


# WHISTLE STOP TOUR:

## THE BRITISH NEWSPAPER ARCHIVE

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There is always more than one side to a story... and as thorough researchers, we should be attempting to find them all! Exploring UK newspapers - including those from Commonwealth locations - has been made much easier thanks to the extraordinary [British Newspaper Archive](#).



The British Newspaper Archive, or BNA for short, is a partnership between the British Library (BL) and Findmypast to digitize newspaper pages from the BL's vast collection. For the first time, these newspapers are being made available for online research. The British Library collection of newspapers is one of the largest in the world and contains most of the runs of papers published in the UK and its territories since 1800.

General titles are available, but there are also several unique categories, such as sport, theater and cinema, and suffragette papers. There are currently over 41,000,000 pages available<sup>1</sup>, dating from the 1700s. Many titles extend to current day.

There are numerous opportunities for research of our American ancestors through this global resource. Consider the following examples:

- The death of an individual in Ohio may be reported in a Scottish newspaper... perhaps they were born there, or the family was well known in the community.
- Reports of battles from either World War would include US military units, and in some cases, specific names.

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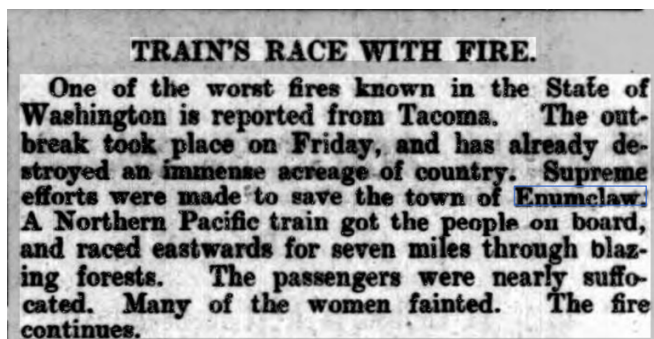
<sup>1</sup> Page count accurate as of January 27, 2020. Additional materials are added each week.

- Historical events, such as the Molly Maguire's of Pennsylvania, would be reported on; not only because of their connection to Irish history but because of the sensational type of story it would create. (Newspaper editors are *always* looking for that snappy headline!)
- An English immigrant strikes it big in the California gold rush!

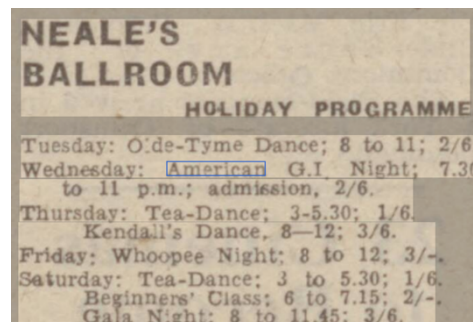
From a more general interest perspective, just how did the English populous view the American Revolution? The Civil Rights movement? Or the great waves of migration of the Homestead Act?

### What will you find?

As the examples above imply, it is certainly possible to find vital events, immigration information, military history and other essential genealogical data in international newspapers. As with any newspaper research, you should feel encouraged to read through many pages of the content, not just the snippet that includes the name of your ancestor. Also recognize that stories of broad interest would be republished in many papers, just as we do today, such as the dramatic "Train's Race with Fire" article indicates.



Leominster News and North West Herefordshire & Radnorshire Advertiser, 27 Jun 1902, page 2.



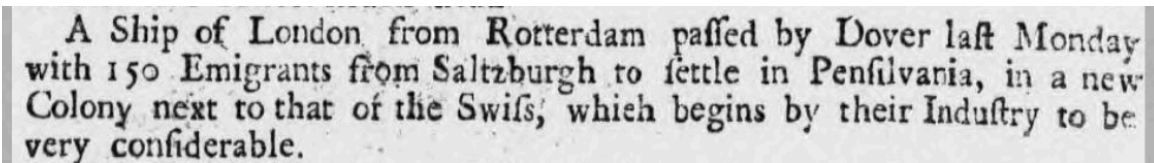
Neale's Ballroom advertising "American G.I. Night." Coventry Evening Telegraph, 3 Apr 1945, page 2.

Of course, we should also consider news published when our family members were traveling or living abroad. You can find many names of prominent American Suffragette leaders in British papers, as it was common to spend a few months or years in England learning from the UK movement before trying to implement similar tactics in the States. Also, the periods during both World Wars are heavy with social engagements, American soldiers, and other stories that can offer great insight to the time spent overseas. The above example advertising Neale's Ballroom provides us

with a possible date, time and place that American servicemen and women may have been present for.

Being somewhat aware of common terms, slang, and localized vernacular will assist your research. Utilize your favorite search engine to find articles that describe common slang terms for the period and location you are interested in. These types of articles are common, and even quite popular, in today's news-heavy environment. See an example on Mental Floss, "[20 Slang Terms from World War I.](https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/58233/21-slang-terms-world-war-i)"<sup>2</sup> Additionally, take the time to share ideas with today's locals, which we can easily do thanks to social media sites; find a genealogy organization with a Facebook page for the area in question and post your query. You may learn to search newspapers for "American G.I.," or "Yank."

What you should **not** expect to find is lists of passengers by name. Searching for your immigrant ancestor in newspapers can be very rewarding, but individual names were generally not recorded. You may, instead, find snippets that help to tell the story of their journey, such as:



A Ship of London from Rotterdam passed by Dover laft Monday with 150 Emigrants from Saltzburgh to settle in Pensilvania, in a new Colony next to that of the Swifs, which begins by their Industry to be very confiderable.

*Ipswich Journal*; 23 Jun 1733, page 3



The ship Universe, Hatton, hence for New York, was left at 8 30 a.m. on the 10th inst. off Point Lynas, by the tug United Kingdom. Wind N.E., fresh breeze.

*Liverpool Mercury*; 13 Nov 1863, page 3.

While major historical events seem quite obvious, with a bit of preparation, the lesser-known can also be teased out of online newspapers. This is generally true for all newspaper research! The time committed to shift your mindset – whether that is 10 seconds or 10 minutes – is well worth it.

## Region Search

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<sup>2</sup> Jones, Paul Anthony. *20 Slang Terms from World War I*. 6 Apr 2019. <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/58233/21-slang-terms-world-war-i>

Each country within the British Isles is broken down by region allowing you to search a group of geographically similar newspapers at one time. Use the interactive map on the homepage of the British Newspaper Archive to find the region of interest. The regions are classified as follows:



- Ireland: Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland
  - Wales: North Wales, Mid Wales, West Wales, South Wales
  - Scotland: Highland, Western Isles, Grampain, Tayside, Central, Strathclyde, Borders, Dumfries & Galloway
- England: North East, North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, East Midlands, West Midlands, East, London, South East, South West

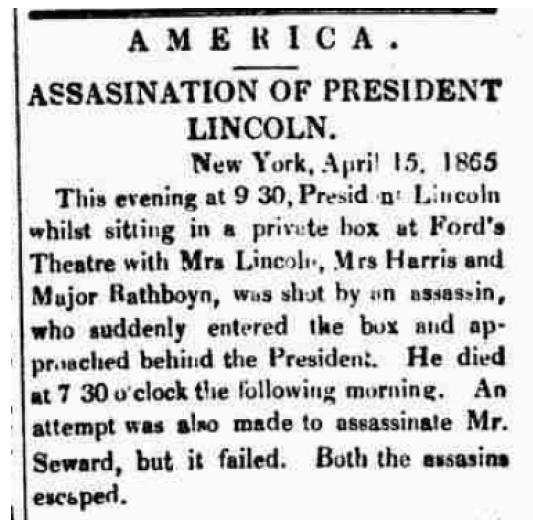
### British Diaspora Collection

In 2020, the British Newspaper Archive extended its digitization efforts to include newspapers from across the globe. These materials generally reflect locations in which the British Commonwealth was politically prominent or the governing power. Additional materials are scheduled throughout 2021. See the table on the last page.

#### Need to Know

Knowing these five things will help you in your research efforts!

1. The collection on the British Newspaper Archive site is mirrored on Findmypast. Therefore, if you have a current subscription to *either site* you have access to the digitized newspapers. You may find, however, that the search functionality on the BNA site is better suited to specialized research, as it is designed specifically for newspapers. Using both in tandem is a common research tactic.



2. **The BNA site is a subscription-based site.** Many libraries in North America are starting to add it to their offerings, so check your local facility for access.
3. Remember to use **local spellings and vernacular.** For example, the word "patriot" took on new meaning during the period of the American Revolution. Understanding that history will assist you in interpreting any articles you discover.
4. **You can search articles, family notices, letters, obituaries and advertisements all separately.** This feature allows you to identify the type of newspaper content you are most interested in.
5. **Not sure *exactly* where your ancestor is from?** Try using the map search or county search to take advantage of newspapers from the larger region.

The first report of the assassination of President Lincoln currently available on the BNA comes from the April 26, 1865 issue of the *Waterford Mirror and Tramore Visitor*, page 2. The following day, the story was printed in numerous papers around the UK.

#### Key Resources:

1. The BNA Knowledge Base, found in the Help section of the site.  
<https://help-and-advice.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>
2. Search Tips, including Advanced Search:  
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/content/help>
3. List of International Titles (updated regularly):  
<https://blog.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/2020/10/12/our-special-international-titles/>
4. "How can I find a person's name in the newspapers?" Article and YouTube video.  
<https://help-and-advice.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/knowledgebase/articles/328743-how-can-i-find-a-person-s-name-in-the-newspapers>
5. Terms & Conditions:  
[https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/content/terms\\_and\\_conditions](https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/content/terms_and_conditions)

All examples used in this syllabus are from [www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk).

Website functionality, design, and features change over time. Your suggestions and comments are always welcome, please address those to [support@findmypast.com](mailto:support@findmypast.com).

Commonwealth Titles available on British Newspaper Archive as of 1 Feb 2021

<b>Title</b>	<b>Year Range</b>	<b># Pages</b>	<b>Country</b>
<i>Colonial Guardian</i>	1882 - 1897	3,374	Belize
<i>Royal Gazette of Jamaica</i>	1779 - 1840, sporadic	16,700	Jamaica
<i>Hamilton Daily Times</i>	1873 - 1920, sporadic	33,964	Canada
<i>Toronto Daily Mail</i>	1882 - 1895, sporadic	32,882	Canada
<i>Toronto Saturday Night</i>	1887 - 1910, sporadic	16,520	Canada
<i>Madras Courier</i>	1790 - 1818, sporadic	7,714	India
<i>Bangalore Spectator</i>	1877 - 1883	3,586	India
<i>Englishman's Overland Mail</i>	1864 - 1928, sporadic	62,946	India
<i>Friend of India and Statesman</i>	1852 - 1883	46,604	India
<i>Times of India</i>	1861 - 1888	42,030	India
<i>Indian Daily News</i>	1875 - 1880	6,710	India
<i>Bombay Gazette</i>	1792, 1813 - 1868, sporadic	39,496	India
<i>Indian Statesman</i>	1876		India
<i>Civil &amp; Military Gazette</i>	1884, 1891-1893	788	Pakistan
<i>American Register</i>	1872 - 1914, sporadic	20,088	United States
<i>Naval &amp; Military Gazette and Weekly Chronicles of the United States</i>	1833 - 1886, sporadic	37,402	United States