



Department of  
**Culture, Arts  
and Leisure**  
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# Views on the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland

*August 2009*



Findings from the April 2009 NISRA Omnibus Survey

DCAL Research Findings 3/2009



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## KEY FINDINGS

- Sixty percent of those surveyed stated that they would be interested in researching their family history/genealogy, while just over half would be interested in studying the history of their local area/ town (52%).
- Sixty-eight percent of respondents had heard of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI).
- The most common way for people to have become aware of PRONI was through a friend, family or other user (32%).
- Nine percent of respondents had ever been to the Public Record Office at Balmoral Avenue.
- The main reason for visiting PRONI is to research family history/genealogy (34%).
- Of those who had ever visited PRONI at Balmoral Avenue, around a fifth had been in the last year (21%).
- Fifteen percent of those surveyed said it was likely that they would want to use the archives in PRONI within the next 12 months.
- The most common reason given for not using PRONI by respondents who indicated that they would not be likely to use PRONI in the next 12 months, was having no interest in what PRONI offers. Thirty five percent of respondents gave this as a reason.
- Looking at opening hours, 19% said they would like to see Saturday opening hours while 13% would like to see more evening opening hours.
- Around one in ten respondents had ever used the PRONI website (9%).
- If the most popular archives were online 30% of respondents said they would be likely to use this material.
- Being able to access photographs online was the type of material most commonly stated as a preference (45% of respondents).
- Fifteen percent would be prepared to pay for access to the archives on the PRONI website.
- Around three quarters of respondents agreed that PRONI could do more to publicise its services (76%), and 32% of respondents said that television was the best way for this to happen.
- Two percent of respondents said they knew where PRONI was relocating to.

## INTRODUCTION

The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), which is a division of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, is the repository for records of historical interest relating to Northern Ireland. It aims to identify, acquire and make available records which are of cultural and historical importance and interest.

In April 2009, questions relating to PRONI were placed on the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) Omnibus Survey. This module replicates in part, a series of questions on a NISRA Omnibus Survey conducted approximately 2 years ago.

The purpose of asking these questions is to facilitate decision making and business planning by informing senior

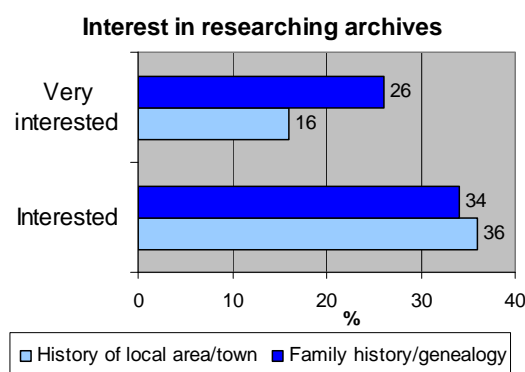
management of the public's views on various aspects of PRONI's services.

Topics covered include awareness of PRONI, use of PRONI, reasons for use, opening hours, likelihood of using PRONI in the future, electronic access, barriers to use and marketing.

The NISRA Omnibus Survey consists of modules of questions on different themes and is conducted at various times throughout the year. It is based on a representative Northern Ireland-wide sample of 2,200 domestic addresses taken from the Land and Property Services Agency's valuation list. At each address sampled an adult is randomly selected to participate in the survey. There were 1,268 achieved interviews for this survey.

## INTEREST IN ARCHIVES

Sixty percent of those surveyed stated that they would be interested or very interested in researching their family history/genealogy, while 52% said they would be very interested or interested in studying the history of their local area/town. In 2007, 55% said they would be interested in researching their family history/ genealogy while 48% indicated having an interest in researching the history of their local area/town.



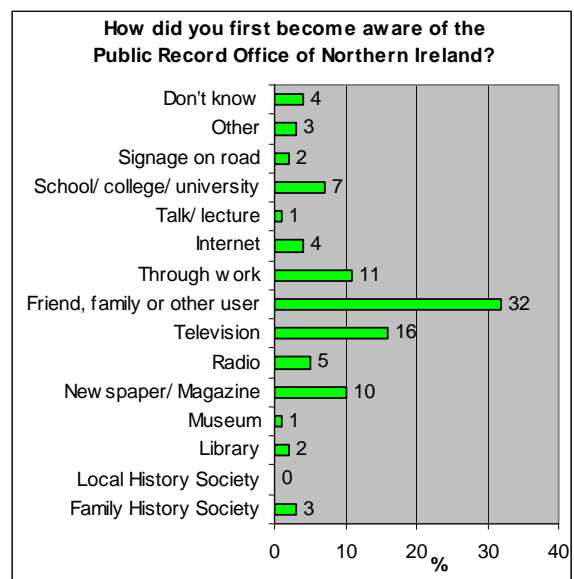
## AWARENESS OF PRONI

Sixty-eight percent of respondents have heard of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. This was the same figure as in 2007.

Of those who had heard of PRONI, the most common way people had become aware of PRONI was through a friend, family or other user (32%). Sixteen percent became aware of PRONI through the television, while through work and newspapers/ magazines were the next common means of becoming aware of PRONI (11% and 10% respectively). In 2007, the most common ways for people to become aware of PRONI were through friend/other user (34%), followed by television (12%), newspapers/ magazines and other ways (both 11%).

Respondents who had said they became aware of PRONI through newspapers/ magazines were asked to say which

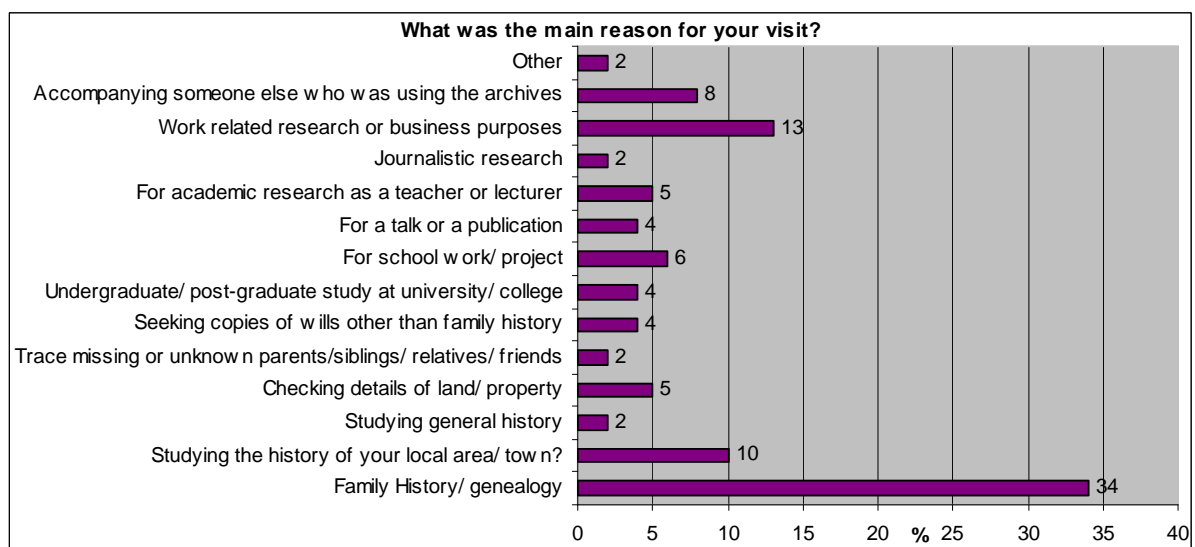
newspaper or magazine this was. The most common one was the Belfast Telegraph (24 respondents), 8 stated the Irish News while 6 stated the Newsletter. 23 respondents were not sure what newspaper made them aware of PRONI while 3 said it was a local paper.



## USE OF PRONI

Nine percent of respondents had ever visited the Public Record Office at

Balmoral Avenue. In 2007, this figure was 8%.



For those who visited the Public Record Office at Balmoral Avenue, the main reason given for visiting was family history/genealogy (34%). Thirteen percent said that work related research or business purposes was the main reason for visiting PRONI at Balmoral Avenue, while 10% stated the main reason was studying the history of local area/ town.

In 2007 when there was a shorter list of options, 41 out of 90 of respondents said that the main reason for their visit was family history/genealogy, 14 gave a reason other than those presented on the list and 9 said that school work/project was the main reason for their visit.

Of those who had ever visited PRONI at Balmoral Avenue, a fifth had been in the last year (21%).

## LIKELIHOOD OF USING PRONI

All respondents were asked how likely it would be for them to want to use the archives in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland within the next 12 months.

Five percent stated it was very likely that they would want to use the archives, while 10% said it was likely. In 2007 6% said they would be very likely to want to use the archives in PRONI while 14% said they would be likely to use the archives in PRONI in the next 12 months. In the most recent survey around a third (32%) stated that it was not very likely that they would use the archives in PRONI within the next 12 months (27% in 2007), while around one half stated it was unlikely they would want to use the archives in PRONI in the next 12 months (53%). This was the same figure as in 2007.

Respondents who had indicated that they would not be likely to use the archives in PRONI in the next 12 months were asked why this was the case. Of the reasons mentioned first, the most common one given was having no interest in what the Public Record Office offers (32%), followed by having no need to go to/use the Public Record Office (26%). Sixteen percent of respondents who were not likely to use PRONI in next 12 months said that having no time was the reason for this.

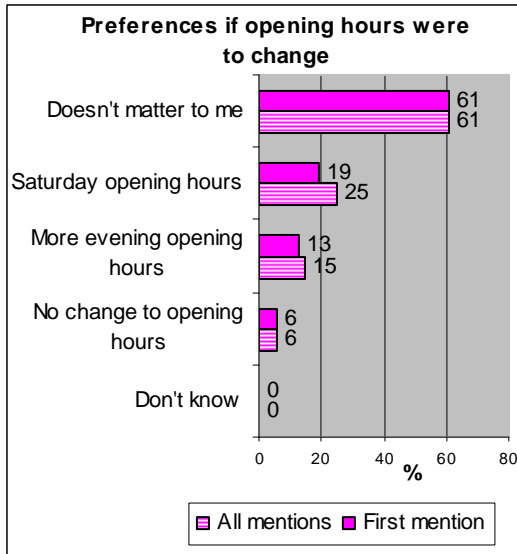
Taking all mentions into account, the same three reasons stated above were the most commonly reported (35%, 32% and 20% respectively). No interest, no need and no time were the top 3 reasons in 2007 (42%, 29% and 21% respectively).

## OPENING HOURS

PRONI's opening hours were considered. Those surveyed were told the current opening hours and asked to state which options they would like to see if the opening times were to change.

Sixty-one percent of all respondents' first preferences indicated that it didn't

matter to them, while 19% stated that they would like to see Saturday opening hours. Thirteen percent said they would like more evening opening hours, while 6% said they would not like any change to the opening hours.



Looking at all preferences, again 61% indicated that it did not matter to them, while Saturday opening hours was mentioned by a quarter of respondents as one of their preferences. Fifteen percent of all respondents stated that they would like more evening opening hours, while 6% stated no change to opening hours.

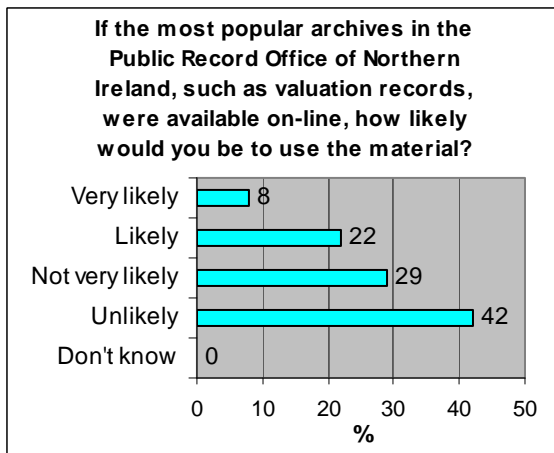
The 'does not matter to me' option was not available in 2007; then 45% said that they did not want any change to the opening hours, while 33% wanted Saturday opening hours and 18% wanted more evening opening hours.

## PRONI WEBSITE

Opinions on the availability of archival information online were investigated.

Around one in ten respondents had used the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland website (9%).

In particular, looking at the services offered on the PRONI website, 3% had used the electronic catalogue which describes the archives in the PRONI.



Those surveyed were asked if the most popular archives in PRONI were available online, how likely they would be to use this material. Eight percent said they would be very likely, while 22% said they would be likely to use this material. For 29% of respondents it was

unlikely that they would use popular archives online, and 42% said it was very unlikely that they would use this material.

In 2007 almost half of respondents stated they would access popular archived material online if it was available (47%).

Regarding what type of material those surveyed would like to see online, almost a quarter gave photographs as their first preference (24%), while 17% said they would like to see school registers as their first preference. Being able to access valuation revision books was the first preference for 12%. Thirty-nine percent of respondents said that they would not be interested in any of the records that were on the list.

When all mentions were taken into account nearly half of all those surveyed would like to see photographs online (45%), while 30% would like to see school registers. A fifth mentioned workhouse records as one of the things that they would like to see online while 15% said that they would like to see valuation revision books.

Almost a third respondents in 2007 would access photographs online (34%) followed by school registers (29%). Forty-five percent would not access any of the options online.

Paying for archives online was investigated. Fifteen percent said they would be prepared to pay for access to the archives on the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland website. Around a

quarter said it would depend on the level of the charge (27%) while over half of respondents stated that they would not be willing to pay for online archives (57%).

Around a fifth of respondents in 2007 were prepared to pay for access to archives (19%), while 59% were not prepared to pay and a fifth said it would depend on the charge.

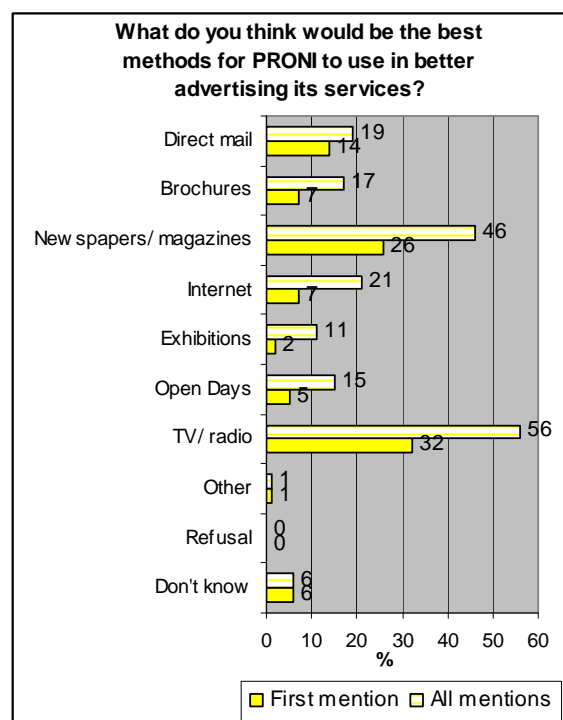
## MARKETING

Views on marketing were sought. Those surveyed were asked if the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland could do more to publicise its services. Three quarters of respondents agreed with this (76%), while 18% did not think they could do more to publicise its services. These figures were similar in 2007 with 74% agreeing and 17% disagreeing.

Methods of advertising were considered. Those surveyed were given a list of various means of advertising. The most popular option which was mentioned first was television (32%) followed by newspapers/magazines (26%). Fourteen percent gave direct mail as their first choice for methods for PRONI to advertise.

Taking all mentions into account, over half of respondents mentioned TV/radio as a method of advertising (56%). Almost half stated that newspapers/magazines would be one of the best methods of advertising (46%). Around a fifth mentioned the Internet (21%) and direct mail (19%) as one of their options.

In 2007 when television wasn't one of the options on the list provided to those surveyed, over half of respondents believed newspapers would be the best method for PRONI to advertise its services (54%) followed by direct mail (29%) and brochures (26%).



## RELOCATION

Finally respondents were asked if they knew where the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland will be relocating to in late 2010. Two percent said they were

aware of the location. Eighteen of the 26 respondents who said this were correct in stating it was relocating to the Titanic quarter.

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