

Local Studies Library

The Local Studies Library was created in 1973 from the local history, genealogical, archaeological and topographical holdings of the Somerset Library Service, and until 1996 was kept at Taunton Castle. Today, since its move to the Somerset Heritage Centre in 2010, it is a collection of more than 20,000 published works relating to the history, people and places of Somerset, including books, newspapers, pamphlets, photographs and ephemera.

Holdings of the Library

Books

The Local Studies Library holds published works relating to all aspects of Somerset life. The books are arranged on the open shelves in numerical order by subject. There are also a large number of books relating to specific places, and these are organised alphabetically by place name. As well as the books on the open Searchroom shelves, there is a substantial collection of older works held in the strongrooms, as well as 'Somersettings', the county's collection of literature and poetry inspired by Somerset.

The books in the public searchroom are self-service and may be removed from the shelves by visitors for consultation: they are for reference use only and may not be borrowed. Please see Accessing the Library below for more information.

Newspapers

Almost all of Somerset's weekly newspapers are held on microfilm at the Heritage Centre dating from the earliest, the Western Gazette, beginning in 1737. Most of those published before 1974 are available on self-service in the Searchroom and can be viewed and printed out using a reader-printer. Newspapers published after that date are held in the strongrooms and can be requested. Newspaper reader-printers are very popular, so booking a visit in advance is strongly advised. Please ask a member of staff about making an appointment.

Pre-1974 newspapers may be taken from their cabinets by visitors and put in the returns tray when finished with. Please ask a member of staff about ordering more recent editions.

Parish Packs

These packs include a copy of the 1st Ed. Ordnance Survey map of the area, transcriptions from the Domesday Book, Hearth Tax and Protestation Returns and population figures. Each entry from the trade directories relating to a single place have been copied and collected together in date order, making a survey of a town or hamlet much easier. There is no parish pack for Taunton, Yeovil, Bridgwater or Weston-super-Mare, but there are place-specific trade directories published for each of these towns available: see Quick Reference below.

The parish packs are stored in the blue folders on the library shelves at the end of the oversize section and are organised alphabetically by place.

Quick Reference

- **Clerical Directories** list the education and positions held by Anglican clergy and can be useful for tracing the movements of relatives who had been ordained: directories are available from 1902 to date.
- **County Trade Directories** list the cities, town villages and hamlets of the county with a brief description of the area, including noble families, agriculture, charities and churches and include a list of residents, both private and commercial. These lists were compiled by subscription and therefore not all residents were included but they are a useful starting point for finding relatives: county directories are available from 1822 to 1935.
- **Town Trade Directories** do the same as above but for a much smaller area. There are town directories available for: **Taunton** (1864, 1887, 1900, 1902, 1906, and every two years between 1928-1973) [T TAU]; **Bridgwater** (1883, 1897, 1908, 1936, 1937, 1938, and every 2-3 years between 1951-1973) [T BRI1]; **Weston-super-Mare** (1946-1974) [T WES19] and **Yeovil** (1878, 1883, 1888, 1889, 1902, and every 2-3 years between 1938-1974) [T YEO1]
- **Wills Indexes** can help trace both an individual, and help identify spouses, siblings and children. Indexes are available for the Office Duty wills, probate of the Taunton Archdeaconry and the Prerogative Court of Canterbury. See the Wills leaflet for more information.
- **How-To Guides:** in researching family and local history there will always be problems that cannot be solved easily. Here are a number of guides and almanacs which deal with specific issues, whether how to read a particular type of record such as wills or manorial records, how to research a particular type of ancestor such as a bargeman or one who died at sea, or how to use particular resources to further your research such as the internet, or The National Archives.

All of the Quick Reference books have a blue spot on their spine for identification and are shelved facing the work tables next to the public computer terminals

Photographs

A collection of approximately 40,000 photographs, compiled from a variety of sources including amateur and professional photographers, council departments and illustrations of books is available on filing cards with contact prints for browsing in the Searchroom. They are organised alphabetically by place and include the name of the photographer, details of the photograph and the date it was taken. Copies of these photographs are available through the Research Service: please ask for a **Negative Scanning Order Form** for information on charges.

Periodicals

The following periodicals are available on open access in the Searchroom:

- Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society proceedings (SANHS)
- Somerset Record Society publications
- Somerset & Dorset Notes & Queries
- Somerset Industrial Archaeology Society (SIAS)
- Bristol Industrial Archaeology Society (BIAS)

There are also a large number of periodicals available from the archives, including:

- Parish magazines
- Community magazines

- Local authority publications
- Directories and almanacs
- Leisure and tourism publications
- School prospectuses
- Academic serials

Please ask a member of staff to see a full list.

Accessing the Library

In person

The main collections of the library are on open access shelves in the Searchroom at the Heritage Centre. The items which are held in the archives may be ordered either in advance or on the day: there are no access restrictions to items in the library, and it is not necessary to wear gloves while using the items from the Local Studies Library.

Remote Enquiries

We may be able to answer an enquiry by telephone, letter or email, though longer enquiries should be directed to the Research Service: please see the **Research Service** leaflet for information on the process and charges for having this type of work undertaken.

Through your public library

In certain cases a library item may be transferred to a public library for a visitor to use if it is impractical for them to visit in person. This will be dependent on the age and condition of the item, and the on the condition that it remain in the branch library while being used. Please ask a member of staff for more information.

New Stock and Donations

The library continues to purchase new titles for the collection, as well as filling gaps with older editions where possible. We are also happy to receive donations to the library, provided they are relevant in some way to the people, places and history of Somerset. If you are aware of a new publication, or have an item you would like to donate to the library, please address your enquiry to the Archives & Local Studies Supervisor.

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South West Heritage Trust is a charity and a company limited by guarantee registered in England.
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