluding most of the testimony provided by the survivors and minimising the abuse they endured (**Ó Fátharta, 2013**). The Magdalene Laundries is one of the most shameful stains on Irish history and it is likely many individuals that grew up in this era may have vague memories of a mysterious relation that one day was there and the next day was

gone. Consequently, it would make sense if they were drawn to genealogy as an older person in an attempt to puzzle together what actually happened to a family member who may have suffered this fate.

The results of the survey would suggest that genealogical research is significantly more popular with women (80%) than men (20%). This could play into the stereotypical idea that women are more family-orientated than men and subsequently have more of an interest in learning about their ancestors. Another stereotype suggests women possess more patience than men. Genealogical research is a time-consuming process so if we accept the notion that women are more patient it would make sense that it is a female-dominated hobby. A third possibility could be that women are simply more inclined to partake in questionnaires than men and this explains why the results are so skewed in favour of women. A 2013 Norwegian study found that young men are the least likely to respond when asked to participate in questionnaires, while older women are the most likely. This would certainly fall in line with the demographics of this survey (**Amundsen and Lie, 2013**).

The option of 'Other' was provided as an alternative for an individual who does not identify with either traditional gender. It is interesting to note that no participants availed of this option. As the concept of non-binary identities is a fairly recent development, it is probably understandable that no one selected it given the vast majority of respondents are of an older generation and may not be familiar with gender identities beyond male or female.

The majority of respondents were based in the United States (32%), followed by Britain (22%), the Republic of Ireland (19%) and Australia (13%). In contrast, the response from Asia (0.2%), South America (0.3%) and mainland Europe (1%) was much smaller. This could suggest the former group are more interested in genealogy than the latter but perhaps more likely is that this difference simply relates to the fact that the survey originated in Ireland. There are large communities of Irish people or people with Irish connections living in North America, Britain and Australia. As a result, these individuals may have been more interested in taking part. A survey conducted in Spain, by comparison, may be more likely to garner a high response rate from its neighbour Portugal as opposed to somewhere like China or Japan. The participation of Northern Ireland is something of an anomaly in this regard however as it only generated 1% of the overall response level.

The question of nationality seems straightforward on the surface but the answers received reveal a discrepancy in interpretation. The majority of Irish participants stated their nationality as 'Irish'. Several of these respondents will have ancestors that emigrated to Ireland from other countries at some point in history, whether it be decades or centuries ago. Irish people appear to acknowledge their ancestral links but do not incorporate them into their modern identity. The results show it is rare for an Irish individual to call themselves, for example, 'Irish-French' or 'Irish-Swiss'. The vast majority simply identify as 'Irish'. Respondents from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa generally displayed the same attitude in relation to their own respective nationalities. Britain also follows this format, although some individuals preferred to be more specific by stating whether they were Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish.

Some participants had a different response however. This was particularly noticeable with Americans. While many simply referred to themselves as 'American', several replied they were 'Irish-American'. This term is often used by individuals born in the United States who have Irish ancestry. As of 2015, 32.7 million Americans (1 in 10) identify themselves as being of Irish heritage. In addition, nearly 3 million Americans identify their heritage as Scottish-Irish. While the former group would generally be descendants of Irish Catholics, these individuals would mainly be related to Ulster Protestants who actually departed for America earlier than their Catholic counterparts. Some individuals claiming Irish ancestry may have very close relatives, such as parents or grandparents, born in Ireland. Others will be referring to ancestors that emigrated to the United States hundreds of years ago. Regardless of the period of time involved, these people clearly value their Irish connection and consider themselves to be equal parts Irish and American (**Desilver, 2017**).

The results also revealed some confusion regarding the question. There was a small number of respondents who mixed up nationality with race and listed themselves as 'White' or 'Caucasian'. There was also a significant number of respondents who mistook the concept of nationality for ethnicity and offered an ethnicity breakdown, for example stating they were 65% Irish, 10% Italian and 25% Scandinavian. It is likely the people who answered this way have taken DNA tests (e.g. the saliva sample kit offered by Ancestry referenced in chapter two) as this is the type of ethnicity breakdown they would receive after testing.



These people may have simply responded with this information because the questionnaire centred around genealogy. It is interesting to consider whether or not they would provide a similar answer when asked their nationality on a different type of form. Would they offer a breakdown as they did here or would they give the official nationality as it appears on their passport? It is difficult to say for sure but it seems unlikely a person would offer DNA results on a job application or tax form for example.

Can anything be extrapolated from these results? It could be argued that perhaps Americans care more about their ancestors because they incorporate them into their current identity in a way that other nationalities don't seem inclined to do so but this an extreme conclusion. Ultimately it appears a simple case of differing interpretations of the concept of nationality. When we take into account how many Americans identify as Irish-American (32.7 million), it is clear many consider their ancestral links relevant to how they view themselves today regardless of how long ago their ancestors arrived in America (**Desilver, 2017**). The majority of people from Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa appear to appreciate their genealogical connections but regard their nationality more as a personal identity that relates to them now. Neither option is better than the other. It is simply interesting to note the difference that exists.

## 5.2 Experience

The majority of participants (89%) have several years of experience with conducting family history. This lends significant credence to their opinions as most of them seem to be very familiar with the genealogy sector and the changes it has undergone over the last few decades. The insight they possess is therefore invaluable. Respondents were also asked to confirm how they began their family history research or how they would begin if they had not conducted any yet. The overwhelming answer was talking with family.

The vast majority would naturally use their parents or other close relatives as a starting point as these are the people who can provide an initial insight into the family as a whole and suggest what to focus on. Interestingly the second most popular answer was Ancestry.com. It suggests that many individuals see Ancestry as something akin to a core textbook. This is where a significant number of people start their journey and then they most likely expand to using other websites when they progress and need further information.

### 5.3 Genealogical Resources

Participants were asked to name three genealogical resources they are aware of. Ancestry was far and away the most common answer, with 1,178 mentions. This makes perfect sense as it is the biggest genealogy related website and carries out a heavy marketing campaign. It is interesting to note that the top answer (Ancestry) is significantly more popular than the closest runner up, FamilySearch.org, which received 636 references. This website is run by the Church of the Latter-Day Saints and is free to use. Although people do mention libraries, archives and cemeteries, the results are dominated by a list of various other websites. This would seem to indicate that people conducting family research lean heavily towards the use of online resources.

Participants were asked if they have ever paid for access to genealogical records and if not would they ever consider doing so. The results reveal that 77% of respondents have previously paid or are currently paying for access to genealogy resources. 10% stated they have never paid but would be willing to pay, while 13% said they had never paid and would never pay. At first glance this indicates the vast majority of people involved in genealogy research see no problem paying for access to records but the results are not quite so straightforward.

About 70% of this group were enthusiastically in favour of payment as they felt the service was well worth the money they paid for it. The remainder were somewhat more divided. About 10% of that group actually stated they felt it was unethical but they were still willing to pay if they had no other option to get the information they wanted, while approximately 20% stated they didn't necessarily view it as unethical per se but were not particularly thrilled having to pay a company for information about their own relations.

For those who had paid, the price range varied considerably depending on the type and number of resources each participant used. Approximately 20% of this group stated they had only spent small amounts over the course of the last year (less than €100 in total) for one subscription or for various paper copies of records. The majority, around 80%, had paid anything between one and several hundred for two or more subscriptions and a few stated they had paid in the region of €1000 for various website subscriptions and the services of a

professional genealogist to aid them with their research. If we take €350 per year as an average figure, this gives rise to the question of whether or not genealogy is becoming the preserve of the middle class and wealthy of society. The current cost of living means a significant proportion of people would struggle to afford this amount (and potentially more) to conduct research. It is possible, of course, for individuals unable to pay to go to a public library or archive and access the information for free but many might not necessarily have the time to devote to doing this and as a result could simply abandon the idea altogether.

The participants who stated they would have or would be willing to pay for access to genealogical records were asked to explain the main reason why they would pay. Almost all quoted the same four reasons. The first reason was the ability to search. People felt these websites make searching for records much easier as they all possess a user-friendly search function and a variety of filters to narrow down information. For many people, this is preferable to tracking all the way to a repository and attempting to search through huge volumes of information that may or may not be indexed.

The second reason was cost. Respondents stated they are perfectly happy to pay the cost of a subscription as it is ultimately much cheaper than travelling to view a record. The third reason was convenience. A few mentioned they were unable to travel, potentially due to ill-health. These individuals also said they are happy to pay for a subscription because the websites allow them to continue their research from the comfort of their own homes. The final reason referenced was necessity. If they wanted the information and there was no other option, they would pay to access it. These reasons seem completely understandable. Not everyone has the time or money to travel, potentially to another country, just to view a record. People want an easy way to access this information and companies like Ancestry and FindMyPast offer this to them.

Participants were asked to confirm what resources they use personally. As already mentioned, 89% are experienced genealogical researchers and as a result subscribe to several resources but the most consistent answer was Ancestry with 909 references. This is again hardly surprising considering Ancestry's position as the market leader. When asked how they learned about paid genealogy resources, most people (66%) stated they learned about them through the internet. This would make sense as this is where these resources are generally based and can be easily found through search engines.

The second most popular answer was word of mouth (23%). Using the ‘Other’ option people also mentioned genealogical societies, genealogical conferences and genealogical magazines as ways they became familiar with available resources. It is interesting that television only accounts for 10% of the total. Given the number of genealogical television shows currently on air, it would be natural to assume television would play a greater role in spreading information about available resources.

## 5.4 Ethics

Participants were asked whether or not they feel it is ethical for commercial companies to charge money for access to genealogical records. Although some people (roughly 25%) argued genealogical records should belong to the public, the majority (approximately 75%) did not feel any particular sense of ownership regarding these records. This group of respondents praised the convenience provided by the websites. They appreciate being able to find the information they need without having to physically go to a repository. They are very aware of the hard work and cost involved in the digitisation and indexing process and feel they are paying for the service provided (i.e. the collation of the records) as opposed to access to the records themselves. The main complaint seemed to be how expensive the various subscriptions are.

Several participants mentioned they only took out subscriptions when they required them. They would sign up on a monthly basis and then simply cancel their subscription as soon as they had finished their research or if they were taking a break from it for the time being. Many respondents also stated they would not sign up if they had to pay the full price for a subscription and only proceeded to do so when the website in question was offering a special discounted rate. FindMyPast.ie, for example, periodically runs a promotion in which a user can get one month’s access to the website for the price of €1 (**FindMyPast, 2017**). Many respondents made reference to taking up this deal or the equivalent offered by its UK and US counterparts as they felt it was simply too expensive otherwise.

When participants were asked the same question in relation to cultural institutions, the majority (around 80%) seemed to feel that this would be unethical. They argued public institutions are funded by the tax payer and introducing another fee would essentially force researchers to pay for the same information twice. Most participants stated they had no

problem paying for copies of records or if they received research assistance from staff but emphasised any costs involved should be reasonable. The general consensus seemed to suggest it is perfectly acceptable for such organisations to cover their own costs but they should not aim to make a profit from genealogical records.

A smaller but significant group of respondents (about 20%) took a different stance and indicated they would be willing to pay for access to genealogical records in cultural institutions as they appreciate how much it costs to provide these resources. Many argued that despite government funding, cultural institutions are often subject to severe budgetary constraints and they would be happy to support them through payment. Some also pointed out that genealogy is a past-time and questioned why tax payers should be required to fund their hobby. They stated they would prefer to pay a fee as this would allow taxes to be spent on necessary alternatives such as health services. Interestingly there did not seem to a noticeable difference of opinion between age groups, genders or countries of residence when it came to these ethical queries.

Is there a contradiction in the opinions expressed in relation to these two questions? Why would people be willing to pay for a record from one source and not another? On the surface, it seems illogical but the difference in attitude towards paying for genealogical records from a website and from a public institution actually makes sense. Many participants expressed the belief that they are paying for the service the websites offer them as opposed to simply paying for access. Genealogical companies invest time and money to digitise and index records and provide a user-friendly search function allowing people to find the information they need.

Libraries and archives may also digitise records in-house when they can but they often do not have the time or funds to actually index them. People can access them if they are willing to search through them without the guidance of an index but this can be a time-consuming process. When we look at it from this point of view, it makes sense that researchers are happy to pay website subscriptions but not fees to a public institution. They believe they are paying for the ability to search huge volumes of material quickly and easily as opposed to simple access. This is something genealogical websites can offer more readily than public libraries and archives.

## 5.5 Conclusion

The main aim of this dissertation has been to explore how the general public interested in genealogy feel about the ownership of genealogical records. A questionnaire was formulated and distributed to this target group which asked the participants to comment on whether or not they feel it is ethical for commercial businesses to profit from such resources. The questionnaire received an excellent response and has provided a substantial sample from which to extrapolate a general consensus on this particular issue.

The results of the questionnaire revealed that approximately 75% of people do not have an issue with paying to access genealogical records. While some participants argued that records of genealogical value belong to the public on principle and there should be no fee, the vast majority did not see any ethical dilemma associated with charging money for access to them. They acknowledged the cost and hard work involved in the digitisation and indexing process and felt it was only fair for the companies involved to be compensated. Many did not see the subscription fees involved as payment for simply accessing the records. Several participants stated they believed they were paying for the service provided by these companies, that is the ability to search a vast array of records quickly and easily. They were happy to pay for the convenience.

Although the majority were in favour of payment, the one consistent complaint that presented itself was the level of cost. Most people were willing to pay but felt subscription prices were too high. Some mentioned they would be willing to pay for a variety of resources if the ones they were currently using were not so expensive. While people complained about the cost, no participants specifically indicated what they would consider a more reasonable price so this is something that may be worth investigating in future research.

The people who expressed frustration about the subscription fees generally felt the companies were charging too much in order to increase their profit margins. This may be the case but on the other hand the fees could actually be fair when we consider the cost involved in the digitisation and indexing process and also the other costs involved in running a business. It could be argued that prices are set in relation to the funds spent in order to

provide the service and these individuals are simply underestimating just how much money is needed to sustain these companies and the work they do.

While many participants disapprove of the subscription fees, several still pay them despite their reservations. At the same time, it is likely there is people out there interested in researching their family history that simply cannot afford to pay these charges at all. The findings of the survey revealed most individuals involved in genealogical research pay, on average, around €350 per year for various resources and many pay more than this. Given the cost of living in today's world, genealogical research is probably a luxury endeavour to a significant proportion of society. It is interesting to consider the implications here.

A person unable to afford paying for resources could go to a public library or archive to access information if they wished but depending on their circumstances (e.g. ill-health, caring for young children, etc.) this might not be as feasible as it sounds. If they cannot pay for access from their homes, many may simply decide to give up on the idea of finding out more about their family history altogether. It is outside the scope of this dissertation but the question of whether genealogy has in many ways become the preserve of the middle class and wealthy could provide a valuable future research topic, particularly in relation to how it might affect our view of history in the long term.

In addition to the ethical implications involved in commercial genealogy websites charging money for access to records, the participants were asked to give their thoughts about cultural institutions such as libraries and archives following suit. In this instance, the general consensus (roughly 80%) of people felt this would be unethical. The majority were willing to cover costs (e.g. photocopying records) but argued it would be unfair for these organisations to charge for access as they are funded by tax money and this would essentially be forcing individuals to pay twice.

About 20% of respondents stated they would not have a problem paying if fees were introduced across the board. Despite the fact that cultural institutions are funded by the tax payer, these people argued that this funding is not always enough to support their endeavours. They would be happy to pay as this would ensure libraries and archives can continue serving the community. Some also mentioned that genealogical research is a past-time and they feel it

is unfair that the tax payer is forced to pay towards their hobby. They argued if payments were introduced, taxes could be diverted to more urgent areas such as health services.

The findings of this dissertation ultimately suggest that commercial companies and cultural institutions are two sides of the same coin that serve the genealogical community in different ways. It is not fair to simply say one makes money from genealogical records and the other doesn't. These two avenues allow people to conduct family research in a way that suits their circumstances. For some people, going to a library or archive and accessing records for free is ideal because they cannot afford to pay for personal subscriptions themselves. Others may not have the time to visit a cultural institution or the records they require could be held somewhere that would involve costly travel. In this case an individual may prefer to pay for the convenience of being able to carry out research in their own home at their own leisure. This dissertation concludes that the majority of people involved in genealogy regard paying for access to records as simply one way of conducting research and generally do not view it as unethical in nature.

## 5.6 Recommendations

Based on the above findings, it is recommended that commercial companies consider ways in which they may be able to facilitate a reduction in their subscription prices. People interested in genealogy research are generally more than happy to pay for the service they provide but the overall cost seems to be a significant area of concern. Many of these businesses do offer discounts and special offers from time to time but at least 50% of participants using these resources specifically stated they only subscribed because they were able to avail of these deals. A large proportion stated they would not have done so if they had to pay the normal fee and would cancel their subscription once the special offer expired.

Several participants stated they would be willing to use several websites if they were not so expensive individually. If the major competitors were willing to compromise and each reduce their costs, they may all see an overall rise in subscriptions as people will not be forced to pick one over the other. A reduction in costs may also drive up the number of younger people (18-30) willing to sign up. Cost is probably one factor that prevents young people in particular from subscribing to these types of websites. While older people may have the time to go to a library or archive and access websites free of charge, most younger people



lead busy lives and may not have the time or energy to do this. If they are going to conduct research, it will most likely be on the internet in the comfort of their own homes at their own convenience. If commercial companies considered dropping their charges, it may encourage young people to give family research a chance.

Although this approach may potentially produce positive results in terms of increasing user numbers across the board, it is unlikely to be a viable option. These companies understandably must look out for their own interests. They need to ensure they cover the costs involved in running their business. This includes paying for office space, employing staff and marketing the service they offer, as well as the expense involved with digitising and indexing large collections of records. As a result, they may not be in a position to simply reduce their fees as they need to ensure all these variables are accounted for financially.

These companies also have no major incentive to reduce costs. People may complain about the fees but they are still willing to pay them because they want to gain access to specific information. A business will only consider dropping their fees if they are struggling to attract customers. Companies like Ancestry and FindMyPast do not appear to have this issue. From a business perspective, there would be no valid reason to drop their subscription costs.

While all commercial businesses need to make a profit in order to sustain themselves, a possible compromise may involve the introduction of concessions and rewards for certain sectors of the customer base. One example would be a student discount price upon verification of a valid student card. This could be one way in which to increase the number of younger subscribers. Generally speaking individuals who are studying are likely to either not be working for the duration of their course or possibly working part-time. Consequently, they probably would not have the funds available to pay the full price of a subscription. They could technically avail of a special offer if one comes up but this would need to be marketed directly to them. A student discount, on the other hand, might garner more interest as it is specifically aimed at this group and students are usually keenly aware of where they can use their student cards to receive a discount due to word of mouth.

Student discounts are often paired with senior citizen discounts but given the fact that the majority of people who use these websites fall into this category, it would not be practical

from a business point of view to offer them all a concession price. An alternative could be the introduction of a rewards system for long-term members. Many of the survey participants mentioned they only sign up for a short period, find the information they need and subsequently cancel their subscriptions. There were, however, several long-term members who joined up many years ago and have continually renewed their subscriptions. These individuals have demonstrated loyalty to the company and in turn the company could offer them a discounted price to express their appreciation. There could be a tiered system, offering lower prices the longer a person has been member. It could be divided into 3, 5 and 10 year divisions for example.

In terms of cultural institutions, it seems the majority of people are happy with the way things are at present. These organisations allow a person interested in their family history to conduct research free of charge and people are very keen for this to continue. Although most participants have no issue covering any costs incurred, the idea of a library or archive making profit from genealogical records provoked disapproval. Cultural institutions allow genealogical research to be democratic. They ensure a person who does not have personal internet access or the ability to pay for a subscription to a website the opportunity to search for information about their ancestors regardless. Caution should be taken regarding the introduction of any fees beyond covering basic costs as findings suggest it would be met with a negative reaction.

## Chapter 6: Reflection

### 6.1 MSc. Information and Library Management Course

I embarked on the one year full-time MSc. Information and Library Management in September 2016 at Dublin Business School. I had completed a joint subject undergraduate degree (Ancient History and Archaeology/Biblical and Theological Studies) at Trinity College in 2010 and had initially intended to pursue a career in the Museum sector. Unfortunately, there were very few job opportunities in this field at the time so I ended up working in a variety of retail and administration positions before making the decision to return to education.

I chose the Information and Library Management course as I felt it was a similar discipline to museum work but had more employment opportunities. I looked into both the DBS course and the UCD course available. I ultimately decided to apply for the DBS course for a number of reasons. I attended an Open Day at DBS and spoke with Marie O'Neill. Marie is the Head Librarian at DBS and founded the course. I was very impressed by her enthusiasm and passion for training librarians. I was also drawn to the fact that work experience was a core component of the course. In comparison, the UCD masters required 6-weeks work experience before application. It is not always easy to arrange a work placement without connections so I liked the fact that DBS helped the student to organise one.

The year was divided into two terms. Classes took place over 3 days per week (Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday) and consisted of 10 modules in total:

| Term 1                                    | Term 2   |
|---|--|
| Information Technology                    | Information Architecture                             |
| Teaching Librarian                        | Information Organisation                             |
| Records Management and Information Rights | Management for Information and Library Professionals |
| Research Methods I                        | Research Methods II                                  |
| Personal & Professional Development       | Network Resource Management                          |

### **Table 7: MSc. Information and Library Management Modules**

From talking to UCD library students, I found out the DBS course places a greater focus on the use of technology in the field of librarianship. As I have a flair for technology, I particularly enjoyed *Information Technology* and *Network Resource Management*. We learned the basics of HTML and CSS coding in *Information Technology*. I had always had an interest in coding but prior to this had not had an opportunity to attend classes so I was delighted this was an element of the course. One of our assignments involved building a library website and this was a fantastic experience. I was very pleased with how my attempt turned out and it was nice to have a final product for all the hard work involved.

*Network Resource Management* taught us about how networks actually work, various digital storage options, internet security and change management. We also had several classes on legal topics relating to librarianship, such as data protection, freedom of information, whistleblowing and ethical dilemmas. I completed a European Computer Driving License (ECDL) back in 2007 and as a result some of the topics we covered were familiar to me but technology evolves so fast that it was great to cover the information again and learn about how things have changed since that time. I really enjoyed the legal elements also because our lecturer was a barrister and it was interesting to hear about different cases and how they could affect the role of a librarian.

I enjoyed the *Records Management and Information Rights* module also as it provided the opportunity to learn all about the management of records and archiving. I am very much an organised person who likes to have systems in place to find things easily so this subject naturally appealed to me. It was great to learn how an archivist would go about undertaking such a project in a professional environment. I was somewhat less keen on the *Teaching Librarian* module. The lecturer was very good and it is a valuable topic but I am a relatively shy person so the thought of getting up and teaching a class does not appeal to me. I would rather have a background role so would be more drawn to working as a Systems Librarian as this would allow me to utilise my technology skills.

When classes concluded at the end of the second term, I undertook my work placement at the Oireachtas Library and Research Service based in Leinster House. It took place over the course of four weeks and I thoroughly enjoyed it. The placement allowed me the opportunity to encounter much of what I had learned throughout the course in a real-

world library context. I had the chance to meet with several staff members one-on-one and ask them questions. One of our assignments for the *Management for Information and Library Professionals* module involved choosing a specific library service and interviewing the head librarian that worked there in order to gain an understanding of how that service operated. There were several topics we were encouraged to talk about, such as user needs, marketing and budget issues. I felt this assignment helped prepare me for essentially interviewing the staff at the OLRMS and finding out the key aspects of the service they offer.

We also learned about the importance of metrics and demonstrating the value of a library service in the *Information and Library Management* module. Many of the systems used by the OLRMS have the ability to record this sort of data. The Enquiry Tracking System used by the librarians, for example, allows them to monitor the number of individuals using the library service and which political party they are affiliated with. Another example would be cataloguing. I had the chance to meet with the cataloguer and she explained to me she uses MARC21, AACR2 and the Dewey Decimal System. I had studied all of these during the *Information Organisation* module and it was interesting to see them being employed in a professional setting. The placement at the Oireachtas Library and Research Service gave me the opportunity to experience work in a busy library environment and learn from a variety of professionals in the field. I feel I came away with a good understanding of the key elements involved in the role of a librarian.

## 6.2 Dissertation

Following completion of my work placement, the next task was the dissertation. I chose to do my dissertation on genealogy for a variety of reasons. As I previously mentioned, I come from a history background having completed my undergraduate degree in Trinity College. Consequently, I wanted to find a topic that would allow me to express my interest in history and also be relevant to the library course. The idea of genealogy came to mind because my mother has been researching her family history over the last few years.

I felt genealogy would be an ideal subject for the dissertation as it deals with the history of families and also the use of records which plays a major role in the library world. This dissertation is not my first dissertation. I was required to complete one in the final year

of my undergraduate degree which was entitled '*The influence of the Greek myth of Pandora on the Christian perception of the Biblical figure of Eve*'. It involved the formulation of an original research question and the use of secondary research to explore it. This dissertation was a very different experience as it involved formulating a research question and conducting primary research in order to address it. I chose to produce a questionnaire as my form of primary research. I had never conducted a public survey before and learned a great deal.

The major lesson was the realisation that questionnaires/surveys are not as simple as I assumed. I imagined it would be fairly straightforward to put together a list of questions but it proved much more difficult than expected. Determining what questions needed to be asked and how to word them in a clear and neutral manner is surprisingly tough. I also realised how easy it can be to offend someone without meaning to. When I posted my survey to the Irish Genealogical Research Society Facebook page I received a few responses suggesting I was being biased. They interpreted my research question and the questions contained in the survey as an attack on commercial businesses. I explained to these individuals this was not my intent and apologised if it came across otherwise. This situation made me realise that it is important to take different viewpoints into account but at the same time it can be very difficult to please everybody.

Although I did not receive any specific complaints, I would amend question 2 of the survey if I could go back and redo it. This question asked the participants to confirm their gender and offered 'male', 'female' and 'other' as options. By using the term 'other' I was attempting to be inclusive of people who identify as anything other than male or female. I realise now that the term 'other' may have been offensive as it is not specific and lumps anyone who does not identify as a traditional gender into one category. If I could alter this, I would have used the term 'non-binary' or perhaps simply left it as an open option so the participant could fill in the term they are most comfortable with.

I was delighted to get so many responses to the questionnaire as it is very important to have a decent sample to work with in order to draw any meaningful insights but at the same time found the analysis process somewhat overwhelming. It was simple enough to assess the quantitative answers by using the formulae provided in Excel but the qualitative answers were more difficult. As they were open questions, each participant had something different to say so it was not possible to filter the answers. If I could redo it, I would strongly consider

making the qualitative questions (with the exception of questions 12 and 13) into quantitative questions instead. I elected to leave these questions open as I was concerned I may inadvertently leave out options and skew the results. I only reassessed this decision upon receiving the results in an Excel spreadsheet and realising I would have to wade through so many answers. This proved to be a very time-consuming approach and looking back I think it would have been easier to offer a list of suggestions the participant could choose from and an 'other' option so they could add in anything I had missed. This would have saved a great deal of time.

Another lesson was making sure to determine what options are available on different websites before starting the process of inputting your survey. I originally planned to disseminate the questionnaire through SurveyMonkey as I was familiar with this website but this did not pan out. The final version of the survey consisted of 13 questions in total. SurveyMonkey allows users to create questionnaires made up of 10 questions for free. Any further questions require signing up for a paid account. I did not realise this until I had already input the questions. As a result, I had to cancel the survey and switch to an alternative website called SurveyPlanet which allows the creation of questionnaires with unlimited questions for free.

SurveyPlanet was very simple and straightforward to use but also presented me with an issue. When I published the survey, I was under the impression that it was possible to export the survey results into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. This is indeed an option but is only available to paid members. By the time I made this discovery, it was too late as the survey was already live and had received a number of responses. I did not wish to ask people to fill out the same survey again on another website so decided to go ahead and purchase a paid account from SurveyPlanet. Although it was frustrating having to pay, I ultimately did not mind as SurveyPlanet provided the exported Excel document that I needed and this made the analysis of the results much easier to undertake. This experience made me realise it is very important to double check what is available for free and what requires payment before publishing a survey as once it is live your options are restricted.

The process of conducting interviews with various relevant stakeholders was somewhat intimidating as I was aware these people are experts in their field and I was worried my level of knowledge may not be sufficient to carry out a meaningful discussion

and come away with all the information I required. Fortunately, I was able to draw on the experience of conducting an interview as part of the previously mentioned college assignment in which we were required to select a specific library and interview the head librarian about the services they offer. Although I still felt nervous when meeting with the stakeholders, I followed the same approach in conducting the interview as I had for my assignment. I went in with specific questions in mind but also allowed the individual to offer their own thoughts. This allowed me to ascertain the information I needed and also pick up interesting insights that I had not previously been aware of or considered in relation to my research.

Although the entire process of writing this dissertation was challenging and at times stressful, I thoroughly enjoyed it. I had the opportunity to research a topic I am genuinely interested in and hone my research skills at the same time. I had only conducted an interview once before and had never carried out a public survey prior to this. While I do not claim to be any sort of expert now, I feel like I have a greater understanding of what original research involves and will hopefully be in a position to approach it with confidence should the opportunity present itself again in the future.



## Bibliography

- Amundsen, B. and Lie E. (2013) 'Fewer willing to participate in surveys'. Available at: <https://phys.org/news/2013-06-surveys.html> (Accessed: 15 August 2017).
- Ancestry.com (2017) 'Finding Your Roots'. Available at: <http://www.ancestry.com/cs/finding-your-roots> (Accessed: 22 July 2017).
- Ancestry.co.uk (2017) 'Start Free Trial'. Available at: <http://www.ancestry.co.uk/cs/offers/freetrial?ie=true> (Accessed: 16 April 2017).
- Ancestry.co.uk (2017) 'DNA'. Available at: [https://www.ancestry.co.uk/ireland?s\\_tnt=80804:0:0](https://www.ancestry.co.uk/ireland?s_tnt=80804:0:0) (Accessed: 16 April 2017).
- Bon Vacantia (2013) 'Make a claim to a deceased person's estate'. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/make-a-claim-to-a-deceased-persons-estate#history> (Accessed: 16 April 2017).
- Borders, W. (1981) 'Village in Tipperary is cashing in on Ronald Reagan's roots', *The New York Times*, 6 September [Online]. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/09/06/world/village-in-tipperary-is-cashing-in-on-ronald-reagan-s-roots.html> (Accessed: 18 July 2017).
- Cavaglieri, C. and Knight, J. (2009) 'A lost legacy? Lucky you &ndash; but watch out for greedy heir-hunters' fees', *The Independent*, 15 November [Online]. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/money/spend-save/a-lost-legacy-lucky-you-ndash-but-watch-out-for-greedy-heir-hunters-fees-1820829.html> (Accessed: 25 June 2017).
- Central Statistics Office (2016) 'Overseas Trips to and From Ireland'. Available at: [http://www.cso.ie/Quicktables/GetQuickTables.aspx?FileName=TMA14C1.asp&TableName=Overseas%20Trips%20to%20and%20from%20Ireland&StatisticalProduct=DB\\_TM](http://www.cso.ie/Quicktables/GetQuickTables.aspx?FileName=TMA14C1.asp&TableName=Overseas%20Trips%20to%20and%20from%20Ireland&StatisticalProduct=DB_TM) (Accessed: 26 June 2017).
- Cullen, N. (2017) 'Justin Trudeau's Irish Roots Revealed Using Findmypast Records', *FindMyPast.ie*. Available at: <https://blog.findmypast.ie/justin-trudeau-irish-roots-2453622892.html> (Accessed: 6 July).
- De Groot, J. (2009) *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Deignan, T. (2011) 'Presidential Visits to Ireland', *Irish America*, August/September [Online]. Available at: <http://irishamerica.com/2011/08/presidential-visits-to-ireland/> (Accessed: 18 July 2017).

Desilver, D. (2017) 'The fading of the green: Fewer Americans identify as Irish', *Pew Research Center*. Available at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/17/the-fading-of-the-green/> (Accessed: 15 August 2017).

Fáilte Ireland (2017) 'About Discover Ireland'. Available at: <http://www.discoverireland.ie/Info/About-Discover-Ireland> (Accessed: 1 July 2017).

Fáilte Ireland (2017) 'Heritage and History'. Available at: <http://www.discoverireland.ie/Things-To-Do/Ideas-for-arts-culture/Heritage-History> (Accessed: 1 July 2017).

Fáilte Ireland (2011) 'Queen and Obama bring advertising boost for Irish tourism'. <http://www.failteireland.ie/Utility/News-Library/Queen-and-Obama-bring-advertising-boost-for-Irish.aspx> (Accessed: 1 July 2017).

FindMyPast.ie (2017) 'Subscribe'. Available at: <https://www.findmypast.ie/pay?isfreetrialrequest=false> (Accessed: 16 April 2017).

FindMyPast (2017) 'Start your family history journey for €1'. Available at: <http://www.findmypast.ie/november-offer> (Accessed: 16 August 2017).

Irish Genealogical Gazette (2013) 'Genealogy – A National Resource?' *Irish Genealogical Gazette*, April [Online]. Available at: [https://www.familyhistory.ie/docs/gazette/2013/Gaz\\_Apr2013.pdf](https://www.familyhistory.ie/docs/gazette/2013/Gaz_Apr2013.pdf) (Accessed: 21 July 2017).

Heinlen, E. (2007) 'Genealogy and the economic drain on Ireland: Unintended consequences', *First Monday*, 12(1). Directory of Open Access Journals [Online]. Available at: <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1424/1342> (Accessed: 25 June).

Irish Family History Foundation (2017) 'Subscribe'. Available at: <https://rootsireland.ie/ifhf/subscribe.php> (Accessed: 16 April 2017).

Immediate Media Company (2017) 'Who Do You Think You Are? Live – Exhibitors'. Available at: <http://www.whodoyouthinkyouarelive.com/about-show/our-exhibitors> (Accessed: 22 July 2017).

Kenny, C. (2015) 'Certificate of Irish Heritage abandoned after low uptake', *The Irish Times*, 17 August [Online]. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/generation-emigration/certificate-of-irish-heritage-abandoned-after-low-uptake-1.2320015> (Accessed: 2 July 2017).

- Matthews, M. S. and Sandberg, B. (2012) *Genealogy*. London: McGraw-Hill.
- McCarthy, R. L. (2010) *Origins of the Magdalene Laundries: An Analytical History*. North Carolina: McFarland & Company.
- McGreevy, R. (2010) '1901/1911 censuses central to bid to boost visitor numbers', *The Irish Times*, 3 July [Online]. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/travel/1901-1911-censuses-central-to-bid-to-boost-visitor-numbers-1.617583?mode=amp> (Accessed: 17 April 2017).
- McGreevy, R. (2013) 'Tom Cruise's Irish ancestry stretches back to the time of Strongbow', *Irish Times*, 3 April [Online]. Available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/film/tom-cruise-s-irish-ancestry-stretches-back-to-the-time-of-strongbow-1.1347399> (Accessed: 16 April 2017).
- Morgan, G. G. (2012) *Genealogy*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. US: McGraw-Hill Osborne Media.
- Murphy, C. (2015) 'Report of the Joint Committee on Maximising Our Cultural and Genealogical Heritage', *Joint Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht*. Available at: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/Committee-Report-on-Genealogy.pdf> (Accessed: 17 April 2017).
- Murphy, S. J. (2016) 'American Presidents with Irish Ancestors', *Academia*. Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/29768043/American\\_Presidents\\_with\\_Irish\\_Ancestors](https://www.academia.edu/29768043/American_Presidents_with_Irish_Ancestors) (Accessed: 18 July 2017).
- Ó Fátharta, C. (2013) 'A moral obligation', *The Irish Examiner*, 19 July [Online]. Available at: <http://www.irishexaminer.com/viewpoints/analysis/a-moral-obligation-237286.html> (Accessed: 15 August 2017).
- Osborn, H. (2012) *Genealogy: Essential Research Methods*. London: Robert Hale Limited.
- Paton, C. (2012) 'Irish Tithe Applotment books imminent', *The GENES Blog*. Available at: <http://britishgenes.blogspot.ie/2012/06/irish-tithe-applotment-books-imminent.html> (Accessed: Accessed 15 July 2017).
- Paton, C. (2014) 'RootsIreland moves to subscription model', *The GENES Blog*. Available at: <http://britishgenes.blogspot.ie/2012/06/irish-tithe-applotment-books-imminent.html> (Accessed: 15 July 2017).
- PBS (2015) 'Finding Your Roots – About'. Available at: <http://www.pbs.org/weta/finding-your-roots/about/> (Accessed: 16 April 2017).

PBS (2015) 'Genealogy Resources'. Available at: <http://ec2-54-235-253-171.compute-1.amazonaws.com/weta/finding-your-roots/blog/links-resources-genealogy-resources/> (Accessed: 13 July 2017).

Purcell, J. (1996) 'Comptroller and Auditor General Report on Value for Money Examination: The Irish Genealogical Project', *Department of the Taoiseach*. Available at: [http://www.audgen.gov.ie/documents/vfmreports/14\\_GenealogicalProject.pdf](http://www.audgen.gov.ie/documents/vfmreports/14_GenealogicalProject.pdf) (Accessed: 21 July 2017).

Purcell, J. (2004) 'The Irish Genealogical Project', *Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism*. <http://audgen.gov.ie/documents/annualreports/2004/ReportChap9.pdf> Available at: (Accessed: 21 July 2017).

Research Methods Knowledge Base (2006) 'Deduction & Induction'. Available at <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/dedind.php> (Accessed: 19 April 2017).

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. (2016) *Research Methods for Business Students*. 7<sup>th</sup> edn. Essex: Pearson.

Shoffman, M. and Rickard Straus, R. (2015) 'Is there a windfall waiting for you? What the Heir Hunters can teach you about tracking down an unclaimed inheritance', *This Is Money*, 28 February [Online]. Available at: <http://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/bills/article-2965122/Heir-hunters-track-unclaimed-inheritance.html> (Accessed: 16 April 2017).

Steinberg, B. (2015) 'Finding Your Roots to Return to PBS After Ben Affleck Controversy', *Variety*, 19 October [Online]. Available at: <http://variety.com/2015/tv/news/finding-your-roots-pbs-ben-affleck-1201621127/> (Accessed: 16 April 2017).

*The Bible: Contemporary English Version* (2000) London: Harper Collins.

Tourism Ireland (2011) 'President of the United States of America Barack Obama State Visit to Ireland May 2011'. Available at: <http://www.merriionstreet.ie/en/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/obama-state-visit-media-fact-sheet-on-itinerary-genealogy.pdf> (Accessed: 17 April 2017).

*The Independent* (2004) 'Reagan feared Irish roots would damage his career', *The Independent*, 24 October [Online]. Available at: <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/reagan-feared-irish-roots-would-damage-his-career-26225824.html> (Accessed: 16 July 2017).

Tourism Ireland (2017) 'About Tourism Ireland'. Available at: <http://www.ireland.com/en-gb/legal-information/about-tourism-ireland/> (Accessed: 1 July 2017).

Tourism Ireland (2017) 'Genealogy and ancestry'.  
<http://www.ireland.com/en-gb/what-is-available/genealogy-and-ancestry/articles/irish-genealogy-resources/> (Accessed: 1 July 2017).

Treasury Solicitor's Office (2015) 'Treasury Solicitor's Department announces name change'. Available at:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/treasury-solicitors-department-announces-name-change> (Accessed: 16 April 2017).

Tubridy, R. (2010) *JFK in Ireland: Four Days That Changed a President*. London: Harper Collins Publishers.

Tucker, L. (2015) *Anatomy & Physiology*. London: EMS Publishing.

## Appendix

### Item 1 – Questionnaire

Please circle your answer:

1. What is your age group?

- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| A. 18-30 | D. 51-60 |
| B. 31-40 | E. 61-70 |
| C. 41-50 | F. 70+   |

2. What is your gender?

- A. Female      B. Male      C. Other

3. What country do you live in?

4. What is your nationality?

5. Have you previously researched your family history or do you intend to research your family history in the future?

- A. I have previously researched my family history.  
B. I have not researched my family history but would like to do so in the future.

6. Can you name 3 genealogical resources (i.e. organisations/companies/websites) you are aware of?

7. What was/would be your starting point for beginning to research your family history?

8. Have you ever paid or would you be willing to pay for access to genealogical records?

- A. I have paid to access genealogical records.  
B. I have not paid to access genealogical records but I would be willing to pay.  
C. I have not paid to access genealogical records and would not pay.

9. If you have paid for genealogical records within the last year, please list the organisations/companies/websites you used and approximately how much you paid to use them (i.e. one-off payment, monthly/yearly subscription fee, etc.)

10. How did you hear about these organisations/websites?

- |             |                           |
|-------------|---------------------------|
| A. TV       | D. Word of Mouth          |
| B. Radio    | E. Other – Please Specify |
| C. Internet | F. Not Applicable         |

11. If you have/are willing to pay for genealogical records, what is the main reason?

12. Do you feel it is ethical for commercial businesses (e.g. Ancestry.com) to charge money for genealogical records? Please explain your answer.

13. Do you feel it is ethical for cultural institutions (e.g. public libraries, public archives, etc.) to charge money for genealogical records? Please explain your answer.

**Thank you so much for completing this survey!**

## Item 2 – Consent Form

My name is Lyndsey Riddall and I am a postgraduate student at Dublin Business School. I am writing a dissertation entitled “The Commercialisation of Genealogy – Is it ethical to charge money for genealogical records?”. The aim of the dissertation is to explore how genealogy has become a commercialised industry in recent years with the emergence of subscription websites (e.g. Ancestry.com) and question the ethical implications of businesses making money from such resources.

I would be hugely grateful if you would be willing to fill out this questionnaire and allow me to use the results as part of my study. Please be assured you cannot be identified from your responses which are completely anonymous. They will be treated as strictly confidential and will only be retained for the purpose of the dissertation to be submitted to Dublin Business School on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2017.

**Deadline: Friday 14<sup>th</sup> July 2017**

**Please tick the box to confirm your consent:**