

Researching in English & Welsh Record Offices

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The Record Office System in England and Wales

Archives can be classed by who runs them. It's important to be aware of the different types of archives & libraries. You will find the following:

- National Archives
- County & Other Local Archives
- University Libraries/Archives:
- Private & Specialist Archives.

Use Find an Archive to locate relevant archives:

<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/find-an-archive>

The National Archives (TNA)

Holds over 10 million documents created or collected by UK central government departments and major courts of law. Its catalogue also details the holdings of over 400 local record offices. TNA is a 45 minute trip out of central London on the underground. No booking is required. If you want to look at original records it saves time to pre-register for your reader's ticket and pre-order your documents. A few records require 3 days' notice to be produced, so do your homework well in advance. Read TNA's website in detail before you visit. It covers everything you need to know from what identification you will need, and the rules you must abide by, through to travel arrangements and refreshments.

Many records have been digitised. Some are available via third party companies, e.g. Ancestry.co.uk, www.thegenealogist.co.uk & Findmypast.co.uk and other via TNA's website. There is a small fee for some of the TNA downloads but images are available as free-to-browse records. To get an idea of TNA's collections and which are digitised see the links below. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/free-online-records-digital-microfilm/>

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/start-here/>

TNA's catalogue is called 'Discovery': <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

TNA Reference numbers. These are made up of the following sections.

1. **Department code:** department which originally created the document e.g. C (Court of Chancery), BT (Board of Trade), MH (Ministry of Health)
2. **Series number:** identifies a particular series of documents within that department. This usually consists of one set of numbers and is added to the department code, e.g. BT 159 are the 'Registers of Deaths at Sea of British Nationals'

3. **Piece number:** defines a particular document, or set of documents, within the series, such as BT 159/1 which is Registers of Deaths at Sea of British Nationals in England between 1875 and May 1877

National Library of Wales (NLW)

Wales has its own national archive at Aberystwyth. <https://www.llgc.org.uk/>. Material includes the deposited records of many estates of the landed gentry. There is an indexed list of estate records and these are essential for local and family history. It also holds church records including both parish and non-conformist registers. Wales has its own series of county record offices which also hold parish register copies. NLW has several important online collections notably The Welsh Newspaper collection and The Cynefin project which covers tithe records.

The British Library

Its main premises are next door to St Pancras railway station. The catalogue is at <http://explore.bl.uk/>. The biggest draw for family historians is the British India collection & the British Newspaper Archive (BNA) or Newsroom, the latter formerly housed at Colindale, North London. This includes all newspapers and journals ever published. Substantial parts of both these collections are online with Findmypast <http://www.findmypast.co.uk> (£). The newspaper collection is accessible with a superior search engine at www.britishnewspaperlibrary.co.uk (£)

Lambeth Palace Library is the principal repository of the documentary history of the Church of England. Records date from the 9th century and cover the entire Province of the Archbishopric of Canterbury i.e. Wales and all of England **except** Cheshire, Cumberland, Durham, Lancashire, Northumberland, Nottinghamshire, Westmorland and Yorkshire. <http://www.lambethpalacelibrary.org/>

The Borthwick Institute, York <https://www.york.ac.uk/borthwick/>

Holds records of the Diocese of York, including many wills & also parish registers for the Archdeaconry of York. Many are on Findmypast: There are many local Yorkshire archives. It's important to get the right one. See <http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/YKS>

County Archives and Libraries

Traditionally hold records produced or collated by local administrative units or authorities such as county councils, churches and parishes, poor law unions, local courts and schools, as well as accepting donations of documents from private individuals and organisations. In some places the archives have been combined with the library, but in other areas the archives and local library are still separate entities. Libraries often hold a good range of local history books and local newspapers on microfilm which are often not available in the local archives They are a good source for historic Ordnance Survey maps too. For the family historian primary sources held in County Archives are often parish records, nonconformist records,

Quarter Sessions, probate records, land and tax records. You may also find useful collections of estate papers and solicitors' papers. In some counties there may be several different record offices. Know which offices exist in each relevant county & how the records are split. Use <http://www.genuki.org.uk/> & <http://www.familysearch.org/wiki>

The Society of Genealogists in London is a very important resource. It has a large family history library with access to many parish register transcripts and other sources, some of which are available online for members. The London record centre for the Church of Latter Day Saints is now located at SOG. See www.sog.org.uk. The **Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies** in Canterbury should also be considered if you are staying in Kent. www.ihgs.ac.uk. Both organisations offer library access to non-members for a small fee

Catalogues

Each record office will have its own online catalogue and most have guides relating to their collections and the best ways to search. Some catalogues can be hard to find! Googling 'Such and such record office AND online catalogue' is often quicker.

For an explanation of the UK archive catalogue system see <https://postalheritage.wordpress.com/2013/09/25/cataloguing-archives-in-four-very-easy-steps/>

Planning and Making your Visit to the Archives: Points to Consider

- What are you trying to find out? Revise past research & evidence
 - Use catalogues to identify useful documents & make a priority list
 - Which records are on open access & which need ordering?
 - Are any documents available as downloads or via copying services?
 - Pre-register for readers' ticket/Pre-order as many documents as possible
 - Email Record Office -warn them of your visit! Double check availability of documents
- Opening & last order times/lunch breaks/stock taking?
- Facilities – vary greatly e.g. parking/refreshments/ public transport
- Rules & Regulations
 - Photography & Copying?
 - Laptops/Files & Folders/Memory sticks – allowed??
 - ID required? Need to book a seat?
- Seek advice of your genealogist/Ancestral Tourism

Travelling By Train

The rail network is made up of various individual rail companies. Your train ticket will be valid for travel via a specific company or companies on a particular route or routes. Savings can often be made on long distance train travel by booking well in advance, although this may limit you to travelling on a specific train. Use the following sites to plan journeys and book tickets. <http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/> <https://www.thetrainline.com/>

Use Transport for London to plan journeys in London <https://tfl.gov.uk/>

Travelling by Car

Use the following Route planner as a guide to journey routes and times

<http://www.theaa.com/route-planner/index.jsp>

Nearly all roads are toll free, with a few exceptions e.g. the M6 toll road round Birmingham, and the Dartford Crossing between Kent and Essex. This latter is charged by automatic toll and you will need to pay on line by midnight the following day. <https://www.gov.uk/pay-dartford-crossing-charge> If travelling on the M25 allow plenty of extra time, as it can get very congested.

If You Can't Visit in Person

- Make full use of the online catalogues and any record office ordering services.
- Use a qualified professional genealogist. Find these at the Association of Genealogists & Researchers in Archives. Only Full Members are fully vetted. <http://agra.org.uk>
- Join the local family history society: <http://www.ffhs.org.uk>. It may provide look-ups, advice and data online

Further Reading and Websites

National Archives Research Guides <https://tinyurl.com/hm3blqn>

Federation of Family History Societies <http://www.ffhs.org.uk>

Welsh Genealogy by Bruce Durie. (Pub. The History Press 2012)

Atlas & Index of Parish Registers. Ed. Cecil Humphrey Smith. (3rd ed 2002). Earlier editions are as good. Maps available via Ancestry or online from IHGS at www.ihgs.ac.uk

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