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The London Gazette

The London Gazette was founded as the Oxford Gazette in the summer of 1665 as the then monarch, Charles II, was in residence in Oxford due to the plague in London. The first issue was 'Published by Authority' on 16 November 1665. It comprised two main categories of news: foreign reports and those from English ports on shipping movements. It also contained news of the King and Court, and other information such as bills of mortality, which included deaths from the plague, legal lists of circuit judges and sheriffs, and occasional reports of crime and its punishment.

In February 1666 the Court returned to London and from its 24th edition for 1-5 February, the Oxford Gazette became entitled the London Gazette. It then appeared twice weekly, but has sometimes appeared daily, weekly or three times each week.

During the latter half of the 17th century the London Gazette contained financial news in the form of notices and taxes inserted as they fell due. Advertisements for lost property also began to be inserted, as well as rewards for information on thefts, murders and runaways. From 1684 the printing of proclamations in the gazette offered a supplementary method of distributing information. The first instance of a requirement to publish in the gazette occurred in 1694 when the Queen in Council ordered that the Treasury Commissioners"should prepare a notice for the London Gazette signifying the approval of the Commission for a subscription to the Bank of England."

The 1712 Act to relieve insolvent debtors, which required that the debtor give notice to his creditors in the gazette, resulted in a flood of insertions. Shipping and foreign news now decreased, and with the advent of the Daily Advertiser in 1730, the miscellaneous advertising such as property and auction sales disappeared, although official and legal insertions were not affected. Tables of the weekly average price of corn and returns of corn and grain were regularly inserted. With the inception of the Home Office in 1782, the London Gazette was to record its specific concerns (i.e. naturalisation of aliens).

The London Gazette saw a substantial increase in the amount of private advertising during the 19th century. In the period of extensive railway investment, each company had to obtain its powers by private Act of Parliament, which were notified in the gazette.

In 1910 the London Gazette became a Stationery Office publication.

ZJ 1/1-47 conform to the Julian or 'Old Style' calendar

Other Official Gazettes

Other official newspapers of the UK government are the Edinburgh Gazette and Belfast Gazette, which, apart from reproducing certain materials of nationwide interest published in the

London Gazette, also contain publications specific to Scotland and Northern Ireland, respectively.

This series contains copies of the London Gazette, the official newspaper of the government. The copies include acts of state, proclamations, and appointments to offices under the crown; also orders in Council and such other orders as were directed to be published, including dissolutions of partnership, notices of proceedings in bankruptcy, official notices relating to insolvent debtors, etc.

Many volumes contain integral indexes. There are indexes to complete years and also indexes within volumes to parts of the same year. In many cases the entire volume is an index, usually to the whole year, occasionally to four, five or six years (1820-1839) and occasionally to six months (1917-1921).

The London Gazette - Treasure Trove of Historical Information

"This day, the first of the Oxford Gazettes came out, which is very pretty, full of news and no folly in it…"

With this brief diary entry Samuel Pepys recorded the first issue of Britain's oldest continuously-published newspaper, the London Gazette. It has recorded significant political events, the everyday working of government and to some extent the lives of ordinary everyday people. Its birth was an accident of history, a result of one of those accidents of history of which even nearly 350 years later historians can only imagine the impact. In the early spring of 1665 Charles II removed himself and the Royal Court from London to Oxford whilst plague set about killing more than 100,000 Londoners. Such was the fear of contamination that people would not attempt to have any contact with any object or person from London, this included letters and newspapers. Royal authority was sought to publish a news sheet for the court and issue no 1 of the *Oxford Gazette* appeared in November 1665. When in February 1666 the Court returned to London, the title changed to the *London Gazette* which it bore from issue 24.*(www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/1/pages/1; www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/24)*

A two-sided sheet printed in a two column layout, published twice weekly on Monday and Thursday, early issues reflected the preoccupations of the court and a nation expanding its world trade routes. News from abroad – guaranteed reliable as it came from British ambassadors - and records of shipping movements in and out of half a dozen British havens or ports were supplemented by advertisements for the lost dogs, stolen horses and runaway servants of the gentry. Thus in the London Gazette 2838 of January 1692 we can read "*Richard Fitzgerald alias Gerald aged about 20, middlesized, paled countenance, down looked, think fair lank hair" who on the 19th stole "great sums of gold and silver, jewels, rings, medals , seals and watches" His Master not surprisingly offering a reward for the whereabouts of the goods and Richard Fitzgerald. (www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/2838/pages/2)*

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With a monopoly of the printed news, the Gazette also carried some major domestic stories: the issue of September 10th 1666 is a detailed report of the inexorable spread of the Great Fire of London despite "*His Majesties (sic) own...personal plans to apply all possible remedies to prevent it" (www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/85)*

From the beginning the Gazette readership was not the general public but the mercantile classes, the legal profession and officers of state serving at home and abroad. Whilst this guaranteed a large circulation - 6,000 copies by 1704 - over 1,000 of these were provided free to office holders and often sold on for a profit. By the early eighteenth Century regular contributors included the Treasury and Privy Council, whilst the Admiralty and War Office submitted details of the appointments and promotions of their officers, a process continuing even today and known as "being gazetted".

Published three times a week from June 1709 although still a single, two-sided leaf, in 1712 the Gazette assumed one role it still fulfils today when an *"Act to Relieve Insolvent Debtors"* required publication of insolvency announcements in the Gazette, with a resultant doubling of size to four pages on most publication days. In the words of the Gazette's historian, "the businessman losing money must publicise the fact and the Gazette was to be his pillory". This public penalty, also confusingly referred to as "being gazetted" or "being in the gazette" was mentioned in the literature of such diverse figures as Lord Byron and Charles Dickens. In the same year the newly-introduced Newspaper Stamp Duty, caused publication to revert to twice weekly (Tuesday and Saturday) and taxed the placing of advertisements - spelling the end of appeals for lost dogs, horses and servants, but increasing revenue from statutory notices. These early years of the eighteenth century saw detailed information on the price of grain and an increasing number of public notices of a legal nature, encroaching on space once given to foreign news and shipping arrivals. By 1785, the Gazette varied in size between four and eight pages but had assumed a shape recognisable to modern readers.

With the publication of the first daily English newspaper - London's *Daily Courant*- in 1702, the Gazette lost its monopoly of news and throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries circulation declined. As a cost-saving measure the Gazette staff were all housed under one roof from 1811, but by 1828 fewer than 600 copies were sold: a later Comptroller of the Stationery Office was to comment "No-one buys it for amusement or as pleasant reading…it is only taken by those who cannot help it". But the Gazette maintained a lead in military matters with British Commanders in the field being its impeccably authoritative sources. During the Napoleonic wars despatches of particular importance began to be published as Extraordinary Gazettes, two examples recording Nelson's death at the Battle of Trafalgar and the first news of Wellington's victory at Waterloo, a report which *The Times* simply republished verbatim. *(www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/15858; (www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/17028)*

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In the middle years of the nineteenth century the Gazette gradually assumed its modern form. Usurped as a newspaper by the daily press, it was the growth of legislation and the rise of a civil service to administer that legislation that made it an essential part of the government's communication machine. Whilst Gazettes of 24 pages were regularly published, the railway building boom of 1845 saw a bumper 548 page issue and the number of advertisements rose to 26,000 a year by 1857. Legislation on Patents and Company Law in the 1850s and 1860s required the regular publication of information to interested parties, and from 1870 the newly-created Civil Service Commission, appointed to oversee the recruitment and examination of government employees, published details of civil service appointments at all grades in the Gazette. This continued through the first half of the twentieth century and included bodies such as the post office that we don't today regard as civil service, for example the appointment (without competition) of Henry William Preston, as a Learning Postman at Henley-on-Thames is thus duly recorded in the Gazette of September 8th 1899. Perhaps the last remnant of this past role today is the Imperial Service Medal, a supplement to the Gazette published on an occasional basis announcing awards to officials on their retirement. *(www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/58889)*

In 1899 a Naturalization Act *(www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/27039/pages/13)* resulted in the regular publication of lists of those granted British citizenship and in 1925 the Trustee Act *(www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/33120/pages/84)* picked up pre-existing practice by specifying certain legal privileges for executors giving notice of deceased's estates in the Gazette. Notices of this type are placed even today, providing family historians with a rich trail of information.

Perhaps the greatest growth change in the Gazette during the nineteenth century - now of great interest to many family historians – were the increased notifications of honours and awards to the armed services, active throughout the century in an expanding and often troubled Empire. From the eighteenth century, published despatches from commanders in the field had noted the distinguished service of officers of senior rank, but it was not until 1843 that a British commander mentioned rank and file soldiers (what the army called Other Ranks) by name. With the introduction during the Crimean War of three medals to be awarded to Other Ranks for brave conduct, details of the actions for which they were awarded – known as citations – were published in the Gazette. The best-known of these is the Victoria Cross, the first examples being awarded for service in the Crimean War *(www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/21971)*.

At the turn of the century despatches from the Boer War were frequently accompanied by regular lists of those awarded medals or whose conduct was to be noted. Whilst the names of those whose conduct was noteworthy are sometimes recorded within the text of a despatch, it became common practice to provide a separate list of such names after the main despatch, an appearance in such lists becoming known as a "mention in despatches". Awards of a new medal for naval officers, the Conspicuous Service Cross (later the Distinguished Service

Cross) were gazetted from 1901 (*www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/27328/pages/4330*). To fit in with the Gazette's publishing schedule (still twice-weekly on Tuesdays and Fridays) lists of awards were published as supplements to the regular gazettes, often a day or two later.

In 1910, HM Stationery Office, established in 1787, won a long battle to become the publishers (although not yet the printers) of the London Gazette and four years later began expansion to meet the demands of The Great War. With the official publishing days still Tuesdays and Fridays, the scale of the conflict resulted in almost daily publication of the Gazette and print runs of over 5,000 copies. Apart from the despatches received from military commanders and legislative changes affecting an expanding industrial sector, the First World War brought changes to the Honours and Awards system, reflecting the nature of the conflict. Existing medals for bravery were extended by the creation of the Military Cross (MC) in December 1914 (*www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/29024/supplements/7*) and the Military Medal (MM) in March 1916 (*www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/29535/supplements/3647*), the Royal Warrants instituting both awards appearing in the Gazette. By 1920 over 120,000 MMs and 40,000 MCs had been gazetted. Although most of these awards did not include detailed citations, for a short period the name of the home town of the award winner was published within the Gazette entry.

A permanent and wide-ranging change to the British honours system resulted from the introduction by King George V of the Order of the British Empire in June 1917. Ranging from Knights and Dames Grand Cross (GBE) to the simple British Empire Medal (BEM), these awards rewarded British and Empire civilians who were helping the war effort and for the first time recognised the contribution of women. Divided from 1918 into Military and Civilian Divisions, the order recognised outstanding military service of a non-combatant nature or a distinguished contribution to the state in the arts and sciences, public services outside the Civil Service and charitable work. With these regular awards came the institution of the Birthday and New Year Honours Lists, published as Gazette Supplements (*www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/30111/supplements/5453*).

Between the wars the Gazette, printed from 1923 by HM Stationery Office, settled back to its twice-weekly schedule, recording the dates of bank holidays, the appointments of Lords-Lieutenant, High Court and Circuit Judges, probate notices, the designs for coins and banknotes, the dissolution of partnerships, pending registrations of freeholds with the Land Registry, and the appointment of Royal Warrant Holders. A second world war saw a similar expansion to the Gazette as that of 1914: daily publication, extensive lists of promotions and regular supplements of Honours and Awards. In January 1942 an alteration to the Gazette indexes introduced a separate heading for Honours and Awards, which had formerly been listed within the State Intelligence section under the name of the award.

Although it has been available in public libraries for many years, the official nature of the material recorded in the Gazette has meant a limited circulation, making access difficult for

many interested users. The Gazette recognised this and has digitised past copies of the Gazette. 99%+ of London Gazettes are available online with most being key word searchable and the small balance of mostly 17th and 18th century gazettes retrievable by searching on a date or issue number.

Two tips to remember to get the most from the web archive are that a search within a date range, but without a search term, will give you all Gazette issues within that range which you can browse through; the publication date of a supplement will differ by a few days from the date of the Gazette with which it was published – so always look at the dates on the front pages of Gazettes and not just the results bars, to locate the issue you require. Alternatively, the printed indexes have now been scanned and can be consulted on the London Gazette website, providing an additional way to locate historical information.

Today's Gazette, now published each working day by TSO on behalf of HMSO, continues to carry a wide range of official notices covering details of state, parliamentary, ecclesiastical, transport and planning matters as well as the long-established corporate and personal insolvency notices (*www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/59109/pages/10873*) and regular supplements covering honours and awards (*www.london-gazette.co.uk/documents/qb09*), armed forces officer commissions, promotions and retirements and details of unclaimed Premium Bonds. Although now a newspaper only in a very specialised sense, the Gazette has evolved to meet the needs of government and its readership whilst providing a fascinating record of the changing face of Britain. The lists of unclaimed Premium Bond prizes published since 1956 *(www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/58868/supplements/1)* recall Queen Anne's 1694 instruction that notice of her royal approval of the lottery must be included in the Gazette, the proceeds of which were specifically to finance the launch of the Bank of England. Gazettes of 1900 publish the local wheat prices (*www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/27150/pages/13*) alongside the diets for workhouse inmates, whilst the growth of property ownership is reflected in the Land Registry notices since the nineteenth century providing details of freehold properties awaiting registration (*www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/29360/pages/11079*). Whether you are researching a person or a social trend, the Gazette is a treasure trove of family and other history and will probably have something of interest.

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September 2011