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Mind & Roots Course

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"Our family history shapes who we are mentally and emotionally, affecting how we think, feel, and behave. But the effects go further back into the past than we realise".

Handout: Newspapers for Family History

Newspapers are one of the best sources for finding out more about your ancestors, what life was like for them and about events that affected them. They can cover almost any subject under the sun, from events such as births, marriages and deaths but also reports of crimes your ancestor may have been involved in (not necessarily as criminal), suicides and accidents through to bravery awards, reports about community events and adverts for the family business. They are also good social and historical background reading for understanding the times in which our ancestors lived.

The growing digitisation of so many newspapers with our ability to search them using a search engine is rapidly providing us with a very powerful search tool. We have the ability to search for our ancestor over a whole range of newspapers and years with one mouse click.

NATIONAL OR LONDON NEWSPAPERS

These first developed in 17th century. Some of today's nationals date to this time - e.g. London Gazette began life as Oxford Gazette in 1665. By the 18th century there was The Times, Morning Post and Public Advertiser.

Don't presume your ancestor will not be mentioned in national or London papers. They could appear for various reasons:

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- witness in a trial
- involved in a major accident
- be declared bankrupt.

The London Gazette with the Belfast & Edinburgh Gazettes official voice of government. It was where official/legal notices such as bankruptcies, gallantry awards or announcements by government placed. The Gazettes are free online - see list below and some are on Ancestry too.

Accessing National Newspapers

Many of today's national papers such as The Times, Guardian, Express etc., have archives online and these are listed below under the websites section. If you are a library card holder some local libraries provide card holders with access to the Times Digital Archives and also the Illustrated London News - a beautifully illustrated weekly newspaper, with news from Britain and around the world. Explore what there is to offer using this free service. What is offered may vary from county to county!

The National Library of Scotland provides access to the Scotsman - but you have to have a registered Scottish address.

There are some gems to be had on some of the commercial websites - not just papers but periodicals. The Genealogist.co.uk provides access to some editions of the Jewish Chronicle and two war publications entitled The Great War and War Illustrated as well as the Illustrated London News. Ancestry gives access to The Times 1788-1833 and Gentleman's Magazine 1731-1868. Also has The Andrew's Index a collection of notices from newspapers and various official sources, such as the London Gazette. Dates range from 1790s – 1970s.

Copies of all national and local newspaper are held by the British Newspaper Library based St Pancras & Boston Spa. At the British Library, St Pancras you can access newspapers via the British Newspaper Archive online free of charge (or at home for a fee), on microfilm or in some cases original paper copies (these have to be ordered from Boston Spa – 48 hours' notice needed).

If the newspaper or any other publication you need is not available online then look for a hard copy. Since 1662 a copy of all publications have, by law, had to be deposited at the British Library (the main library of Legal Deposit). BL keeps 70% of free newspapers though not those which consist purely of advertising. 5 other libraries have the right to ask for copies of any publication if requested within 12 months: National Library of Scotland, National Library of Wales, Bodleian Library, University College Library Cambridge, & Trinity College Library Dublin. Since 2013 requirements of legal deposits also apply to digital and online media. Read more at <http://www.bl.uk/aboutus/legaldeposit/introduction/>

LOCAL NEWSPAPERS

The Evolution of local or provincial papers.

The earliest date from early 1700s e.g. Stamford Mercury and Norwich Post but, generally speaking, it was not until mid-19th century that they started to carry much local news & became local papers

as we know them. Before this they mainly replicated news from London papers. You may find snippets of local news or some obituaries.

From the mid-19th century following the abolition of stamp duty on newspapers they became more affordable while an improved transport meant London papers were available in the provinces so there was no point in a local paper reproducing the contents of London papers.

They are primary sources for locating inquest reports and obituaries and reports about weddings, divorce, slander cases or criminal cases. Your ancestor may have been involved in the latter as a victim or witness or of course the perpetrator of the crime!

Online Access to Local Newspapers

Many local newspapers form part of a major digitisation project by BL (now in conjunction with Findmypast) aiming to make 40 million pages of local newspapers available online. The resulting database is the wonderful British Newspaper Archive (BNA) which you can access from home by subscriptions or via findmypast. Not all local newspapers will be digitised. Most of those that are not digitised are available on microfilm however.

You can check which newspapers are covered on BNA by going straight <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/home/newspapertitles> or using the 'filter by newspaper option' when searching.

The National Library of Wales is digitising all out of copyright papers and placing them online on its website. There are many other online databases and many are the work of private and some of these are listed below.

If you are looking for a specific event and there is no relevant paper online remember there may be copies in the relevant local library or record office. You can currently use the British Library online catalogue [here](#) to tell you which newspapers were in existence for the place and at the time you want. This is a temporary catalogue following a cyber attack in October 2023 and may change in the future.

Locating Newspapers Not Online

- Use the British /Library catalogue as above
- 'Local Newspapers' by Jeremy Gibson see below
- Check with local archives and libraries
- <http://www.genuki.org.uk>

WEBSITES AND FINDING AIDS

Below a list of websites mentioned in my talk and also various suggestions for further reading.

London/Belfast and Edinburgh Gazettes

<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/>

National Newspaper Archives online - subscription sites.

- <http://archive.timesonline.co.uk/tol/archive> The Times 1785 - 1985
- <http://archive.guardian.co.uk> Guardian and Observer.
- <https://ukpressonline.co.uk/> Daily Express (1900 - present) and Daily Mirror (1900 -1980). Also Church times (1863- present); The Watchman (1835-1884) This is the first Methodist newspaper; The Daily Worker (1930-45); The South eastern Gazette pre-cursor to the Kent Messenger (1852-1912). Subscriptions are primarily intended for Education and Library institutions on annual contract, but Personal access is available by short-term, monthly and annual contract.
- Irish Newspaper Archives involves the complete digitization of Ireland's newspaper heritage in an effort to convert this valuable data into accessible information. They now also have a free portal where you can access text from a range of newspapers during the 1916 Easter Rising. <http://www.irishnewsarchive.com/>
- The Scotsman: <http://archive.scotsman.com/> 1817-1950

National Online Collections of Provincial Newspapers – free sites

National Library of Wales: includes almost 120 newspaper titles up to 1910.

<http://welshnewspapers.llgc.org.uk/en/home>

National Library of Scotland <https://auth.nls.uk/ldc/>

- The Scotsman 1817-1950 and British Newspaper Archive for free but only for those with registered Scottish addresses.

Commercial Genealogy Websites Offering Newspaper collections

- [Findmypast.co.uk](http://findmypast.co.uk) gives access to British Newspaper Archive (see below) although the search engine is not as powerful as that on BNA's own website. Also: an index to names in the *Eastbourne Gazette* (1858 – 1931).
- <http://www.ancestry.co.uk> growing database of obituaries, *The Times* 1788-1833. The *Gentleman's Magazine* (1731-1768, *Edinburgh Advertiser* (incomplete coverage 1731-1868 and various short runs of other local papers including: *The Staffordshire Sentinel* (1875-76, 1915, & 1925), *Soulby's Ulverston Advertiser* (1848-1862), *Liverpool Courier* (1897-98): *Liverpool Daily Post* (1897)): *The Bristol Times & Mirror* ((1897). Check coverage at <https://tinyurl.com/gsn6ne9>
- TheGenealogist.co.uk Short run of the *Jewish Chronicle* (1905-08). War periodicals *War Illustrated'* and *The Great War* and the periodical *Sphere* 1914-1915. *Illustrated London News*

1842-1918. *Illustrated War News* (1914-16), *The Channel Islands Monthly Review* (1941-45) plus other publications from war years.

- <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>. The British Newspaper Archive. Subscription site but also available if you have a Findmypast subscription. To check coverage go to: <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/home/newspapertitles>

If your library has paid to subscribe, some of the above sites may be available to you from the library. If you are a library card holder some counties provide online access at home to the British Library 19th Century Newspaper collection which was the forerunner to the British Newspaper Archive.

Other Online Collections

- Richard Heaton's Last Chance to Read offers a large selection of scarce newspapers - pay per view.
- [https://www.old-liverpool.co.uk/Old Liverpool](https://www.old-liverpool.co.uk/Old%20Liverpool) – collection of Liverpool area marriages, obituaries and other interesting snippets from local newspapers.
- <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/> New Zealand papers online
- <http://trove.nla.gov.au> Australian resources online includes newspapers
- *Jewish Chronicle* www.thejc.com Although the JC is available from 1840 onwards subscriptions are not researcher friendly. Read more at <https://tinyurl.com/jhmtgvh>
- <https://www.imuseum.im/newspapers/> Isle of Man newspapers courtesy of Max heritage has an interesting range of newspapers from 1792-1960 including some First World War Internment Camp newspaper. Subscription site
- The Stage Online Archive is useful if you had music hall or other dramatic ancestors on the stage from 1880 onwards. <https://archive.thestage.co.uk/>

The Burney Collection

Available at the British Library and other subscribing libraries this includes, among other things, newspapers and news pamphlets gathered by the Reverend Charles Burney (1757- 1817). It is the largest single collection of 17th and 18th century English news media available from the British Library. The 700 + bound volumes of newspapers and news pamphlets were published in London but there are also some English provincial, Irish and Scottish papers, and a few examples from the American colonies. <https://www.gale.com/intl/c/17th-and-18th-century-burney-newspapers-collection>

Newspapers Off-line

For those newspapers not online find out what is available by using the following finding aids:

- BL catalogue – [see above](#)
- Gibson Guide to Local Newspapers (see reading list below)
- [GENUKI](#)
- Contact local library/archives

Much as Wikipedia comes in for much stick it does I have found have a fairly up to date list of historic newspaper archives online including many for abroad too

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_of_online_newspaper_archives#United_Kingdom

Further Reading

- *Local Newspapers 1750-1920 England & Wales, Channel Islands, Isle Of Man; a select location list Second edition J Gibson 2002. FFHS.*
- *Tracing Your Ancestors Through Death Records Celia Heritage (2nd edition) 2015 Pen and Sword 2015*
- *Newspapers John Westmancoat The British Library Board 1985*
- *Family History in Newspapers Eve McLaughlin ISBN: 090709970X*
- *An Introduction to Newspapers C.R. Chapman FFHS 1993*
- *Town Records J. West Phillimore ISBN 085033 472 1*
- *Directory of Scottish Newspapers Joan P.S. Ferguson pub National Library of Scotland 1984 ISBN: 0902220403*