

Metropolitan Ancestors: Finding Families in Georgian and Victorian London

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Introduction

London is the capital city of the United Kingdom. From about 1830 to 1930, it was the largest city in the world. A high proportion of those researching genealogy in England will find ancestors who lived in London, and all will have to consult records deposited in London. Yet researching London ancestors presents unique problems due to the size of the metropolis. Thankfully, the records of Londoners are profuse.

Boundaries

The county of London was created in 1889, absorbing parts of Middlesex, Surrey and Kent. The present-day boundaries of Greater London were formed in 1965. In earlier times, much of what is known as London was in several different counties:

- The City of London
- Middlesex (including the City of Westminster)
- Surrey
- Kent
- Essex
- Hertfordshire

Consult the following sources to determine the county in which a place was located:

Genuki gazetteer
<https://www.genuki.org.uk/gazetteer>

England Jurisdictions 1851 map
<https://www.familysearch.org/mapp/>

Migration to London

Migration has always been a significant part of London's history. Numerous different communities have settled in the city over the centuries. For further information, see:

Moving Here (archived website)

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20131105215903/http://www.movinghere.org.uk//default.htm>

Community histories from the Proceedings of the Old Bailey website:

<https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/about/communities>

Census records

The London area is covered by the standard English census records from 1841 to 1921, with a few gaps. There are some surviving census records from before 1841:

Early British Census Project (Brigham Young University)

<http://ebc.byu.edu/>

There are also lists of inhabitants from 1695 on the British History Online website:

<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol2>

<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol45>

The land tax records for London on Ancestry complement the area's census records:

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/2170/>

Religious records

A vast variety of Anglican, dissenting and Jewish records are available for London:

Church of England parish registers for London area

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1624/> (1538-1812)

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1623/> (Marriages, 1754-1938)

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1558/> (Baptisms, 1813-1923)

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1559/> (Burials, 1813-2003)

Church of England parish registers for Westminster

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61865/> (1558-1812)

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61867/> (Marriages, 1754-1935)

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61866/> (Baptisms, 1813-1919)

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61868/> (Burials, 1812-1910)

Church of England confirmation records

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1625/>

Clandestine marriages

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/5344/>

Nonconformist and non-parochial records

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/2972/> (National Archives collection)

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1906/> (1694-1931)

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61881/> (Westminster, 1841-1964)

Roman Catholic parish registers

<https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/england-roman-catholic-parish-baptisms> (Baptisms)

<https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/england-roman-catholic-parish-marriages> (Marriages)

<https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/england-roman-catholic-parish-burials> (Burials)

<https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/england-roman-catholic-parish-congregational-records> (Congregational records)

Jewish records

<https://www.jewishgen.org/databases/UK/>

Burial records

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/9041/> (Select cemetery registers)

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61801/> (Brompton Cemetery)

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61263/> (Tower Hamlets Cemetery)

<https://www.deceasedonline.com/> (London boroughs)

Directories

Post Office directories, Kelly's directories and phone books are especially useful. Directories were kept consistently and comprehensively, and are widely digitised:

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61265/> (Directories, 1736-1943)

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/3145/> (Directories, 1677-1939)

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1025/> (Phone books, 1880-1984)

Electoral registers

Those who had the right to vote in parliamentary elections are extensively recorded:

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/2410/> (Poll books and registers)

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1795/> (Electoral registers, 1832-1965)

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/62285/> (Kensington and Chelsea)

Insurance records

The fire insurance records for London contain considerable detail about land ownership, tenancies and occupations. For further information, see this guide:

<https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/history-and-heritage/london-metropolitan-archives/collections/fire-insurance-records>

Newspapers

London's historic newspapers are digitised and searchable on these websites:

British Newspaper Archive

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

Burney Collection (British Library)

<https://www.gale.com/intl/essays/moira-goff-burney-newspapers-british-library>

The Times Digital Archive

<https://www.gale.com/intl/c/the-times-digital-archive>

The Telegraph Historical Archive

<https://www.gale.com/intl/c/the-telegraph-historical-archive>

The London Gazette

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

Criminal records

Many London residents appear in criminal records as convicts or witnesses. These are also thoroughly digitised, and are available to search on the following websites:

The Proceedings of the Old Bailey, 1674-1913

<https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/>

London Lives, 1690-1800

<https://www.londonlives.org/>

Digital Panopticon

<https://www.digitalpanopticon.org/>

Home Office records

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61805/> (Criminal records, 1780-1871)

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1590/> (Criminal registers, 1791-1892)

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61810/> (Prison Commission records)

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61811/> (Newgate prison calendars)

Books and maps

Secondary sources are vital to give context to London research. See the following:

Charles Booth's London

<https://booth.lse.ac.uk/>

Layers of London

<https://www.layersoflondon.org/>

Survey of London

<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/search/series/survey-london>

Victoria County History

<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/search/series/vch--middx> (Middlesex)

<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/search/series/vch--surrey> (Surrey)

<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/search/series/vch--essex> (Essex)

<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/search/series/vch--herts> (Hertfordshire)

East London History Society publications list

<https://www.mernick.org.uk/elhs/publications.htm>

West Surrey Family History Society research aids

<https://wsfhs.co.uk/pages/researchaids.php>

Main repositories

London has a very large number of archives. These are important for genealogists:

London Metropolitan Archives

<https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/history-and-heritage/london-metropolitan-archives>

Archives of London boroughs

<https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/LND/boro-lib>

The National Archives

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

Lambeth Palace Library

<https://www.lambethpalacelibrary.info/>

Barts Health Archives

<https://www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/barts-health-archives/>

Society of Genealogists Library

<https://www.sog.org.uk/research-hub/visit-us/>

Further reading

Stuart Raymond, *London and Middlesex: A Genealogical Bibliography* (2 volumes, Federation of Family History Societies, 1997-8).

Cliff Webb, *My Ancestors were Londoners* (Society of Genealogists, 2002).

Ben Weinreb et al, *The London Encyclopaedia* (Macmillan, 2010).