

The Record Office holds a large number of resources for those tracing their family history. Brief details of some of these sources are given below.

There is access to AncestryLibrary, Findmypast and the British Newspaper Archive websites at Bath Record Office to assist you in your research.

Our catalogues are hosted online:

- The Archives catalogue is hosted by South West Heritage Trust as part of the **Somerset Archives catalogue**.
- The Local Studies catalogue is part of the **LibrariesWest catalogue**.
- We additionally have a number of finding aids that are only available at the Record Office when you visit.

Records of Official Bodies may also be of interest to your family history research. They cover: courts, police, coroners, hospitals, schools and the poor law. Some of these are indexed on the **Bath Ancestors** database – see the website and research guide for more details of the sources included.

Note that access to sources, including details of individuals who may still be alive or sensitive material, may be restricted under the Data Protection Act 2018.

Church Registers

Most of the Anglican parish registers for Bath & North East Somerset are held by the Somerset Heritage Centre. These have been digitised and made available through Ancestry. We also have a number of these registers available as microfiche and transcription.

Many non-conformist (i.e. non-Anglican) church records were transcribed from copies held by The National Archives on to the Family Search website (we also have the IGI available on microfiche). There are some original registers for Methodist and Baptist churches in our archive collections, few of which have been transcribed.

For more information about church registers and lists, please see our page and research guide on Church Registers.

Burial Records

Alongside the burial registers are the Burial Board Books, including fee books and burial books from the 1860s to 1920s (coverage varies between boards and does not include earlier churchyard or cemetery burials). Our collection covers the Boards of Bathwick, Lyncombe & Widcombe and St. James', St. Michael's, St. Saviour's, Twerton, Walcot, and Weston (not yet catalogued).

They provide data for the compilation of the **Bath Burial Index** on our website. Please check this database first before requesting the books. There are more details about burial records on this website.

Wills

Before 1858 wills were proven in the local clerical court. After 1858 civil Probate Courts undertook this role and produced Calendars, or indexes, of Wills and Administrations.

Pre-1858

Wills proven by the Bath and Wells Diocesan courts were deposited at Taunton. Some of these were lost due to war damage in WWII, but the remainder can be found at the **Somerset Heritage Centre**. Some of these wills have been published by the Somerset Record Society, including an index of Somerset wills. These printed indexes are available in the Record Office.

Wills for persons who held property in more than one diocese, archdiocese or country were probably proven in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC). The court copies of these wills are accessible through Ancestry or The National Archives website as part of their digital collections.

Post-1858

The National Probate Registry maintains a Calendar of Wills and Administrations for England and Wales. This is an index, listed by name of the deceased, to probate granted in a given year (which may not be the year of death). This calendar can be searched on their website up to the present – from where you can order a copy of the will. The Calendar is also searchable for the years 1858-1995 on Ancestry and Find My Past. Similar Calendars are also available for Scotland, Ireland and Northern Ireland

The Record Office also holds a small collection (about 400) of office-copy wills for the 18th-20th centuries, mostly from local solicitors' offices. They are often bundled in with title deeds making a direct connection between the property and the family the will relates to. For more information on title deeds, see the **House History** guide.

Registers of Electors

Registers of electors were compiled annually from 1832 to the present day, except 1916-17 and 1940-44.

They list only those entitled to vote. For Parliamentary elections from 1832 until 1918, only men who owned or leased property of a certain value had the right to vote. From 1918 all adult males, and females aged 30 and over, could vote. Females over the age of 21 were given the right to vote in 1928. Some of the registers cover

the 'burgesses' (i.e. Freemen) who had the right to vote in local elections, and this may include women.

Registers are arranged by Wards: 1832-1885 in alphabetical order of surname; 1886 onwards in alphabetical order of street.

Street Directories

Bath's directories started as slim volumes listing mainly medical personnel, some trades and no private householders. They grew to include lists by surname of householders, street by street listing, and details of various societies, churches, hospitals and other organisations, including the Corporation. They often include many advertisements for local businesses.

They were published irregularly initially, then are almost annually from about 1850 to 1973 (excepting WWII). Our collection runs from 1791-1974.

We also hold a selected number of directories covering Somerset, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Bristol. Please see the guide for **Directories** for more information.

Rate Books

Rate books can be a useful alternative to Census returns for locating a household, although only the principal occupier is listed. Mostly, they have not been catalogued, so please ask in advance if you need a specific location or date. A few of the early city rate books have been indexed and can be searched on the **Bath Ancestors** database.

The Record Office holds rate books of different types from the late 18th century to the 1960s. Rates were generally collected quarterly and based on the value of the fixed property. They are ordered by street, listing the occupier/ householder, though house numbers are not generally given in the earlier books. They fall into three main series:

Parish Rate Books – initially the money was used to pay for the Poor Law levies and upkeep of the parish, including the highways, lighting, and the watch. Latterly, it supported the Poor Law which, from 1834, was collected by the Poor Law Guardians for the relevant Union (see below for Poor Relief records). This rate was absorbed into the Council Rates in 1925.

Improvements Rates – these rates, introduced through several Improvement Acts, paid for the Watch or Police in the parish (this was removed when the Bath City Police was created in 1835), the upkeep of the highways, lighting, and cleansing of the parish. They cover the city of Bath parishes (Ss Peter & Paul, St Michael, St James and Walcot inner) 1766-1851; Walcot 1817-1852; and Bathwick 1831-1851. These rates were superseded by the Corporation Rates.

Corporation Rates – these rates were started as a result of the Bath Corporation Act 1851 and have now become the Council Tax and cover the costs of the running of the Council and its services. Our collections run from 1851/2 to the 1960s.

Records of Bath freemen and tradesmen

Apprentices. Register of those apprenticed to Bath Freemen, 1697-1776 (indexed). Small collection of apprenticeship indentures 1735-1885.

Freemen. Registers of those who gained Freedom of the City by apprenticeship, gift or purchase, 1712-1888. Since that date, Honorary Freedom is only occasionally granted by the Council.

Licences: Public Houses. Victuallers' recognizances, 1682-1789 and 1806-1814; Victuallers' registers 1871-1970.

Chairmen licences for the operators of sedan chairs, 1741-1756.

Wheelchairs registers of Bath-chair operators 1908-1945.

Canal Boats registers of boats and their owners 1885-1926

Aliens licences issued to foreigners entering the country, surrendered on arrival in Bath (1798 only).