

London Metropolitan Archives

Information Leaflet Number 37

Sources for tracing
Apothecaries, surgeons,
Physicians and other
medical practitioners



Important access information

Access to some of the records described in this leaflet may be at Guildhall Library. Please see our online catalogue or contact us for specific advice before making a special journey.

Introduction

The first part of this leaflet describes sources in the custody of London Metropolitan Archives. The second part provides general guidance for those tracing an individual who is known to have belonged to a particular branch of the medical profession, and suggests some potential sources held elsewhere.

Part1: Sources in the custody of London Metropolitan Archives

1. The Barbers' (or Barber-Surgeons') Company of London

Microfilm copies of membership and/or apprenticeship records of this Company, 1522-19th century are available (the Company withdrew the original records in 1992). Only those who practised their craft in or around the City of London are likely to be found as members, and only those young people who were bound to a master in or around the City are likely to be found apprenticed to a member of the Company. Until 1745 both barbers and surgeons belonged to this Company, but in 1745 the surgeons formed a separate Company of Surgeons, which later became the Royal College of Surgeons; thus a surgeon completing his apprenticeship after 1745 is unlikely to be found as a member of the Barbers' Company.

In addition to records of members and their apprentices, LMA also has records of the issue of certificates by the Barber-Surgeons' Company to persons intending to serve as a naval surgeon, 1705-1745 (CLC/L/BB/E/001/MS05264). They relate to prospective naval surgeons from the provinces as well as from London. After 1745 such certificates were issued by the new Company of Surgeons.

2. The Society of Apothecaries of London

Membership and/or apprenticeship records of this society, 1617-1890 are available. Only those who practised in or around the City of London are likely to be found as members, and only young people who were bound to a master in or around the City are likely to be found apprenticed to a member of the society. The persons most likely to be traceable in these records are those who practised the craft or trade of apothecary, chemist, or druggist; but persons unconnected with the craft may also be found as members, especially in the later records.

Persons described as 'physicians' or 'surgeons' are unlikely to be found as members. In addition to records of members and their apprentices, LMA also holds records of the Licentiatehip of the Society of Apothecaries (L.S.A.), 1815-1954. Licentiatehips were granted only to persons who had completed a course of training. Most licentiates then went on to undertake the work of a medical practitioner. Licentiatehips were granted under the Apothecaries Act of 1815, and there are no comparable records before that date; however some individuals who were already in practice applied for the society's licentiatehip in 1815 or shortly afterwards. Licentiatehips were granted to persons from the provinces as well as from London.

3. Ecclesiastical licensing of physicians, surgeons and midwives

LMA holds records of physicians and surgeons licensed by the Bishop of London, 1529-ca.1767 (DL/C/0330-0345; DL/B/A/002/MS09537/014-029; DL/A/A/021/MS09532/004-007 and DL/A/B/051/MS10116). An index of all the surviving records 1529-1725 can be found in J H Bloom and R R James, *Medical practitioners in the Diocese of London, 1935* (26.41 BLO). No physicians' or surgeons' licences were issued by the Bishop of London after ca.1767.

There are also records of licences issued by the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral, 1700-13 (CLC/313/K/A/001/MS25598/003); none survive for other dates.

The Bishop of London and the Dean of St Paul's were empowered by Act of Parliament in 1512 to issue licences to any physician or surgeon residing within seven miles of the City of London. However in practice very few, if any, of the licences issued by them were to persons living south of the Thames. The Bishop's licensing records cover the Diocese of London (Essex, Middlesex, the City of London, parts of Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire). Those of the Dean and Chapter cover their peculiar jurisdiction (19 parishes only, in London, Middlesex, Essex and Hertfordshire). Members of the (Royal) College of Physicians were considered exempt from the need to obtain a licence, and many others who practised medicine were not licensed by either the Bishop or the Dean and Chapter.

LMA also holds records of midwives licensed by the Bishop of London, c.1520-c.1739 (DL/C/0330-0345; DL/B/A/002/MS09537/014-022; DL/A/A/021/MS09532/001-005 and DL/A/B/051/MS10116), and the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's, 1662-1711 (CLC/313/K/A/001/MS25598/002). J H Bloom and R R James, *Medical practitioners in the Diocese of London* (as above) lists certificates issued for midwives in 1526, 1557 and 1661. There is also a list of midwives appearing in Vicar Generals' books 1601-44 in the Diocese of London binders on the shelves in the Information Area. This list was compiled by staff in 1995 and is not exhaustive.

LMA holds office act books for cases mainly concerning schoolmasters, midwives and surgeons 1678-1706 (DL/C/0328-329).

LMA holds no other records of episcopal licensing of medical practitioners south of the River Thames.

For records of the Diocese of Winchester try the Hampshire Record Office website - www3.hants.gov.uk/archives

For records of Diocese of Rochester try the Kent History and Library Centre website <http://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/history-and-heritage/kent-history-and-library-centre>

For medical licences issued by the Archbishop of Canterbury see M Barber, A Directory of doctors and surgeons licensed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, 1535-1775 (typescript 1997, 2000) available at Lambeth Palace Library, London SE1 7JU. The introduction and indexes are also available online at www.lambethpalacelibrary.org/files/Medical_Licences.pdf

Part 2: Branches of the Medical Profession

1. Physicians

The term 'physician' traditionally described a person who diagnosed internal disorders, as opposed to one who performed surgery or dispensed medicines. However, some physicians, particularly in the 19th century, also worked in other areas of medical practice. Biographies of physicians who were fellows, licentiates, or extra-licentiates of the (Royal) College of Physicians of London 1518-1825 can be found in W. Munk, Roll of the Royal College of Physicians, vols. 1-3, available at LMA (26.412 MUN), Guildhall Library, and many other reference libraries. Vols. 4-7 (entitled Munk's Roll) cover 1826-1983 but give details of fellows only. Enquiries about members or licentiates after 1826 who did not become fellows should be made to the Royal College of Physicians of London, 11 St Andrew's Place, Regent's Park, London NW1 4LE.

However, many individuals who called themselves physicians (particularly those outside London, before the 19th century) did not belong to the Royal College. Some physicians, particularly those in Scotland, may have belonged to a Scottish college. Enquiries about members of the Scottish colleges should be made to the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, 234-42 St Vincent Street, Glasgow, G2 5RJ or to the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, 9 Queen Street, Edinburgh EH2 1JQ.

Physicians in London and the vicinity can sometimes be traced at LMA in ecclesiastical licensing records 1529-c.1767, or records of the licentiatehip of the Society of Apothecaries, 1815-1954: see the first part of this leaflet. Details of physicians practising since 1845 can be found in Medical Directories and Medical Registers: see paragraph 7 below.

2. Surgeons

The term 'surgeon' traditionally described a person who performed operations with the use of surgical instruments. However some surgeons, particularly in the 19th century, also worked in other areas of medical practice. Surgeons in London and the vicinity between the early 16th and mid 18th centuries can often be traced at LMA, in the records of the Barber-Surgeons' Company or in ecclesiastical licensing records (see the first part of this leaflet).

For information about surgeons, whether in London or elsewhere, who belonged to the Company of Surgeons, 1745-1800, or the Royal College of Surgeons (of England), 1801-date, application should be made to the Royal College of Surgeons of England, 35-43 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2A 3PE (email library@rcseng.ac.uk; telephone 020 7869 6555). Please note that anyone wishing to consult historical material must make an appointment in advance: at least one day's prior notice is required. Biographies of fellows (but not other members) of the college 1843-1973 can be found in D Power, Plarr's Lives of the Fellows of the Royal College of Surgeons, 5 vols. (1930-81), available at Guildhall Library and many other reference libraries.

However, many individuals who called themselves surgeons (particularly those outside London, before the 19th century) did not belong to the Company or the College. Some surgeons, particularly those in Scotland, may have belonged to a Scottish college. Enquiries about members of the Scottish colleges should be made to the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, 234-42 St Vincent Street, Glasgow G2 5RJ, or to the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, Nicolson Street, Edinburgh, EH8 9DW.

LMA also has records of those surgeons who obtained the licentiatehip of the Society of Apothecaries, 1815-1954: see the first part of this leaflet. Details of surgeons practising since 1845 can be found in Medical Directories and Medical Registers: see paragraph 7 below.

3. Apothecaries

The term 'apothecary' traditionally described a person who dispensed medicines and who would now be called a chemist or a druggist. If such a person lived in London or its vicinity, 1617-1890, it may be possible to trace him in the membership and/or apprenticeship records of the Society of Apothecaries: see the first part of this leaflet. If these records do not provide the information sought, assistance may be obtainable from the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, 1 Lambeth High Street, London SE1 7JN.

In the 18th and 19th centuries many individuals who called themselves apothecaries began to prescribe as well as dispense medicines, thus undertaking work which would now be considered that of a general medical practitioner. Some persons in this

category may be traceable in the membership and/or apprenticeship records of the Society of Apothecaries, or in the sources given under 'physicians' and 'surgeons' above. However in the period before 1815 many practitioners (particularly those outside London) belonged to no professional body, and their activities may well be unrecorded. From 1815 onwards most medical practitioners who were described as apothecaries can be found in the licentiateship records of the Society of Apothecaries: see the first part of this leaflet. Details of medical practitioners from 1845 can be found in Medical Directories and Medical Registers: see paragraph 7 below.

4. Army and Navy surgeons and other Armed Forces medical officers

Those serving in the Army, 1660-1960, are listed in A Peterkin, W Johnston and R Drew, *Commissioned officers in the medical services of the British Army*, 2 vols. (1968), available at Guildhall Library and many other reference libraries.

Prospective Navy surgeons had to be examined by, and receive certificates from, the Barber-Surgeons' Company or (from 1745) its successor bodies. LMA has records of certificates issued 1705-45: see the first part of this leaflet. More detailed information about naval surgeons can be found in the Admiralty records, 1660-19th century, at The National Archives, Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Surrey TW9 4DU: these are described in Bruno Pappalardo, *Tracing Your Naval Ancestors* (PRO readers' guide 24, 2002). Guildhall Library has a typescript index of naval surgeons' certificates 1700-54, taken from Admiralty sources. From 1793 surgeons are listed in most of the annual volumes of the Navy List, available at LMA (62.3 NAV, 1968-88 only), Guildhall Library and some other reference libraries.

Note: surgeons serving on board ship with the East India Company (not part of the Armed Services) can be found in Anthony Farrington, *A Biographical Index of East India Company Maritime Service Officers 1600-1834* (The British Library, 1999), available at Guildhall Library and many other reference libraries.

Details of medical officers in all branches of the armed forces from 1845 can be found in Medical Directories: see paragraph 7 below.

5. Doctors, general practitioners

The term 'doctor' can refer to a person in any or all of the four categories above. Strictly speaking, however, a doctor is someone who has been granted a doctor's degree by a university. Not all such degrees are doctorates of medicine: a person described as 'doctor' could be a doctor of philosophy, theology, law, science etc, and may thus be unconnected with the medical profession.

The term 'general practitioner' did not come into use until the 1820s. Many, perhaps most, general practitioners obtained the licentiateship of the Society of Apothecaries: see the first part of this leaflet. Some, however, described themselves as surgeons or

(more rarely) physicians, and obtained another qualification as well as, or instead of, the licentiateship.

Details of the qualification(s) of medical practitioners from 1845 can be found in Medical Directories and Medical Registers: see paragraph 7 below.

6. Dentists

Details of dentists from 1866 can be found in Medical Directories and the Dentist's Register: see paragraph 7 below.

7. Printed sources

There are a number of general published works giving biographical details of medical practitioners. Since 1845 an annual list of most practitioners has been published in the Medical Directories; LMA has copies from 1912-1991 (26.0 MED; with gaps). Guildhall Library has an almost complete series from 1847 to date. Since 1859 the General Medical Council has published an official annual list of qualified practitioners, known as the Medical Register. LMA has copies from 1895-1987 (26.41 MED); Guildhall Library has an almost complete series from 1861 to date. Both publications may also be available at other reference libraries. Both contain fairly comprehensive alphabetical lists of those practising, or qualified to practise, at the date of publication, and record dates of qualifications obtained. The Medical Directories give additional details including posts held in hospitals and the armed services and other official appointments. Both publications cover the whole of the British Isles, and include limited information about persons qualified in Britain but practising overseas. The Medical Directories include dentists from 1866. LMA also holds the Dentist's Register 1937-1987 (26.6 DEN, with gaps); Guildhall Library has copies 1976 and 1980 to date.

Information about medical practitioners can sometimes be found in printed sources of a more general nature, such as trade directories. LMA has an extensive collection of trade, street, court and local directories for London and the Home Counties, mostly dating from the early 18th century; see Information Leaflet No.62 'The Directories of London and the Home Counties' for more details. Guildhall Library has London directories from the 1730s to date, and provincial directories from the late 18th century. Some directories may also be available at other reference libraries.

Medical practitioners and their apprentices, 1710-74, can sometimes be traced in The Apprentices of Great Britain, a typescript index commissioned by the Society of Genealogists, a microfiche copy of which is available at Guildhall Library. It can also be seen at the Society of Genealogists, 14 Charterhouse Buildings, London EC1M 7BA, and at the National Archives, Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Surrey, TW9 4DU.

Details of the careers of those medical practitioners who were university graduates can often be found in published university membership lists. Biographical registers of

members of Oxford University, c.1200-1886, and of Cambridge University, 1261-1900, are available at Guildhall Library, together with some registers for other English, Scottish and Irish universities. University membership lists may also be available at other reference libraries.

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