

Tracing Your South Asian Ancestors



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You can download a copy of this *Guide* from
www.sheffield.gov.uk/archives

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Introduction

This booklet explains how you can set about tracing your South Asian ancestors. Included is information on tracing generations born in the UK, together with immigration records and information sources available in South Asia.

Note we have published a separate guide for the Study of Sheffield's South Asian communities. You can download a copy from our website: [South Asian community research guide \(sheffield.gov.uk\)](https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/south-asian-community-research-guide)

Many of the records detailed below are available online via Ancestry.com and FindMyPast



Both websites are free to use at all of Sheffield City Council's libraries and at the City Archives.

Where to Start?

The best place to start is with yourself and your parents. You may wish to decide which line you want to research - your mother's or your father's.

If you can talk to your parents or grandparents, ask them if they have copies of birth, baptism, marriage, death or burial certificates, or any documents relating to immigrating to the UK. They might also have family photographs which, as well as bringing your family tree to life, can give clues to where your ancestors might have lived. Think of some questions you might like to ask your other family members about their lives.

Births, Marriages and Deaths

Indexes to all births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales since 1837 are available online via websites such as www.ancestry.co.uk and www.findmypast.co.uk.

Starting with yourself you should be able to find your parents' marriage certificate and their birth certificates and then work back methodically through each generation.

You can order copy certificates from the [General Register Office](#) (GRO) which covers the whole of England Wales.

Birth, marriage and death certificates are also available from local register offices. Sheffield Register Office is based in the Town Hall. For more information see [Births, deaths, marriages and citizenship \(sheffield.gov.uk\)](#)

For births, marriages and deaths in South Asia you will need to contact the relevant register office or library. A useful starting point is [Asia • FamilySearch](#)

Census Returns

A UK population census has been undertaken every 10 years since 1801 (with the exception of 1941). They are kept confidential for 100 years so the latest you can see is 1921. Census returns record details of every citizen including name, address, age, marital status and birthplace. You can search these at www.ancestry.co.uk and www.findmypast.co.uk

For census returns in South Asia contact the relevant library or archive service. A useful starting point is [Asia • FamilySearch](#)

Company and Business Information

If the person you are looking for ran their own business in the UK you can search for information on over 2 million companies via Companies House [Companies House - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

The *London, Edinburgh and Belfast Gazettes* record details of business partnerships and bankruptcies. They can be searched online [London, Edinburgh and Belfast Gazettes Online - GenGuide](#)

Change of Name

From 1914 to 1952, all UK deed polls enrolled in the Supreme Court had to be advertised in the London Gazette. It can be searched online [London, Edinburgh and Belfast Gazettes Online - GenGuide](#)

UK Supreme Court records from 2003 onwards are kept by the court: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/guidance/courts-and-tribunals/courts/queens-bench/enforcement.htm>

For more information about records of change of name see the guidance issued by The National Archives: [Changes of name - The National Archives](#)

Electoral Registers

Many UK electoral registers from c. 1832 onwards are available to search on FindMyPast [England & Wales Electoral Registers 1832-1932 | findmypast.co.uk](#) and also Ancestry.com [UK, Electoral Registers, 2003-2010 | Ancestry®](#)

UK electoral registers (edited versions) from 2002 onwards are available to search online on a number of websites including [Search for People, Businesses and Places - 192.com](#)

Registers for Sheffield (c. 1841 onwards) are available at Sheffield Local Studies Library. For more information see [Electoral Registers archive \(sheffield.gov.uk\)](#)

- There were no registers compiled between 1914-1920 or between 1939-1945.
- Until 1969 you had to be aged 21 to be on the register. After that date, those aged 18 were included.
- From 2002 onwards people could opt out from the published version for privacy reasons.

For electoral registers in South Asia contact the relevant library or archive service. A useful starting point is [Asia • FamilySearch](#)

Emigration / Immigration

You can search the Board of Trade lists of passengers arriving in the UK (1878 - 1960) on [UK and Ireland, Incoming Passenger Lists, 1878-1960 | Ancestry®](#) and [Passenger Lists Leaving UK 1890-1960 | findmypast.co.uk](#)

You can search the Board of Trade lists of passengers leaving the UK (1890 - 1960) on [UK and Ireland, Outward Passenger Lists, 1890-1960 | Ancestry®](#)

Note: there are no passenger lists after 1960 and there are no passenger lists for people arriving in the UK by air.

Immigrants / non British citizens were often referred to as 'aliens'. Certificates of alien arrivals and returns (1810-1869) are available on Ancestry.com. You can search them here: [England, Alien Arrivals, 1810-1811, 1826-1869 | Ancestry®](#). You can also search Aliens Entry Books, 1794 – 1921 [UK, Aliens Entry Books, 1794-1921 | Ancestry®](#)

Sheffield City Archives has registers of aliens for Sheffield and Rotherham, 1947-1997 (ref. 2004/79) but you need special permission to access these. Contact us for further details.

For further information see the National Archives guides [Emigration and emigrants - The National Archives](#) and [Immigration and immigrants - The National Archives](#)

Sheffield Local Studies Library and the City Archives have a useful book by Roger Kershaw, *Immigrants and Aliens - A Guide to Sources on UK Immigration and Citizenship* (The National Archives, 2004)
(*Sheffield City Archives: 929.341 S; Sheffield City Archives: KER/FAM TREE*)

Military Ancestors

There are many sources for tracing ancestors who served in the military, particularly in World War One and World War Two, along with other conflicts.

Many service records are available on ancestry.com [Military Records, War Records & Service Records - Ancestry.co.uk](#) and FindMyPast [Military, armed forces & conflict | findmypast.co.uk](#)

See also our separate guide to [Tracing your Sheffield World War One Ancestors Trace World War One relative research guide \(sheffield.gov.uk\)](#)

Bailey, Peter A., *Researching Ancestors in the Indian Army, 1858-1947* (Families in British India Society, 2014)
(*Sheffield Local Studies Library: 929.2095 HIS*)
(the Indian Army / British Indian Army was made up of both European officers and Indian soldiers)

Sikh soldiers in World War One: [Research Your Soldier - EMPIRE, FAITH & WAR \(empirefaithwar.com\)](http://empirefaithwar.com)

Naturalisation

The *London, Edinburgh and Belfast Gazettes* record details of naturalisation and changes of name. They can be searched online [London, Edinburgh and Belfast Gazettes Online - GenGuide](#)

Naturalisation case papers 1801-1871 (naturalisation petitions completed by individuals applying to become British citizens between 1801 and 1871) are searchable online: [Naturalisation case papers 1801-1871 - The National Archives](#)

You can request a search of certificates of British citizenship 1949-1986 via the National Archives [Request a search for a certificate of British citizenship 1949-1986 - Contact us \(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](#)

For further information see [Naturalisation, registration and British citizenship - The National Archives](#)

Newspapers

The British Library British Newspaper Archive (BNA) website includes over forty-six million pages from over 700 UK national and local newspapers (including a number of Sheffield titles, 1819 - c.1950). [Home | Search the archive | British Newspaper Archive](#). Access to the British Newspaper Archive is free at every Sheffield City Council Library and at the City archives.

In addition, microfilms of the main Sheffield titles are also available at Sheffield Local Studies Library, namely: *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 1855 - 1986; *Sheffield Telegraph* (weekly) 1989 - date; *Sheffield Independent* 1819 - 1938 and the *Star* 1873 - date

Archives of some national newspapers are available on the internet, notably *The Times* ([The Times Digital Archive \(gale.com\)](#)) and *The Guardian* ([How to access past articles from the Guardian and Observer archive | Information | The Guardian](#))

For newspapers in South Asia contact the relevant library or archive service. A useful starting point is [Asia • FamilySearch](#)

Probate

There is a central register of grants of probate for England and Wales from 1858 onwards: [Search probate records for documents and wills \(England and Wales\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Prior to 1858 probate records were administered by church courts. For the Sheffield area these are available at the Borthwick Institute for Archives at the eUniversity of York: [Are you looking for a will? - Borthwick Catalogue \(york.ac.uk\)](#) and at the

National Archives (Prerogative Court of Canterbury) [Wills 1384-1858 - The National Archives](#)

For probate records in South Asia contact the relevant library or archive service. A useful starting point is [Asia • FamilySearch](#)

Rate Books

Rate books were compiled in order to keep a record of local people's rate assessment. Rates were based on an assessment of the yearly value of a property (i.e. the annual rental /rent) and were levied to pay for local services. The ratepayer was the person responsible for paying the local taxes and could be the owner or occupier of the property.

The information contained in rate books varies according to the date and type of rate collected, but rate books generally record the names of ratepayers, listed by street, and include the following details:

- Street
- House/Court number
- Name of occupier (head of household only)
- Name of owner
- Rates (amount due, received, arrears, etc.)

Some rate books from the 19th century up to 1974 are available at Sheffield City Archives. For more information see [Rate books \(sheffield.gov.uk\)](#)

Schools

Sheffield City Archives holds records of admission to several hundred local authority schools across the city. These record the name of the pupil, address at the time of admission, names of parents or guardians, date they left the school and sometimes their subsequent school or other destination.

School register information is kept confidential for 75 years.

For further information see [School records \(sheffield.gov.uk\)](#)

Telephone Directories and Trade Directories

The British Telecom (BT) phone book and directory enquiries is available to search online: [Find a Person | The Phone Book from BT](#)

Older telephone directories are available on Ancestry.com [British Phone Books, 1880-1984 | Ancestry®](#)

Other websites such as Search for People, Businesses and Places - 192.com also hold telephone directory data.

A comprehensive collection of Sheffield telephone directories from 1960 onwards including alphabetical, classified and Yellow Pages is available at Sheffield Local Studies Library. There are a few telephone directories from before 1960.

Sheffield Reference and Information Library (in the Central Library) holds hard copies of telephone directories for England.

Sheffield City Archives and Local Studies have trade directories (listing business and private residents) up to the mid-1970s. For more information see [Trade directories \(sheffield.gov.uk\)](http://Trade directories (sheffield.gov.uk))

Sheffield Reference and Information Library (in the Central Library) holds trade directories for other parts of the country.

Useful Websites (all accessed November 2021)

BBC article (2011) [BBC - Family History - Tracing your Asian roots on the Indian subcontinent](#)

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) provides FamilySearch Asia regional information [Asia • FamilySearch](#)

Further Reading

Gill, Anton, *Empire's Children - Trace Your Family History Across the World* (Harper Collins, 2012)

This book includes references to immigration from South Asia.

(*Sheffield City Archives: GIL/FAM TREE; also available at Sheffield Central Library: 929.2094*)

Bevan, Amanda, *Tracing Your Ancestors in the National Archives* (National Archives, 2006)

Includes chapters on 'Immigration and Nationality' and also 'Blacks and Asians' (*Available at Sheffield Local Studies Library: 929.341 S; also available at Sheffield City Archives: BEV/FAM TREE; and a number of lending libraries in the city*)

Kershaw, Roger and Marl Pearsall, *Immigrants and Aliens - A Guide to Sources on UK Immigration and Citizenship* (National Archives, 2004)

(*Available at Sheffield City Archives: KER/FAM TREE*)

Kershaw, Roger, *Migration Records: A Guide for Family Historians* (National Archives, 2009)

(*Available at Sheffield Local Studies Library: 929.342 S*)

The following books / journals are not available in Sheffield Libraries but are worth mentioning:

Abi Husainy and John Trumbour, British Sources for South Asian Ancestors, in *Ancestors* magazine, No. 13, April/May 2003

Abi Husainy and John Trumbour, Military Sources for South Asian Ancestors, in *Ancestors* magazine, No. 14, April/May 2003

Abi Husainy, How to Trace Your South Asian Ancestors, in *Who Do You Think You Are?* Magazine, Issue 14, Oct 2008

V. Hallan, *Asian Names: Guide to Assist Understanding of the Naming Systems of People from the Indian Subcontinent* (Walsall, 1993)

Local Studies Library and Sheffield City Archives Facilities

Sheffield Archives and Local Studies services collect and preserve original records and printed material relating to Sheffield and the surrounding area.

The information dates from the 12th century to the present and relates to Sheffield, South Yorkshire and north Derbyshire.

Included are extensive collections of books • pamphlets • photographs • church registers • newspapers • census records • minutes • diaries • films • maps • deeds • records from schools • hospitals • businesses and charities • family estates • personal papers etc.

Our facilities include:

Study areas • expert staff on hand to help you make the most of your visit • a library of reference books • photocopying and photography services • free Internet access • microform machines and printers • catalogues and indexes • a range of useful publications for sale • CD-Rom library • on-line image library.

Adding to our collections

Sheffield Libraries and Archives seeks to preserve information about events in our city's history. If you have photographs or personal papers that may be worth preserving please consider safeguarding them for current and future generations by placing them in the care of Sheffield Libraries and Archives. It is only through the generosity of individuals and organisations that we are able to have a complete record of important events in the history of Sheffield and the nation. We are interested in photographs, flyers and posters, minutes of meetings etc. For advice on record keeping and the facilities we offer please email us (archives@sheffield.gov.uk or telephone 0114 203 9395).

Contact Details

Sheffield Local Studies Library

1st floor
Central Library
Surrey Street
Sheffield
S1 4SP

Tel: 0114 273 4753

Email: archives@sheffield.gov.uk

Sheffield City Archives

52 Shoreham Street
Sheffield
S1 1XZ

Tel: 0114 203 9395

Email: archives@sheffield.gov.uk

Website: www.sheffield.gov.uk/archives

Search our catalogues:

(not all of the collections are fully catalogued so if you can't find what you are looking for please contact us for further advice)

Local Studies Library catalogue: https://library.sheffield.gov.uk/client/en_GB/default

City Archives catalogue: <http://www.calmview.eu/SheffieldArchives/CalmView/>

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Watch our YouTube videos www.youtube.com/user/SheffieldArchives1

Read our blogs <http://shefflibraries.blogspot.co.uk/>

View some of our photographs on Flickr www.flickr.com/photos/shefflibraries