

Government and Police Gazettes

Unlocking a major untapped resource



NEW SOUTH WALES
Government Gazette.



QUEENSLAND
Government Gazette.



THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN
GOVERNMENT GAZETTE.



TASMANIA
Hobart Town Gazette.



VICTORIA
GOVERNMENT GAZETTE.



WESTERN AUSTRALIA
Government Gazette.

Background

Every Australian colony published regular gazettes to communicate legislation, regulations and information to the public service in particular and the community in general. Some departments such as education and police grew in size, and began their own versions.

Indeed government gazettes are published by governments worldwide as a means of communication to officials and the general public. Such gazettes are useful not only to monitor the actions of the government, but also as far as family historians are concerned, they are primary source documents that have been largely overlooked by many researchers.

The indexing projects by some family history societies and the gazette digitising project by Archive CD Books Australia are now making the early gazettes known and accessible to researchers.

Parallel to the work by Archive CD Books Australia is the growing trend by governments to place their gazettes online. The best example can be found at: www.gazettes-online.co.uk which is the site for the British Government's gazettes, The London Gazette having archived its issues for the war periods of 1914–1920 and 1939–1948.

The University of Michigan's School of Information maintains a site listing all online government gazettes worldwide at: www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/gazettes. However, most of these sites list only current and very recent editions.

Government and police gazette commencement dates

	gov gaz	pol gaz	police restriction
New South Wales	1832 D, I	1862 D	70 years
Queensland	1859 D, I	1864 D, I	65 years
South Australia	1839 D	1862 D	60 years
Tasmania	1825 D	1861	75 years
Victoria (Pt Phillip)	1843 D	1851 D	30 years
Western Australia	1836 D	1876	50 years
New Zealand	1856 D	1877	100 years

D = Digitising commenced by Archive CD Books Australia

I = Indexes published - and available from Gould Genealogy

Police restriction - period from the present unavailable for public use

Gazettes as a research tool

There is little doubt that government gazettes are a largely untapped resource and that a clear understanding of the scope of their content still hampers research. The remainder of this article will focus on Australian and New Zealand government and police gazettes and their value to researchers.

- Your ancestors farmed and may have needed to brand their stock. Brands were registered and the public advised accordingly via the government gazette.
- The letter carrier is unable to locate the addressee for mail and returned the letter to the post office—dead letters were listed in the government gazette.
- Your ancestor may be a victim of a crime, or an offender, and the police are involved. All crimes were listed in reports

by the police commissioner, naming victims, the offence details, the officers involved and the suspects if known.

- An ancestor may have escaped custody or deserted ship or H.M. service – or his wife! The descriptions of such are often very detailed: age, height, “native of ...”, sometimes accent, appearance, marks (scars, tattoos), peculiarities, even photographs in some later police gazettes. See example illustrations.
- Local schools charging fees predated government schools with compulsory education, but many poor people could not afford fees and so early colonial governments provided subsidies to recognised teachers and named them in the gazette. Many other professions, such as doctors, marriage celebrants, publicans, auctioneers, hawkers, magistrates and other legal officers, sundry food handlers and the like were registered and reported.
- Your ancestor fails to pay their council rates on time. They may be named in the gazette.
- Young colonies attracted entrepreneurs and some business ventures failed forcing the proprietor into bankruptcy—the gazette names the bankrupt and their circumstances.
- Although the colony was protected by British garrisoned troops there was a need to supplement this force from time to time with volunteers. Some records and especially promotions are published in the gazette.
- Those that died needed to have their estates wound up. The executor needed to pay debts and distribute assets and a notice in the gazette was deemed to comply with the legal requirement of employing best endeavours to contact all that may have an interest.

Letter to *Australian Family Tree Connections Magazine*

MARVELLOUS RESOURCE

Dear Editor I had the privilege of being picked as ‘Letter of the Month’ in November last and would like to thank you sincerely for my prize, the *New South Wales Government Gazette 1865*. I always knew they were a fabulous source of information but hadn’t had the chance to investigate until I received my prize. It was so much more than I had expected and I have spent many hours sitting at the computer just searching. I have found where a site for a town was picked, when suburbs were formed, the alignment of streets, who got assorted Government appointments, searched intestacies by name, letters not claimed (can I claim one now?), lists of deceased persons of whom creditors have to prove a claim and so much more.

My greatest thrill was to find a list of ‘Insolvent Estates’. Like all family historians I started to go through all the names (not expecting to find any) and who jumped off the page but my great-grandfather, Thomas Reynolds BOTTRELL. Now we know why he left the district of Sofala/Sunny Corner NSW and took his whole family to Elsmore near Inverell in 1871. A family query, solved at last.

I can’t express how much information is available on this one CD that allows so much more ‘flesh to the bones’ to be added to any family history, not just names and dates.

Again, I thank Archive CD Books Australia for my *New South Wales Government Gazette 1865* CD and you for a great magazine full of variety for family history readers.

Tricia Evans, NSW Australia

Some of the information to be found in government gazettes

this may vary in some measure from state to state and from one period to another

- Convict notices
- Licence of departures (notice of licence—permission—for inter colony movement)
- Records of convicts & ex-convicts moving to other colonies inc. NZ
- Records of ticket of leave being confiscated & circumstances behind it e.g. drunkenness, adultery etc.
- Notice of convict absconders: details of ship, details of convict i.e. name, alias, physical description, escape details, convict history (useful if convicted under several names)
- Government appointments
- Land transactions
- Crown land sales
- Lease Applications
- Legal notices
- Insolvencies
- Memorials and petitions
- Government information
- Notice of Acts
- Electoral Registrars
- Ecclesiastical notices
- Land ownership
- Next of kin notices
- Insolvency notices
- Bankrupt notices
- Impoundments
- Private notices
- Patent applications
- Unclaimed letters
- Brands registration
- Deserters and missing people
- Shipping and emigration notices
- Partnerships—formed, dissolved, and seceded from
- Local Council assessments
- Road openings and closures
- Straying cattle notices—branding details and name of pound keeper
- Tenders for government projects (most useful for local history)
- Defence—Notice of deserters: physical features, clothes, details of desertion, post
- Professional—lists of legally qualified medical practitioners etc.
- Lists of licences: publicans, mining, timber, marriage celebrants, brewers, auctioneers, depasturing, storekeepers, pawnbrokers, etc.
- Lists of road toll stations auctioned out: how much they were worth, who bought the tolling rights
- Postal services contracted out: who won the contract, which area they covered, how often they did postal runs, wages
- Impounded letters: insufficient postage
- Requests for information
- Searches for people (e.g. English sister looking for ex-convict brother)
- Government institutions and positions
- Notice of activities and events
- Deaths in government institutions
- Statistics
- Lists of rations for government institutions: prisons, asylums etc. Including items, amount for different people: e.g. men, women, children
- Rates of passengers (families of convicts from England)
- Health: no. of births, deaths, cause of death, epidemics

Later specialised gazettes were published, replacing the *Government Gazette* as the official publication for the department concerned. These are the *Police Gazette* and the *Education Gazette*—and more recently the *Industrial Gazette*.

- Memorials and petitions prepared by citizens such as those to create a new local government region are published together with the names of the signatories.
- Deaths in government institutions such as hospitals, gaols and asylums are reported.
- The Hobart Town Gazette published extensive local government assessments.
- Early New South Wales and Tasmanian gazettes dealt with convict matters – licences, ticket of leave, absconders etc.
- Some Victorian gazettes published substantial Land Tax Registers listing thousands of landowners.

The above is just a small taste of some examples that may lead to the naming of your ancestor in a gazette. According to the nature of the entry you may receive the bonus of some vital statistic about the person previously unknown to you or unavailable via more conventional methods. For example it is known that many deaths went unregistered in South Australia for a number of reasons. If the death involved the police, then you can expect that a report was prepared and a summary of that usually found its way into the gazette. Such an entry may lead you to search police records for even more details ...

POLICE - MORTUARY RETURNS

Abdul ADCOOT; 20 years, a native of Chittongong India 5ft 5in, black skin and hair, clean shaven, thin build, had two tribe marks on left forearm.

Fell down the hold of SS Naddea lying at Ocean Steamers Wharf at 2 am October 15th 1919. Deceased was a fireman on SS Naddea and was called for duty at 2 am on the morning of October 15th 1919. The hold of the vessel was being fumigated with sulphur and dense volumes of smoke were issuing from the hold and deceased not knowing the hold was open accidentally stepped into space and fell a distance of forty feet. An inquest was held by Mr HD Gell SM at Port Town Hall on October 16th 1919 and a verdict recorded that death was caused by accidentally falling down the hold of SS Naddea.

SA Government Gazette 5 Feb 1920 p393

The above example mentions a number of pointers that can lead the researcher on to other material. The State Archives may hold the inquest papers, the National Archives of Australia may have material related to the shipping including the crew, and the daily newspaper may have reported the incident. Nineteenth century newspapers would certainly have reported the inquest in detail if inquest papers have not survived. The following incident highlights a different set of records that may be worth calling up.

Description of the property.	Name or Situation of the property.	Name and Residence of the Occupier of the property.	Name and Residence of the Proprietor of the property.	Area of the property.	Rateable Value.
Farm	Exton	Appleby, William, on property	Thomas Wm. Field, Westfield	ACRES.	£
Allotments	Bracknell	Ayton, Mrs. Edwd., Melbourne	Said Mrs. E. Ayton	140	56
Land	Silver Mines	Adams, Wm., on property	Said W. Adams	4½	2
Farm	Exton	Appleby, Wm., jun., ditto	Said W. Adams	50	5
Cottage	Westbury-road	Attley, Thos., ditto	Henry Martin, Exton	80	38
Land	Near Ilfracombe	Adams, John, ditto	James Holliday, Westbury	under 1	13
Cottage	Arthur-street	Ashforth, Jas., ditto	Said John Adams	16	1
Land	Near West Tamar	Bell, W. T., Launceston	Church of England; M. Williams, agent	under 1	5
Cottage	William-street	Betts, James, on property	Said W. T. Bell	58	5
			William Smith, sen., Westbury	under 1	8

POLICE - MORTUARY RETURNS

Louis CALVITZ; date of death or when reported, September 4th; about 40 years of age, height 5ft. 9in., stout build, auburn hair, brown moustache, slight scar over right eye.

Deceased was run over and killed by the Adelaide and Dry Creek mail coach at Enfield. Inquest held by the city coroner.

Verdict—'Accidental death.' Death registered by the Government undertaker. Deceased was in the colony about ten years; had no relations here; was buried by Government. His clothes were the only property he possessed, which were handed over to the public trustee.

SA Government Gazette 25 Feb 1886 p376

A whole range of licences helped the government's revenue stream and regulated certain activities. Hawkers were required to hold a licence. Indeed auctioneers through to medical practitioners required a licence to conduct their profession. In Queensland, a licence was needed to cut timber and make bricks. In most jurisdictions, ministers could only perform marriages if they were licensed by the government and incidentally this is why of all vital records, marriage certificates are likely to not only have survived, but also be correct. The minister performed the civil part of the marriage as a licensed agent of the government.

Some of the material in government gazettes are general reports about conditions and current issues of the day. The family historian trying to develop an understanding of the circumstances under which ancestors lived can gain great insights from reading some of this material and attempting to understand how this may have impacted on their lives. For example early gazettes often feature reports resulting from a bevy of complaints about a particular emigrant voyage that forced an official enquiry. Maybe the ancestor of interest traveled on the particular vessel and although they are not named in the report, at least the researcher can gain a greater understanding of the conditions endured by their forefathers.

A few key gazettes offer special reports and material of particular significance to researchers. In the case of South Australia one such useful record is the Return of deaths and burials occurring on board emigrant ships from 1849 to June 1865 (Govt Gazette 25 Jan 1866 pp75-96) covering deaths of emigrants en route to South Australia. Another issue of similar significance is the issue of 20 Apr 1865 that details persons found dead in public places for a number of preceding years.

Many government gazettes contain information relevant to family historians simply because citizens have to deal with their government. If you are looking for names of people appointed to public office or employed by the government; details of land grants, transfers and leases; details of convictions and pardons or law breakers; licences for publicans, auctioneers and others; doctors; ship-owners; the list is almost endless, then you will need to consider a search of government gazettes!

The character of the gazettes changed over time and varies in measure between states. The 20th Century government gazettes are less useful to family historians than those from the 19th century. Police gazettes however continue to be useful well into the 20th century.

Police gazettes

Police gazettes differ from government gazettes in that they are not open to the public for some time after creation. See table for restriction periods on page 5.

They were compiled generally weekly in each Australian state starting from around the 1850s and 60s, as a confidential record of police activities, reports and information – for police use only. They often contain details that would not be found in the more publicly accessible government gazettes.

Information on crimes committed. One of the chief purposes of the gazette was to communicate information on crimes.

Deserters from H.M. Service.

DESERTED from the 90th regiment at Melbourne, on 28th December, 1854, private *James Crane*, 5 feet 9½ inches high, sallow complexion, dark brown hair, grey eyes, native of Saint Paul's, Dublin, a laborer, marked with letter D on left side, dressed in regimental clothing. Reward £25. 1st January, 1855.

Deserters from Vessels in the Bay.

DESCRIPTION of three seamen deserters from ship *Tador*:— *Charles Johnston*, 22 years of age, 5 feet 10 inches high, a foreigner, stutters in talking. *John Montan*, 20 years of age, 5 feet 5 inches high, very light complexion hair and moustache, speaks with a foreign accent. *James Straug*, 21 years of age, 5 feet 5 inches high, florid complexion, mark on his nose from fighting. Information as above or to MESSRS. DALGETY AND CO., Melbourne. £5 reward for each man. 3rd January, 1855.

Escaped Convicts.

FROM HOBART TOWN GAZETTE, 19th December, 1854. On pass from the Launceston Prisoners' Barracks, on the 30th ultimo for the service of Mr. Porior, Woodbourne. 87,508. *Robert Smith*, per *Oriental Queen*. Tried at Woodbridge Q.S., 2nd January, 1850, 7 years, farm laborer, 5 feet 8½, age 25, complexion dark, hair dark brown, eyes grey, native place Manningtree, blue marks back of hands, mole on left cheek. Reward 2l. or such lesser sum as may be determined upon by the convicting Magistrate.

Including what was committed, where it was committed, details of the victim of the crime, the details of the crime, any information or evidence gathered that may lead to the arrest of the criminal, details of the suspect or appearance of the criminal and who to contact with further information. These accounts often included names and detailed descriptions.

Information regarding criminals. This includes lists of warrants issued, arrests made, convicted people, people discharged from prison and people released on good behaviour bonds. These lists often included details of the crime, the name of the criminal, any alias's, sex and their race, the location, sentence and terms of release. More detailed information including the appearance of the criminal including height, hair colour, eye colour, any distinguishing features, clothing, place, (including names of ships or prisons or any other relevant place) and the crime they were included in, as well as any dates and sometimes photographs.

Notice of missing persons. These are often recorded as missing family or friends, but also anyone who someone wanted to find. Information such as the missing person's

Police gazettes

Information varies but may include the following

- Theft
 - Arson
 - Wife or child desertion
 - Pick-pocketing
 - Murder
 - Drunkenness
 - Supplying liquor to an Aboriginal
 - Wanted people – often with details such as
 - age
 - height
 - "native of ..."
 - sometimes accent
 - appearance
 - marks (scars, tattoos),
 - peculiarities
 - sometimes photos
 - Escaped prisoners
 - Military absconders
 - Ship deserters
 - Suspected criminals
 - Licences (some states)
 - tobacco sellers
 - liquor sellers
 - wine sellers
 - auctioneers
 - billiards
 - hawkers
 - poisons
 - timber cutting
 - chemists and druggists
 - medical practitioners
 - Police appointments
 - Justices of the Peace
 - Victims of crime
- (later gazettes)

description and appearance is given, the nature of their disappearance, the time of their disappearance, their supposed destination, details of their last known or supposed whereabouts is reported when relevant.

Official police department information. Personnel change

FOUND in Mr. C. E. BEAURTHEAUX's garden, Clyde-street, Prahran, a female child, about two months old, dressed in a black cotton frock, flannel petticoat and white calico shift. Information to the Detective Office, Melbourne.—12th January, 1856.

Escaped Lunatic.

THE undermentioned lunatic escaped from the Yarra Bend Lunatic Asylum on the evening of the 16th January, 1856, dressed in the Asylum clothing, marked BW arrow L.A., name THOMAS WALTON, 44 years of age, 5 feet 8½ inches high, hair and whiskers turning to grey.

Property Stolen or Lost.

A SILVER watch, silver chain, key and steel ring attached, stolen from the tent of Mr. PATRICK BURNS, near the Exhibition, William-street, Melbourne.—12th January, 1855.

within the force. Lists of promotions, dismissals, resignations and appointments are given with information on position, place, and name. Also appointments such as Justice of the Peace and inspectors.

Other related government department information. The police gazettes also include information on vacancies, appointments, promotions and resignations in other government departments. These include lists of Justices and court clerks etc. Notice of amendments and introductions of new acts of parliament are also given. Court lists and sessions are included.

Notice of licences (some states). Licences of various types and lists of those holding them are given in the police gazettes. These include the name, date, location for the licences.

Information from other state police gazettes. Often it was necessary for communication between states and even New Zealand regarding particular criminals, crimes, or missing persons. These are also recorded in the police gazettes, mainly regarding serious crimes or wanted people.

Persons Inquired For.

FURTHER urgent inquiries are requested, at the instance of Queensland police, as to the whereabouts of Maria Hearn, who left the employ of Mrs. Robinson, Fulo, to go to Farnham or Cunnamulla, on the 5th March last, but did not arrive at those places, and no trace of her can be found. She is 40 years of age, 5 feet 4 inches high, dark complexion, wears her hair hanging loose, half-witted, distressed appearance, and remarkably ugly; domestic servant, and single; dressed in a short red dress, hat, and boots. Information to the Officer in Charge, Criminal Investigation Branch, Brisbane.—O. 2094. 19th August, 1903.

INFORMATION is requested, at the instance of G. Gibbs, Morningside, near Brisbane, as to the present whereabouts of George Wooler, who left Leeds, England, about twenty-one years ago, and was in Brisbane about fifteen years ago; since then no tidings of him can be found. He is a pianist by profession. No description furnished. Information to the Officer in Charge, Criminal Investigation Branch, Brisbane.—O. 376. 5th February, 1904.

INFORMATION is requested, at the instance of A. H. Goebert, Homberg (Bez Cassel), Germany, as to the present whereabouts of his grandfather, Johannes Ditzel, and a great-aunt named Goebert, or their descendants, who emigrated to Australia in 1850 or 1855, from Mosheim, near Homberg, and Freudenthal, near Homberg, respectively. No description furnished. Information to the Officer in Charge, Criminal Investigation Branch, Brisbane.—O. 335. 1st February, 1904.

Supposed Arson.

Parke.—On the morning of the 20th ultimo, an unoccupied house, situate at M'Guigan's Gold-field, near Parke, the property of George Tucker, was destroyed by fire. And at an inquest held on the 29th ultimo, before the District Coroner, the following verdict was returned:—"That the house of George Tucker was burned down on the 20th June, 1892, but there is no evidence to show how the fire originated." The property destroyed, value about £30, was insured in the Mercantile Fire Insurance Company for £100.

Abandoned Child found.

St. Peters.—Found on Cook's River Road, St. Peters, about 9 30 p.m., the 7th instant, by Peter Philpot, of Cook's River Road.—A female child, about a fortnight old, wrapped in old skirt, and blue and white spotted jacket, piece of white flannel around head. Now in the Benevolent Asylum.

Bigamy.

Wallsend.—A warrant has been issued by the Wallsend Bench for the arrest of John Stewart, charged with bigamy. He is about 42 years of age, 5 feet 7 or 8 inches high, stout build, dark complexion, dark brown eyes, long dark beard; dressed in dark clothes, and dark felt hat; a watchmaker; an Englishman. Last heard of from Ferrymount, Bellinger River. Complainant, Elizabeth Stewart, Brook-street, Wallsend.

Government and police gazettes offer great information and detail, opening up a window to our past that cannot be found anywhere else. Fascinating to browse and a vast resource of useful information!

To see for yourself what the gazettes are like download the free samplers which are available for most digitised gazettes. These include the comprehensive police gazette indexes in full. The Archive CD Books Australia digitised government and police gazettes are all fully searchable on all text.

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