

Research

Guide

Police

Archives

Why Use This Guide?

Accessing police archives in the UK and Ireland can be essential for researchers, historians, and those interested in the history of law enforcement, crime, and societal changes. This guide aims to provide a structured approach for individuals seeking to explore police archives, offering insights into what these archives contain, where to begin your research, and how to properly reference your findings.

The Archives: What Kind of Things You May Be Able to Find

Police archives in the UK and Ireland house a diverse array of materials that provide deep insights, here are the key types of materials you might encounter:

- **Crime Reports and Case Files:** Delve into detailed crime reports and case files to understand the nature of criminal activities, investigations conducted, and the outcomes of legal proceedings. These documents often include witness statements, forensic reports, and police officers' notes.
- **Personnel Records:** Discover information about police officers who served during different periods. Personnel records may include service histories, promotions, commendations, and disciplinary actions.
- **Court Records:** Explore records related to criminal trials, court proceedings, and legal actions involving the police. These documents provide a nuanced perspective on how the legal system interacted with law enforcement.
- **Photographs and Mugshots:** Visual materials, including crime scene photographs, images of suspects, and mugshots, offer a visual narrative of police work and criminal investigations.
- **Registers and Logs:** Peruse official registers and logs that document various police activities. This includes patrol logs, arrest records, and communication logs, providing a day-to-day account of police operations.
- **Policy Documents:** Examine manuals, guidelines, and policy documents that outline the procedures and practices followed by the police. Changes in policies over time can reflect shifts in law enforcement strategies and societal expectations.
- **Correspondence:** Dive into letters, memoranda, and official communications exchanged within the police department and with external entities. Correspondence sheds light on administrative decisions, inter-departmental communication, and responses to critical incidents.
- **Newspaper Clippings:** Explore press coverage of significant crimes, investigations, and police activities. Newspaper clippings provide a public perspective on law enforcement and can highlight the media's role in shaping public perceptions.
- **Community Engagement Records:** Investigate materials related to community policing efforts, outreach programs, and interactions between the police and the public. Understanding community engagement initiatives can provide insights into the evolving relationship between law enforcement and society.
- **Historical Artefacts:** Some police archives may house physical artefacts such as old uniforms, equipment, badges, and historical memorabilia. These artefacts contribute to a tangible understanding of the material culture of law enforcement.

By exploring these materials, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges, successes, and transformations within law enforcement in the UK and Ireland. The varied nature of these archives allows for a nuanced exploration of the dynamic relationship between the police and the communities they serve over time.

Examples

In the UK and Ireland, several institutions house police archives that researchers can explore to delve into the history of law enforcement. Here are some examples!

Metropolitan Police Archives:

The Metropolitan Police Service Archives house historical records related to policing in London. Researchers can access crime records, personnel files, and other materials that reflect the history of the Metropolitan Police, one of the oldest police forces in the world.

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), Belfast:

PRONI holds a variety of records, including those related to law enforcement in Northern Ireland. Researchers can explore documents that provide insights into the history of policing in the region.

Dublin City Archives, Dublin:

Dublin City Archives house records related to the history of Dublin, including materials related to law enforcement. Researchers can find documents and photographs that illustrate the development of policing in the city.

Local Archives and Libraries:

In addition to national and specialised police archives, local archives and libraries across the UK and Ireland often preserve materials related to regional policing. Researchers may discover valuable records at the city or county level, providing a more localised perspective.

Before planning a visit, researchers should contact these institutions to confirm the availability of specific materials, access requirements, and any restrictions on certain collections.



Officers on parade in Cheltenham Police Station, Crescent Place.
(Gloucestershire Police Archives URN 2464)

The National Archives, London:

The National Archives in the UK holds a wealth of historical records, including those related to law enforcement. Researchers can find documents from various government departments, including the Home Office and individual police forces.

Greater Manchester Police Museum and Archives, Manchester:

This museum and archives centre preserves the history of policing in Greater Manchester. It offers access to documents, photographs, and artefacts that showcase the evolution of law enforcement in the region.

Garda Síochána Historical Society, Dublin:

The Garda Síochána Historical Society, in collaboration with the Garda Museum, houses historical records related to the Garda Síochána, the police force of the Republic of Ireland. The archives include photographs, documents, and artefacts

Where to Start

Here are some steps to kick start your research in navigating a police archive in the UK and Ireland:

Identify Research Focus: Clearly define your research objectives. Are you exploring a specific historical event, changes in policing strategies, or the impact of law enforcement on communities? Knowing your focus will guide your search.

Contact Archivists and Staff: Archivists are invaluable resources. Reach out to them before your visit to discuss your research goals, inquire about specific collections, and confirm any access requirements.

Consider Oral Histories: If available, explore oral history collections related to law enforcement. Interviews with retired police officers, community members, and experts can provide unique perspectives on historical events and policing practices.

Explore Online Resources: Check if the archive has an online catalogue. Some police archives have digitised portions of their collections, allowing researchers to explore materials remotely. Online catalogues, finding aids, and digital databases can be valuable tools for preliminary research.

Review Secondary Sources: Before delving into primary sources, review existing literature on the topic. Secondary sources can provide context, highlight gaps in knowledge, and suggest potential areas for exploration in the archive.

Understand Access Procedures: Familiarise yourself with the archive's access procedures. Some archives may require appointments, while others might have specific hours of operation.

Select Relevant Archives: Different police departments and national archives in the UK and Ireland may house distinct collections. For national-level research, consider institutions like The National Archives (UK) or the National Archives of Ireland. For local studies, contact individual police departments or consult regional archives.

Visit Local Libraries and Historical Societies: In addition to police archives, local libraries and historical societies often preserve materials related to law enforcement history. Explore their holdings to gain a comprehensive understanding of the context surrounding police activities in specific regions.

Network with Researchers: Attend conferences, seminars, or workshops related to law enforcement history. Networking with fellow researchers can offer valuable insights, potential collaboration opportunities, and recommendations for fruitful archive exploration.

Plan Your Visit: If an on-site visit is necessary, plan your research days effectively. Prioritise collections based on relevance to your research focus, and allocate sufficient time for thorough exploration. Consider any travel and accommodation arrangements if needed.

Funding Opportunities: Explore potential funding opportunities for your research, such as grants or scholarships offered by academic institutions, research organisations, or archival institutions.

Taking these steps ensures a well-prepared and efficient approach to using a police archive in the UK and Ireland. By investing time in the initial stages of your research, you'll maximise the value of your archive exploration and enhance the depth of your findings!

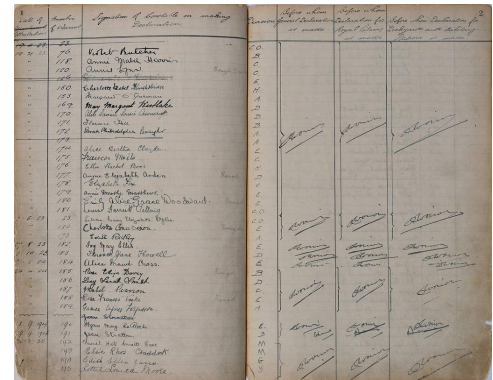
Searching the Archive and Using the Collections

Catalogues and Finding Aids: Utilise the archive's catalogues and finding aids to identify relevant collections. Pay attention to keywords, dates, and collection references.

Digitised Collections: Check if the archive has digitised materials or online databases. This can be especially useful for remote research.

Note-Taking: Keep detailed notes during your research. Record the source, date, and any relevant details about the materials you consult.

Handle Materials Carefully: If you are accessing physical documents, follow the archive's guidelines for handling materials to ensure their preservation.



Signatures from 1923 Attestation Book, these are the first women officers in the Met who had the power of arrest (Metropolitan Police Archives, London)

Referencing Your Research

Citation Style: Follow the citation style specified by your institution or field (e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago).

Documenting Sources: Include details such as the archive name, collection title, document type, and reference number in your citations.

Permissions and Copyright: Be aware of any copyright restrictions and obtain necessary permissions if you plan to use reproductions of documents in your research.

By following this guide, researchers can navigate police archives effectively, uncovering valuable insights into the history of law enforcement, crime, and social dynamics in the UK and Ireland.