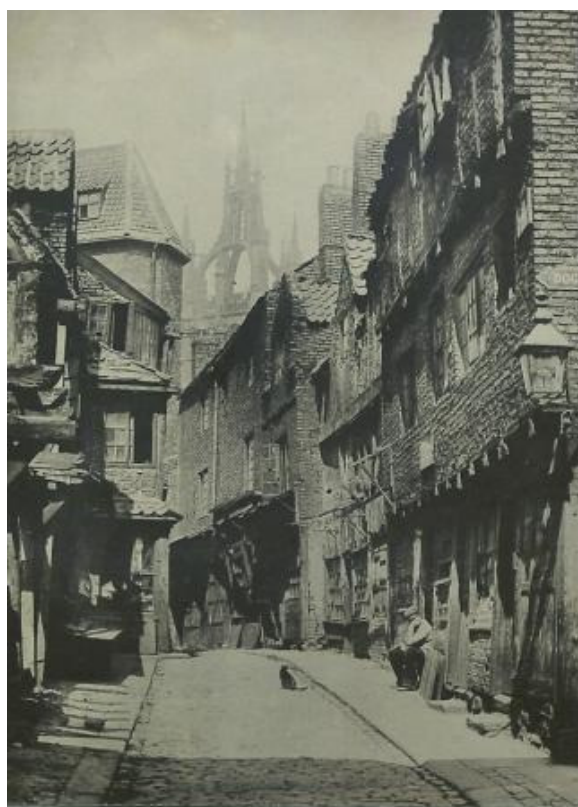




Tracing your criminal ancestor



Local Studies Genealogy Guide No. 24

Turn a new page



Newcastle Libraries

Every family has a black sheep and the paper trail that they left can reveal useful family information such as addresses, occupation, physical descriptions and possibly even a photograph. Criminal records can also reveal names of witnesses, police officers and court officials.

Generally a crime will follow the process of offence-arrest-indictment-trial-conviction. Finding information about one event can help in solving the rest of the puzzle. It is probably best to start with online databases and then to move on to other resources as more information becomes available. It is useful to have a legal dictionary on hand to check legal terms and definitions.

Newspapers are an ideal source for all parts of the process. Although there are publications such as the Illustrated Police News that would focus on speculation rather than hard facts, newspapers are useful for finding information such as dates and details of crimes that can be then backed up by other sources. Publications intended for circulation among police forces such as Hue and Cry which became the Police Gazette provide descriptions of habitual offenders and wanted felons.

Court calendars would have been published before and after trials providing details of the accused, their crime, judgements and punishments. If a crime was sensational or resulted in a execution, there may have been broadsides or chap books produced to cash in on the drama.

Convicted criminals would have details of their punishment recorded. Prison was originally a place where a person would be held until they were freed, punished or executed. Transportation was introduced as an alternative to long term imprisonment and took place from 1700 until it was abolished in 1867.

Sources of information and where to find them

Reference resources on Level 6 of the City Library including indexes of court calendars and calendars of prisoners. These are useful for finding dates and the description of crimes committed, with judgements and punishments

- Northumberland and Durham Quarter Sessions and Assize Courts: newspaper index 1782-1829; indexed by George Bell (microfiche)
- Durham Quarter Sessions rolls 1471-1625, edited and calendared by CM Fraser
- Newcastle upon Tyne Quarter Sessions, Oct 1818-Jan1931 compiled by F Furness
- Newcastle upon Tyne Quarter Sessions, 1831-1855 compiled by M and F Furness
- Newcastle upon Tyne Quarter Sessions Jan 1867-Jan 1876; compiled by R Veitch
- Transportations extracted from the Newcastle Quarter Sessions by M Furness
- Index to Northumberland Quarter Sessions indictments held ay Northumberland County Record Office, 1580-1630 (microfiche)
- Index to Northumberland Quarter Sessions indictments held ay Northumberland County Record Office, 1771-1807 (microfiche)

Newspapers provide details of crimes, trials and punishments

- Local newspapers on microfilm or in bound volumes City Library – a full list of newspapers held can be found at www.gov.uk/libraries
 - Nineteenth Century Newspapers – includes Police Gazette Online free at <http://library.newcastle.gov.uk>
 - British Newspapers online – includes Illustrated Police News Subscription database that can be searched for free www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk
- London Gazette Bankrupts and debtors City Library or online at www.london-gazette.co.uk

Court calendars give dates and the crime a defendant was accused of, judgements and punishments

- Online databases – Ancestry and Find My Past
 - City Library
 - Tyne and Wear Archives
- The National Archives

Ancestry provides access to online databases from the National Archives and is available at all Newcastle Libraries free of charge or it can be subscribed to at www.ancestry.co.uk. The records available are:

- [England & Wales, Criminal Registers, 1791-1892](#)
 - [Australian Convict Transportation Registers – Other Fleets & Ships, 1791-1868](#)
 - [British Chancery Records, 1386-1558](#)
- [UK, Prison Hulk Registers and Letter Books, 1802-1849](#)

Find My Past also provides access to online databases from the National Archives and is available from all Newcastle Libraries free of charge or can be subscribed to at www.findmypast.co.uk. The records available are:

- Admiralty: registers of convicts in prison hulks (TNA ref: ADM6)
 - Central Criminal Court: after-trial calendars of prisoners (TNA ref: CRIM9)
 - Home Office: calendar of prisoners (TNA ref: HO140)
 - Home Office: criminal petitions (TNA ref: HO17)
 - Metropolitan Police: Criminal Record Office: habitual criminals' registers and miscellaneous papers (TNA ref: MEPO6)
- Home Office and Prison Commission: prison records (TNA ref: PCOM2)

Tyne and Wear Archives have website containing information about their holdings and a factsheet on law and order www.twmuseums.org.uk/tyne-and-wear-archives.html .

Convict records can be found at www.convictrecords.com.au and are useful in tracing criminals who were transported to Australia – provides access to many original records.

Black Sheep Ancestors is a website useful for finding sites that hold information and can be found at www.blacksheepancestors.com/uk .

Old Bailey Trials is a website at www.oldbaileyonline.org providing transcripts of trials.

Recommended reading

Barry Redfern – Victorian Villains gives an insight into a photographic record of prisoners held at Newcastle Gaol between 1871 and 1873. It is available to borrow from all Newcastle Libraries or to buy from Newcastle Libraries and book shops.

Barry Redfern – The Gallows Tree covers Eighteenth Century crime and punishment in Northumberland and Berwick-upon-Tweed (companion volume to *The Shadow of the Gallows*). It is available to borrow from all Newcastle Libraries or to buy from Newcastle Libraries and book shops.

Barry Redfern – The Shadow of the Gallows describes Eighteenth Century crime and punishment on Tyneside Available to borrow from all Newcastle Libraries. It is out of print and there is a free downloadable copy from www.newcastle.gov.uk/libraries.

Catharine Arnold – Underworld: Crime and Punishment in the Capital City focuses on London, however, conditions would have been similar in other English cities.

Kate Summerscale – The Suspicions of Mr Whicher is a fine example of unravelling the facts behind a notorious murder case

Sarah Wise – The Italian Boy: Murder and Grave Robbery in the 1830s, the author uses the murder of a street seller to reveal the London underworld.