



Contacting us

We recommend that you contact us to book a place before visiting our searchrooms.

WYAS Bradford
Central Library
Prince's Way
Bradford BD1 1NN
Telephone +44 (0)1274 435099
e-mail bradford@wyjs.org.uk

WYAS Calderdale
Central Library
Northgate House
Northgate
Halifax HX1 1UN
Telephone +44 (0)1422 392636
e-mail calderdale@wyjs.org.uk

WYAS Kirklees
Central Library
Princess Alexandra Walk
Huddersfield HD1 2SU
Telephone +44 (0)1484 221966
e-mail kirklees@wyjs.org.uk

WYAS Leeds
2 Chapeltown Road
Sheepscar
Leeds LS7 3AP
Telephone +44 (0)113 214 5814
e-mail leeds@wyjs.org.uk

WYAS Wakefield
Registry of Deeds
Newstead Road
Wakefield WF1 2DE
Telephone +44 (0)1924 305980
e-mail wakefield@wyjs.org.uk

Family History Sources

The West Yorkshire Archive Service holds a wide variety of records that may be of help when tracing your family history. We are always happy to offer advice on how to move forward in your research, please get in touch using the details down the side.

This guide offers some brief details about records that might be helpful in finding out more information about your ancestors. This is not a complete list of sources available, please contact one of our offices for further information.

Below is an overview of what is included in the guide:

Getting started

- Civil registration – birth, marriage and death certificates, 1837 onwards
- Census returns 1841-1911

Pre-1837 registration records

- Baptisms, marriages and burials in the Church of England and other denominations
- Cemetery records

Adding detail and context

- Wills
- School records
- Adoption
- Crime and punishment
- Hospitals and health
- Poor Law
- Taxation

Getting started

Once you have spoken to your family and found out what you can there are two particularly useful places to start. The West Yorkshire Archive Service does not hold either of these sources but details of where to find them are given below:

Civil registration of births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales began on July 1st 1837 so after the date you ought to find birth, marriage and death certificates. The indexes are arranged alphabetically under the quarters of the year and give the registration district rather than the actual place where event took place

The indexes for Yorkshire can be accessed at - www.yorkshirebmd.org.uk

Free online access to the national civil registration indexes (often known as the General Register Office indexes) is available on:

<http://www.freebmd.org.uk/> coverage is not yet complete but most of the earlier records have been transcribed.

Or you can pay for access at one of these sites:

<http://www.ancestry.co.uk/>

<http://www.findmypast.co.uk/>

<http://www.bmdindex.co.uk/>

Microfiche copies of the indexes are available locally at the Local Studies and Reference Libraries in each of our five districts.

The other main source is the records of the **census** listing the names of those living at an address. There has been a census in England and Wales every 10 years since 1801 but the first census to list everyone living at a particular address was in 1841. Census records are closed for 100 years so the most recent census currently available is the one from 1911.

In 1841 the census entries showed whether someone had been born in the County they were living in, gave ages rounded down to the nearest 5 years (apart from children) and did

not show who was the head of the household or relationships between residents. Later censuses give ages, occupations, place of birth and relationships. Ages and places of birth are of help in tracing families back through the different census records.

The WYAS does not hold copies of census returns; however census records are available in the National Archives; and copies are available in local libraries on microfilm, microfiche or you can get access online.

Free access to the 1881 census is available at: http://www.familysearch.org/Eng/Search/frameset_search.asp

Or you can pay for access at one of these sites:

<http://www.ancestry.co.uk/> 1841-1901 censuses.

<http://www.findmypast.co.uk/> for all census returns from 1841-1911.

Research before 1837

Census and civil registration records will help you to get back to 1837; before that date you will need to look at other sources of information. The main sources for family history before 1837 are registers of baptisms, marriages and burials for either the Church of England or non-conformist chapels and churches.

Church of England Parish registers have been kept since 1538 (although not all survive from this date) and record baptisms (not births), marriages and burials (not deaths).

Early registers only give names and dates; later registers give more information and from the mid nineteenth century baptism registers may give the date of birth. Some parishes have 'Dade' registers which provide much more detailed information than 'normal' registers. They are particularly useful as for baptisms they give not only the name of the father but the mother's name, father's occupation, and the names of both grandfathers and parishes of residence.

Most West Yorkshire parishes have deposited their records with the West Yorkshire Archive Service. See Collections Guide 1 - Parish Registers for a list of the parish registers held by the West Yorkshire Archive Service. The registers are being made available to search online via Ancestry.co.uk, free access is available in all our searchrooms.

Another useful source you can try searching if you are not sure where a baptism took place is the International Genealogical Index (IGI) which is available at: <http://www.familysearch.org/>.

Copies of the parish registers were sent to the Bishop and are known as Bishop's Transcripts; they are useful when the original register has been lost or is difficult to read. See Collections Guide 3 – Bishop's Transcripts for a list of Bishop's Transcripts held by the West Yorkshire Archive Service. Many of those for West Yorkshire are held by the Borthwick Institute for Archives at the University of York: <http://www.york.ac.uk/library/borthwick/>.

Non-Conformists are members of a religious organisation that does not 'conform' to the Church of England. The term covers Protestants including Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Independents, Congregationalists, Quakers etc. and Roman Catholics. By 1851, a quarter of the English population were nonconformists.

In 1837, nonconformist churches were asked to send their registers to London. These pre-1837 registers are now held by the National Archives in Kew (see <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> for further information) and can be searched on line at <http://www.bmdregisters.co.uk>.

West Yorkshire Archive Service holds registers from over a thousand nonconformist chapels. See Collections Guide 2 – Nonconformist Registers for a list of those held by the West Yorkshire Archive Service. These registers are also being made available to search online via Ancestry.co.uk, free access is available in all our searchrooms.

Cemetery records

During the nineteenth century the churchyards in large towns and cities became full and had to be closed; and cemeteries were opened either by private companies or by local authorities.

The majority of the records of local authority cemeteries in West Yorkshire have not been deposited with the West Yorkshire Archive Service. Exceptions are the records of **Beckett Street Cemetery** which have been deposited with WYAS Leeds and the records of **Halifax General Cemetery** which have been deposited with WYAS Calderdale. WYAS Calderdale also has microfilm copies of cemetery records from Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council.

The records of **Undercliffe Cemetery** (originally privately owned by the Bradford Cemetery Company) have been deposited with WYAS, Bradford.

For other cemeteries you should contact the Local Authority which owns and maintains the cemetery. Leeds and Huddersfield Local Studies libraries do have copies of the cemetery records for their districts.

Adding detail and context

Once you have got the basic information about your family tree you can start to try and find out more about the lives of your ancestors. There are a number of sources you can look at to add detail to the information you already have. Not all the sources detailed below will exist for your ancestors but where they do they can be invaluable.

Wills are drawn up by an individual wishing to settle his or her affairs prior to death and can provide information about social status, furniture and possessions (through an inventory of the estate) and family relationships.

Before 1858 there was no one place at which wills were proved. Most Yorkshire wills for the period before 1858 were proved in the courts of the Archbishop of York. These wills are now held at the Borthwick Institute for Archives - <http://www.york.ac.uk/library/borthwick/>. An index to the Borthwick wills 1688-1857 is held on microfilm at WYAS Wakefield.

For wills proved after 1858, if you know the name of the deceased person, the place and the date on which probate was granted, a copy of the will can be purchased by:

- a visit to the Court of Probate at High Holborn, London,
- ordering from your local District Probate Registry,
- post from the Probate Registry at York.

The National Probate Calendar which is an index to wills between 1858 and 1941 is available to search on Ancestry.co.uk.

See Collections Guide 4 - Wills for further information on wills including details of pre-1858 wills for Richmond held at WYAS Leeds and post-1858 Wakefield wills at WYAS Wakefield.

School records can provide information about the school an ancestor may have attended, what happened in their early years and the community in which they lived. There are a variety of records that might be useful.

School **Admission registers** record the arrival of new pupils at a school and tend to be arranged by date of admission. They may be indexed and usually include pupils' names, parents' or guardians' names, addresses, pupils' dates of birth, entry and leaving.

School **log books** are a day-to-day record of events at a school kept by the head teacher. They include information on activities outside the normal timetable: official visits, inspections, outings, staff appointments and absences, incidents of misbehaviour, reorganisation of classes, and reasons for low attendance (harvesting or illness being the most common). The content of each log book varies according to the head teacher compiling the entries. They can be a very valuable source of information.

We do not usually hold individual pupil reports or examination results. The survival of all these records varies from one school to another.

School records are held by all five of our offices for the local area. Additionally WYAS Wakefield also hold the records of the West Riding County Council Education Department. Please contact the offices for further details of the records they hold.

Adoption records are often scarce and can be difficult to trace. Early adoptions were informal unrecorded agreements between people that were regulated by any formal process. It was not until the 1st January 1927 that adoption as a legal process began in England and Wales. Tracing the natural parents of fostered children in early records can be very difficult.

Once legalised adoption was introduced in 1927 the General Register Office (GRO) began compiling adoption birth certificate registers, indexes to these registers can be found at The National Archives in London. These provide the adopted name of the child and the date of adoption, but not the names of the natural parents.

WYAS Wakefield holds some adoption records in the records of the Petty Sessions Courts who were responsible for the initial regulation and administration of adoption proceedings. These are mainly the documentation of the court proceedings and are not adoption files and do not usually include much personal information about the child or their natural/adopted parents. There may be restrictions on access to records under 100 years old.

In the mid to late twentieth century regulation and administration of the adoption process moved to local authority social services departments. Unfortunately, the WYAS does not hold any significant collections of local authority adoption files and it is assumed many have been lost or destroyed.

Crime and punishment

There are a number of sources that may be useful if your ancestors were on either side of the law. Many of these records will be subject to access restrictions on content under 100 years old.

Court records: Quarter Sessions are the records of the Justices of the Peace and relate not only to the court cases they heard but also to the upkeep of bridges and highways, regulation of prices and labourers' wages, licensing of nonconformist meeting houses, administration of the poor law and registration of recusants (Roman Catholic dissenters who refused to swear allegiance to the Crown). The Quarter Sessions were abolished in 1971.

The three main records of the court are the **Sessions rolls** recording all aspects of the business of the court in session, the **indictment books** recording criminal convictions and the **order books** recording orders passed by the court regarding civil matters.

Records of the West Riding Court of Quarter Sessions are held at our Wakefield office. Some boroughs ran their own Quarter Sessions, but fewer of their records have survived.

Petty Sessions dealt with minor criminal and civil offences, domestic disputes such as maintenance and adoption, and also provided an official administration of registration duties such as alehouse licensing. The records include: minute books, court registers, licensing registers and court orders. Many of these can be sparse in the details given but they can still be useful.

Unfortunately very few of the petty sessions divisions which now lie within West Yorkshire have records which survive prior to the twentieth century.

Coroners records: The two main types of records created by local authority coroners' offices are inquest files and written off files.

Apart from some nineteenth century material for the Liberty of Ripon area, full inquest papers (giving much more detail than the inquest returns to Quarter Sessions) only survive from the late 1940s. Our Wakefield office holds a set of notebooks belonging to one Thomas Taylor, who was County Coroner and coroner for the Honour of Pontefract in the late nineteenth century. These notebooks are a personal record of the cases where he presided and include a wealth of detail.

Access to all Coroners' records on reported deaths is restricted for a period of 75 years. To request access to a record less than 75 years old an application must be made in writing to the relevant Coroner's office.

Police records: The first county police force the West Riding Constabulary was established in 1856. This operated alongside borough police forces for Batley, Bradford, Dewsbury, Huddersfield, Leeds and Wakefield. Between 1968 and 1974 the Borough forces were absorbed into the County force. This combined force became known as the present West Yorkshire Police from 1986.

The majority of the Police records held by WYAS are at WYAS Wakefield but Borough Watch Committee minutes for most Borough Forces are available at the office for that District.

Survival of personnel records varies greatly from force to force but include lists of officers and constables, conduct books, honour rolls, personnel files, payroll records. These tend to include name, age, residence, physical description, collar number, rank, conduct, promotions, date of appointment and resignation. There are also photographs, Chief Constables reports and registers of criminals, though these are far from a complete set of records, for some forces.

Some police records under 100 years old are subject to legal restrictions on access. See Collections Guide 6 - Police Records for further information about the records held.

Prison Records: WYAS Wakefield holds the archives of HMP Wakefield (formerly the West Riding House of Correction until 1878), HMP Leeds (Armley Gaol) and HMP New Hall. The series of prisoner records for all three prisons have significant gaps where registers have not survived or are missing. The registers list the prisoner's name, date and court of conviction, sentence, previous admissions, date of release, education status, physical appearance. Prior to the establishment of Armley Gaol in 1847 the House of Correction at Wakefield held prisoners from across the West Riding of Yorkshire.

Access to all prison registers is restricted for entries less than 100 years old. If you have a specific enquiry relating to prison records, please contact WYAS Wakefield.

Even if we cannot find a record for your ancestor as a prisoner, we may be able to use court records to trace the trial if you know where they were living or convicted.

Hospital & Health records

WYAS Wakefield holds most of our hospital records including those of the West Riding Asylums, the former workhouse Infirmaries, and the principal hospitals in each of the five West Yorkshire districts. The records of the Leeds General Infirmary are held by WYAS Leeds. See Collections Guide 7 – Health Records for more information about which hospitals we hold records for and where they are.

There are a variety of records that might be of use or interest in tracing your ancestors. These include:

Admission and Discharge registers: These usually give details of the patients name, age, date of birth, date of admission, date of discharge, where admitted from, address and reason for admission.

Case books and patient files: These will records patient details, dates of admission, discharge, diagnosis and details of medical treatment.

Staff records: Where these survive they record details of medical and nursing staff including dates of appointment, name, address, date of birth, and sometimes details of conduct,

promotion, salary.

Brief details about the location of hospital archive records can also be found on the Hosprec database:

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/hospitalrecords/

Taxation: Land Tax was a tax on real property which could be levied on tithes, buildings and in particular plots of land.

An Act of 1780 made it necessary for all voters to be assessed for the land tax in order to substantiate their right to vote. Duplicates of the land tax returns for each township were deposited annually with the clerk of the peace and it is these duplicates can be found in the enrolled records of the West Riding Quarter Sessions (ref. QE13).

Land Tax returns under the Act of 1780 list the owner, occupier and sum assessed for each township. They are arranged by wapentake (the ancient divisions of the West Riding). And give the names and location of those paying the tax.

Land tax duplicates for townships in the Liberty of Ripon can be found in the Quarter Sessions for the Liberty (ref. QT1). Records for the wapentakes of Skyrack, Leeds Borough, Claro and Ripon can be found at WYAS: Wakefield in collection (ref. WYW1390).

Rate books were compiled in order to keep a record of local people's rate assessment. They were based on an assessment of the yearly value of a property and were levied to pay for poor relief and for the maintenance and repair of highways, the parish watch, sewers, street lighting, etc. The ratepayer was the person responsible for paying the local taxes and could be the owner or occupier of the property.

The information contained in rate books varies according to the date and type of rate collected, but generally records the names of ratepayers, listed by street, and includes the following details: street, house number, name of occupier, name of owner, rates due. They may also give a brief description of the property e.g. whether it was a tenement, public house, whether it had workshops or had been improved.

Rate books can be found with the records of the Metropolitan District Council or predecessor authority at the relevant WYAS office. If they have not been deposited they should still be held by the Council.

There are a number of other sources that relate more specifically to land ownership and occupation and might be useful in your research. See User Guide 10 – House History for further details on some of these.