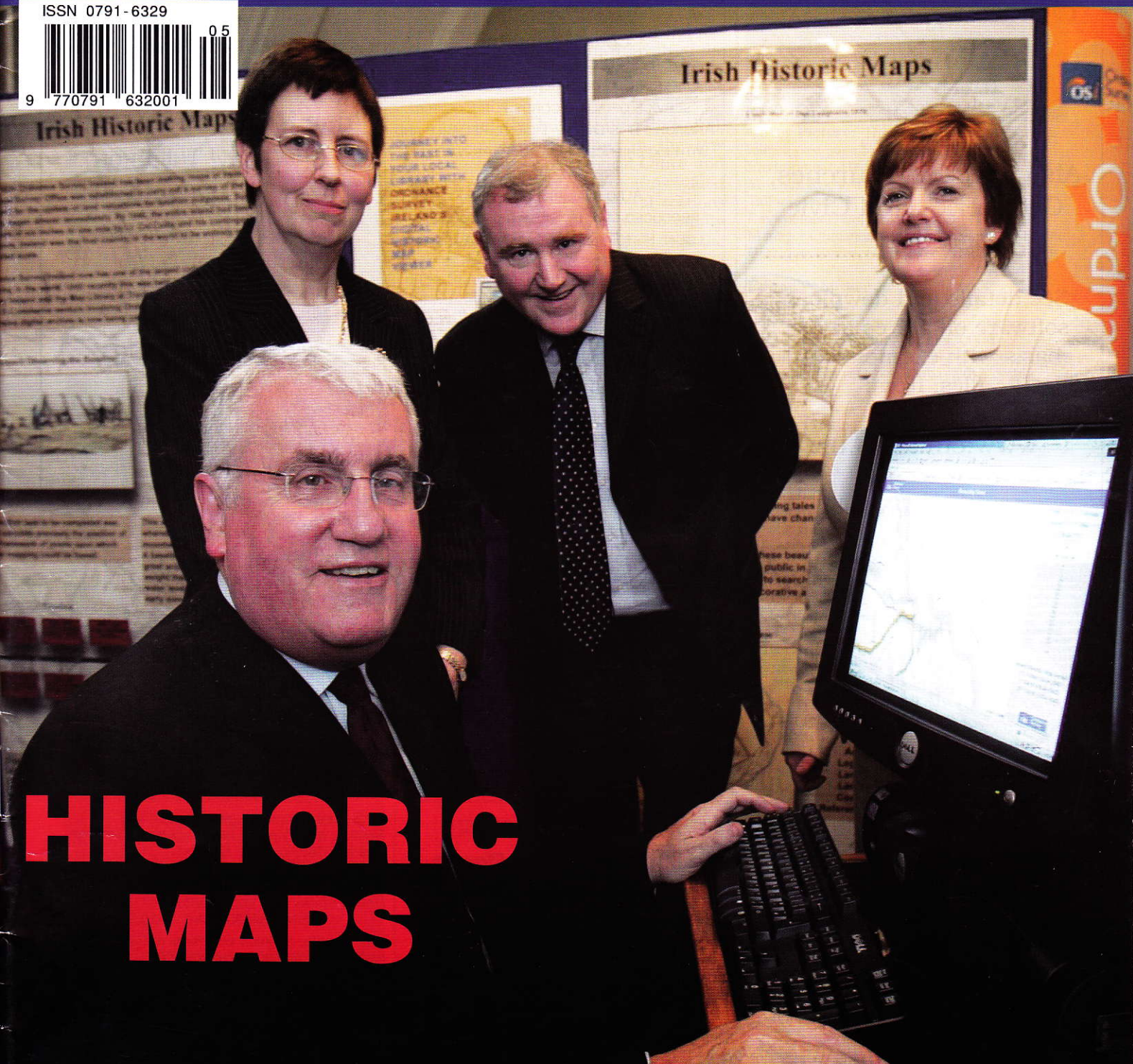


Irish Roots

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HISTORIC MAPS

Genealogy and Heraldry Bill 2006
Hiberno-Mexican Historical Links
Finding John Dargan
Bridging the Gap: Australia to Ireland
News from the World of Genealogy

IRISH ROOTS

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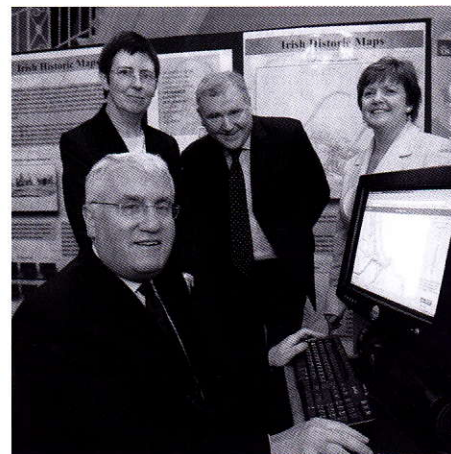
AFTER A SIX year campaign, the Genealogical Society of Ireland have managed to devise, compose and bring to the floor of the upper house of our national parliament for consideration, a set of legislative proposals entitled the Genealogy and Heraldry Bill. In itself, this is quite an achievement and a considerable development on previous impressive political actions which involved the successful submission of amendments to heritage bills which were initiated elsewhere.

Much of the bill is rather technical, addressing shortcomings in the law relating to the Genealogical Office and the legal status of grants of arms issued since 1941. However, several sections will be of substantial interest to family historians. The proposal to change the law to facilitate the release of the 1926 Free State census returns for perusal by researchers will be welcomed by all. So too will the proposed designation of certain records as of genealogical importance, and the compilation of an inventory of genealogical records, which would be put on-line.

Innovations in the field of heraldry, which form a major part of the bill, are likely to arouse new interest in this ancient art. The proposal to appoint licensed heraldic agents to assist people who wish to obtain a personal coat of arms would simplify and reduce the cost of the current unnecessarily complicated and expensive process.

One of the best proposals in the bill is to use the granting of personal arms as an honours system. A person deserving of public recognition would receive a coat of arms with the nature of his achievement represented in heraldic symbols — much more appropriate than giving academic titles to people whose achievements have nothing whatever to do with scholarship.

Tony McCarthy



Cover Picture: Historic Map Viewer Service launch (see page 5) — seated Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government Mr Dick Roche TD; standing (L-R) Geraldine Tallon, Assistant Secretary Dept of Environment, etc; Brian McArdle, Channel Manager Ordnance Survey of Ireland (OSI); and Geraldine Ruane, Chief Executive Officer OSI.

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Genealogy & Heraldry Bill 2006

Following a six year campaign by the Genealogical Society of Ireland to provide a proper legislative framework for the delivery of genealogical and heraldic services by the State, a Bill has been initiated in Seanad Éireann by Senator Brendan Ryan.

The **Genealogy & Heraldry Bill, 2006** will reform the provision of heraldic services by the State and it will make these services more accessible to the ordinary citizen of Ireland and the Irish Diaspora. It will create a new and less expensive procedure for obtaining a coat of arms for individuals, institutions, clubs and corporate bodies.

Sports clubs, schools, societies and others will be able to register their coats of arms and obtain legal protection for their own unique heraldic symbols including their flags and emblems.

To provide for these services the Bill will properly establish an Office of Arms for Ireland to remove any legal doubt as to the right of the State to make grants of arms and it will retrospectively confirm grants made by the non-statutory Genealogical Office since 1 April 1943.

The Bill will place the Office of the Chief Herald of Ireland and its functions on a sound statutory footing and provide for an expanded role for this important Office of State under the aegis of the Board of the National Library of Ireland.

It will repeal the fundamentally flawed Section 13 of the National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997 and provide a new legal basis for the Irish heraldic authority which has functioned in Dublin since 1552. The Bill will remove the absurdities surrounding copyright to Arms in present legislation. This Bill will make Ireland one of the few democratic republics in the world with a solid legislative framework for heraldry. Another democratic republic with specific legislation is the Republic of South Africa.

The Bill will provide for the registration and protection of the Arms of Ireland, the Presidential Standard, the flags and emblems of the Irish Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána and other State agencies.

A new feature introduced by the Bill will enable the government to properly recognise meritorious citizens and others with a special grant of arms by harnessing an existing heraldic function of the State to meet the needs of a confident, modern and open republic seeking to provide due national recognition for an exceptional contribution to the development of the community or voluntary sectors or for humanitarian work overseas.

The Bill provides for the open transparent functioning of a modern heraldic office for Ireland as befits her status as a sovereign republic. It respects heraldic tradition and practice whilst applying such in a uniquely Irish context, meeting

the needs of the Ireland of the twenty-first century. It removes from the Irish context any semblance of the traditional heraldic practices that were considered to be inconsistent with our constitutional position as a republic, and in doing so, the Bill will modernise Irish heraldry.

The Bill recognises the special position of place, local identity, county affinity and family roots in Ireland by promoting the

Additional Information

The **Genealogy & Heraldry Bill, 2006** is a Bill in six parts, forty sections, two hundred and three sub-sections, three schedules and proposing eight amendments to existing legislation. An explanatory memorandum accompanies the text of the Bill.

The Bill was researched and written by Michael Merrigan, FGSI, for and on behalf of the Genealogical Society of Ireland for delivery to the sponsoring parliamentarians for consideration and, where necessary, amendment before its initiation in Seanad Éireann (Irish Senate). Mr Merrigan is the Hon. Secretary, Director and Co-Founder of the Genealogical Society of Ireland.

The Genealogical Society of Ireland is a voluntary non-governmental educational and heritage organisation with charitable status promoting the study of genealogy, heraldry, vexillology and social history as open access educational leisure pursuits available to all in our community irrespective of creed, age, social or economic circumstances, educational qualification or ethnic background.

The Society is incorporated in Ireland, has received a grant of arms from the Chief Herald of Ireland and is registered as a Nominating Body for Seanad Éireann.

Established in 1990, the Society is Ireland's premier publisher of genealogical material, hosts two open meetings per month and operates an Archive and Research Centre at the restored Martello Tower at Seapoint, County Dublin. Membership is open to all with an interest in the subjects concerned and the Society has members in Ireland and the world over amongst the Irish Diaspora.

Senator Brendan Ryan has been a member of Seanad Éireann since 1982 and is a Lecturer in Chemical Engineering (CIT) by profession. He was elected to the Upper House in 2002 by the National University of Ireland and is a Cork City based member of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

development of heraldry as a visual expression of this heritage in a manner available to all in our community and thus removing, once and for all, the notion of the privileged exclusivity of heraldry.

The Bill through the licensing of heraldic agents will effectively repatriate a lucrative aspect of the production and sale of Irish heritage products by creating a facility by which individuals may obtain an authentic, certified and unique coat of arms for use by themselves and their descendants rather than purchasing fake 'Irish family' coats of arms manufactured the world over.

The importance of our genealogical heritage to the citizens of Ireland and to her Diaspora is fully recognised for the first time in legislation in this Bill which will provide a National Inventory of Genealogical Records. It will also provide for the protection of records of a genealogical potential to prevent such being removed from the State or destroyed.

The Bill will create a special category for the returns of the first census of Ireland, taken following independence, as this census is an essential resource for the study of genealogy and social history in the Irish Free State. The census taken in 1926 is the first since 1911 — the latter has been open for research for nearly three decades and the continued closure of the 1926 census creates a huge gap in our understanding of the period which includes the First World War, the Easter Rising, the War of Independence and the Civil War. Creating a special heritage category for the census of 1926 will make it available to family historians twenty years earlier than currently provided for.

The important contribution to the study of heraldry and genealogy in Ireland made by individuals and voluntary organisations is also recognised by the Bill through the establishment of advisory committees to provide an ongoing consultative process in the development of policy and the delivery of services.

The publication of this Bill offers all with a genuine interest in Irish genealogy, heraldry and vexillology an opportunity to re-examine the issues which were raised during the debate on the 1997 Act. Many of these issues remain unresolved or were unsatisfactorily or incompletely addressed during the debate or in the subsequent legislation. This is the time to resolve these issues through an open and constructive debate on the **Genealogy & Heraldry Bill, 2006**.

NOTE: FOR FULL TEXT OF THE BILL AND THE EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM:
WWW.OIREACTHAS.IE

MICHAEL MERRIGAN, FGSI