



Helen V. Smith PG Dip Public Health, BMedLabSci, ADCLT,
Dip. Fam. Hist. PLCGS
Email: HVSresearch@DragonGenealogy.com
Website: www.DragonGenealogy.com
Researcher, Author and Speaker
ABN 53 785 967 121

Researching UK Archives from Abroad

Often, we live in a different country to that of our ancestors and thus much of our research is based in a different country. We want to access archival material about our ancestors places of interest.

Over the last few years there have been major digitisation projects resulting in an increase of archival material available online. Particular attention has been given to heavy use records such as censuses and major indexes and these have been a major boon to researchers. The lockdown years of the pandemic has also accelerated digitisation and also greater, more detailed cataloguing of archival material, sometimes even down to name level. However, even with all this digitisation the great majority of pre-computer archival records are not online, as many of these are specialised, lesser used records and will probably never be digitised due to cost restraints.

Another point to remember is the wide range of archives that are of interest to the family historian.

Each country has a National Archives

England <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

Northern Ireland <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/public-record-office-northern-ireland-proni>

Wales <https://archives.wales/> Also look at National Library of Wales for genealogical content
<https://www.library.wales/>

Scotland <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/>

Ireland <https://www.nationalarchives.ie/>

And then there are the County Archives/Record Offices, the Council Archives, University Archives, Professional organisation archives, Local history archives, local library archives etc . The majority of the National and county archives will have an online presence with a catalogue

Items in the catalogue can vary in the detail given ranging from a broad topic:

Hawsden parish chest material 1748-1798 to the very specific:

“James Qusted of Barham, labourer, in £10, to appear, answer and to keep the peace towards Lawrence Applegate of Canterbury; sureties, Richard Young and Thomas Cullynge of Barham, yeomen **QM/SRc/1598/69 6 Aug 1598**”

First, we need to know the time and place of interest, the records of that time and the agency (government or otherwise) that had responsibility for the creation of the record and the laws under which that record was created. For every country you will need to learn about the history, the geography, the religion/s at the time and place in which you are researching. We need to be aware of county name changes (many counties in England, and Wales changed their names and for some their boundaries as well in 1974) (Scotland 1975). Important as you are researching in pre-1974 counties but post 1974 county archives control your record of interest.

A good place to start for any country is the FamilySearch Wiki
https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Main_Page

Once you have looked at the Wiki remember to peruse the catalogue for your area of interest. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have been microfilming records relating to people for many years (70+) and recently they have completed the mammoth job of digitising the microfilms the copyright holders have agreed could be put online. The great majority of these have NOT been indexed to name level so you can only find them using the catalogue. Some, you may have to view in person at a FamilySearch centre or affiliated library due to copyright holder restrictions.

This will give you an indication is your desired record set a national set eg Civil Registration or at a county level, a Poor Law Union level (post 1834 poor relief in England and Wales) or at the parish level. Then there are some records such as the Methodist Circuit church records which may cover events in multiple counties.

It is easy to say the UK but remember that comprises a number of countries and post-1922 it is UK&I (England inc Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Ireland). While England and Wales have many records laws such as Civil Registration 1837+, National Probate 1858+ there are also differences. Each country has a National Archive and then each county has a county record office/archive. The majority of these have an online presence with at least a partial catalogue available.

The National Archives (English) is at Kew <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> their catalogue is named Discovery. This is an integration of the old Access to Archives (A2A) site, the Manorial Documents Register and the documents Online site so all will be available through the one search. There are a number of digitised documents that for a small fee (£3.50 although as of March 2023 date, you are able if you log in, to download these for free with a limit of 100 downloads a month. This was implemented during the pandemic so it is not known how long this will free access will last). You can download digitised in PDF format archival documents. Online comprises a number of collections which are constantly increasing.

Examples of these include:

Prerogative Court of Canterbury wills (PROB 11) Wills from the Prerogative Court of Canterbury made between 1384 and 1858 (better images are on The Genealogist (\$) and Death Duty Registers (IR 26)

Wills of Royal Naval Seamen, (ADM 48), Nursing Service Records WW1

They are also digitising some of their over 9000km of microfilm which are available to download as PDF. These are files most about 400MB+ and are not indexed but there is some amazing material available.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/digital-microfilm.asp>

Some examples are:

- **ADM 10** Admiralty: Officers' Services, Indexes and Miscellanea
- **HO 9** Registers of the convicts in the hulks and a letter book relating to the establishment of the hulks, 1847 to 1849
- **HO 10** Home Office: Settlers and Convicts, New South Wales and Tasmania: Records. Lists of the male and female convicts and former convicts in the colonies.

Discovery (Access to Archives)

Initially this aimed to become a an encompassing catalogue of archives. It contains an index to about 30% of Archival collections in England and Wales comprising 10.3 million records relating to 9.45 million items held in 418 record offices and other repositories. Unfortunately, the project did not continue and you need to be aware that it does not necessarily contain all the catalogue of each of the participating archives, and the level of detail varies, some down to name level some by place only. It is well worth a search for your name/place of interest. Sadly, not all the archives participated and it is unfortunately not being updated but very much worth a look as there are some quite unusual and lesser known archives among the collection.

What you can do now is search the "Find an Archive" <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/find-an-archive>
National Library of Wales: <https://www.library.wales/>

National Library holds items usually seen in Archives elsewhere such as parish registers and wills. These are wills proved in Welsh ecclesiastical courts pre 11 Jan 1858 when National Civil Will registration started (England and Wales) and the Welsh wills were then found in the National Index. Welsh Tithe maps with over 300, 000 entries and their accompanying apportionment documents using original and present day maps, Welsh newspapers with over 15 million articles

There are over 190, 000 Welsh wills with more than 890 000 pages, available to view for free or buy a digital copy. There is an online index. <https://www.library.wales/index.php?id=6860>

Scotland: National Records of Scotland runs Scotlands People <https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/> which is their access point for digitised records (for a fee) searching is free though you need to set up a free account then pay to view images.

Many family history societies are transcribing wills, some freely available others only for members or on payment of a fee.

The Oxfordshire FHS have available a number of wills on their site <http://wills.oxfordshirefhs.org.uk/> which index all names mentioned, and you can see a copy of the main points and transcribed. Best of all you can see who provided the will.

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/public-record-office-northern-ireland-proni>

PRONI have put up their Will Calendars for the three District Probate Registries of Armagh, Belfast and Londonderry covering the period 1858-1965 with some years unavailable due to the 1922 Four Courts Fire. Digitised images of the wills Armagh (1858-1918), Belfast (1858-1909) and Londonderry (1858-1899) available online for free download.

There are many new Irish sites available:

Griffith's Valuation 1847-1864: <http://www.askaboutireland.ie/griffith-valuation/index.xml>

For the best review of Irish Family History Resources Online see Chris Paton's book *Tracing Your Irish family History on the Internet* and for Scotland his *Tracing Your Scottish family History on the Internet*. Both published by Pen and Sword books and also available as ebooks.

National Archives of Ireland <http://www.nationalarchives.ie/>

This has the 1901 census all counties, and 1911 census all counties and the Ireland-Australia Transportation Database. It also has the catalogue and a number of Finding Aids.

Finding Archives

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

Cyndi's List: <https://www.cyndislist.com/uk/> A fantastic gateway site! Operating for 27+ years the site has 317000+ organised genealogically related links organised into categories.

GenUKI (UK and Ireland Genealogy): <https://www.genuki.org.uk/>

Started in March 1995 (so 28 years!) , this is an amazing resource for information about researching in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. It starts at a whole of UK and Ireland basis then down by country then by county then by parish within the county. The counties are based on the pre-1974 counties for England and Wales and the pre-1975 counties for Scotland. The same headings are used for each level of the site and if that particular heading does not contain any information it will not be shown on that page. The headings are those used in the Family History Library catalogue . This site is

run by volunteers so pages are updated and added to depending on the volunteers but it is a fantastic resource.

Google it! But remember Google is not the only search engine and it is worth trying your query in other search engines as each searches the web slightly differently. One hint for using Google if you are interested in a particular county's records is to use the Google site for that country, as the results are likely to be more country specific. You can also use Google to find other search engines.

Family History Societies

Don't forget to contact the Family History Societies in your ancestral area as they have often indexed a wide range of archival material, which can include Poor Law, Workhouse admissions, School registers, Wills, Apprenticeships, Freeman of the City or Court records.

The indexed material may be on website, may be for sale on CD or microfiche or might be in a card index in meeting rooms (or in someone's garage). It is usually available for a look-up possibly for a small fee.

It is worthwhile joining the Society in your area of interest, even if you just concentrate your research for the time in that area to gain the most out of your membership. Write that article or at least a query for the journal with your ancestral information, with a stable email address as journals can stay in libraries for many years. I have had a reply to a query inserted in a journal 15 years later!

Subscription (\$) Sites

The pay sites such as Ancestry, FindMyPast, MyHeritage and the Genealogist all have digitised archival material available in their collections eg Ancestry has London Metropolitan Archival material, Dorset Archives lots of convict stuff, criminal registers and incoming passenger lists and much more. Each of the pay sites have arrangements with certain providers who lease the records to the pay site. It is important to realise that the providers can withdraw from this arrangement so that a digitised image may become not available (the pay sites do their own indexing/transcribing so the index/transcription should always be there).

Each subscription site will have some records under a restricted licence to that site while also having records that are also on other sites. However, one site may have digitised the record in colour so have a much better image. Even if the sites all have the same digitised image they do their own indexing so perhaps you can't find your ancestor in a record from one pay site look at another site as it may be indexed differently there.

Download your image of interest when you find it!!!! Just because a pay site has access to the image now does not mean they will always have that access. Their contract with the copyright holder may expire. Always pay attention to the source citation for the record so you know the original record details. Then go and look in that archive catalogue for related records.

Another issue to realise is that not all related records are available on the pay site so whilst the admission/discharge records for a workhouse might be on the pay site other workhouse related records such as the Creed Register, discipline book, Guardian minutes etc (assuming they have survived) will only be available at the archive (or potentially FamilySearch if they have been previously microfilmed). It is important to always "Roadmap Your Record" to see what related records could exist at the time period in which you are interested. The related records can also change over time, depending on necessity and changes in legislation.

Keep checking back on their websites. It is worth subscribing to their newsletters and Facebook pages (can be done even if you are not a paid subscriber) so you are aware of upcoming archival releases.

Don't neglect using university catalogues as many history departments have amassed a collection including business documents, local history documents, occupational resources and much more.

Local history collections are also found in libraries across the United Kingdom and are a great resource as are local history societies, professional organisations and sporting groups.

Newspapers are a fantastic source of news regarding crimes, probate etc. In fact for inquest material you will get your greatest amount of information from the newspapers as survival of Coroner's case books is very patchy.

Not every record has survived due to the usual mice, flood, fire, paper salvage during the wars etc. Sadly, as researchers, it is hard to comprehend that not all material is considered archival and worth retaining. Another great issue is the "retaining the representative sample (often ~10%) or the index books but not the actual person specific files. However, it is always worth looking for the material and if you find a type of record in one archive checking if that record type or equivalent is also found elsewhere.

It can be an adventure finding the records of interest. There is no one central point. The Crew List Index Project (CLIP) <https://www.crewlist.org.uk/> was set up to assist research into the records of British merchant seafarers of the late 19th and early 20th century. The Documents by Archive page <https://www.crewlist.org.uk/data/sourcesarchive> gives an idea of just how many archives around the world can hold data relating to one broad topic: British merchant seafarers of the late 19th and early 20th century.

Maps

It is important to know the locality of your research. Did they live in the valley, near a river system or canal system or by the sea? Which churches, which denominations were in the locality? How far were they from the Market Town, the railway? What were the local industries?

Various types of maps can give you these answers.

GenUKI has links to maps and gazetteers.

Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/>

Vision of Britain: <https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/> has maps, gazetteers and also population statistics from 1801 to current time.

Ireland: <https://www.askaboutireland.ie/> Griffiths valuations

National Library of Scotland: <https://maps.nls.uk/> not just Scottish maps!! Has Ordnance Survey maps for Great Britain from c1840s to 1960s in a range of resolutions. They also have many County maps, town maps, military maps including WW1 trench maps for the Western Front

Researching the non-digital collections when you can't visit in person

Yes, many records are not catalogued to name level so an email will be necessary or even an actual letter to enquire as to holdings. Most archives do not have the staff to do your personal research. There are many sources for information but unfortunately, in these economic times archives are being cut in staff and opening hours.

Most archives are not able to recommend specific researchers but often have a list of researchers who have asked to be put on the list.

Generally try and use a researcher that has been recommended by someone you know, or perhaps by the family history society in the area, a Facebook group specific to the locality.

Association of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives: <https://www.agra.org.uk/>

Association of Professional Genealogists Directory: <https://www.apgen.org/directory>

There is a lot of material available and even though we are thousands of miles away from these archives, with some effort, we can continue to research our ancestors and their lives from afar.

Other websites of interest:

National Archives of Scotland: <http://www.nas.gov.uk/>

National Records of Scotland: <http://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/>

London Gazette: <http://www.london-gazette.co.uk/>

British Newspaper Archive (\$): <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>

Old Bailey Online: <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/>

London Lives: <http://www.londonlives.org/>

Find My Past (\$) <http://www.findmypast.co.uk>

Ancestry (\$): <http://www.ancestry.com>

The Genealogist (\$): <http://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/>

MyHeritage (\$): <https://www.myheritage.com/>

Family Search: <http://familysearch.org/>

Gazettes Online: <http://www.gazettes-online.co.uk>

Historical Directories: <http://www.historicaldirectories.org/hd/>

Google Books: <https://books.google.com/>

Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/texts> Has over 20 million books including gazetteers, government reports, from around the world.

National Fairground Archive: <http://www.nfa.dept.shef.ac.uk/>

Historic England Archives: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/archive/>

Search Local Archives Archives Gov.uk : <https://www.gov.uk/search-local-archives>

Archives Hub: <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/> 380+ institutions including universities, councils, and specialist archives

See <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/list/location> for A-Z locations

British Library : <https://www.bl.uk/>

Archive Grid: <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/> manuscript collections can end up anywhere so worth checking