

Research advice sheet

Bureau of Military History and Military Pension Collections

The **witness statements from the Bureau of Military History** are valuable primary sources for the history of the revolutionary period, 1913 to 1921. They represent the personal accounts of nearly 2000 witnesses who took part in active service in that period.

They can be searched by name, location, events, battles, organisations and dates. There is also a separate index of names which also provides location and rank for individuals.

SEARCH TIP: even if you have located an individual under a **name search** in a particular place, it is very useful search under **'place'** as well, in order to get a general overview, e.g. searching under 'Dingle', will provide information on the activities of Ernest Blythe and Desmond Fitzgerald and the organisation of the local Volunteers while they lived in Dingle prior to 1916. There are 45 hits returned for Dingle. [Full search advice here](#)

The Military Service Pensions Collection

These pensions were awarded to those who could prove they had active service during the period. Although they may be used together with the witness statements to provide information on individuals, it should be noted that not everyone who played a part in the War of Independence sought a pension. Secondly, not all the files are yet available online. There are 7 returns for Dingle. [Search](#)

Check different versions of surnames or changed surnames in a search

- During this period, many people changed from the English to Irish version of their name. But they could still be known by the original version by some, e.g. 'Seán MacDiarmada', 'Seán McDermott' and 'John MacDermott' in police files.
- **Women** can be known either by their maiden or married names. A search for 'Min Ryan' yielded several returns in the witness statements in the Bureau of Military History, but she is only registered as 'Mary Josephine Mulcahy' (her married name) in the Military Pensions Collection.

Collect random pieces of evidence like jigsaw pieces

- Checking random leads in one source may create a pattern, or be discarded, e.g. a name or place mentioned in an individual's account could be followed to gain a fuller account of an event.

NARROW PLACE NAME SEARCHES

- Even if a location is known, be as precise as possible with street names, e.g. the Cork Volunteer Headquarters was in Sheares Street, searching under

'Sheares Street' will include 'Sheares' and 'Street' (1211 hits). Searching under 'Sheares' will yield valuable information on the activities of the Volunteers in Cork (85 hits).

Oral history

The witness statements can be described as a form of oral history. They were collected between 1947 and 1957, many years after the events they describe. They are personal accounts and as such they must be submitted to special scrutiny. It is advisable to **cross-check** any statement of an individual and if there is any difference in accounts, note that in your assessment of the usefulness of a source.

A witness account can be truthful and accurate, but without cross-checking may not provide the full picture. Even then, it may not be always possible to draw a definite conclusion and this should be stated.

Quiz the sources:

In order to assess the usefulness of a source, adopt the same basic rules at all times. Follow the 5 Ws rule. Make notes as you go along.

- **What type** of document /source is it?
- **Who** wrote / produced it?
- **When** was it written/produced? Do you know anything about the author/creator?
- **Why** was it written/ produced?
- **Where** did it happen?