



Derbyshire Record Office's online finding aids

A series of leaflets to introduce two complementary resources: the Derbyshire Record Office guide, and the online catalogue. To view the guide, visit www.derbyshire.gov.uk/recordoffice and click "our collection", then "record office guide". For the online catalogue, click "our collection", then "search collection".

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A three-stage process to finding records

In historical research, it often pays to ask some basic questions:

1. What type of source would include the information you are looking for?

Think carefully about what you are hoping to find out. The answer “everything” is not always helpful; if you start with a target, you are more likely to stumble across clues. If your research poses a question, what kind of record might you find the answer in?

2. Which organisations or bodies created those records?

Go back to your first source of information and re-examine it to identify solely those people or agencies involved that were creating records at the time.

3. Where are the archives of that body kept, and do the surviving records include any relevant series?

Identify which repository (if any) is currently responsible for preserving the surviving records (if any). Often the National Register of Archives (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra) indicates a single archive centre or record office that is formally charged with the custody of official records. Then check the relevant finding aid (in these examples, the record office guide).

Let's look at ways of tracking down sources using three example subjects:

1. A public house in Borrowash
2. A crime in Derby
3. Schools in Chesterfield and Castle Gresley





A public house: The Wilmot Arms, Borrowwash



BORROWWASH.
OLD LICENSED INN, WITH LAND,
THE WILMOT ARMS.
TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,
By Messrs. OLIVER, SON, and OLIVER,
At the BELL HOTEL, Derby, on FRIDAY, the 5th
June, 1885, at six o'clock in the evening, subject to
Conditions of Sale to be then produced ;
THE FREEHOLD OLD-ESTABLISHED ROAD-
SIDE INN, containing two parlours, tap-room,
kitchen, four bedrooms, two attics, and good cellaring,
with front and back yards, brewhouse, set of malt-
rooms, large garden, orchard, outbuildings, and appur-
tenances, situate and having a frontage of 30 yards to
the Derby and Nottingham Turnpike-road, in the centre
of Borrowwash aforesaid, known as the Wilmot
Arms, now in the occupation of Mrs. Keenan, the
owner.
Together with a HOUSE, BAKEHOUSE, and Front
Shop adjoining, containing cellar, small room, large
sitting-room, and three bedrooms, occupied by Mrs.
Davis, the whole including about one acre, more or
less.
The premises are supplied with water and gas, and
may be viewed on application, and further particulars
obtained from the AUCTIONEERS, Wardwick : or at the
Offices of
Messrs. J. & W. H. SALE and MILLS,
Solicitors.
Corn-market, Derby.

Derby Mercury, 3 June 1885

We want to know: who owned and ran the pub over the years; what the pub looked like inside; how profitable the business was.

What type of source might contain the information we want?

Proprietorship: licensing records, title deeds

Appearance: plans of the premises

Finances: accounting records

What organisation was responsible for creating such sources?

Licensing records: "Which body licensed pubs to serve alcohol?" is a simple question, but somebody researching the history of a pub would need to do a little background reading to find the answer. From 1753-1827, the county **quarter sessions** had responsibility but in 1828, it passed to **petty sessions**. Borrowwash was in the petty sessional division of Derby.

Title deeds: drawn up by **solicitors** on behalf of the business/other party.

Plans: **the business**; also required by **police**, and licensing authorities.

Accounts: the business.

Next, we will check the guide to see if the records created by these bodies have been deposited in Derbyshire Record Office.



Are there surviving records and what do they contain?

County quarter sessions:

If we select “County quarter sessions” as record type and simply submit, we get too much information – a hitlist eight pages long. Instead, let’s limit using a keyword, in the “search the collection” box: the database picks up on any string of letters, so using “licen” would pick up “licence” as well as “licensing” or “licensed premises”. The resulting list of four hits includes registers of licensed victuallers 1753-1827 (Q/R).

Derby petty sessions:

Select “Petty Sessions” as record type, Derby as place. Result: collection D1990 contains registers of licences, but only from 1877. Intervening years may be covered by published sources such as directories or newspapers.

Police:

Select “Police” as record type, and “licen” as keyword. Result: collections D6202 and D6829 contain plans of licensed premises, c1950-2005.

Local solicitors:

We do not know which solicitors drew up any relevant title deeds, so the guide will not help with this part of the search. Instead, we turn to the online catalogue, and use “Wilmot Arms Borrowwash” as keywords (selecting AND as our word option). No title deeds are returned, but the hitlist includes some valuations and inventories from 1897 in collection D5126. It may be worth looking for title deeds using the index cards in the search room, as two-thirds of catalogues do not appear online.

The business:

Select “business and commerce” as record type, “hotels and public houses” as sub type, Borrowwash as place. Result: we hold accounts for the business from 1942 to 1968 in collection D3676.

Now that we have identified relevant collections, we can visit the online catalogue by clicking “our collection”, then “search collection”, and inserting the reference number in the RefNo field. A keyword, “Wilmot” is sometimes useful. We end up with a list of three sources we can order for consultation (shown in **bold**), and others that we can check up on when we arrive at the record office.

Q/RA/1/4	Register of licensed victuallers	1810-1821
D1990	Not available online; try the search room shelves.	
D6202	No relevant entries	
D6829/25/1-2	Plans of the Wilmot Arms, Borrowwash	1963, 1969
	Scales: 1/8 inch to 1 foot, 1:2500	
D5126/1/37	Valuation and inventory of Wilmot Arms	1897
D3676	Only fonds-level online; try search room shelves	





A crime: the trial of William Wopling

The jury then retired to consider their verdict, and after an absence of about fifteen minutes, they returned into Court, and the Foreman (Mr. Lomas) said: "The jury find that the deceased died from burns. These burns were caused by William Wopling wilfully throwing a lighted paraffin lamp at the deceased, so causing her death."

The Coroner: Otherwise murder?

The Foreman: Yes, sir.

The Coroner then asked Wopling to stand forward, and he addressed him as follows: The jury find you guilty of the wilful murder of Mary Jane Moore, and therefore it is my duty to commit you to the next Derby Assizes for the borough and county of Derby, to take your trial for such murder, and I commit you accordingly. The Coroner next handed the Chief Constable the warrant, and afterwards Wopling was taken from the Court.

The enquiry lasted eight hours and three-quarters.

Derby Mercury, 19 December 1900

We want to know: what the post-mortem showed; what witnesses told police after the murder; whether William Wopling was convicted of murder.

What type of source might contain the information we want?

Results of the post-mortem: inquest report.

Evidence given to police: notebooks or other police records.

Results of the trial: court minutes.

What organisation was responsible for creating such sources?

Check the source again. The full article (not shown) says:

Inquest: **Derby Borough Coroner**

Investigation: **Derby Borough Police**

Trial: **Derby Assizes**

Are there surviving records and what do they contain?

Coroner records: From 1888, coroners were appointed directly by the relevant local authority, in this case Derby Borough Council. If we select "Derby" as place, and "borough council" as record type, we retrieve several results, but none mentions the coroner. What if we try another way of searching? What happens if the only search term is "coroner" or "inquest", or "post-mortem"? (Remember, the guide does not use Boolean operators, so you cannot search for e.g. "coroner AND inquest".) "Inquest" brings up only one result, and this concerns lead-mining – a different type of inquest altogether. "Post-mortem" brings up records relating to post-mortems on hospital patients. And a search for "coroner" returns references to:

- coroner's files relating to a 1937 mining disaster
- the Liber Pacis (quarter sessions court records) giving names of coroners
- expenses returns of various coroners – but not for the borough of Derby.



Having tried and failed, we might have a look at the Frequently Asked Questions on the guide's webpage. This gives us the bad news: "few inquest records survive for Derbyshire at any period". Sadly, this is typical: Jeremy Gibson's Guide to Coroners' Records (Family History Partnership, 3rd ed, 2009) says that, in general, "you are more likely to find a newspaper report than a coroner's record during the hundred years before the Second World War". So the report we have already seen is the best source of information.

Derby Borough Police records: A guide search for "police", and "Derby" returns no results. But let's try another tack: "borough" as search term, and "police" as record type. This time, we retrieve:

Place: Derbyshire
Collection Ref: [D3376 - View more information on this Collection](#)

Police records comprising records of the Derbyshire Constabulary and the former **borough police forces** of Chesterfield, Derby and Glossop, including chief constable's orders and circulars, standing order books,

Why did the original search not pick this up? Entries in the guide are only indexed by place if they refer exclusively to one place – an entry that discusses Chesterfield, Derby and Glossop as well as the county force will have been indexed under "Derbyshire" only. But will there be records relating to the Wopling case? The guide gives a summary of the collection, including "registers of reported crime", but without giving dates or saying whether these were created by the borough or the county force. The same doubts apply to other series mentioned, so we really need to see the catalogue, if there is one. Click the [link](#), and we find only one catalogue entry, which describes the collection as a whole. If this happens, Derbyshire Record Office staff should be able to tell you why – in this case, it is because the police collection has never been fully listed, so the only description of the documents is an "interim" list. A hard copy is in the search room.

Assize court records: Here, we have a problem before the search begins – what do we select as "record type"? There are various court options to choose from (county court, petty sessions divisions, county quarter sessions) but no category named "Assizes". A keyword search using that term brings up only one incidental reference, to a transcript made by a shorthand writer in 1841. To go back to those FAQs again: "Assizes records are held at The National Archives – there are no records of assizes cases in Derbyshire Record Office".

This explains the lack of a relevant category. Again, we have drawn a blank.
Results of the post-mortem: inquest report – no longer extant
Evidence given to police: police records – check hard copy catalogue
Results of the trial: records not held at Derbyshire Record Office

This goes to show that locating materials can be just as challenging as examining them. But the record office guide and catalogue have the potential to cut down some of the leg-work.





Schools: two in Chesterfield, one in Castle Gresley

92 CHESTERFIELD.

DERBY

Board Schools.

St. Helen's street, erected in 1872, for 199 boys, 181 girls, 108 junior & 193 infants; average attendance, 192 boys, 173 girls, 109 junior & 196 infants; George W. Taylor, master; Miss Harriet Mason, mistress; Miss Clara E. Hill, infants' mistress; Miss Mary J. Leeson, junior school mistress

Kelly's directory, 1899

We want to know: what were the main challenges in the day-to-day management of Derbyshire schools, e.g. class sizes; the class background of the schools' pupils; how schools fit into the education system generally.

As examples of how the online catalogue works, we will look at three schools: Chesterfield Central Mixed School, Chesterfield St Helens Street School and Castle Gresley Infants School.

What type of source might contain the information we want?

Day-to-day operation of schools: log books

Class backgrounds: admission registers often give one parent's occupation, or employment details of school-leavers

Education system: minutes/reports from those responsible for local schools

What organisation was responsible for creating such sources?

Log books: the school (in particular, the head teacher).

Admission registers: the school

Authority minutes and reports: County Council education department, Chesterfield School Board, Chesterfield Borough Council

Are there surviving records and what do they contain?

The guide can be used to find details of education committee and school board records, in much the same way as in the preceding two examples.

Rather than concentrating on those series, though, we will carry out specific searches for log books, requiring the online catalogue as well as the guide.



Search 1: Chesterfield Central Mixed School

Let's look for the log book covering the years 1872-1896.

Step 1. Find the collection reference

Go to the record office guide. Select "schools" as record type, Chesterfield as place, and "central" as keyword. Click "submit". From the list of Chesterfield "central" schools, find* the mixed one (collection D4967).

Step 2. Move to the online catalogue

There is a blue [hyperlink](#) to the catalogue. Click it, to open the fonds-level catalogue entry.

Step 3. Work down to item level

To see a list of series in the collection, click the link [D4967](#). The first series shown is "mixed school". Click the link [open](#) to show the next level down. The only item in the series is the volume we need. Click the number [1](#) next to the description to open the full description of the item:

Level File
RefNo [D4967/1/1](#)
Title Mixed School log book, Jul 1872 - Feb 1896
Date 1872-1896

Now we finally know the full reference number, D4967/1/1, and can order the item for consultation in the search room (by telephone or email).

* Why didn't we just type "Chesterfield Central Mixed School" as the search term? Because the database only looks for the exact string of text supplied. The word "school" is not in the entry title, so a search for "Chesterfield Central Mixed School" would return no results.





Search 2: Chesterfield St Helens Street

Try to find the log book covering 1898-1910.

Step 1. Find the collection reference

Go to the record office guide. Select “schools” as record type, Chesterfield as place, and “Helen” as keyword*. Click “submit”. From the list of schools, find the St Helens Street one (collection D4965).

Step 2. Move to the catalogue

There is no link to the catalogue this time. To check whether there are any entries, click “our collection”, then “search collection”. Type “D4965” in the “RefNo” box. If there are still no entries, move on to the hard copy catalogue.

Step 3. Check the hard copy catalogue

Find the catalogue for collection D4965 in the maroon binders on the search room shelves. This gives the reference we need: D4965/4/1

* Why not type the whole name of the school? Because of the difficulty of predicting the exact wording, and the database’s problem with apostrophes:
St Helen’s Street? (*with apostrophe*)
Saint Helen’s St? (*“Saint” spelled out in full*)
St Helens Street? (*no apostrophe*)
St. Helen’s Street? (*full-stop used to abbreviate “Saint”*)
All these could interfere with our search. But a search for “Helen” would return all of them.



Search 3: Castle Gresley Infants School

Try to find the log book covering 1911-1944

Step 1. Find the collection reference

Go to the record office guide. Select “schools” as record type, Castle Gresley as place, and “infant” as keyword. Click “submit”. There is only D6983.

Step 2. Move to the online catalogue

There is a blue [hyperlink](#) to the catalogue. Click it, to open the fonds-level catalogue entry.

Step 3. Work down to item level

To see a list of series in the collection, click the link [D6983](#). The first series shown is “log books”, 1880 to 2004. Click the link [open](#) to show the next level down. The only item in the series is the volume covering 1880 to 1911 – why aren’t the log books up to 2004 shown? Let’s check the hard-copy catalogue to find out.

Step 4. Check the hard copy catalogue

Find the catalogue for collection D6983 in the maroon binders on the search room shelves. This gives the reference we need: D6983/1/2, but the log book is marked down as “not normally available”. This is because log books can contain personal information about individual pupils, and we are obliged to restrict access to information about people who may still be alive. (Our rule of thumb is to assume a lifespan of 100 years.) With the catalogue database, items that are not normally available are hidden from view.

