



15 HOW TO Trace past solicitors and law firms

Resources held by the Law Society Library

The following books and manuscripts are just some of the resources held by the Library. Whilst the Library is primarily a private library for our members, we are able to search these historical resources for members of the public for a fee of £20 plus VAT per 30 minutes. Please contact the Library on library@lawsociety.org.uk or 020 7320 5946 if you would like to use this service.

The Library also runs a non-member day pass scheme to allow members of the public access to these books and manuscripts at the Library in Chancery Lane. See our [website](#) for further details.

Our catalogue [Library Knowledge Base](#) contains further information about records held on solicitors and law firms, including those listed here. Search the Common Queries database using the phrase 'historical records'.

The Law List (1775-1976) and its successors (1977-2014)

Published under various titles from 1775, the Law List is a pure directory of individual solicitors and where they worked. It was a commercial rather than official directory until 1860, when it was taken over by the Inland Revenue. It has been published by, or under the authority of, the Law Society since 1896.

A lawyer's name normally appears in the Law List the year after admission and continues until he or she retires, dies or is struck off (there is no indication which applies). There are separate lists for London solicitors, country solicitors and counsel (barristers). There are often separate lists for overseas lawyers, judges, conveyancers and draftsmen.

In 1977, the Law List was re-named the Solicitors' Diary and Directory. In 1984 it became The Solicitors' and Barristers' Directory and Diary. From 1991 it was called The Law Society's Directory of Solicitors and Barristers. The last printed directory was the 2013-14 edition. The library has Waterlow's Solicitors' and Barristers Directory from 2014 onwards.

History of firms (1760s - 1980s)

Seven large handwritten volumes that track the name changes and mergers of law firms for over 200 years. An index is currently being compiled.

Lists of Attornies (1729-1732)

From 1729, all attornies and solicitors were required to register by law and the records of registration were published for the first few years as the Lists of Attornies. There are several lists in one volume, divided either by date or by the court to which the solicitor was admitted.

The Roll of Solicitors (1720-1858)

The original manuscript is held at The National Archives and called 'The Inrolment of Solicitors Admissions in Chancery'. It contains a record of solicitors admitted to the Court of Chancery from 1720 onwards (it does not include all solicitors, only Chancery solicitors). The Library holds a copy on microfilm and CD-ROM.

The four volume Roll covers 1720-1791, 1791-1823, 1824-1836 and 1836-1858, and is arranged alphabetically by name then by date of admission. The alphabetical list may continue out of sequence



occasionally, but this is indicated. In the CD-ROM the four volumes have been rearranged into a continuous alphabetical sequence, with a single index. Please note that the CD-ROM is a digital image of the original manuscript, not a searchable database.

Admissions to the Incorporated Law Society (1878-1962)

Four manuscript volumes listing the names of those admitted to the Roll in chronological order by month and year. It is a pure list of names with no other details.

Proposed members [of the Incorporated Law Society] (1878-1887; 1894-1962)

Six volumes listing information about each proposed new solicitor member. It includes : name, address, proposer, admission on Roll, in weekly circular, balloted for, letter sent, remarks, became a member (date).

Richard's Roll : attornies and solicitors c1200-1906

Compiled in the early 20th century by the solicitor W U S G Richards. The content is very selective and contains potted histories of individual solicitors. There is an A-Z index.

Law Society Gazette (1903 -)

The Law Society Gazette contains obituaries and also notices about individual solicitors being struck off or suspended. The earlier volumes are certainly worth checking as the number of solicitors in the profession were small enough that every obituary submitted was published.

Registers of articed clerks holding office while serving under articles (1907-1970)

Two volumes containing the names of articed clerks who held other jobs. Permission was required to do this and details kept in these registers. These contain : name of articed clerk, the solicitor they worked for, office address, order and date, details about nature of order.

Not to be confused with solicitors clerks - articed clerks were trainee solicitors.

Register of articles of clerkship (July 1932-1958)

Five volumes containing : remarks [inc. date of admission], name of clerk, address, name of solicitor, address., name of other parties, address; permit, date of articles, examination, term of service; date of entry [into register]. These are in very poor condition and can only be used by library staff.

Index to register of articed clerks (1937-1968)

A sequence of alphabetical indexes to articed clerks covering the years 1937-1968. These contain only names and a number; the numbers relate to the above corresponding volumes. We do not hold the main registers for all the indexes.

Biographies

The Library has a small legal history section. This collection include biographies and histories of individual solicitors and law firms. Search the [catalogue](#) to see if we hold a book on a person or firm.



Further information

Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) records (1993 -)

The [SRA](#) holds records on individual solicitors and law firms from 1993 onwards only. They can be contacted by tel: 0370 606 2555 or by e-mail: contactcentre@sra.org.uk

Society of Genealogists www.sog.org.uk

The Society of Genealogists (SoG) are able to answer enquiries about past solicitors. They have a number of resources including Cockerill's card index of past solicitors. This index was compiled by a retired solicitor, Mr Timothy Cockerill, and covered provincial solicitors and attorneys from the 16th century to 1900, but mainly 18th and 19th centuries. The information in the index includes biographical and career information.

The Society of Genealogists also holds an index by Mr Brian Brooks covering solicitors and attorneys and another covering solicitors from the Bristol area. The SoG genealogist can be contacted by email: genealogy@sog.org.uk

The National Archive, Kew www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Names of attorneys and solicitors who practiced at the various courts can be found in records relating to the court to which they were admitted. The National Archives research guides include looking for lawyers (see link below) which provides information on how to start your research.

The National Archives also has a guide listing the range of material on solicitors and attorneys held by The National Archive at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/research-guides/attorneys-solicitors.htm

Useful websites

A short history of The Law Society, from 1825 to the present.

<http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/news/stories/a-short-history-of-the-law-society-published/>

Government information about parish registers, births, marriages and deaths etc.

www.gov.uk/browse/births-deaths-marriages/register-offices

GENUKI provides a virtual reference library of genealogical information of particular relevance to the UK and Ireland www.genuki.org.uk

The National Archives website has research guidance if you are looking for a person.

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/looking-for-person/default.htm