Finding Primary Sources
1. Introduction

As a history student you will rely heavily on the resources provided by the Library, both print and electronic, and this guide focuses on the types of primary sources available at York and how to access them.

Where to find help

If you need help at any time during your course, you can:

• ask at the main desk in the Library
• email: lib-enquiry@york.ac.uk
• contact the Academic Liaison Librarian for History, Kirsty Whitehead (lib-history@york.ac.uk).

The Library’s website is the main source of information about the Library, its resources and all of the services it provides. You will find tips for using the Library, contact details, information about history resources, and guides to using our collections and electronic resources:
http://www.york.ac.uk/library/

The IT Services website contains information about how to use the campus computing, printing and copying facilities as well as training material on using different software:
http://www.york.ac.uk/it-services/

Tips for reading texts online

You will find that an increasing number of the texts which you are required to read are online. Whilst this is good news for improving access to resources, we understand that reading long texts online does not suit everyone.

There is a useful website which gives you tips on reading on-screen and might help to make your studies easier. In particular, have a look at the Quick Guide which you can download – the link is on the right-hand side of the page:
http://readingonscreen.wordpress.com/

Planning your search

For tips on planning your search please refer to the Finding Secondary Sources handbook.


2. Primary sources available online

The University Library & Archives provide access to a vast array of primary sources of interest to those undertaking historical research. The advent of digital technology has opened up research opportunities which until recently would have been almost impossible. Researchers now have access to rare manuscripts online; difficult to decipher handwritten texts have been converted to easy-to-read web formats; documents and texts which previously had to be poured over in print or on microfilm can now be searched quickly and easily for their common themes.

All of the Library’s electronic resources can be accessed via the E-resources Guide or the Subject Guides:
http://subjectguides.york.ac.uk/e-resources
http://subjectguides.york.ac.uk/history

This section lists some of the online primary sources available at the University of York, divided into broad categories. It is intended as an introduction and you should use the Subject Guide for History to find out more information about each resource listed and for links to open the resources. The list, which is far from exhaustive, concentrates on British resources, but international resources are available too.

Where available, online guides to searching these resources can be accessed by clicking the button next to their entries on the E-resources Guide or Subject Guide.

Full Text Online Resources

The resources listed here contain the full text of books, pamphlets, letters, diaries, personal papers and other documents from 1475 to the present day. Many of the resources contain a combination of primary and secondary source material. In the Subject Guide these resources will be listed in the relevant period category, so look out for the ones relevant to the period you are researching:

- Early English Books Online (EEBO)
- Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO)
- Empire Online
- Victorian Popular Culture
- London Low Life
- Mass Observation Online
- The Gerritsen Collection – Women’s History Online, 1543 – 1945
- Perdita Manuscripts: Women Writers, 1500–1700
Newspapers

Some titles are available as individual archives, for example:

- Daily Mirror, 1903–present
- Financial Times Historical Archive, 1888–2006
- Guardian, 1821–2003
- Observer, 1791–2003
- Illustrated London News Historical Archive, 1842–2003
- Times Digital Archive, 1785–1985
- Times of India, 1838–2003

In addition to the single titles above, the following collections of British newspapers are available:

- British Newspapers, 1600–1950 (includes the Burney Collection and 19th Century British Library Newspapers)
- 17th & 18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers
- 19th Century British Library Newspapers
- Nexis UK

British Official Publications

Official publications are documents and information produced by government departments and central government organisations. They include parliamentary publications, legislation, policy documents, discussion documents, statistics and reports. The following collections are particularly important:

- Parliament Rolls of Medieval England
- State Papers Online:
  Part 1: The Tudors, 1509–1603: State Papers Domestic
  Part 2: The Tudors, 1509–1603: State Papers Foreign
  Part 4: The Stuarts and Commonwealth, 1603–1714: State Papers Foreign
- House of Commons Parliamentary Papers: 18th century – 21st century
- Hansard 1803–2005

Film resources

Moving images are excellent primary material for studying the twentieth century. Many of the collections provide background information on the footage:

- InView: Moving Images in the Public Sphere
• British Council Film Collection
• Screen Online
• National Archives Focus on Film