

The British NEWSPAPER Archive

About the British Newspaper Archive

The British Newspaper Archive is a partnership between the British Library and findmypast to digitise up to 40 million newspaper pages from the British Library's vast collection over the next 10 years.



What makes this project so special?

We are scanning millions of pages of historical newspapers and making them available online for the first time ever.

You can now search hundreds of millions of articles by keyword, name, location, date or title and watch your results appear in an instant.

Compare this with hours of painstaking manual searching through hard copies or microfilm (often requiring a visit to the British Library in London or Yorkshire) and it is easy to appreciate the ground-breaking nature of this project.

The British Newspaper Archive contains around three million pages of newspaper content originally funded as part of a £3m contribution from JISC. This was an important initiative that contributed greatly to the British Library's digitisation of their historic newspapers.

You can refine your search to focus on announcement types.

What can I search here?

News Articles - read about national events, as well as issues of local and regional importance. News articles are your window into daily life in historical Britain.

Family Notices - search for your family's birth, marriage and death notices plus related announcements including engagements, anniversaries, birthdays and congratulations.

Letters - read letters to the editor written by the newspaper's readers, including illuminating contemporary debates, aspirations and anxieties.

Obituaries - view a wealth of contemporary information on the lives of notable individuals and ancestors.

Advertisements - these include classifieds, shipping notices and appointments. **Illustrations** - see photographs, engravings, graphics, maps and editorial cartoons.

What does the collection cover?

The British Library's newspaper collections are among the finest in the world, containing most of the runs of newspapers published in the UK since 1800.

The scale of the newspaper publishing industry from the early 19th century onwards is enormous, with many cities and towns publishing several newspapers simultaneously, often aimed at distinct audiences depending on social status, geographical location and political affiliation. The first stage of this project focused on runs published before



1900 and titles from cities such as Birmingham, Derby, Manchester, Nottingham, Norwich, Leeds and York, along with local titles from London boroughs.

Newspapers which aimed for county circulation - from Staffordshire to Sussex - also feature prominently, providing an unrivalled picture of provincial life spanning the whole of the 19th century.

We're now also adding a wealth of material from the 20th century, right up to the 1950s.



How did we digitise the original newspapers and make them available online?

Over the past years our team has been scanning thousands of digital images per day from original bound newspaper pages, as well as microfilm. One benefit of being able to access the original bound volumes of newspapers is that, unlike many other newspaper digitisation projects, we have been able to scan some of the rarest and most fragile newspapers in the collection.

We have even scanned single pages more than two feet wide! These publications are now not available for public view or access through the Library's reading rooms; however, they will be available to view on this website.

Our scanning uses five Zeutschel A0 scanners that create very high quality digital images (of 400dpi in 24bit colour, for the technically minded).

Some of the newspapers already scanned have resulted in single page image files being as large as 400MB! This is due to the very large physical size of the original newspaper pages, particularly around the turn of the 19th century.

The scanned page images are then converted to a JPEG2000 format for archive purposes. The image files are also run through an optical character recognition (OCR) process which creates the electronic text.

This process involves segmenting each page into classified zones to help your searching. Finally, the output OCR text is indexed in a large database which you see on this website.

As well as the original paper scanning, we have scanned a significant amount from existing microfilm, created by the British Library over the years.

The resulting digital image quality is slightly lower than that produced by the paper scanning; however, it does have the benefit of being much faster to digitise.

This allows us to create many more pages for the website than would otherwise be possible. The resolution of microfilm sourced images is greyscale at roughly 300dpi.

Getting Started - some top tips

It's free to search The British Newspaper Archive, but to view original newspaper pages, you'll need to choose a subscription package. When you register, we'll give you 3 free pages, which you can use to view any pages you choose. Here's some useful tips to help you get started.

SEARCHING

There are two ways to get to the particular page you may be interested in; you can **search** or **browse**.

1. SEARCH:

There's a simple "Google" type Search box on the home and search pages. This lets you type in words or phrases and will then search for pages containing those words.

There's also our more powerful Advanced Search form. It combines several powerful options to help refine your search. These include keyword(s), date, region, title, article type and tags that other users have added.

On your search results, a series of filters on the left hand side lets you refine your search. Read our Search Tips for more detailed advice on searching.

The BNA uses what is known as a **fuzzy search**, first matching the exact spelling of the word that you enter (e.g. archive), plus any related word variants (archived, archives, archiving etc.). This captures a broader set of results. When ordered by relevance, the search results that contain the exact matches will always appear first.

Using the 'Exact Search' checkbox

Please select the 'Exact Search' checkbox below the search box. This will exclude any related word variants from your search results. For example:

Search keyword	Standard search results (includes variants)	'Exact Search' selected (excludes variants)
newspaper	newspaper, newspapers	newspaper
archive	archive, archives, archived, archiving	archive

2. BROWSE:

This lets you find a specific newspaper by its title (via the drop down title list) or by place of publication (via the clickable map). A series of filters on the left lets you drill down to find the exact edition you're looking for.

VIEW:

When you have narrowed down your selection by either of the above methods, just click on the thumbnail of the pages shown in the results panel and it will appear in the viewer. At this point if you have already chosen a usage package, the image will appear in the viewer. If not, you will be prompted to purchase a package. Once the Viewer appears, you can move through the newspaper pages using a mixture of zoom, scrolling and grab tools.

The Viewer contains print and download image options. There are also engaging features allowing you to add a comment or tag to a page to help contextualise it. However, perhaps the most useful tool is Bookmarking. This enables you to save and organise your research into a series of folders in your "My Research" area (accessible via the top navigation tabs).

SEARCHABLE TEXT:

Once images of the original material have been created, they are sent through a process called Optical Character Recognition (OCR) which creates the electronic text in a searchable format. This process also involves segmenting each page into article types to aid searching. Although OCR makes it possible to search large quantities of full text

information it is not 100% accurate. The accuracy depends on a variety of factors: condition of the original newspaper or microfilm, quality of the paper, size and style of the font and column layouts, for example.

When viewing an image, the OCR text can be viewed via the left navigation column 'All Articles' option. You can select an individual article (either from the image in the Viewer or from the 'All Articles' dropdown. Then select the 'Edit Article Text' option in the left navigation column. How to correct the text - This additive option can be accessed by simply clicking the list of sections displayed and applying your own corrections. By correcting the text, you will be adding to the quality of the data that can be searched by others.

Search Tips

You can search for articles in two ways: a standard Search or an Advanced Search, which offers powerful additional features.

SEARCH

Simply enter your keyword(s) or search term into the search box and click 'Search'.

TIPS:

1. **Avoid putting dates in the search box** - you can narrow down dates easily once you've got your search results
2. **Use quote marks around names and phrases** to make sure the search engine looks for the words together. This is especially useful for names. A search for "John Jones" will find the two words next to one another: if you don't use quotes, it will just find pages with those 2 words on it - that will be a lot of pages!
3. **Be creative with names and phrases.** Elizabeth Jones (nee Adams) could turn up as Lizzie Adams, Mrs Jones, Mrs Arthur Jones or many more variants! Equally, remember that phrases which are commonplace today might not have been at the time - so searching for "World War One" is a no-no as they had no idea at the time that a second one was on the way.
4. **Search the whole country.** Don't apply filters to narrow the area of publication too early. Remember that newspapers would cover events from around the country, and around the world. A story that happened in Glasgow, Scotland could easily get covered in Dublin, Ireland, or Dover, England.
5. **Search for events and places if a name search doesn't give you results.** The names of the people involved were not always recorded, so if you know the type of event, or any other information, try searching for that instead, for example a search for [Drowned Cardiff] may find you the story that ["Joseph Edwards" drowning] might not.

You will be presented with a list of search results which you can narrow down by selecting options from the menu on the left-hand side of the page. Use the facets to limit your results by article type, publication date, publication geography, newspaper title or tags.

ADVANCED SEARCH

An advanced search gives you more powerful tools: you build a "power search" which will let you be much more specific about words you want to find (and exclude) from your searches, let you filter by specific date ranges, and many other options.

POWER SEARCH OPTIONS

All of these words: all search terms you enter in this box will be searched for. It is like using AND on many search engines.

Some of these words: some of the search terms you enter will be searched for. We use a minimum match (mm) formula to ensure that you get the most relevant results. Depending on the number of keywords that you enter into this box, the search system will try to find the following:

Number of keywords entered	Minimum match (mm) formula	What does that mean? Your search results will each contain . . .
1 to 2	all	all keywords
3	n-1	at least 2 of your keywords
4 to 8	n-2	at least 2 (if you search for 4) up to a minimum of 6 (if you enter 8) keywords
9 or more	6+	at least 6 of your keywords

Without these words: exclude these terms from your search. This is very useful if you are searching for a common or ambiguous word, such as "church" which can be a building, a surname, institution or company.

Phrase: search for words that appear together in an article. This will search for the occurrence of your search words together in the order that you type them. This works well when searching for a forename, surname combination. e.g. searching for "joe bloggs" will give results where the two words are located together, rather than the occurrence of separate occurrences of 'joe' and 'bloggs' in an article.

PLEASE NOTE - the search engine ignores common words and characters known as stop words. These include words such as "where", "on", "and", "the", and "how", as well as certain single digits and single letters.

OTHER ADVANCED SEARCH OPTIONS

Region: use this dropdown to limit your results to the place of publication.

Date range: enter dates in the 'Date From' and 'Date To' boxes to restrict you results to a date range. Alternatively, fill in just one box to search for results on a specific day.

Article type: use this checklist to limit your results to particular types of content, e.g. article, advertisement, family notice. Use this with care as not all pages are fully categorised and you may hide good matches.

Tags: search by Tags that other users have added to articles. Not all articles have tags, but the number that do is growing every day.

Front page only: tick this box to limit your results to articles that appear on the front page only.

Your search results will appear in order of relevance, with the most relevant results first.

Seeing your search terms in search results

Every search result lists the first occurrence of your search term within the newspaper article or page to display how your search terms are used in context on that page. In the excerpt, your search terms are displayed in bold text so that you can quickly determine if that result is from a page you wish to view.

Searching for words with hyphens or punctuation

Hyphens: To search for hyphenated names or phrases, remove the hyphen from the name and try to combine both words, e.g. parkersmith rather than parker-smith. You can also search for the name as a phrase – just replace the hyphen with a space, e.g. parker smith. This will ensure you get results where the electronically translated text has not recognised the hyphen.

Punctuation: To search for names or phrases that include punctuation, remove the punctuation from the name to make it all one word, e.g. oleary rather than O'Leary. You can also try searching with a space where the punctuation would normally appear, e.g. o leary.

Glossary

Bookmarks: Any registered user can assign bookmarks to viewed items (all saved within My Research) to create separate folders in which to organise articles.

Comments: Any registered user can add comments underneath an item. Comments are public so can be seen by all users. Your Screen Name will appear with your Comment. Each comment can contain a maximum of 160 characters.

Content type: Any section within a newspaper page. This includes articles, illustrated articles, advertisements, family notices, miscellaneous.

My Research: Your personal account area. All the articles you view are automatically saved within My Research. You can bookmark articles into folders, organise your favourite articles and add My Notes to articles within My Research.

My Notes: As a registered user, you can create My Notes within your My Research area. My Notes are the private notes you can add to the articles saved in your My Research area to enrich your research. They are not public in the way that Comments (in the Viewer) are and will not appear on the original image. Other users cannot see your My Notes.

OCR text: 'Optical Character Recognition' text has been electronically converted from the original newspaper pages into fully searchable text on this website.

Screen Name: This is the name that will appear next to any public Comments that you add to an item on the Viewer page. You will be prompted to create your own Screen Name when you first add a Comment. You can edit your Screen Name in your My Account area at any time. If you choose not to create your own Screen Name, we will assign you a Screen Name of the first letter of your first name and the first letter of your last name, plus a designated number, e.g. ag123. Your Screen Name will be used as an identifier for Comments (or any other future public user-generated content) that you create in the public domain.

Tags: Any registered user can add tags to items. All tags are public, so all users can see and search across the tags. Adding tags to items is a really useful way to categorise them and will help other users when they search.