

Information Leaflet No.23

The Directories of London and the Home Counties

The uses of directories

London Metropolitan Archives' extensive collection includes volumes of trade, street, court and local directories, the earliest dating from 1677. These directories have been perceived as transient, ephemeral publications, to be discarded after subsequent editions were produced. Yet, taken as a set, they are of considerable value as a source of evidence of the social, commercial and topographical development of the metropolis.

Examples of use include:

- as a genealogical source that can be useful in tracing occupancy and trades of individuals.
- as a source for the history of businesses and institutions.
- to establish links between street naming and the occupations of the streets' inhabitants, eg. Milk Street was named after the milk sellers who traditionally traded in that street.
- to investigate the municipal development of London. The early directories chart the year by year development of street numbering and naming that followed the Court of Common Council's 1765 Bill, introducing street numbering to the City of London.

Points to remember when using the directories

- It is important to remember, when consulting directories, that they are not an official source of information but were produced commercially by independent publishers. Hence, especially before the later half of the nineteenth century, format and coverage of the directories are not consistent. Frederick Kelly's *Post Office London Directory* dominated the market from the mid nineteenth century but before this time other publishers, such as Holden, Johnstone and Underhill produced more comprehensive volumes.
- There is not uniform representation of trades in the directories. For example, the *Post Office London Directory* for 1880 lists 94% of solicitors practising in the city but only 56% of milk producers.
- Similarly, as London developed as a city, the area covered by the directories grew. It is sometimes necessary to consult the Suburban or Home Counties Directories for addresses that are now considered to be within Greater London.

- A large proportion of the London directories are held on microfilm and are available on open access in the Reference Room. Often the component parts of directories spread over more than one reel of film or films contain parts of more than one directory. The complete contents of each microfilm, in order, is listed at the beginning of every film.

Guide to the directories of London and the Home Counties held in London Metropolitan Archives

This guide is a summary of the London Metropolitan Archives' holdings. Covering dates for a series indicate holdings which will not necessarily include each edition within that period. For more detailed information please consult the comprehensive catalogue on top of the cabinet containing the directories on film, or consult a member of Reference Room staff.

Trade directories

(Ref 3.2)

Various publishers with a first edition in 1677, then from 1744 to present day. For precise dates and publishers refer to chronological catalogue on top of the directories film cabinet. The area covered is mainly central London, and publishers include Wakefield 1794 (15m. round) and Holden 1802-4 (10m.).

Contents:

- alphabetical list of owners of businesses: London 1677, complete guide 1744; with traders' occupations: London 1768.
- classified trade section: Andrews 1789.
- street arrangement: (many small streets omitted or, if included, list only businesses) Johnstone 1817.
- private residents: (relatively few in trade directories) Holden 1799.
- churches: complete guide from 1744.

Post Office London Directory (POLD)

(Ref 3.4)

The area covered is bounded by Kensington-Hackney-Poplar-North Greenwich-North Lambeth from 1801; the London postal area from 1958; and within the M25 from 1988.

Contents:

- trade sections: alphabetical from 1801, classified from 1842, and from 1988 shops omitted.
- street arrangement: from 1842 (many small streets omitted or, if included, list only businesses), from 1988 shops and street intersections omitted.
- private residents: from 1842 to 1959 (selective).
- churches: from 1838 to 1980
- official: from 1841, including an alphabetical list of persons holding situations under the Crown.

Post Office London Suburban Directory (POLSD)

(Ref 3.5)

From 1860 to 1903 (then continued as the *County Suburbs Directory*). The area covered is a 12 mile radius but excluding areas in *POLD*.

Contents:

- district entries consisting of alphabetical lists of tradesmen, and residents.
- trade sections: alphabetical and classified.
- court directory (selective).
- churches : from 1868.

County Suburbs Directory (CSD)

(Ref 3.5)

From 1904 to 1916 the *CSD* is the continuation of the *POLSD*. The areas covered are the districts in the London County Council area which are not covered by the *POLD*.

Contents:

- street arrangement.
- trade sections: alphabetical and classified.
- court directory (selective).
- churches.

From 1917 the *CSD* forms a section within *POLD*; from 1934 entries are amalgamated with other entries in *POLD*.

Post Office (or Kelly's) Directory of the Home Counties

(Ref 3.6)

From 1847-1938 and covers the counties of Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Middlesex, Surrey and Sussex.

Contents:

- street arrangement 1862 & 1866 only, for a few large suburbs.
- trades section: classified.
- court directory (selective).

Kelly's Directories Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Middlesex & Surrey

(Ref 3.6)

This series consists of separately bound county volumes from series above. Please consult the catalogue as there are years which are not included in the *Home Counties* directories above.

Local Directories

(Ref 3.7)

Various publishers from 1853 to 1977 with the majority published between the 1890s and 1930s. Please consult the complete list in the folders on top of the library subject catalogue. Many areas in Greater London are available, with good holdings of Middlesex and Surrey districts. (Note that Holborn, Finsbury, Shoreditch, Bethnal Green, Stepney, Bermondsey, Southwark and North Lambeth are not represented).

The contents vary between publishers; they may include alphabetical list of residents, alphabetical and classified trade sections and street section, or only some of these. Kelly, the most prolific publisher, included all sections although that of classified trades is very selective. The proportion of householders listed is greater than in the directories above.

All local directories must be ordered from the strongrooms using the normal order system.

Court guides

(Ref 3.1)

Various publishers from 1792 to 1938 and include the more affluent residential areas of central London.

Contents:

- streets section.
- private residents.

Bibliography

Atkins, P. J. *The directories of London 1677-1977*. Mansell Publishing, 1990. (R 3.5 ATK).

Goss. *The London directories 1677-1855*. Denis Archer, 1932. (3.5 GOS).

Introduction to London directories filmed by Guildhall Library, 1677-1889. At the beginning of microfilm MF001 or available from the Reference Room enquiry desk.

Other useful directories

Crockford's clerical directory, 1858 to date (53.0 CRO).

The medical directory, 1920 to 1991 (26.0 MED).

City Livery Companies guide, 1905 to 1996 (03.2 CIT).

The law list, 1852, 1883, 1889, 1911-15, 1922-1976 (21.7 LAW).

Published in July 2000 by the
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