

Me(e)t the Ancestors... -

the Metropolitan Police Museum and Family History

What records do you hold which might help find my ancestor?

- Police Orders 1858-1968 – these were issued daily to every police station in the Met and include subheadings for retirements, dismissals, sickness, deaths and (from about 1880) joiners, usually giving an officer's surname alongside their warrant number and/or divisional collar number. It is easy to cross-reference a joining and leaving date from other sources to the relevant Police Orders entry, but searching a whole police career would require one or more research appointments, since Police Orders are not indexed by name and have not yet been digitised.
- Divisional Ledgers for A (Whitehall), B (Chelsea), E (Holborn), F (Paddington), G (Finsbury), H (Whitechapel), K (Bow), L (Lambeth), M (Southwark), N (Islington), R (Greenwich) and Y (Highgate) Divisions for a limited range of dates – if you have a male officer's divisional or collar number you can cross-reference it to these, which also give details of his previous occupation, height, birthplace and past service in the army, navy or other public service.
- Registers for widows' pensions from 1880 to 1969
- Registers for gratuities granted to those resigning on medical grounds from 1859 to 1931
- Registers of medical re-examinations for pensions from 1891 to 1933
- Commissioners' Annual Reports – Until 1913 these included deaths in service.

Can I come in to research in person?

Yes indeed! Visits are on Tuesdays and Wednesdays in January-July and September-December by pre-booked appointments only – do get in touch via [our contact page](#) .

Where is your Research Room?

Our Research Room is located in [Marlowe House](#), a Met building less than 200 yards from Sidcup train station. If you are coming by car, the postcode for your satnav is DA15 7ES.

What is available elsewhere?

The main repository for joiners' and leavers' registers is the National Archives at Kew:

- [Discover - Advanced Search](#) and enter 'MEPO' in 'Any of these references'
- [Research guide - How to look for records of ... Police](#)
- [Research guide - How to look for records of ... London Metropolitan Police](#)

They also hold [all surviving Police Orders from 1829 to 1857 and a full run of Police Orders from 1858 to 1968](#). Both in our own collections and elsewhere, Police Orders from 1968 onwards are subject to the 50- or 82-year rule and are not yet accessible to the public.

Individual Met officers are sometimes also mentioned on [Old Bailey Online](#) and the [British Newspaper Archive](#) - the latter is available for free in British Library reading rooms.

My ancestor served in the Met after the Second World War. What records do you have?

For some officers from that period we have a Central Record of Service. Due to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), for living officers and former officers this can only be released to the officer him- or herself with proof of ID or with the written permission of his or her next-of-kin, again with proof of ID. If the officer is deceased, it can also be released on receipt of a PDF or JPEG of the death certificate. For some post-war male officers (1958-2003 only) and all female officers from 1923 onwards, if you can provide a warrant number we can email or post an image of their signature on attesting (swearing an oath) when they first joined the Metropolitan Police.

Do you have a photograph of my ancestor?

Before about 1960 we only have photographs of officers if they have been donated to us. Our archives and photographs are currently being catalogued onto a searchable collections database, but this database will not be complete for the foreseeable future.

I have a photograph of my ancestor. What can you tell about them from it?

The officer's divisional or collar number begins with the letter of his division, followed by a number (1 or 2 digits for a Sergeant, 3 for a PC), only held by one officer on that division at any one time. 'R' after the divisional letter indicates he was in that division's Reserve, made up of its tallest and most imposing officers and usually the first to be called upon for ceremonial and public order duties.



Until 1936 the divisional number and letter also appeared on the helmet plate.

An officer's medals are also instructive (see next page). This one has the 1887/97 Police Jubilee Medal and the 1902 and 1911 Police Coronation Medals.

The uniforms of Inspectors and above were very different, featuring a flat peaked pillbox hat and (before 1936) a helmet plate with the divisional letter but no number.



1919



1931

1946



1967



1972-1978
& 1979-1986



1978-1979



1986-present

Frequent changes in women officers' hats and uniforms enable precise dating.

My police ancestor is wearing medals in a photograph. What are they?

The most common medal ribbons are:



(without bar) 1887 Police Jubilee Medal / (with bar) 1887 and/or 1897 Police Jubilee Medal(s)



1902 Police Coronation Medal



1911 Police Coronation Medal



1935 Silver Jubilee Medal



1937 Coronation Medal



Police Long Service and Good Conduct Medal (introduced 1951)



King's / Queen's Police Medal for Gallantry



King's / Queen's Police Medal for Distinguished Service

He would also wear any medals he had earned during previous army, navy or RAF service – particularly common are the campaign medals for the Boer War and World Wars and gallantry medals such as the Military Medal. Police service would also entitle him or her to the 1939-1945 Defence Medal and officers were also awarded the George Medal for civilian gallantry.

My ancestor was a Special Constable in London. Do you hold any records?

We hold no personnel, joiners', leavers' or pension registers for specials and they appear in Police Orders intermittently or not at all. We hope this may change in coming years as we catalogue our collection and accept new donations in this area.

My ancestor was living in a coastal town but is given on the census as "Metropolitan Police". Why is this?

From 1860 to 1934 the Met policed Woolwich Arsenal and the UK's main naval dockyards at Chatham, Portsmouth, Devonport and Pembroke. Rosyth in Scotland was added between 1915 and 1926. These were assigned numbers not letters – 1 for Woolwich, 2 for Portsmouth, 3 for Devonport, 4 for Chatham, 5 for Pembroke and 6 for Rosyth. A pre-1936 officer's collar and helmet plate (shown below) would feature a divisional number beside or below an anchor.



Does ‘Docks Police Officer’ in a London census entry mean he was in a Metropolitan Police dockyard division?

Probably not. This term is usually used for officers from the private forces run by the companies who owned London’s commercial docks, namely the London and India Docks Company, the Surrey Commercial Docks Company and the Millwall Dock Company. In 1909 those three forces merged into the Port of London Authority Police, whose archives can be consulted at the Museum of London Docklands (email - portriverarchive@museumoflondon.org.uk).

I have a photograph of my ancestor in police uniform at a London museum or gallery. Was he or she in the Met?

Probably yes. In the Victorian and Edwardian periods the National Gallery, the British Museum and the museums in South Kensington all had detachments of Met officers.

My ancestor was a ‘Railway Detective’ or in the ‘Railway Police’. Does this mean he or she was in the Met?

No. Until the formation of the British Transport Commission Police (now the British Transport Police) in 1949, each railway company ran its own set of police and detectives. A good first port of call is the [British Transport Police History Group](#).

My ancestor is shown as “Police Reserve” or “War Reserve” on the 1939 Register? What does this mean and do you have any records?

“Police Reserve” usually signifies regular officers who had recently left the Met but were re-drafted for the duration – we do not hold any records on them

specifically but they may appear in Police Orders. “War Reserve” usually denotes members of the War Reserve Constabulary, taken on for the duration of the conflict and of whom we have a set of index cards which you are welcome to consult.

My ancestor was a London police officer but he or she was not in the Met. Where else could I look?

City of London Police – email lma@cityoflondon.gov.uk and / or see [its catalogue entry](#).

Kew Constabulary – email archives@kew.org

Met Records in the National Archives at Kew

* - available as free PDF download

** - available as a free PDF download and also searchable by name on National Archives online catalogue

My ancestor joined the Met between 1829 and 1842

- [MEPO 4/31](#) *
- [MEPO 4/32](#) *
- [MEPO 4/333](#) **
- [HO 65/26](#)

My ancestor joined the Met between 1842 and 1857

- [MEPO 4/334](#) **

My ancestor joined the Met between 1858 and 1877

- MEPO 4/352 to 360 ** (1869 onwards only)
- MEPO 4/509 (part of 1873 only)

My ancestor joined the Met between 1878 and 1909

- MEPO 4/335 to 337 **
- MEPO 4/352 to 360 **
- MEPO 4/361 to 477 (1889 to 1909 only)

My ancestor joined the Met between 1909 and 1958

- MEPO 4/338 to 360 **
- MEPO 4/352 to 360 **

My ancestor received a Met pension or gratuity between 1840 and 1852

- MEPO 4/33 *

My ancestor was the widow of a Met officer before 1858

- MEPO 4/33 *

My ancestor left the Met between 1889 and 1947

- MEPO 4/339 to 351 **

My ancestor died whilst in service with the Met before 1889

- MEPO 4/2