



Newspapers Research

Newspapers are a rich source of information when it comes to researching your family history and for historical research in general. They can give a real feel for what living in a certain era was like – you will see this reflected in the reporting style (which has changed significantly over the years) and even the advertisements.

The first known English newspaper was published in 1549 (under the catchy title of *Requests of the Devonshyre and Cornyshe Rebelles*), but the oldest surviving newspaper, *Berrow's Worcester Journal* started life in 1690 and was published regularly from 1709.

Other older newspapers which survive to this day include *The Times*, which started life as the *Daily Universal Register* in 1788, the *Aberdeen Journal* in 1748 (now the *Press & Journal*) and the *Daily Telegraph* which was the first penny national in 1855.

The late nineteenth century was the heyday of the newspaper and local papers flourished. But these historical newspapers differ from modern newspapers in a few ways, and it is helpful to understand these differences as you begin searching.

Historic newspapers were often only 4 pages long and carried advertisements and notices on the front page rather than a 'cover story'. While you will find some beautiful engravings particularly as part of advertisements, **there were few photographs** until after 1910.

The expense of producing the newspaper meant that the text was often densely packed to make the most of the available space, there were few headlines and each story was followed closely by the next. Newspapers were the main source for all news and entertainment and they often published stories and poetry.

What will you find?

1. **Birth, marriage & death notices:** These appear regularly after 1820 and also include announcements about family members who have moved abroad
2. **Civil & Army promotions:** If your ancestor was in the civil service or military services, their promotions and movements can be followed in the newspapers
3. **Advertisements:** Early advertisements relied on words rather than images to get their message across and these story-like advertisements can give you great insight into your ancestor's business dealings
4. **Debtors:** The names and addresses of borrowers and money-lenders were printed in newspapers
5. **Court reports:** These feature regularly in newspapers and contain the names of defendants, victims and witnesses. Court reports often give descriptions of defendants, and report testimonies, allowing you to 'hear' your ancestor's voice
6. **Charitable donations and subscription lists:** You will find long lists of names in the newspapers acknowledging contributions to charity and group membership

7. **Public meetings:** The minutes of public meetings are reported in newspapers and usually list the names of committee members
8. **News!** News stories big and small, local, regional, national and international were reported in the papers

Be advised, private details are made public. Historical newspapers print details that would not be included in modern newspaper reports. The details of events can be quite graphic. Incidents such as suicides were reported with full details such as the name of the person and the circumstances of their death.

The British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-guides/newspapers>, holds over 34,000 titles from the UK and overseas or 60 million individual issues. The newspaper collection includes the ongoing deposit collection of UK and Irish newspapers. The collection of British newspapers is fairly comprehensive from 1840s onwards.

Since 1869 British and Irish newspapers have been received through legal deposit by which publishers are required to send one copy of each issue to the British Library. The collection includes full runs of the main London edition of all the British national daily and Sunday newspapers. Most daily and weekly provincial newspapers are held including some from the early 18th century onwards.

There's no doubt newspapers are a joy to search and to read – and many newspaper archives are increasingly available online, and not only through commercial websites.

1. British Newspaper Archive <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> (also at Findmypast) <https://www.findmypast.co.uk>

The British Newspaper Archive (BNA), provided jointly by the British Library and Findmypast, features more than 700 newspaper titles from across the UK and Ireland, at the time of writing, including local, national and regional titles, with some going back to the 18th century. There are over 17 million pages available with more content being added regularly.

The records are free to search online and you can buy monthly or yearly subscriptions or Pay As You Go on the British Newspaper Archive site. The newspaper collection is included in a Findmypast subscription. Check with your local library as both sites may be free to use on their premises.

2. The London, Edinburgh and Belfast Gazette <https://www.thegazette.co.uk>

The Gazette was the first official journal of record and the newspaper of the Crown. Its website has a special feature whereby you can search by event such as World War I, World War II, Boer War 1889-1902, Great Fire of London 1666 (issue 85), First Awards of the Victoria Cross 1857 (issue 21971) and the Battle of Trafalgar 1805 (issue 15858).

The London Gazette has an index that is searchable from 1829 while the Edinburgh and Belfast *Gazette* indexes are searchable only from 2002. All articles are free to search and view.

3. Welsh Newspapers Online <https://newspapers.library.wales/>

This fully searchable website run by the National Library of Wales features 1.1 million pages from nearly 120 newspaper titles up to 1910, including some English as well as Welsh publications. The website is completely free to search and view.

Other online sources;

- National Library of Scotland <https://www.nls.uk/collections/newspapers/online>
- Irish Newspapers <https://www.irishnewsarchive.com/>
- Australian Newspapers <https://trove.nla.gov.au/>
- Cyndi's list <https://www.cyndislist.com/newspapers>

Sources: *The British Library, The National Archives, British Newspaper Archive*

Attributed to the Madeley & District U3A Family History Group