	Show Notes – Bonus Episode Digitally reconstructing Ireland's lost archive	THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

On 30 June 1922 the Public Record Office of Ireland was destroyed by fire in the opening engagement of the Irish Civil War. Historians have long considered the 700 years of records that the building contained as tragically lost to history.

In this special podcast episode we explore how nearly 100 years later five core archival partners are collaborating on the Beyond 2022 project to virtually reconstruct the building and its contents by hunting for replacement documents around the world and using ground breaking technology.

Documents from The National Archives used in this episode: E 101/230/16; E 101/230/28; E 101/232/24.

Other key documents discussed in this episode:

National Library Australia – MS 144; MS 6169; MS 1458/7/9/15

Huntington Library – 'Acta Regia'

To find out more about the Beyond 2022 project take a look at their website: https://beyond2022.ie/

Listeners, we need your help to make this podcast better! We need to know a bit more about you and what themes you're interested in. You can share this information with us by visiting smartsurvey.co.uk/s/ontherecord/

Transcript

[Intro – clips taken from the episode set to music]

Laura Robson-Mainwaring: This is On the Record at The National Archives: uncovering the past through stories of everyday people.

I'm Laura Robson-Mainwaring.

Will Butler: And I'm Will Butler.

Laura and I are both historians at The National Archives in Kew, West London, where we research, look after, and help our audiences better understand the Archives' collections of historical government and public records.

Laura: At the end of our last episode, which was all about archives as evidence of the past, we asked our guest a hypothetical question: 'what would be lost if everything stored at The National Archives disappeared'?

Nigel Taylor: If all those records went then that back knowledge would go and you'd almost be starting from fresh.

Will: That was just a rhetorical question to get you, our listeners, thinking about how important archives are to society and culture; obviously, we have experts dedicated to making sure that our collections at The National Archives are safe and secure from all kinds of disasters.

But for historians of Ireland, that hypothetical situation is all-too-real. That's because in 1922 a fire destroyed the main government archive of Ireland and the 700 years of Ireland's recorded history it contained.

Laura: For the last century, this gap in the historical record has limited the sources available for researchers trying to understand more about Ireland's past. But a new project called Beyond 2022

is changing this story of loss into one of discovery and collaboration through an international initiative to digitally rebuild Ireland's lost archive.

Will: In this episode, we're talking to four members of the Beyond 2022 team about the destroyed Public Record Office of Ireland, the groundbreaking methods being used to rebuild it online, and the fascinating archival discoveries that are already being made in the process.

The first Beyond 2022 team member we chatted to was Neil Johnston, who told us the story of the 1922 fire and introduced us to the enormous task of rebuilding this lost collection in a digital space.

Will: So first of all Neil, would you be able to introduce yourself to us.

Neil Johnston: I'd be delighted to. My name is Dr Neil Johnston and I'm the head of Early Modern Records at The National Archives.

Will: So I think if you take us back maybe a hundred years ago...you are visiting the Public Record Office in Ireland in 1921...what was there, what was its purpose, what would you be doing in your day there?

Neil: The Public Record Office was located within the Four Courts complex along the River Liffey in Dublin. And if you know Dublin, that's sort of halfway between O'Connell Bridge and Euston Station, the railway station. It's right along the river. It was a six-storey repository, the records were held at the back, and at the front was the reading room. It was built in cut granite. It was a very imposing building and it housed the government's archival collection that began sometime around the beginning of the 13th century. So there were roughly 700 years of records within the repository available to be consulted by readers. And that would have been the first generation of historians of Ireland, legal people needing to consult legal records, some archaeologists, curious people interested in or writing the history of Ireland. So, as it was the Public Record Office, anybody could visit.

Will: Let's sort of move things on a little bit to the 30th of June 1922, or roundabout the end of June 1992 anyway. What happens to the Public Record Office?

Neil: It's desperately sad to say that the building was occupied at the start of the Irish Civil War in 1922 when the forces who opposed the agreement that had been reached between Ireland and Britain occupied strategic buildings in Dublin, including the public record office along the River Liffey. The repository was turned into a munitions factory and dump where they were building weapons. The opposing forces started to shell the building at the end of June 1922 and it's no surprise that the building caught fire soon after, and the contents were there destroyed. So as a new country begins to emerge, its records from the previous centuries are destroyed.

Will: What's the sort of content of some of those records, particularly what impact then might have on people today in terms of their research and what they hope to achieve when they are researching Ireland's history?

Neil: Well, the core of the collection was legal records. The building was really built to house the records of the Four Courts in Dublin. So the Court of Chancery, the Court of Exchequer, the Court of King's Bench and the Court of Common Pleas. These archival collections were huge. And I think the Court of Chancery began operating in Ireland in the 1230s and immediately began producing records. You're looking at that kind of duration. But alongside that, you would have had all the modern bureaucratic bodies that a government creates to implement its work. You had political correspondence between Dublin and London and all the correspondence that arrived into Dublin. You had the financial and taxation records. You had the state papers which were brought in from Dublin Castle. And then various repositories around Dublin and around Ireland were combined to create the Public Record Office to make it easier for people to access and to make it easier for them to search. It was a huge collection. And then you move beyond that when you start to accumulate paper and parchment as governments did and still do...and it was a massive archive.

Will: So obviously then this is then a massive loss. This is an incredibly important archive, public record office. Hundreds of years of history. Can you try and put that loss into some more context for us?

Neil: Well, one of the great laments among those of us who write Irish history is that the collection is gone. And those of us who have made a living from trying to write the history of Ireland, we all know our own areas individually. And we know that we need to go to London, to The National Archives or the British Library, to Oxford or Cambridge or areas where we might find replacements, but this is usually for political documents. And the political history, the narrative history of Ireland has been quite well written. But there are other areas of Irish history that it's much, much, harder to write such as cultural history and social history and gender history, especially for the pre-modern period before say 1750.

And if you think of collections like legal cases, where women were initiating legal cases...their ownership, their land ownership, their livelihoods were described... these records are gone. And they're irreplaceable because they don't exist anywhere else. So it's much, much harder in many ways to write the history of women in early modern Ireland below the nobility and gentry, because others, they don't appear in the historical record. So that's massively affected how history is written...economic history too and local history. It's much, much harder to write local history for Ireland than it is for say England, in particular, the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries because the comparable records are gone.

Laura: So this is interesting because if you've listened to other episodes of On the Record, we often use records to investigate stories of everyday people who otherwise would never have made it into history books. We have so many examples of people and communities who we only know about because they just happen to have intersected with some type of government department or the legal system.

So what Neil is saying is that the equivalent treasure trove of names and events for Irish history was lost forever, or at least that's what historians thought. But the Beyond 2022 project is proving that assumption wrong.

Will: I wonder whether you could tell us more about the project and why it's so ground-breaking?

Neil: So, Beyond 2022 is a digital humanities project to try to virtually recreate the Public Record Office in Dublin as it was in 1922. We're trying to recreate the building in 3D and then repopulate the contents of what were in the record treasury to the best of our abilities.

The project has a couple of functions, but at the core of it is a collaboration between what we call the core partners, which is The National Archives in Dublin, the Public Record Office in Belfast, the Irish Manuscripts in Dublin and ourselves The National Archives in London. And it's the first time that the three archives in Dublin, Belfast and London have combined in a project.

Our role is twofold. We have two work streams in the project that revolve around what we call our 'inventory of loss' and our 'inventory of survival', and the inventory of loss is the really sad bit. It's based on a 1919 inventory or book published by a man called Herbert Wood, who was the Deputy Keeper in the Public Record Office in Dublin at the time. And it lists and describes the collections in varied amount of detail. Alongside this, then you have the published Annual Reports of the Public Record Office in Dublin, which lists everything that was accessioned from 1869 when it opened until 1922.

And then we have – what has become really key – what we call our increment books, which were in the reading room when the building was destroyed. So they actually survived. And the few other finding aids that were in the reading room, we still use now in the project. So we are really standing on the shoulders of our forebears who came before us. And we can see from the Deputy Keeper's reports and the increment books, in particular, where everything was. So we know what was on every shelf in every bay, on every floor of the six floors of the repository. From that, we've created a modern database. That's our inventory of loss.

Laura: So to recap what Neil has said so far: all the books and parchment rolls and papers kept in the building were destroyed by the explosions and subsequent fires. BUT, Herbert Wood's Guide to the collection was already published, meaning there were copies outside of the building.

And it just so happens that the reading room... was spared...along with the research guides detailing specific parts of the collection.

Will: Without these clues, we might never have known the full extent of what was lost. But with this catalogue and the research guides, Neil and the other team members have a starting point for the work of repopulating the new digital repository...

Neil: We then, the Archival Discovery Team – and that's based in Dublin and Belfast and London – we then are working to identify replacement items of whatever type. So they might be original correspondence that left Dublin that has survived. It might be facsimiles. They might be items that were published before the fire, transcribed and published. Sometimes there are what we call para-replacements, so they're not actually direct replacements but they're a direct equivalent of what would have been in the record treasury in Dublin.

So by piecing these together, we have our inventory of loss and inventory of survival. We then hand this over to our really amazing colleagues in the ADAPT Center in Trinity College in Dublin who have built a data capture interface for us so we can enter all of this data that we're creating. Then that gets turned into what's called 'linked data'. So we're able to create a database that connects all these items back together in a way that certainly hasn't previously been possible and the collections have actually gone beyond what was originally in Dublin. So we're now creating what we call a 'meta archive'.

Will: And I suppose with the Beyond 2022 project then, are you trying to join the dots for people, is it a research aid? Is that one of the things you're hoping to achieve?

Neil: The significant parts of the project and what makes it truly exciting is not just identifying replacement records, but it's harnessing frontier technologies, really, in search, in transcription, in linking records together through the creation of what we call 'authority files'. So as people begin to appear in the record – say a senior office holder – we will create an authority file for him. Or say a Countess or a Baroness we'll create an authority file for her. And then everything that we find about that person, we link to that authority file. So if somebody comes along to search, they don't have to search in multiple places within the archive; everything that we identify that relates to that person, that entity, as it's called, or that place or that event will be linked together.

One of the really exciting things about this too for the public, we hope, is that as with all archives now, you're not allowed to walk into the repositories, but because we have the plans of the Public Record Office as it was, we can virtually rebuild this in 3D. So people will be able to walk into the repository on their computers and click on a shelf and the contents of that shelf will pop up. And if we have been able to find materials on that record series, we will link to them, so that when people come along to search for their locality or for their ancestors, or for research topics for school or for university, they should be able to find a whole wealth of information and material and sitting behind this and below this data is the brainpower of some really, really brilliant people from across the world.

And because these records are coming from multiple repositories around the world, this is a really, really powerful resource that's being built for people. And we see ourselves going beyond building a database, and what we're really doing, we hope, is building a knowledge base for the writing and understanding of Ireland and Irish history in the decades to come.

Will: This is obviously all incredibly exciting. And I wonder, from your point of view, personally, what's the single most exciting moment for you, working on this project for you?

Neil: It's an embarrassment of riches, to be honest with you. It's the most fulfilling thing I've ever been able to do professionally, working on this project. The team I'm in is superb, the collaboration – working internally and then internationally – has been a real pleasure to be part of. I think the most exciting thing is not just the archival finds, because, in isolation, they are particularly exciting for those of us who like this...when we identify materials that either are unknown or little known or were only known to a few scholars. And it's the possibilities... that technology allows us to link these collections together across the world. That's what makes this really, really exciting. And that's why it's going to become such a powerful resource in the coming years as we continue to repopulate the Record Treasury.

Laura: So that's the big picture, but now I think we should zoom in a bit and take a closer look at just one example of the records being used to rebuild the collection of the Public Record Office of Ireland.

Will: A few sets of particularly rich documents stand out from everything identified so far, and the Beyond 2022 team refer to these as 'gold seams'. One of these gold seams is a large set of parchment rolls here at The National Archives related to the medieval Dublin Exchequer.

Laura: The Exchequer was essentially the royal treasury, and of course, they carefully recorded every payment in and out of that treasury. The English medieval Exchequer rolls are kept here at The National Archives, but rolls for the treasury in Ireland were kept in Dublin at what would become the Public Record Office. So that means, all of Ireland's exchequer rolls - or at least the ones that survived the centuries - were lost in the fire.

Except...for about 400 individual parchment rolls which found their way into our collection here in Kew, West London. These records span the period from 1270-to the mid-1400s, so around two hundred years.

We'll get into the scandal that brought these records to London a bit later, but first, a closer look at what information they hold and how the Beyond 2022 team is capturing that data.

Elizabeth Biggs: Hi, I'm Elizabeth Biggs. I'm one of the researchers on the Beyond 2022 project. I'm one of two researchers based in London at The National Archives, working with people who are based in Dublin and Belfast. My job is to work on the medieval records of The Exchequer. So I'm looking at what's going on in Ireland between 1270 and 1446.

Will: How much detail can we get about individuals from these rolls?

Elizabeth: It really depends on the individual, but each entry will give us a person's name, so someone like Donenel O'Hanley, it'll tell us why he's paying in money. So that can be really detailed or really brief. It'd be something like 'for a fine', and it'll tell us how much money he's paying in, which might be anything from a couple of pennies to hundreds of pounds depending on what it is.

You got some really lovely more full examples. So, Donenel O'Hanley – who I just mentioned – we're told he's a fugitive, he's fled justice, so money is being paid in for him. Occasionally, you get

amazing things like one person has to send money from quite a long way away to Dublin. And so, he splits up the payment among three of his friends. So, they all pay in one after each other. And it'll say for this person, for a fine, and then by these three different people and sum tally. If I'm remembering correctly, I think he gives his brother the largest share of the money, but he doesn't just send it with his brother. He sends it with about two or three other people for safety because they're moving physical coin. So if you can imagine having to bring not just your credit card to pay your taxes, you're having to physically carry however much money you need to bring in silver pennies. No other coins, just silver pennies. So yeah, that's the basic picture we get.

And then as you start seeing people reoccurring, you start to get a feel for what's going on, there might be more details in one entry or fewer details in another. For example, there's a woman called Alice Crumbe, who we see turning up a couple of times with fairly normal things - paying in a fine, she needs a writ - the kind of not-very-informative entries. But then we see her paying in for other people. You start getting the sense that she's got her fingers in lots of pies and she's somebody who people trust to do financial transactions for them. That's how we start building up the picture as we start seeing them more than once. And then there's somewhere you really want to know what's going on but they only show up once and you're like, 'Well, something really cool happened here', but you can't say anything about it.

Will: That's really interesting, that must be so fascinating and also, as you say, quite frustrating sometimes as well. I was wondering what sort of scale are we talking about here. How many individuals, approximately, are mentioned? You talked about multiple entities, what's perhaps the person who has come up the most times for you when you've had a look at these?

Elizabeth: The person who turns up most often by far is John de Sanford, the king's escheator. And that means that if somebody dies without any heirs and there's questions over the ownership of the land, it goes into the care of the escheator. He looks after it and it's held separately from other royal property, but the escheator is paying in money pretty much every week in some years. And so John de Sanford is the most common person by far.

In terms of the scale and the extent of the records we're dealing with, the records are kept by year. Each roll will deal with a full year from September to September, which is how the exchequer calculates this stuff. And if we've got a full roll, you're looking at about a thousand entries, maybe, across the entire year. And of those, I guess, you're looking at maybe 800-900 individuals. I haven't actually gone and done the calculations but that'd be about what it feels like. So, 900 people each year showing up with their bags of coin in Dublin to pay in money. And you see different patterns through the year. In the autumn, you get a lot. So, there's a big spike in September when everybody's like, 'Oh, we better get our payments in'. Then there's another big spike around April. So the same as you get for the modern tax year, there's a bit of a spike around then, and then it's quiet. It's kind of lumpy through the year.

Will: There's a lot of technology being used to digitally rebuild the Irish Public Record Office. Can you tell me more about that and how it impacts your work on the Exchequer Rolls aka the gold seam?

Elizabeth: I'll start with the basic stuff that I'm using and that we're using on The Exchequer Rolls that isn't getting used elsewhere. So we're marking out all of our translations in TEI XML, which means that the computer can read and say, 'Aha, this is a person. We've marked that as a person'. So, we'll then we'll be able to search across that or link that. It can also do things like show the structure of the document that we can then put on the website so it'll be a freely available, freely searchable thing. That's what we're using primarily for the gold seam. That's not getting used elsewhere in the project because it's so time-intensive. You know, it's a tool for marking up individuals within a text.

What they're using across the project is a tool called Transkribus, which is where you can upload an image and then it will have automatic character recognition for handwriting. They can do quick transcriptions, not translations but just transcriptions of what's there, for the huge corpus of documents that they're finding–and we can't use Transkribus. It would be lovely if we could, but because the nature of the text is so compressed and so abbreviated, if we gave people a transcription, we're not helping them as much. You really need the translation, to make it available.

Laura: So basically, for more modern records, Transkribus turns handwriting into text so a separate AI can automatically pull out names, places, dates, etc., but for the medieval Exchequer rolls, that same work has to be done manually through TEI XML.

Will: XML is a 'markup language', like the more well-known HTML, that can be used to turn a plain text document into a data-rich internet page. Elizabeth is using TEI XML. The TEI stands for Text Encoding Initiative, which sets XML standards so that different academics working with XML use the same labels and formats, which is important for the long-term usability of the data.

Elizabeth: So that's the tool that we're using to take images of documents and make them into text. And then we're doing two separate things with those images and texts once we've got them. We're creating a database which has all the metadata, so you'll be able to search for the Exchequer rolls I've worked on. Each roll will have all the kinds of metadata that you'd find in the TNA catalogue and we'll have written a little description about it. There's a database that you'll be able to search all of this material.

And we're also building what we're calling the 'Knowledge Graph', which is a way to link together instances. We'll feed in translations with the people and places marked up. You'll be able to tell the Knowledge Graph, 'I want to see this person', and it will help you link together the people across multiple documents. So, it won't just be searching within this text, it'll let you search between texts. You'll also be able to say, 'Aha, this person–say John de Sanford–is an escheator of Ireland, I want to see all of the escheators of Ireland. I want to see all of the places that the escheators have been involved in'. So, we can start building a way that lets you move between categories as well. So we're playing around with that at the moment for the medieval period, you know going how do we make these links work? But those are the kinds of technologies that we're working towards.

Will: I was wondering what your average day or week look like when you are working on the project?

Elizabeth: An average day, an average week...there hasn't been one yet! So there's lots of trying to think about how do we make the data we're producing for the Exchequer work with the rest of the project in the database.

By far, what I spend most of my time doing is having an image of these rolls on my computer and then the specialist software we're using to mark up the translation. So I'll sit there with the image and where I need to write the translation into and just read line by line: here's the person, here's what it's for, here's the sum of money and markup ah yes, this is money, this is the place, this is what it looks like. So yes, 90% of my time is spent with translations.

And then there's always the fun bits where you can't quite read something and you spend 30 minutes squinting at it going, 'is it that letter form?' It's great fun when you start having to identify medieval place names because medieval clerks do not get modern spelling at all. So every time you come across a place name, it's almost certainly going to be spelt slightly differently, and you're going to be trying to go, 'Is that this?' I had a brilliant time trying to work at Kidwelly in Wales because the clerk had spelt that with... oh gosh, I think there was an H involved. I can't tell you how they managed that, but there was some stuff like that. Or Cardiff, which involved no vowels and just a K and an R and then a couple of F's. And then for Ireland, they sometimes use the Irish place-names, sometimes they turn them into Latin, sometimes they put them into some approximation into English or French occasionally. So that's one of the fun bits; looking at these place names and going, 'Where is this? What have they done to it?'

What I'm doing really – as you can probably tell from that description – is I'm taking the rolls, which are written in fairly cramped, fairly abbreviated handwriting in a very formulaic fashion and translating them so that people can read them, and also starting to identify people and places and subjects so that people will be able to use them. And then we'll put that into the Knowledge Graph and then we'll start being able to link these things. So, you'll be able to say, 'Oh yes, here's Juliana de Howth from Dublin. We see her at around Easter in 1284 having to pay a fine because she's been using too small of measures', so she's been shortchanging her customers. And hopefully, we'll be able to say, 'oh yes, here's Juliana. She's a reformed character. Here, she's paying in money for–I don't know–a license to build something else'. I don't know what we'll find, we haven't yet

found her again. But that's what we're hoping to be able to do, to pull that kind of information together across, not just the Exchequer rolls, but across all the other documentation that the others are finding.

Laura: As advanced as programs like Transkribus are, you can't just give it 14th century abbreviated, irregular handwritten Latin and expect great results. So Elizabeth has to expand abbreviations, translate the rolls from Latin into English, and normalise the different spellings and place names that each medieval clerk may have used.

Will: And then instead of just putting a text document with the translation online, she turns her translations into TEI XML and enters it in the Knowledge Graph. As a result, the Exchequer rolls are more usable for both researchers who want to play around with the data and quickly search within the documents and historians who don't happen to be experts in deciphering 600-year old handwritten notation or may not know enough Latin to navigate the rolls on their own.

Will: So, it's clear that this project is going to be a huge asset to anyone researching Irish history, but I'm curious if you think the more innovative tools and techniques of Beyond 2022 are going to impact archival work on the whole in the future?

Elizabeth: I think yes, in the sense that it provides different ways to build big collections of documents. There are projects that have done translations of medieval documents, but they've all been standalone. So you can, for example, go to the Fine Rolls project which uses a particular type of medieval Exchequer record. You can search that, just the Fine Rolls. But because we're going to put the Exchequer rolls into a much bigger context of the other medieval documentation that's out there from the Irish government and we'll put it into the context of later Exchequer documentation, that's what's really exciting about this, you hopefully will be able to chase the story through from the very earliest days of the English lordship in Ireland right through to the 1920s, and that's quite exciting, really.

Laura: And now, as promised, let's take a look at how the Dublin Exchequer rolls ended up in London and how they can help build a fuller picture of Irish history.

Will: For that, we've turned to Paul Dryburgh, Principal Specialist for Medieval Records here at The National Archives and co-investigator on The National Archives' Exchequer rolls for Beyond 2022

Laura: So how did these rolls from Ireland end up in our repositories in Kew in London?

Paul Dryburgh: Yeah. Now, this is quite a long, complex story, but essentially, it boils down to two things. Firstly, of course, in the 1170s, the King of England, Henry II, effectively takes lordship of Ireland. And that eventually leads to the establishment of a more institutionalised government in Ireland based in Dublin. But as part of that process then, the institutions of English mediaeval state, so the Chancery which is the writing office, which gives out the Kings orders, and then the Exchequer which is the financial office, they get set up in Ireland during the 13th century. And in the early 1290s, a financial accounting scandal is discovered. So, the Treasurers of Ireland–the officer in charge of the finances of the English state in Ireland–two of them...so Stephen of Fulbourn, who's Englishman but he's Bishop of Waterford, and Nicholas de Clare, who is his successor, they both get accused of, effectively, corruption; siphoning money off, taking bribes, profiteering, forcing people to sell their own lands... that kind of thing. The estimate is that around 13,000 pounds was taken by Stephen de Fulbourn. That is an awful lot of money in the 1270s-1280s. I think the annual receipts income of the Irish Exchequer at around 1300 is only about 6000 pounds a year. So 13,000 pounds as you can see over a seven or eight-year period is an awfully large amount of money.

This gets discovered. Basically, the English government under Edward I, he basically decides that we're not going to have this anymore. In 1292, Parliament lays down an ordinance that the Irish Treasurer has to account annually at the English Exchequer in Westminster. Previously, the Irish treasurers had accounted in Ireland. You know, they had their accounts audited. But there is then this need to account in England for financial probity.

Initially, it was supposed to be annually, but in the end, just with the conditions, the long journeys, warfare, the individuals concerned, lots of treasurers reported periodically for their entire period of office or parts of their period. And as part of that process, they were required to bring over the rolls that they created in Dublin.

And as part of the audit process, not only the treasurer had to bring his rolls, receipts, tallies, that kind of thing over, but one of the chamberlains had to bring theirs over, too. And the copies that we have in The National Archives UK are those of the chamberlain, the second chamberlain as it's often known as. They were never returned to Dublin, unlike the other rolls. Obviously, there has been some loss, theft, wastage over time. But I mean, the gaps that we can fill with the Irish Exchequer accounts at The National Archives UK for the Beyond 2022 Project, this gold seam could create an almost complete reconstruction of a really important part of the medieval archive of Ireland.

Laura: What do these records tell us about life in medieval Ireland that we otherwise just wouldn't know, or we would know less about?

Paul: The bigger themes that you tend to notice, things like the cosmopolitan nature of life in Ireland, there are lots of entries relating to, for example, Italian merchants and Italian bankers, Flemish merchants. There are communities from Wales, there are people with surnames which tell you that they come from all over England, for example. You also really get the sense of how interconnected what we might think of now as apparently dispersed and remote parts of all of the islands that we live in actually were at the time. And that really gives you an indication of how powerful the English state and commercial links were at the time because you're getting English trading posts as far west as Galway. There are sheriffs in Counties Kerry, and Cork, who are regularly bringing receipts in 100, 150 miles in you know awful winter conditions, potentially getting lots of resistance, not just from the Gaelic Irish communities, but those settler communities who, you know, they're remote from the centre of power. They don't necessarily feel that they owe some of the financial obligations to the Dublin government that perhaps if they were in England, they might think they would.

You can see from a macro level the financial fluctuation. So you're getting the effects of things like climate change, famines and epidemics. For example, there is a really serious episode of climate change in the mid-1310s where there's sort of this little ice age that comes back. There are really heavy rains, crops fail, there's widespread starvation, and of course, that coincides in Ireland with an invasion from Scotland by King Robert Bruce's brother Edward Bruce.

And that's one of the other things as well, it's the military support that the King of England is able to get from Ireland. So in the roll sort of in the 1290s, 1300s, as Edward I is campaigning in Scotland, you get lots and lots of payments to Irish captains who are bringing over, you know, hundreds of men, hundreds of archers, hundreds of horsemen, from Ireland and they're going on campaign in Scotland. But there are lots and lots of men from Ireland in Scotland in the 1300s.

There's also really good evidence there for cultural conflicts and cultural contacts. So you get lots of payments from individuals who are representing Gaelic Irishman. It may well be that those men want to pay for the right to enjoy English legal practices.

And then you also get on the reverse side, you get the cultural conflict. So you do get the payments or the receipts for campaigning armies in Ireland, there's some brilliant entries about payments being made in decapitated heads of Irish war captains being brought into the exchequer as evidence of what's happening, success on a campaign.

And then I guess–quite unusually–you get decent evidence for the presence of women in one of these great institutions of state. We've got quite a good number of examples of women making payments themselves, rather than simply being represented by an official. Some of them of course are elite women who are countesses or baronesses, others less easy to work out exactly what their status in society is because you don't often get reference to occupation. Normally you'll just get told as somebody who's a widow or wife of somebody rather than somebody is a brewer, which of course is a female profession. So you do get a really good insight into quite broad themes. As well as if you are a historian of locality, you'll get lots of really good insights into

individual communities, what they're paying for, who's representing communities, the ebb and flow of the financial payments coming in from different parts of Ireland, as you know, the size of the area under English control grows in the 13th century and then shrinks back again in the 14th or 15th century to where it's just what they call the Pale, which is those four counties around Dublin.

Laura: Yeah, I always think if you follow the money then you always find where the power sits, don't you?

Paul: Exactly, yeah.

Laura: So can you tell me why we should care or why should everyday people care that we have some government records for medieval Ireland?

Will: And in terms of the bigger picture, why do you think the Beyond 2022 Project is worth all the time and effort that the project team and their institutions are putting into it?

Paul: Obviously, first and foremost, this is an international collaboration between both cognate institutions – heritage institutions such as National Archives UK, National Archives Ireland, National Library of Ireland – and also academic institutions. So it's both rooted in rigorous academic research but also has a really important public engagement, public informational focus that a lot of projects don't have. From our point of view at The National Archives with the medieval collection, this is a collection that has survived the worst that the centuries can throw at it. And it is being used to fill out a picture of not just Ireland across seven centuries, but also Britain, Western Europe, in a way.

Just in general terms, being able to understand and explore how the medieval state of England controlled…asserted its power over not just Ireland but large parts of Northwestern Europe, and then how the institutions of state affected people on the ground, how it affected individual places,

how places developed...the fact that the English and then the British state has kept records that go back now effectively 8-9 centuries gives all parts of society...roots them in a past that they can hopefully through this project and through others, connect with.

Will: So far in this episode, we've been talking about records in Ireland and elsewhere in the British Isles, but in order to reconstruct the Irish Record Treasury, the Beyond 2022 team are doing an international search. To find out more about this part of the project, we called up one of the researchers who is currently in Australia.

Sarah Hendriks: I'm Dr Sarah Hendriks. I'm a socio-cultural and architectural historian, and I'm the UK Archival Discovery Fellow with Beyond 2022.

Laura: So first of all, what I'd be interested to know is how did copies and originals of Irish records end up in archives and libraries around the world and how has Beyond 2022 managed to track them down?

Sarah: There are some really interesting stories about the archival history of all of these documents that we're trying to track down and all sorts of reasons as to how they've ended up all over the world. But generally, it links to one of two reasons. Either documents were created in places where Ireland had a presence. So for example in Australia, there are original records relating to Irish transportation. The other main reason we have documents in repositories all over the place is that they were part of private collections that have been relocated or purchased by individuals and institutions all around the world.

For example, the Thomas Phillips collection; Phillips was a collector of books and manuscripts in the 19th century. His collection was as big as 40,000 printed books and 60,000 manuscripts. And after he died the collection was split up, and it was sold to archives and repositories all around the world, and there was Irish material all through it. It wasn't exclusively Irish, but there were a lot of Irish documents. So it now means that his manuscripts are in archives all over the place. And so part of our job is to then track them down, which of course is a challenge in and of itself with so many documents in so many different places.

So, the Archival Discovery Team have a few different techniques that we use to track these down. Sometimes we know exactly where documents are. Wood's Guide can sometimes give us clues. For example, he mentions that the Library Company of Philadelphia had papers relating to Irish State Papers. We have some indication of where we should start searching, but other times we just have no idea and we have to work it out for ourselves.

Will: Just to refresh people's memory, Wood's Guide is the catalogue from the Public Record Office that Neal mentioned in the beginning of the episode...the one that lists everything that was in the repository when it was destroyed.

Sarah: So a couple of techniques I use is that I might pick a catalogue or a library, normally one of the bigger institutions. And sometimes I'll start with a search term that is wildly generic like 'Ireland' or 'Irish', and it's amazing...you'll either get two or three results or you'll get 20 or 30,000. And from there you can start narrowing down and working out what's likely to reveal what you need or what's maybe not going to be the best use of time for finding the types of material that you're after. Yeah, so there's all sorts of different ways in which we can approach it. And one of the great things about the team as well is that we all have different areas of specialism, so sometimes from our own research, we'll know where there are caches of materials and we can send each other to look for things.

Laura: Wow that's really fascinating. Do you have any other examples of documents located in other institutions located outside the British Isles, and how can they help fill in the gaps in Irish history?

Sarah: Yeah. They really do appear anywhere and everywhere. We'll have all sorts, from documents about the Irish linen trade showing up at the National Library of Australia, and those items include the earliest known bank draft connected with the Irish linen trade, now so well known. We have 17th-century legal cases in New York. There's transcripts of debates in the Irish

House of Commons at the Library of Congress, and they're amazing because they even have notes in them about the comments that were made on the floor and not just the official record of what happened. We're tracking down leads, so watch this space. We're looking at repositories in Spain and in France, even New Zealand and South Africa. So material really does occur anywhere and everywhere, much like the Irish diaspora, I suppose.

Laura: I just think that's amazing really, how archives from all over the globe are interconnected. But yeah, you've been looking at some interesting records relating to the transportation of convicts to Australia. Can you tell me how they are relevant to the project, and how you went about locating them?

Sarah: Yeah, this was an example of an archival discovery that began from Wood's Guide. The convict department is listed in the guide as a specific series of documents that once belonged in the PROI...

Will: PROI being the Public Record Office of Ireland that was destroyed.

Sarah:...and these include various types of records ranging from lists of passengers that were transported both as convicts and also as free settlers through to some details around the administration and the process of transportation. As you may have picked up from my accent, I'm also an Australian citizen, and so I was familiar with this idea of transportation and thought that maybe there might be some information somewhere over there. So I did some digging in some of the repositories, and I focused on the National Library of Australia, in particular, where I found quite a few documents that have both replaced items that we know were in the PROI so we can directly furnish new material that can replace what was lost and also other items that tell us more about the story that we can find out about what Irish transportation was like and what it involved.

So one of the documents I found was a passenger list for a ship called the Friendship II which sailed from County Waterford in 1799 and arrived in Botany Bay in 1800. So what we have in this list is the names, the crimes, and the sentence lengths of 172 Irishmen. And many of them were defeated rebels from the 1798 uprising, so it fills out a broader story of Irish history and also gives us lots of individual details for family historians and those tracing individuals through to the whole process of transportation and all of those that were involved.

Laura: Are there any interesting stories or characters that stand out from these documents?

Sarah: Yeah, there really are such a range of documents and so many individuals and so many stories that come through from these records. And it means that we can use them not just to replace the lost items that were once in the PROI and to put them back on the shelves of the virtual record treasury, but we can do one of the things that I actually find most interesting about tracking these documents down. And that's finding the records of human stories of individual voices and the social histories of how these men and women throughout the ages thought, how they behaved, how they really lived. One example is I came across a record for Rebecca Armstrong Atkinson from County Tyrone, and she put in a request to travel with her three children to join her husband William who had been transported on a ship called The Martha in 1818. And in this record, there was no note to say whether the request had been granted or not. And so I was curious and did a little searching, and I found a record for her. And it came from 1830 where she's listed as being transported herself on a ship called the Asia I for a seven-year term for shoplifting, and she'd been tried in 1828. So 10 years after she put in her request - and it would seem that her request was rejected - and like many others, she then took to actually committing a crime herself in order to be transported and join her family.

And so these are the types of stories that aren't immediately obvious just by looking at lists of names and dates and pure data. But by putting them together and seeing how they connect, you can really get a sense of how these people lived and how difficult it must have been to be separated from family and the lengths that they would go to in order to be reunited and to carve out new lives together.

There's another record, also at the National Library of Australia, the logbook of John Smith who was a surgeon on a ship called The Clyde, which transported 235 Irish prisoners from Ireland to Sydney and they even stopped off in South Africa to pick up a few more on the way. And with his logbook, amongst all the notes around the details of the passengers and life on the ship and the weather and how he would sanction the prisoners if they misbehaved...I should add, there was a note included at the beginning from one of the prisoners after they'd arrived in Australia thanking him for how kind he was to them and the generosity he showed - so he was obviously a nice man amongst it all. But amongst his notes, he writes that he had referred to one of his officers after inspecting the prisoners at Kilmainham that he'd received, and I'll quote a bit from his logbook, 'a communication that Thomas Luffy made to me relative to a murder to which he was privy perpetrated by three men about two years ago'. And then he gives nothing else. He doesn't tell us

if they worked out who it was, what happened, who did it. You know, so sometimes these documents raise more questions than they give answers, but they give us insights. And that's part of the joy of it, is being able to discover so much more about what's there.

Laura: So many of these records, they are already in archives where researchers can already go and look for them. Why do you think it's important to collect these far-flung records into one digital space?

Sarah: It is true. A lot of these documents are in repositories and libraries across the world. It's also true there are quite a lot of documents that aren't in official repositories, that are in private collections that might still be in someone's attic, on their library shelf, under the bed that are going to take a bit more work to try and track down. But part of what we're doing is bringing these items together again, and we're making them accessible.

In some instances, we're reuniting or we're attempting to reunite disparate parts of what was once the singular collection. And by doing that, it makes research, it facilitates research, it makes these documents more accessible. But it also enables all sorts of people to discover not just those specific items, but also the story of Irish history and to see how these documents might relate and be part of something larger.

So for example, there's a volume of a major but unrealised publication of Irish state papers called the Acta Regia in The Huntington in California. And it was created by a man called William Monk Mason whose papers after his death went to Sir Thomas Phillips, that collector that we were talking about earlier with his 40,000 records, which as we know were dispersed. And so Monk Mason's manuscripts were part of that collection and also ended up all across the world.

As it happens, we tracked down the second volume of this Acta Regia to The National Archives in Ireland. So one of the things that the project can do is now reunite these two volumes that were never published which will enable scholars and researchers and anyone who's interested to be able to see the two pieces reunited once again.

Things like this are only possible through collaboration with our partner institutions. And TNA, of course, is one of our major partners. And they have so many records that have been reunited with collections all across the world in contributing to this project. But I think we have more than 50 institutions who are officially partnered with the project at this stage and more are being added all

the time. And so this really is a combined effort, and it helps to link people and resources and documents in the spirit of working together through research and making collections accessible.

So having all of these items combined in a digital repository of virtual record treasury also means that we can make them accessible not just by being in one place but also through the different approaches and techniques we're applying to the documents. Some of these include programs like Transkribus which let us automatically transcribe handwritten documents from the 15th century right through to the modern-day, and it means anyone who wants to read them can read them like text in a printed book. They don't have to know paleography, they don't have to be an expert in how to decipher the handwriting of an individual or a different time period. So it makes it a far more accessible resource then to anybody who wishes to look at it.

The other thing we can do by doing the transcripts is also make the documents text-searchable. So instead of reading 500 pages of someone's letters and correspondence, you can do a search. And it will show you the specific letters or the specific pages that might be of relevance. So it can save researchers' time, and it can lead you directly to what it is that you're most interested in discovering. The projects are also developing a Knowledge Graph which is, in essence, a database of pure data: names, dates, places, titles.

But the really clever thing about it is that it will find the connections, so you can look for the title of the person, and it will tell you everybody who has held that title. And then it can tell you all the places that were in common with those people. Of where they've maybe lived or where they worked or where they were born. You can trace histories and connections between places, people, whatever you like and explore history in different ways. I think this is one of the great things about the project, is not only bringing these documents to the fore and making them better known and more accessible to the public but enabling people to explore them to discover new documents, new aspects to the material, and to help people be curious about Irish history in a way that hasn't previously been available to them.

Laura: So I have one final burning question now. When and how will the public be able to access the result of all this wonderful research and collaborative work?

Sarah: Well, I've got great news in that you can already see some of what we've achieved on the website at beyond2022.ie

The full Virtual Record Treasury will be launched on the centenary of the Four Courts blaze on June 30, 2022. So you'll have to wait a whole year for the official launch, but the good news is we're sharing our process and our finds along the way both through the website and through a whole range of events that we'll be having over the next year.

Laura: Great. Thank you.

Will: Thanks for listening to On the Record, a production of The National Archives at Kew.

To find out more about The National Archives, follow the link from the episode description in your podcast listening app or visit nationalarchives.gov.uk.

Laura: I definitely want to encourage anyone listening to go have a browse on the beyond2022.ie website. You can play around with a model of the building we've been talking about, flip through some of the documents that have been added to the digital repository, read blogs about the work, and a lot more.

There's a number of visual stories on the website that are a lot of fun if you like archives, which since you're listening to this podcast, I have to assume you do. One of these has some photographs of the exchequer rolls Elizabeth and Paul talked about, including an image of a list of payments, which really brings Elizabeth's interview to life.

Will: Listeners, we need your help to make this podcast better! We need to know a bit more about you and what themes you're interested in. You can share this information with us by visiting smartsurvey.co.uk/s/ontherecord. We'll include that link in the episode description and on our website. You can also share your feedback or suggestions for future series by emailing us at OnTheRecord@nationalarchives.gov.uk.

Laura: Thank you to all the experts who contributed to this episode. This episode was written, edited, and produced by Hannah Hethmon for Better Lemon Creative Audio.