

## Researching British Newspapers – 11 January 2020

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Newspapers are a wonderful genealogical resource, but many researchers fail to maximize the use of this incredible resource. Before the age of on-line research it could be laborious cranking through copies of newspapers on microfilm, especially if nothing was indexed, but in 2020 there are a large number of newspapers online and it much easier to take advantage of this resource and use newspapers effectively. Historical newspapers and particularly small-town newspapers give first-hand accounts of what was happening in the time and place they document. They provide background information about our ancestors' lives. Today we are going to look at British newspapers, and that includes England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Newspapers are particularly useful in areas where there have been record losses, for example Devon. When the Devon Record Office was bombed during WWII all Devon and some Cornish probate records were lost. There was a loss of almost all censuses in Ireland prior to 1901. Newspaper and to some extent city directories and transcription of records can help fill that void.

### **Types of information found in British Newspapers:**

#### **Family Events**

**Birth, marriage and death notices** – usually very short but may precede vital records. Often early birth records do not name the child.

**Obituaries** - the obituary typically focuses on their work life and has little or no family information.

**Funeral reports** – may list the mourners who could be family members. Funeral reports may be a part of a more personal obituary

**Death Notices** – Modern British death notices don't give as many details as those in the US

**Engagements, weddings, silver and golden wedding anniversaries** – there may be a picture of the couple in an engagement announcement, the bride in a wedding announcement, and almost certainly a story with a picture for a golden wedding. Some announcements are brief.

#### **Local Interest (Gossip) in local papers**

**Churches** – notices about new ministers, congregations, service times, church events.

**Society Pages** - Who has visitors in town, who is traveling, who is throwing a party/for whom, who is celebrating a milestone birthday.

**Front Page Stories** – Oldest resident is interviewed, family reunion, organizations of a social or political nature (with the names of members.) (Local papers are best for this and you won't find this information in large city papers!)

#### **National and Local Tragedies and Catastrophes**

Was there a flood? Did several people lose their lives in a tragic accident? Did a factory burn or close causing loss of jobs? Did that cause your family to move? Or was a member of your family killed in a local or national tragedy?

#### **Business notices**

**Probate notices** – asking for creditors to submit bills to the estate of..., Estate settlement notices

**Bankruptcy** – more common than you think – lists in papers and magazines

**Civil and Criminal Trials** – I hope your ancestor was the witness or a member of the jury!

**Divorces** & notices that a man is no longer liable for his wife's debts (implying a couple have separated)

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## **Land & Farming**

Land sales, estate & farm sales, sheriff's sales. Stories about farmers and farming, crop problems, animal and cattle diseases, agricultural shows. The agricultural show info will tell you the types of crops grown in the area.

## **Historical Background**

Here you need to spend some time browsing or reading the old papers. For example, did the town have any special events that your ancestors might have participated in?

## **Advertisements**

Learn how much your ancestors had to spend for basic food and/or clothing. What type of clothes did they buy? Was your ancestor a local merchant?

## **Words You Need to know:**

These words are often found in old newspapers:

|                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Ultimo or Ult. – previous month  | 10 <sup>th</sup> ultimo – 10 <sup>th</sup> day of last month      |
| Instant or Inst. – current month | 10 <sup>th</sup> instant – 10 <sup>th</sup> day of current month  |
| Proximo or Prox. – next month    | 10 <sup>th</sup> proximo – 10 <sup>th</sup> day of the next month |

However sometimes a notice was written at the end of a month but not run till the following month and you will find errors – e.g. Harriet Jacobs died on 29<sup>th</sup> **inst.** But run on the 6<sup>th</sup> of the month. This death notice was delayed several days before it was run and by the time the notice was printed it should have said 29<sup>th</sup> **ult.**!

## **Access to On-line British Newspapers**

This is by no means an inclusive list. I have focused on the main free and paid websites

- The newspapers in the British Newspaper Archives (free at Family Search Centers) are the same newspapers that are a part of the British Newspapers in the personal edition of FindMyPast.com: “Gathered from one of the largest collections in the United Kingdom, our British newspapers include thousands of local and regional publications across the England, Wales, and Scotland. Each page has been completely digitized and fully indexed, offering you the ability to search every word within an article.”<sup>1</sup>

## **The London Gazette<sup>2</sup>**

This is one of the official [journals of record](#) or [Government gazettes](#) of the [British government](#), and the most important among such official journals in the United Kingdom, in which certain statutory notices are required to be published.

## **The Edinburgh Gazette and the Belfast Gazette**

Other official newspapers of the UK government are [The Edinburgh Gazette](#) and [The Belfast Gazette](#), which, apart from reproducing certain materials of nationwide interest published in *The London Gazette*, also contain publications specific to [Scotland](#) and [Northern Ireland](#), respectively. The London and Edinburgh Belfast Gazettes can be accessed free of charge at their respective websites. The Belfast Gazette is not online at present.

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<sup>1</sup> “About the British Newspaper Collection,” *FindMyPast.com* (<https://www.findmypast.com/> : accessed 29 December 2019)

<sup>2</sup> “The London Gazette,” *Wikipedia*, ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_London\\_Gazette](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_London_Gazette) : accessed 29 December 2019)

## Which Newspapers can I access for Free?

- British Newspaper Archives at Family History Centers. (The same newspapers that are part of the FindMyPast individual subscription are not free,)
- Newspaper records from county Cork – some at British Newspaper Archive
- The London and Edinburgh Gazettes
- Free Irish Newspapers.<sup>3</sup> Lot's of good information here
- Google Newspaper Archives. <https://www.thoughtco.com/search-tips-for-google-news-archive-1422213> **Google News Archive** offers a wealth of digitized historic newspapers online — many of them for free. The **Google newspaper archive** project was discontinued by **Google** many years ago but, although they stopped digitizing and adding new **papers** and removed their useful timeline and other search tools, the historical newspapers that were previously digitized remain. These papers need to be browsed as they can no longer be searched!
- **Glasgow Herald 1806-1990** online at Google. Google has extended its **archive** coverage of the **Glasgow Herald** to now cover the period from 1806-1990 at <http://news.google.com/newspapers?>
- Welsh newspapers (many in English) are free to use at the National Library of Wales <https://newspapers.library.wales/>

## Some Newspapers Require a Payment!

- The Scotsman (later editions, some earlier ones are in the British Newspaper Archives)
- The Guardian – can be viewed at Newspapers.com
- The Observer (paper not magazine) can be viewed at Newspapers.com
- Belfast Telegraph (will eventually be free)
- Irish Newspaper Archive (not free but one can purchase a monthly subscription - be sure to cancel before your month is up!)
- British **newspaper archive**: Irish Independent : 1905 to 2016: Irish **newspaper archive**: Irish Press : 1931 to 1995: Irish **newspaper archive**: Irish Times : 1859 to 2016: The Irish Times: Irish Times : 1859 to 1909: British **newspaper archive**: 1859-1870, 1873-1909 : Public Register or Freeman (Freeman's Journal) 1763 to 1924: Irish **newspaper archive**
- Edinburgh newspapers (7) are on Newspaper Archives.com. There are only 14 British newspapers on Newspaper Archives.com, and Edinburgh has the best coverage!

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<sup>3</sup> “Irish Genealogy Toolkit,” (<https://www.irish-genealogy-toolkit.com/irish-newspaper-archives.html>) : accessed 9 January 2020)