



Family History

Newspapers and family history

How can newspapers assist the family history researcher?

Old newspapers can be a great source of information for family history. Sometimes the information reported about an individual may not have been recorded in any other source.

State Library of Queensland holds an extensive range of Queensland newspapers as well as selected interstate and overseas titles. Most old newspapers are held on microfilm. Please consult our One Search online catalogue, <http://onesearch.slq.qld.gov.au>, for details of titles and holdings. There are also two listings in the family history area on level 3: *Newspapers by place* and *Newspapers by title*.

What types of information can you find in newspapers?

Funeral / death notices

Funeral notices can provide a researcher with clues about their ancestors. Notices may include the cemetery where the deceased will be buried / cremated, the last address of the deceased and the names of living relatives. They can be particularly helpful in finding the married names of female members of the family whose marriages occurred after the cut off dates for birth, death and marriage indexes.

Obituaries

Obituary notices can contain a wealth of background information on an ancestor such as:

- age and birth of the deceased
- wife and children's names
- how many years in the district, state or country
- occupations and community activities of the deceased
- important events or interesting stories in the deceased's life
- a detailed description of the church service.

Example from the *Darling Downs Gazette* - 31 January 1916, p.4:

"An old and respected resident of Freestone, in the person of Mr. David Payne passed away at St. Clair Private Hospital. Deceased, who was born at Mildon Hill, Suffolk, England was 77 years of age. At the early age of 18 years he came on to the Downs and settled at Freestone, where he has laboured ever since. His wife predeceased him two and a half years ago."

Inaccuracies in newspaper obituaries and reports may mislead. Dates, names and chronologies may be wrong. This can be deliberate to cover some embarrassment or crime. Always cross-check.

Marriage notices

Marriage notices can appear up to several weeks after the date of the event. Apart from the names of the bride and groom, notices may contain the names of the parents of both parties and possibly the suburb or town where they live. Some newspapers have social pages (usually published on a Saturday) with photographs or a detailed description of the wedding. In some instances, the newspaper has listed the names of the guests and what everyone was wearing.

Example taken from *The Queenslander* – 28 January 1871, p.1:

"On the 20th January, by the Rev. M.H. Parkinson, Wesleyan Minister, Robt. Jones, of Ipswich, to Catherine, second daughter of Mr John Barr, Springburn, Glasgow."

Golden and diamond wedding celebrations may provide the name of the ship on which the pair travelled to Australia, their early life and movements, a list of descendants and a photograph.

Shipping intelligence

Incoming and outgoing overseas and coastal ships were usually recorded in the shipping intelligence column of the local newspaper. Where shipping lists have been lost, newspaper reports may identify some of the immigrants' names. Cabin passengers are usually named but the majority, such as assisted immigrants in steerage, are only occasionally listed.

An account on the ship's voyage often appeared on the same page as the shipping intelligence column within a few days of the ship's arrival in port. It often records any unusual occurrences, as well as the number of births and deaths on-board.

Accidents and inquests

Newspapers usually reported serious accidents ranging from automobile crashes and mining mishaps to house fires. If an accidental death occurred, articles reporting the inquest or magisterial inquiry may appear within the next few days or even weeks after the date of the accident. These articles can give detailed descriptions of the accident and people involved.

Crime and punishment

Crimes and court sessions covering theft, drunkenness, assault and murder are reported.

Personal and social

These two common headings, which appear in newspapers, tend to record community events and gossip such as dances, church fetes and visitors to the town.

Example from *The Queenslander* - 14 July 1906, p.3:

“Mr. and Mrs. John Munro and family, Chillagoe, passed through Brisbane last week from the South en route for Cairns, where Mr. Munro has purchased Mr. Hobler’s picturesque residence at Juranda, Barron Falls. Mrs. Munro and her children were passengers by the Orontes from Scotland; where they have spent twelve months.”

Which newspaper do I search?

- If you are checking newspapers for obituaries and funeral notices find the exact date the death occurred from the births, deaths and marriages indexes held in the Reading Room on level 3.
- If you are unsure where a death occurred search electoral rolls or directories to determine where the deceased was last residing. Cemetery records may also be useful.
- Some regions may not have had a newspaper or copies of the local newspaper have not survived. Check the nearest town’s newspaper, as sometimes it reported regional events. Be aware of where of the deceased lived at different stages. E.g. A Melbourne death may be reported in a Brisbane paper.

Newspaper digitisation

Many newspapers are being digitised and are accessible on the web. OCR (Optical Character Recognition) software is used, which means the text is keyword searchable. The **Advantages are:** much content difficult to find may now be found, and items that occurred in one state outside the dates digitised in that state may be reported in another state’s paper e.g. sinking of the Centaur 1943 (Qld) reported in southern papers. The **Disadvantages are** that OCR misses key words because of the poor quality of microfilm from which digital images are made, and the faded or damaged newspaper originally microfilmed.

What newspapers are available on the internet?

Historic Australian Newspapers, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper>, available through National Library of Australia, is a range of out-of-copyright newspapers from all Australian States and territories. Access is free. The digitisation offers flexible searching options and searching across newspapers regardless of State if the date range of newspapers is available.

Papers Past, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>, made available through the National Library of New Zealand, contains more than one million pages of digitised New Zealand newspapers and periodicals. It includes publications from all regions of New Zealand.

Databases [<https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/research-collections/information-collections/newspapers>]

(Log in from home if you are a Queensland resident, using your library membership)

British Library Newspapers – A rich collection of primary source material, this database gives access to over 160 influential national and regional titles from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, with over five million easily searchable pages.


Irish Newspaper Archive – A digitised collection of around 80 historical and current newspapers from Ireland dating back to the 18th century.

Illustrated London News Historical Archives – The full archive from 1842-2003 in fully searchable digital format. More than 100 years of social, political and cultural history.

Times Digital Archives - Complete digital edition of *The Times* (London) from 1785 to 2014, searchable by keyword. It includes all articles, advertisements and illustrations/photos.

Need further information?

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