

# FAMILY HISTORY IN LONDON

***Before you begin tracing your family history you should obtain as much precise information as possible from other members of the family about your grandparents and great-grandparents. It will help you to know their full names, dates of birth, marriage, and death, their religious beliefs, their various addresses, the schools they attended, where they worked, and the names and ages of all their brothers and sisters.***

## **Recording information**

You should set out all your data in a clear form, distinguishing family legend from hard facts. You should always make a note of the source of the information, e.g. "oral information from Uncle Charles, July 1992", "Census returns for Islington 1851, Family Records Centre", "St Mary, Islington, register of baptisms 1869-1871, P83/MRY1/1 186, London Metropolitan Archives." If you do this, you will be able to check back quickly and evaluate the accuracy of different pieces of information. You should also make a note of all the sources you consult, even if fruitless, so that you will not waste time using them again.

## **Sources of help**

Many books have been written on how to trace your family history. A few of these are listed at the end of this leaflet. Your local library should be able to help you obtain copies of some of these and also advise you about any continuing education classes on family history in your area. You may find it helpful to join a family history society.

## **Civil registration of births, marriages and deaths**

The first outside source which you should consult when tracing your family history is the registers of

births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales kept by the General Register Office. These start in July 1837. The registers are not open to public inspection. Information from them is only available in the form of certificates which must be purchased. You first need to identify the relevant entry in the indexes to births, marriages and deaths, which were compiled for each quarter of the year. The index will tell you the registration district, the volume and page number. The indexes may be consulted at the Family Records Centre, 1 Myddelton Street, London EC1R 1UW, where application forms for the purchase of certificates can be completed. Microfilm copies of the indexes to births, marriages and deaths are also available at the Family History Centres of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and many local libraries and county record offices. London Metropolitan Archives does not have copies of these indexes. Postal applications for copies of certificates should be sent to the Postal Application Section, Office of National Statistics, General Register Office, PO Box 2, Southport, Merseyside PR8 2JD.

## **Registration Districts**

Registration Districts are the geographical units of administration used by the Registrar General. The districts were originally based on the poor law districts or unions administered by the Boards of Guardians.

If the name of the registration district is known, it will be possible to identify the area in which to concentrate a search in the parish registers. This may be done as an alternative to purchasing a civil certificate. However, parish registers will only record baptisms, marriages and burials of that particular denomination.

London Metropolitan Archives has compiled a six volume guide which lists Church of England parishes

and other churches (mission chapels, chapels of ease) in each registration district in London and Middlesex for the period 1841-1891. Entitled 'Parishes and churches within registration districts,' there is a volume for each census year which gives the earliest date of parish registers and their location or reference number, if held here. It covers the areas of the later administrative counties of London and Middlesex giving full details of boundary changes up to 1891. This guide is available for consultation in the Reference Room.

It is important to note that some registration districts in central London took the name of a single ancient parish. The registration district however included many other parishes.

### **Census Returns**

A census has been taken in the United Kingdom every ten years since 1801 except 1941. No detailed census returns survive centrally before 1841. A few census returns dating from 1801 to 1831 are held by local record offices, but they may not give the names of all the members of a household. As information given to the census enumerator is treated as confidential, census returns are closed to public consultation until they are over 100 years old. The original census returns for England and Wales from 1841 onwards are held by the Public Record Office. Microfilm or microfiche copies of the census returns for 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891 and 1901 may be consulted at the Family Records Centre, 1 Myddelton Street, London EC1R 1UW. Many county record offices or local history libraries have copies of census returns for their area. London Metropolitan Archives does not have copies of census returns. However, we do have a copy of the indexes to the 1881 census for London and the adjoining counties which have been compiled by the Family History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. We also have indexes to earlier census returns for some areas of London and Essex and Kent, which have been published by local family history societies. Census returns are arranged by area, street by street. For families living in a town, if there is no index to the census returns, it is necessary to know their address in order to avoid a lengthy search. As well as the names, ages and relationships of the members of the household, from 1851 onwards, census returns also record place of birth, though this information is not always accurate.

### **International Genealogical Index (IGI)**

The IGI is an index to approximately 118 million births, baptisms and marriages compiled and published on microfiche by the Family History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (also known as the Genealogical Society of Utah). The information has been collected from a number of sources (mainly parish registers dating from 1538 to 1875) and from many countries. It is arranged by county and within the county alphabetically by surname. We have a copy of the 1992 edition for the whole of England and Wales. It includes entries from the registers of many important London parishes such as St Leonard, Shoreditch, St Luke, Old Street, Finsbury, St Marylebone, and St Pancras, but many younger London and Middlesex parishes are not at present included.

*For further information see our leaflet on the International Genealogical Index.*

### **Parish Registers**

Before 1837 and the introduction of civil registration, parish registers of the Church of England are the most comprehensive source of information about individuals. The registers of ancient parishes may date from as far back as 1538, but only a very few parishes have registers surviving from this date.

Usually an ancient parish had only a single church, the parish church with a single set of registers. Since the early seventeenth century and the rapid growth of population in London, the ancient parishes have been sub-divided. By the end of the nineteenth century some ancient parishes had been sub-divided as many as 30 or 40 times each with its own parish church and own registers.

London Metropolitan Archives holds registers from over 700 churches within the former counties of London and Middlesex. It excludes parishes in the Cities of London and Westminster. Parish registers for parishes within the City of London are held by the Guildhall Library Manuscripts Section, Aldermanbury, London EC2P 2EJ. Registers for parishes within the ancient City of Westminster are held by the City of Westminster Archives Centre, 10 St. Ann's Street, London SW1P 2XR. London Metropolitan Archives has produced A guide to Anglican parish registers and records. This is available in the Reference Room (it has a blue spine) and lists Anglican churches and gives a

note of the dates and locations of the baptismal, marriage and burial registers. It will give a general reference if registers are held in this office. Lists of parish registers arranged according to the present London Boroughs can be found amongst our lists of major genealogical sources, 'London Generations'. Full catalogues of parish records held by London Metropolitan Archives are arranged alphabetically by the dedication of the church. Establishments other than parish churches kept baptismal and burial registers. In London these are notably hospitals, including the Foundling Hospital, workhouses and prisons. London Metropolitan Archives keeps an index to registers of these institutions held here. It can be found in the reference copies of the guide to parish registers.

## **Information in Parish Registers**

### **Early Parish Registers**

Early baptism, marriage and burial entries were frequently made in a single volume, which had separate sections for each type of entry. Some parishes also had a separate section relating to a chapel-of-ease or chapelry which carried out their own baptisms, marriages and burials.

The information recorded was very sparse, usually only a single line relating to each entry. The amount and type of information varied from parish to parish. Entries were often written at least partially in Latin. Our library holds various publications which may assist you with common Latin terms and phrases.

Marriages were entered in a separate volume from 1754 and baptisms and burials from 1 January 1813. The information recorded is given under the relevant headings below.

### **Baptism Registers**

Typically a pre 1813 register recorded the date, name, names of parents and possibly the father's occupation. Occasionally the street or area in which they lived was noted. The date of birth was not normally given. The maiden name of the mother, if married, is never entered, nor are the names of the grandparents, god-parents or sponsors.

From 1 January 1813 a new type of register was introduced (known as George Rose's register). The entries followed a standard format, in bound volumes with pre-printed pages. The information recorded was the date of baptism, child's name, parents' names, address which may just be the name

of the parish or street; father's occupation and the name of the officiating minister. The alleged date of birth may sometimes be noted. It is only in the mid to late 20th century that the names of god-parents or sponsors are recorded. The practice of noting this information varies from parish to parish.

### **Marriage Registers**

Early marriage registers give the date and the names and surnames of the bride and bridegroom. In some instances the occupation of the bridegroom was given.

After Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753 a standard form of entry for marriages was introduced in 1754. The information recorded was the date, the names of both parties, the parish in which they lived, whether the marriage was by banns or licence and whether spinster, bachelor, widow or widower. The register was signed by the bride and bridegroom, the officiating minister and two witnesses. Those who were unable to write would make a mark. Ages may only be noted in the case of a person under 21 years of age (a minor). No information would normally be provided about the parents or their occupations. Most entries were recorded on pre-printed sheets in bound volumes. On the introduction of civil registration on 1 July 1837 a new type of register was produced. The entries gave the date, names of the parties, addresses, occupations and ages. Before 1870 the age is frequently given as 'of full age'. This usually indicated 21 years or above, although sometimes the registrar has taken it to mean above the age of consent. The address is commonly only given as the parish and the bride's occupation is seldom given. The parties were required to state if they were bachelor, spinster, widow or widower. The name and occupation of both fathers were required, even if they were deceased. The register would also confirm if the marriage had taken place by banns or licence. It was signed by the bride and bridegroom, two witnesses and the officiating minister.

Two copies of the register were made, one was sent to the local Superintending Registrar and the other to the General Register Office. The copy sent to the GRO did not contain the original signatures. The copies formerly held by the church are the ones now kept at London Metropolitan Archives.

Civil marriages, those held in Register Offices, also began in July 1837. Records of these marriages are not held at London Metropolitan Archives.

## Burial Registers

Burial entries until the end of 1812 were usually only very brief. They gave the date and the name of the person to be buried. Occasionally, family relationships such as wife of or son of may be noted. It may be recorded if the burial was that of a child or baby or from the workhouse (pauper or poor). Occupations are rarely given. From 1 January 1813 new format registers were introduced. As with the baptism registers, the pages were pre-printed and bound in a volume. The name of the deceased, address, date of burial, age and officiating minister were given.

During the 1850s the churchyards and burial grounds of inner London were closed by a series of Acts of Parliament. They had become overcrowded and for reasons of hygiene and of good public health not suitable for further burials.

Many burial registers for parish churches in inner London cease by 1855. Those that continue usually only contain a few entries relating to burials in existing graves or special interments in the church.

In the 1830s and 1840s new cemeteries were being established. Some were run by private companies and others administered by local authorities. London Metropolitan Archives holds records from the City of London and Tower Hamlets Cemetery 1841-1966 (CTHC) and New Bunhill Fields (1831-1853), (B/NBF). We also hold Bishops' Transcripts for Highgate (1839-1871), Kensal Green (1833-1872), Nunhead (1842-1871) and West Norwood (1838-1918).

## Bishops' Transcripts

Bishops' Transcripts are copies of entries in the baptism, marriage and burial registers. They were made by churchwardens once a year and returned to the Bishop's Registry.

London Metropolitan Archives holds Bishops' Transcripts for the counties of Surrey, Middlesex, (excluding the City of London) and those parishes in Kent which later became part of the County of London.

BT's for marriages cease, on the whole, after civil registration was introduced in July 1837. BT's for baptisms and burials cease at various dates between the 1830's and 1900.

Amongst our holdings there are only a few exceptions where BT's survive before 1800. For many parishes the holdings are incomplete. The information

contained in them should be identical to that in the register. However, small differences may be noted.

## Family History Reading List

Our Library holds a large collection of works on family history. You will find many of these shelved at the classmark R61.2 in the quick reference section. The following is a brief selection of some of the more useful.

Bevan, Amanda ed. Tracing your ancestors in the Public Record Office. 5th ed. Public Record Office, 1999. (R61.2 PRO)

Gandy, Michael. Short cuts in family history an introduction to planning research. Countryside Books, 1994. (R61.2 GAN)

Gibson, Jeremy. Probate jurisdictions: where to look for wills. 4th ed. Federation of Family History Societies, 1994. (R60.34 GIB)

Gibson, Jeremy & Hampson, Elizabeth. Marriage, census and other indexes for family historians. 5th ed. Federation of Family History Societies, 1994. (R61.2 GIB)

Hey, David. Oxford companion to family history. OUP, 1996. (R61.2 HEY)

Hey, David. The Oxford guide to local and family history. OUP, 1993. (61.2 HEY)

Humphery-Smith, Cecil. Phillimore atlas and index of parish registers. Rev. ed. Phillimore, 1995. (R60.53 HUM)

Pelling, George. Beginning your family history. 6th ed. Federation of Family History Societies, 1995. (R61.2 PEL)

Saul, Pauline. Family historian's enquire within. 5th ed. Federation of Family History Societies, 1995. (R61.2 SAU)

Webb, Clifford. Greater London cemeteries and crematoria. Society of Genealogists, 1994. (R25.5 WOL)

Webb, Cliff. My ancestors were Londoners. How can I find out more about them? Society of Genealogists, 1999. (R61.2 WEB)

Wiggins, Ray. St. Catherine's House Districts. An alphabetical list of over 650 districts with details of counties, sub-districts and adjacent districts. For the author: [c. 1989?]. (R.60.36)

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