

East Midlands Oral History Archive

Information Sheet
#16

Researching the
history of
Leicester,
Leicestershire
and Rutland

This sheet will :

- Offer some tips on how to research the history of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.
- Give you a brief guide to the variety of sources available.
- Explain where you can get access to these sources.
- Suggest places to look for further advice and suggestions.

East Midlands Oral History Archive

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How can I research the history of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland?

Oral testimony is an invaluable source of information for local historians. EMOHA publishes a series of information sheets which explain how to conduct your own oral history interviews, how to access the recordings in the East Midlands Oral Archive and how to publish your material. Yet while oral history can make a unique contribution to histories of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland you should still use it in conjunction with other historical sources:

- to test its accuracy and reliability
- to understand the broader historical context
- to follow up the new avenues of enquiry that it might open

The following is a brief outline of some of the sources available for the study of local history. While these relate mainly to Leicestershire and Rutland, much of the basic information will also apply to other areas of the country.

What sort of sources are available?

These fall broadly into two categories. **Primary sources** are actual records which have survived, and provide first hand evidence of historical events. For example:

- Census returns and electoral registers
- Street directories
- Medical Officer of Health Reports
- Minutes of local authorities and their various committees
- Personal diaries
- Records of local businesses, societies & other organisations
- Newspapers and periodicals
- Maps & photographs
- Unedited video or audio recordings
- Artefacts

Secondary sources are those which bring together and interpret primary historical material. These include books, pamphlets, edited video or audio sources, museum displays and internet websites.

Where can I get more information?

- EMOHA Information Sheet #5: Who can help?
- Bennett J. D., *Writing About Leicester: a local history booklist* (2000)
- Jarrett R. & Brown C., *A Guide to Local History Sources for Leicester & the County* (1996)
- Lord E., *Investigating the Twentieth Century: sources for local historians* (1999)
- BBC History website, local historical sources www.bbc.co.uk/history/lj/locallj
- British Association for Local History, PO Box 1576, Salisbury SP2 8SY, <http://www.balh.co.uk/> or email mail@balh.co.uk or info@balh.co.uk
- Historical Association, 59A Kennington Park Road, London SE11 4JH, which produces a series of short guides to records, and organises an annual Local History Week. Telephone (0207 735 3901) or see <http://www.history.org.uk>.
- Historical Manuscripts Commission, Information Sheet 15: Sources for Local History, available online at <http://www.hmc.gov.uk/nra/nra2.htm>
- Local History Magazine, 3 Devonshire Promenade, Lenton, Nottingham, (0115)

Where can I get access to local sources?



Observations of the built environment, architectural styles and public art and monuments can be just as useful as historical sources as paper records.

Many local records are available from the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland (ROLLR), which also has an extensive local studies library. The ROLLR is located at Long Street, Wigston, Leicester, LE18 2AH (0116 257 1080). Telephone for details of its collections and opening hours, or visit its website at <http://www.leics.gov.uk/museums/records/>.

Libraries are a useful source of local historical information. The Central Reference & Information Library in Bishop Street, Leicester, has a local studies section covering the County as well as the City of Leicester (0116 299 5410), and the Community History section of Leicester City Libraries is also based there. This has an extensive collection of reference material, including books, newspaper cuttings and photographs. Enquiries are welcome, but this material is not available on the open shelves, and it is essential to make an appointment to view it. Telephone 0116 299 5417/5410. Smaller local libraries in Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland often have material specific to their particular locality.

Depending on the subject of your research, you may also find useful information through **museums**, either in the displays themselves, or by contacting curators or other specialist staff.

These are the most obvious sources for local historical information, but here are some others which may be relevant to your research:

The members of **local historical societies** have often done extensive research into their own particular locality or subject area, and may publish newsletters or journals. For details of historical and heritage societies in Leicestershire & Rutland, contact your local library or visit Infolinx, the website of the Community Information Network for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland at <http://www.infolinx.org/>. You can also find links to village and community sites on the EMOHA website at <http://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/community/leicesterlinks.html>.

There are a number of other **websites** carrying historical information about Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland. They include Leicester & Leicestershire at <http://www.leicesterandleicestershire.com>, which has a useful 'Who's Who' section; and Leicestershire Past & Present <http://www.suite101.com/welcome.cfm/leicestershire>. The EMOHA site at <http://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/community/leicesterlinks.html> has links to more local websites.

The **Leicester Mercury** has a daily 'Mr Leicester' page, which publishes photographs, short historical articles, and appeals for help with research. Write to 'Mr Leicester' at the Mercury, St. George Street, Leicester.

BBC Radio Leicester may also broadcast appeals for help with research, and the 'Talkback' programme currently includes a 'Memory Lane' phone-in from 9–10 a.m. on a Friday morning. The BBC Leicester website also carries information about historical projects. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/leicester/aroundleicester/>.

A **guided walk** can be an interesting way of exploring aspects of local history. For details of walks see the EMOHA diary at <http://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/news/diary.html> Or contact Leicester Promotions on 0116 299 8888, or visit <http://www.le.ac.uk/leicester/tourist/tb.html>.

You might consider taking a **course of study** on a historical subject. You can get details of courses available locally through your library, by contacting local colleges or organisations direct, or through *learndirect*, a free national learning advice line on 0800 100 900 or <http://www.learndirect.co.uk/>.