



Read All About It!

Newspapers as a treasure trove

Research in most formal record sources will provide you with facts but not 'stories'. There are also lots of events which may have touched on your ancestors' lives, but which left no formal record. Perhaps they saved someone from drowning, won a prize at an agricultural show or witnessed an accident. Newspapers can provide that vital record of events which otherwise would have passed without note.

Until recent decades, newspapers were only helpful if you knew when and where an event took place as few are indexed in any thorough way. It is only with the advent of online digital copies of an increasing number of newspapers that they have become a place where you can look for your ancestors and accounts of their part in events which help to bring them alive as individuals.

Online Newspapers

There are several web sites offering copies of historical newspapers, some dating back to the 18th century. All offer the ability to search the text of all issues over a period of time for appearances of specified words or phrases. This is made possible by the text of the scanned newspaper pages having been processed into machine-readable text using Optical Character recognition (OCR) software. Search results link to images of the scanned page, or section of the page, on which each article containing the specified text appears.

Note: OCR is not a perfect process, particularly with small newsprint. The machine-readable text may contain conversion errors and so you may find that a search for a word or phrase does not produce matches for all the articles in which it appears, although the search algorithms try to make some allowance for this. Avoid lengthy search phrases and try searching using alternative terms to maximise the chance of success.

Where do I find Online Newspapers?

The largest single collection of UK newspapers are online on the subscription web site britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk but the contents can also be accessed from findmypast.co.uk although the search capabilities are more limited.

Manchester Central Library offers library card holders free online access to The Times Digital Archive and the Manchester Guardian and Observer Digital Archive.

Lancashire County Library offers card holders free online access to the British Library collection of historical newspapers 1730-1950.

There are several other sites offering access to UK and overseas newspapers. Links can be found in the Weblinks section of this site.

What can I find and where can it take me?

You may find almost anything! However, there are some major categories of article, which will provide helpful information in themselves but which can also lead you on to other sources to expand the story. Some of the more common ones are:

Birth, Marriage and Death Announcements – Cross-refer to the appropriate civil registration certificate registers and to church baptism, marriage and death registers. Deaths may lead you to wills and possibly the place of burial and (hopefully!) a memorial.

Criminal and Civil Trial Reports – Your ancestor may appear as victim, witness or (hopefully not!) as the accused. There may be records of the trial and if a prison sentence was given, records in prison registers. There may also be a report of the crime in an earlier newspaper.

Inquests – Inquests were held when a person died in circumstances where it is questionable whether the cause of death was 'natural causes'. Your ancestor may appear as the deceased or as a witness. Coroners' records rarely survive, but if they do, they may provide more information. Will lead you to the death and/or burial record and possibly a will.

Accidents – If your ancestor died in an accident, there may be a report in which he/she is named. Many accidents were the result of poor living conditions and a cavalier attitude to health and safety at work. Expand your reading to understand the conditions in which your ancestors lived and worked. There should also be an inquest (see above).

Bankruptcies – Bankruptcy was (and remains) a common hazard of running a business. The names of individuals and companies going through the bankruptcy process were regularly published. Where there are details of a hearing, you may find out something about your ancestor's business and why it failed. Trade directories may provide more information about the dates the business was in existence and the address(es) from which it operated. In some cases there may be business records deposited in record offices, though mostly this will not be the case.

Competitions – Newspapers frequently listed the competitors and prize winners in sporting events, agricultural shows and other competitions. There may be further information (particularly for sports) in specialist collections.

What's Special about Manchester?

As a large city, Manchester was the birthplace (and in most cases the last resting place) of numerous newspapers. A listing of local titles held on microfilm by Manchester Local Studies appears below.

Four of the more important Manchester newspapers are included in the online collection at britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk viz:

- Manchester Mercury 1752-1820 (with gaps)
- Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser 1825-1916
- Manchester Times 1828-1900
- Manchester Evening News 1870-1907 (with gaps) 1914-1921, 1939-1949

Today's Guardian newspaper was launched as The Manchester Guardian in 1821 and published in the city up to 1964, when it moved to London. Consequently there is a strong local bias in the coverage. The Guardian Archive is available online free of charge to holders of a Manchester Library card.

Looking More Closely at Newspapers

A Brief History

From the advent of printing until the middle of the 17th century, the publication of news was embargoed on grounds of national security. From 1643 it was possible for publishers to obtain licences, but publication was strictly censored.

The earliest regular publication which might be considered a newspaper is The London Gazette, which was first published as The Oxford Gazette, when Charles II moved his court to Oxford to avoid the Great Plague of 1665. It has been in continuous publication ever since with its content little changed. The London Gazette was the official vehicle to announce government appointments, military commissions, awards of medals and individual and corporate bankruptcies. It was followed by The Edinburgh Gazette which was published erratically from 1699 and then continuously from 1793 and The Dublin Gazette from 1706. This latter continued from 1921 as the Belfast Gazette and as a parallel publication called Iris Oifigiúel in the Irish Republic following independence in 1922.

The first daily newspaper, The Daily Courant appeared in London in 1703. The development of newspapers was inhibited by a stamp duty imposed in 1712 and which had reached the level of 4d by 1812. Since the cost of the newspaper was 2d or 3d, this put them beyond the reach of labouring classes. William Cobbett published his Political Register from 1816 onwards, but as did several other radical publishers, he avoided the duty by publishing monthly and by printing only comment and not news. In consequence, his pamphlet attracted the nickname "Twopenny Trash". The duty was reduced to 1d in 1836 and finally repealed in 1855. The Times appeared in 1790. In Manchester, the earliest newspaper was the Manchester Weekly Journal of 1724. The first daily was The Manchester Mercury (1752-1830). The Manchester Guardian first appeared in 1821 and was published in Manchester under that title until 1959 when it was renamed "The Guardian".

Although publications such as The Illustrated London News included engravings from as early as the 1840s, it was not until the early 20th century that illustrations became increasingly widespread in daily and weekly newspapers. By the 1930s, new processes made the inclusion of photographs simpler, but it was not until the 1970s that colour printing in newspapers became increasingly widespread.

Using Newspapers for Family History

The value of newspapers to the family historian is incalculable. They contain material which was never recorded elsewhere or for which other records have been lost. Some possible uses include:

- **Historical context** – What was happening locally at important times in your ancestors' lives?
- **Weather** – Did it rain on someone's wedding day?
- **BMDs** – Classified announcements can provide useful details such as where a marriage took place or where a person was buried.
- **Obituaries** – The lives of more prominent local people may be described at some length.
- **Inquests** – Coroners' records seldom survive, but newspaper reports can be just as informative, perhaps more so.
- **Accidents** – Shipping, railway and industrial accidents were common and widely reported. Victims are often named and sometimes the specific circumstances of their deaths are described.
- **Court appearances** – Local newspapers regularly report cases in magistrates' courts and assizes. If the case is newsworthy, verbatim reports can sometimes be found.
- **Bankruptcies** – These were frequently reported in local newspapers and always in the London Gazette.

Historical Newspapers on the Internet

One of the most exciting developments in the past few years has been the appearance of scanned newspapers on the internet. These typically employ optical character recognition (OCR) to enable full searches of the text. When searching online newspapers, it should be borne in mind that OCR is very imperfect and that incorrect interpretation will mean that matching words may not always be found. To maximise the chances of success, keep the search terms as short as possible and try alternative words which might locate the same account. Some online UK newspaper sources include:

The Times Digital Archive (Note 1, Note 2, Note 4)

The Manchester Guardian (Note 2)

The Observer (Note 2)

The London, Edinburgh and Belfast Gazettes **gazettes-online.co.uk**

The BL Burney Collection of 17th & 18th century newspapers (Note 1)

BL 19th century newspapers (2 million pages – 48 titles) (Note 1)

Catalogue of British Library holdings **bl.uk** (part of integrated catalogue)

British Newspaper Archive **britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk** (subscription required) This archive includes the Manchester Times, Manchester Mercury, Manchester Evening News and Manchester Courier for various dates 18th- early 20th century.

Dickens Journals Online **djo.org.uk** This includes Household Words, Household Words Almanac, Household Narrative and All the Year Round.

Welsh Newspapers Online **welshnewspapers.llgc.org.uk/en/home**

Note 1 – Available via Lancashire Online Library

Note 2 – Available via Manchester Online Library

Note 3 – Pay to view, but available free at Manchester Central Library

Note 4 – Palmer's index is available in printed and CD format at Manchester Central Library

There are links to all of the above on the Web Links page of this site.

Where to Find Newspapers on Microfilm

Most large libraries have some sort of collection, usually on microfilm but occasionally the original printed editions. The principal UK collection is held by the British Library at Colindale, North London, where there is also a public search room, and at its outstation at Boston Spa, Yorkshire.

Manchester

There is an excellent collection on self-service microfilm in Manchester Local Studies at Manchester Central Library. The titles held are:

Adams Weekly Courant and Journal 1733-1778
Advertiser 1992-1996
Anderton's Universal Advertiser 1762-1789
Anti-Corn Law Circular 1839-1841
Area News 1992, 1995, 1997-1999
Ashton-under-Lyne Weekly Herald 1910 only
Aston's Exchange Herald 1809-1826
Britannia 1834-1836

Britannia Advertiser for Liverpool / Manchester, 11
Jan 1837, Dec 1838
British Volunteer & Manchester Weekly Express -
various dates 1804-06, very incomplete, Jan
1807 - Dec 1809, 5 Feb 1820, Jan- Dec 1821,
1822-25, very incomplete
British Worker, 5-11 May 1926
Cheshire Daily Echo 1887-1900 (incomplete)
Cheshire Observer 1974 only

Chester Courant 1861-1863, 1974
 Civic Review 1974-1984
 Comus/Momus 1877-1882
 Cotton Factory Times 1885-1937
 Cowdroy's Manchester Gazette 1796-1829
 Courier or Manchester Advertiser, Saturday's M/c
 Courier Jan 1817-14 Nov 1821
 Daily War Telegraph & General Advertiser 21 Oct-
 Dec 1854, 2 Apr 1855
 Didsbury & Withington Observer 21 May 1914
 Droylsden Journal 1854-1855
 East Manchester Reporter 1976-1980, 1991-1997
 Eccles Journal 1974-1981
 Four Heatons Digest 1984-1985
 Free Lance 1866-1880
 Gorton Reporter 1873-1918, 1939-1970
 Hulme Advertiser, Chorlton-on-Medlock &
 Stretford Observer 21 May 1870- 6 May 1871
 Irish Echo 1992-1993
 Lancashire Journal with the history of the Holy
 Bible Oct 1735 -16 Mar 1740
 Manchester and Salford Advertiser 1825-1848
 Manchester Chronicle (became Chronicle Midday)
 30 Nov 1917- Jun 1920
 Chronicle Midday (formerly Manchester Chronicle)
 Jul 1920 -Dec 1950
 Manchester City News 1864-1953
 Manchester Courier 1825-1916
 Manchester Daily Telegraph & Northern Counties
 Advertiser May-Nov 1855
 Manchester Election Chronicle 23- 28 Mar 1857
 Manchester Evening Chronicle 1897-1963
 Manchester Evening Mail 1876-1915
 Manchester Evening News 1868-
 Manchester Examiner 1846-1894*
 Manchester Express Jan-Jun 1847
 Manchester Free Press & Northern Counties
 Advertiser 6 Oct 1894
 Manchester Gazette & General Advertiser
 Manchester Herald 1792-1793, 1834, 1836, 1843
 Manchester Iris 1822-1823
 Manchester Halfpenny Express 13 Jun 1855
 Manchester Programme & District Omnibus Guide
 21 Jun 1872
 Manchester Record & Lancashire General
 Advertiser 3 Aug 1833
 Manchester & Salford Gazette & Commercial
 Advertiser 8 Nov 1873-7 Aug 1874
 Manchester Magazine 1737-1760
 Manchester Mercury 1752-1830
 Manchester Metro News 1991-2000
 Manchester Observer 1818-1821
 Manchester Shipping Telegraph & Daily
 Commercial Advertiser 13 Jul- Dec 1897
 Manchester Stock Exchange List 1921-1935, 1963-
 1974
 Manchester Telegraph & Weekly Universal
 Advertiser 19 Jul- 16 Aug 1803
 Manchester Times 1828-1848 (incomplete)*
 Manchester Times & Stretford Chronicle 27 Dec
 1825
 Manchester Weekly Advertiser 1854, 1857-1860
 Manchester Weekly & General Advertiser 8 May-
 12 Jun 1880
 Manchester Weekly Journal 1724-1725
 (Miscellaneous MF146)
 Manchester Weekly Post 1875-1887
 Manchester Weekly Times 1861-1922*
 Manchester Weekly Times Supp. 1862-1900
 Middleton Albion 1868-1876
 Middleton Guardian 1890-1892
 Middleton and North Manchester Guardian 1992-
 1999
 Morning News 14 Sept-Dec 1882
 Moss Side District News May 1895, 17, 24 Apr,
 1,15 May, 18 Sept 1897
 Moss Side Weekly Review & District Advertiser 8
 Jul, 9 Sept, 4 Nov 1904
 Moston, Middleton, Blackley and Crumpsall
 Express 1992-1999
 Moston, Middleton and Blackley Guardian 1977-
 1980
 North Cheshire Herald 1984 only
 North Express 1901-1902
 Northern Athlete 5 Apr 1882
 Northern Express & Lancashire Daily Post 1 Dec
 1821
 Northenden News 1992-1993
 Northern Advance 1888-1889
 Northwich Chronicle 1885-1946 (incomplete)
 Oldham Advertiser & Free Press 1851-1859, 1890
 Oldham Chronicle 1980, 1987-1992
 Oldham Express 1867-1889
 Oldham Herald 1855 only
 Oldham Journal 1854-1855
 Oldham Liberal Elector 1868 only
 Oldham Observer 1858, 1863
 Oldham Reformer 1853-1854
 Oldham Standard 1859-1946 (incomplete)
 Pendleton Reporter 1879-1881
 Prescott's Manchester Journal 1772-1781
 Rochdale Star 1889-1898
 Rossendale Worker 1909 only
 Salford Chronicle 1873-1916
 Salford County Telephone 1889-1892
 Salford Journal 1991 only
 Salford Reporter 1886-1988, 1991
 Salford Weekly News 1859-1889
 South Manchester Chronicle 1889-1897
 South Manchester Express/Advertiser 1992-2000
 South Manchester Gazette 1885-1888
 South Manchester Reporter 1993-2000
 (incomplete)

Stephens Monthly Magazine 1840 only
 Stockport Advertiser 1822-1980
 Stockport Messenger 1978-1984
 Swinton and Pendlebury Journal 1970-1985
 (incomplete)
 Voice of the People 1831 only
 War Express & Daily Advertiser - Manchester
 Express & Daily Adv. 24 Oct 1854, 8 Jan 1855

Wardle's Manchester Observer 5 Jun- 3 Jul 1819
 Wardle's Manchester Observer or Literary &
 Political Register 10, 17 Jul 1819
 Weekly Dispatch 1804-1838
 Wheelers Manchester Chronicle 1781-1842
 Wythenshawe Recorder Express 1946-1979
 Wythenshawe World 1980-1999 (incomplete)

Oldham

The following titles are available at Oldham Local Studies and Archives:

Crompton and Royton Chronicle 1936 (January) - 1958 (June)	Oldham Express 1867 (December) - 1889 (July)
Illustrated Oldham Telegraph 1859 (March - November)	Oldham Liberal Elector 1869 (September - November)
Illustrated Oldham Herald 1855 (June - August)	Oldham Observer 1863 (October)
Illustrated Oldham Journal 1854 (October) - 1855 (February)	Oldham Observer and Lees Free Press 1858 (March - May)
Midweek Oldham Mirror 1954 (September) - 1955 (January)	Oldham Operative 1884 (November) - 1885 (January)
Oldham Ensign and Standard 1868 (July - September)	Oldham Reformer and General Advertiser 1853 (September) - 1854 (March)
Oldham Evening Chronicle May 1854 to date	Oldham Standard 1859 (August) - 1946 (December)
Oldham Daily Advertiser 1856 (December) - 1859 (May) 1889 (October) - 1890 (December)	

Bolton

The following titles are available at Bolton Local Studies Library:

Bolton Catholic Herald: Weekly 1908-1909	Bolton Standard: Weekly, British Library 1923- 1961
Bolton Catholic Herald: Weekly, British Library 1908-1934	Bolton Star: Weekly 1891-1892
Bolton Chronicle: Weekly 1825-1917	Buff: see Football Field
Bolton Chronicle (Metro News): Weekly 1979-1996	Farnworth Chronicle: Weekly, Farnworth Library 1906-1917
Bolton Daily Chronicle: Daily 1873-1885	Farnworth Express: Weekly, Farnworth Library 1890-1891
Bolton Daily Chronicle : Daily, British Library 1885- 1907	Farnworth Journal: Weekly, Farnworth Library 1873-1975
Bolton Evening Echo: Daily 1894	Farnworth Observer: Weekly, Farnworth Library 1868-1873
Bolton Evening Guardian: Daily 1873-1893	Football Field (later Cricket and Football Field and The Buff): Weekly 1884-1988
Bolton Evening News: Daily 1867-date	Horwich Chronicle: Weekly, Horwich Library 1888- 1916
Bolton Examiner: Weekly 1858-1861	Horwich and Westhoughton Journal: Weekly, Horwich Library 1927-1980
Bolton Express: Weekly 1823-1826	Horwich and Westhoughton Journal: Weekly, Westhoughton Library 1927-1980
Bolton Express and County Effective Advertiser: Weekly 1888-1896	Manchester Courier: Weekly 1825-1826
Bolton Free Press: Weekly 1835-1847	Manchester Mercury: Weekly 1752-1830
Bolton Guardian (formerly Bolton Independent): Weekly 1859-1893	North West Times: Weekly 1988
Bolton Journal (later Journal and Guardian): Weekly 1871-1976	Teddy Ashton's Journal and Northern Weekly: Weekly 1896-1908
Bolton Journal: Weekly 1985-date	
Bolton Mercury: Weekly 1853-1854	
Bolton Metro News: see Bolton Chronicle	
Bolton Monthly Advertiser (Mackies): Monthly 1849-1859, 1868-1876, 1878-1892	
Bolton Spectator: Weekly 1857-1858	

Westhoughton Echo: Weekly, Westhoughton
Library 1890-1891
Westhoughton & Hindley Times: Weekly,
Westhoughton Library 1894

Westhoughton Recorder: Weekly, Westhoughton
Library 1895-1903

Tameside

The following titles are available on microfilm at Tameside Local Studies and Archives Centre:

Ashton-under-Lyne Reporter 1855-1977, and
January-March 1978
Evening Reporter 18 December 1876-Aug 1913
Ashton Herald October 1887-1936
Ashton Standard 1858-1885
Ashton News January 1868-February 1874
Evening Star 20 April 1877-26 June 1878
The Ashtonian May 1847, Feb and June 1849
The Ashton Ricker and Municipal Mirror
Dec 1852, July 1855, 5 July 1856
The Ashton Times and Oldham Visitor March
1851-January 1853
The Ashton Guardian 27 January 1877-12 Oct
1878
Ashton and Stalybridge Guardian 2 November
1867-18 July 1868
Ashton, Stalybridge and Dukinfield Elector 21
October-11 November 1868
Ashton Weekly Reporter 12 January 1856-21
August 1858
The Pioneer 8 January 1898
Ashton Sentinel October 1911-August 1912
Electric Press December 1909-January 1910
Audenshaw Reporter 1941-1970
Cotton Factory Times 1885-1948
Denton Reporter 1888-1890, 1893-4, 1896-8,
1900-1906, 1933-1962-1977
Denton, Haughton and District Weekly News 5
June 1873-25 December 1875
Denton and Haughton Examiner 1876-1892
Denton Post May 1965-August 1970

Droylsden Reporter 1951, 1953-1970, 1972-
1973
Droylsden Literary and Advertising
Journal 1854-1855
Droylsden Express April 1870 Dukinfield
Reporter 1960-1970
Glossop Chronicle Before 1997 see the North
Cheshire Herald. From 6 November
1997 this newspaper became part of the
Tameside Reporter
Gorton Reporter 1873-1970
Hobson's Advertiser July and August 1854
Hobson's Ashton and Stalybridge Advertising
Journal 15 Dec 1853
Hobson's Mid-Monthly Advertising Journal 16
September 1854
North Cheshire Herald 1851-1977
Manchester Guardian 1821-1864
Mossley and Saddleworth Reporter 1876-1977
Protector 16 April 1859-29 May 1859
Stalybridge Reporter 1872-1977
Stalybridge Times September 1945-February
1950
Stalybridge and District Gazette October 1936-
January 1938
Tameside Reporter 1978-to date
Tameside Advertiser May 1979-to date
Tameside Leader 14 September 1983-20 July
1985
Tameside Echo May 1987-November 1988,
1995-1996
Town Magazine April-August 1988

John Marsden

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