

London Metropolitan Archives

Information Leaflet Number 40

Sessions records for the City of London and Southwark



The records held by London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) relating to criminal trials within the City of London and the ancient Borough of Southwark are summarised below. Please bear in mind that court records before 1733 may be in Latin and that modern court records are closed for 30 years.

Gaol Delivery Sessions CLA/047

For centuries, the Sessions House and nearby Newgate Gaol in the Old Bailey in the City of London were used to imprison and try criminals from both the City of London and the County of Middlesex. Many people held in prisons elsewhere in the City or County would be transferred to Newgate Gaol to be tried at the next Session of Gaol Delivery. These Gaol Delivery Sessions (and the general Sessions of Oyer and Terminer normally held at the same time) usually dealt with more serious offences such as treason (including counterfeiting coinage) or felonies such as murder, burglary and larceny. The original trial records for London cases, i.e. offences arising within the City of London form part of the City of London Sessions Records (CLA/047), but records for offences committed within the County of Middlesex were kept separately at the time and form part of the Middlesex Sessions Records also held by LMA. See Information leaflet No.39 'A Brief Guide to the Middlesex Sessions'.

In 1834 the Gaol Delivery Sessions were widened with the establishment of the Central Criminal Court [CCC] at the Sessions House, Old Bailey. The CCC could try capital and other offences (such as murder, forgery, perjury, conspiracy and assault) arising within the City of London, the County of Middlesex and parts of adjoining counties such as Essex, Kent and Surrey (including the Borough of Southwark). It could also try crimes committed on the high seas or abroad. CCC trial records are held at The National Archives, Ruskin Avenue, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU, telephone 020 8876 3444, (TNA refs: CRIM 1, 4 and 5 etc).

On rare occasions, Special Sessions of Oyer and Terminer were held at Guildhall. Some notable state and other trials from the 14th to the 17th centuries are described by JE Price in *A Descriptive Account of the Guildhall of the City of London* (London, 1886) (ref: 16.3 PRI).

Sessions of the Peace CLA/047

Offences classed as misdemeanours (such as perjury, fraud, riot and assault) were usually tried at the Sessions of the Peace for the City of London which often began at the Guildhall but could be adjourned to the Old Bailey. In the 18th and early 19th centuries the Sessions of the Peace also dealt with other business such as settlement cases or appeals against conviction or sentence at lower courts. After 1834, however, more serious offences in the metropolitan area were often tried at the CCC and from

c.1840 the business at each session declined noticeably. Sessions of the Peace were abolished by the 1971 Courts Act which set up the modern Crown Court system.

Records

From 1785 there are separate series of minute books and files for sessions of gaol delivery and sessions of the peace. Brief details of the trials are recorded in the Sessions Minute Books as follows:

- Gaol delivery, oyer & terminer and peace 1612-1785 (CLA/047/LJ/04)
- Gaol delivery and oyer & terminer 1785-1834 (CLA/047/LJ/05)
- Peace 1785-1971 (CLA/047/LJ/06, CLA/047/LJ/07)

Other documents such as recognizances (bonds to appear e.g. to answer a charge or give evidence) and indictments (detailing the alleged offence, usually with a note of the verdict and sentence, if any) are filed on the Sessions Files as follows:

- Gaol delivery, oyer & terminer and peace 1568, 1604-1785 (CLA/047/LJ/01)
- Gaol delivery and oyer & terminer 1785-1835 (CLA/047/LJ/02)
- Peace 1785-1927 (CLA/047/LJ/06, CLA/047/LJ/03)

There are name indexes to City of London indictments Dec 1714-Jan 1927 (CLA/047/LJ/10).

Sometimes depositions and examinations of the accused and any witnesses can be found in the original Sessions Papers 1648-1833 (CLA/047/LJ/13) but these papers are incomplete for most types of session. The sessions papers 1690-1796 have been digitised by the London Lives project and can be searched their website.

For Gaol Delivery trials only, you may find more information in the printed transcripts known as Old Bailey Sessions Papers. These are indexed and cover both City of London and Middlesex cases. An incomplete set is held by LMA for the years 1734-1745, 1761-1779, 1835-1837 and 1839-1850, (ref: 60.32 PRO). but an almost complete set of OBSP 1684-1913 (1714-1834 additionally on microfilm) is held by Guildhall Library, Aldermanbury, London EC2P2EJ, e-mail guildhall.library@cityoflondon.gov.uk

The Old Bailey Sessions Papers can be viewed and searched online on The Proceedings of the Old Bailey.

Petty Sessions CLA/004, CLA/005

In the City of London, Justices of the Peace [JPs] could act alone to deal with minor offences which elsewhere required several JPs. By charter, the Lord Mayor and senior

Aldermen (from 1741 all the Aldermen) were ex-officio JPs. Petty Sessions were held before the Lord Mayor, originally at Guildhall but from the mid 18th century in the Justice Room at the new Mansion House. In 1737 a second Justice Room was set up at Guildhall where regular sittings were held before one of the other Aldermen. Aldermen continue to form part of the bench of JPs who now hear City cases at the City of London Magistrates Court (the modern successor to the Justice Rooms) in Queen Victoria Street.

Records

For City of London Petty Sessions, brief details only are given in the Lord Mayor's Waiting Books 1624-1733 (with gaps) (CLA/004/01/01) and in the Minute Books and Court Registers from the 18th century onwards for the Mansion House Justice Room (CLA/004) and the Guildhall Justice Room and City of London Magistrates' Court (CLA/005).

You may find more information about such trials if they were reported in newspapers such as the City Press (succeeded by the City Recorder) from 1857, which is held on microfilm in Guildhall Library.

For Petty Sessions cases you will need to have some idea of the date of a trial before starting to search the original court records in LMA.

Southwark Sessions CLA/046, CLA/031

By a royal charter of Edward III in 1327 the town of Southwark was granted to the citizens of London, in consequence of felons, thieves and malefactors escaping there from the City. To strengthen the jurisdiction of the City, Edward IV granted a charter in more precise terms in 1462. This gave the citizens powers beyond the administration of justice and included regulation of bread, wine, ale etc, the right to hold an annual fair, and other royal privileges with the Borough.

A further charter of Edward VI dated 23 April 1550 was granted with the intention that Southwark should be incorporated into the City, making the inhabitants subject to the City law and extending the jurisdiction of the City Courts. The Mayor, Recorder and Aldermen who had served the office of mayoralty were appointed Justices of the Peace for the Town and Borough of Southwark and held regular Sessions of the Peace there. For a brief period in the 19th century, a senior Alderman also sat daily in Southwark holding petty sessions but this revived magistracy lapsed after c.1840 since the Aldermen had no jurisdiction over the Metropolitan Police. The City's jurisdiction in Southwark is explained in more detail by DJ Johnson in *Southwark and the City* (OUP 1969) (ref: 84.1 LON).

Records

The records include Sessions Books 1667-1929 (CLA/046/01), Sessions Files 1667-1870 (CLA/046/02), Sessions Papers 1654, 1667-1784, 1814-1846 (CLA/046/03) and a Record of business done before the Southwark Justice, including committals to and discharges from the Southwark Compter [Prison], notes of warrants issued, affidavits taken etc. 1776-1781 (CLA/031/03/001).

Unusually there are also personal details (such as physical characteristics or age) for prisoners committed for trial from the Southwark Compter 1814-1842 (CLA/031/01/009).

Records of other courts with jurisdiction over Southwark

Surrey Assizes

The Surrey Assizes dealt with more serious offences such as homicide, highway robbery, rape, assault, theft of goods worth 12d or more, coining, forgery and witchcraft, which were not normally tried by the Sessions of the Peace. The records are in the care of The National Archives.

Surrey Sessions of the Peace

Records are in the care of the Surrey History Centre, 130 Goldsworth Road, Woking GU21 6ND Tel: 01483 518 737 email shs@surreycc.gov.uk.

Newington Petty Sessions PS/NEW

The Petty Sessions for the 'East Half Hundred of Brixton and the Town and Borough of Southwark' dealt mainly with the licensing of public houses. The records which are held by LMA include court minutes 1794-1966, and calendars and registers of licences 1775-1953.

Tower Bridge Police Court, later Tower Bridge Magistrates Court PS/TOW

An Act of Parliament in 1792 established seven 'Public Offices' (later Police Courts) in the central metropolitan area where paid magistrates would attend at fixed times to deal with an increasing number of criminal offences. One of these was at the Union Hall, Union Street, Southwark, serving a large part of south London including Southwark and Lambeth. In 1845 the district was split between two new courts, Lambeth Police Court and Southwark Police Court which was situated in Blackman Street, Borough. The court moved to Tooley Street in 1905 and was renamed Tower Bridge Police Court.

The records which have been deposited at LMA comprise court registers 1889 -1953 and court minute books 1914 -1931.

Southwark Fire Court of Judicature CLA/040/02/005-006

This was set up after a fire in Southwark on 26 May 1676. The records include fire decrees June-July 1677.

Southwark Borough Court CLA/040/02/008-013

The records comprise a notebook of cases 1753-1754, a court book 1856-1880 and a few papers c.1824-1850 and 1937.

Church Courts

LMA holds the records of the Commissary Court of Surrey (DW/PC) and the Archdeaconry Court of Surrey (DW/PA).

Manorial Courts

The 1550 charter granted by Edward VI to the City of London made the Mayor, commonalty and citizens lords of the three royal manors at the southern end of London Bridge, the Great Liberty, Guildable and King's Manors. The records of these manors held by LMA (CLA/043) include proceedings of the Court Leet and Court Baron for the 16th century and jury presentments, verdicts and proceedings for individual manors from the 17th century onwards (with large gaps).

LMA also holds court records for Clink Liberty 1690-1827 (with gaps) (M/92/C, Ms 01513) and court books and minute books for Paris Garden Manor 1721-1936 (M/92, E/LET/01/001) as well as a map dating from 1627 (M/92/143). Lists of the records of these two manors can be viewed on the Manorial Documents Register on The National Archives website. However this does not include the records of the Great Liberty, Guildable and King's Manors held by LMA.

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