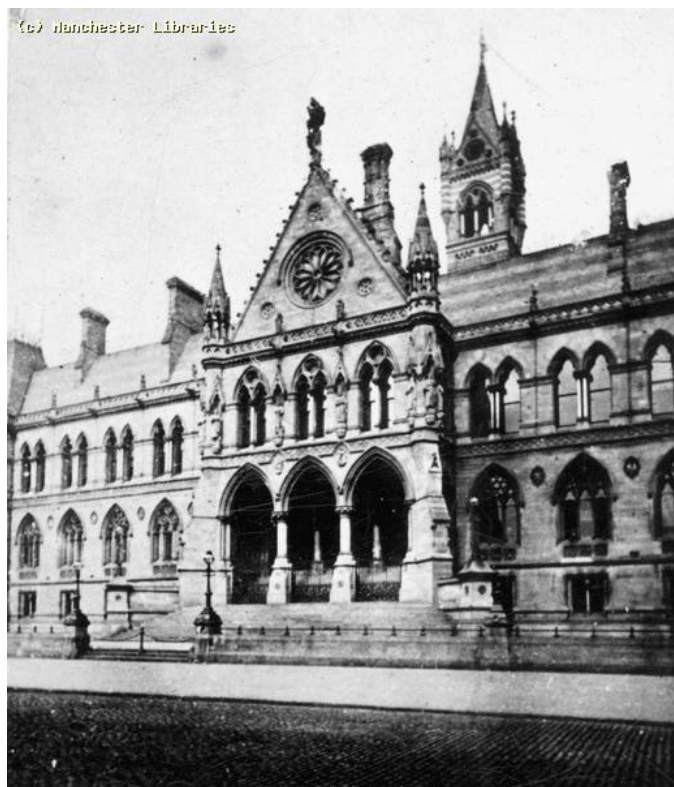


## Manchester Archives and Local Studies

### A Guide to Court and Prison Records



*Old Assize Court, Strangeways, 1900 m55632*

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## **1. Assize Courts**

The most serious criminal offences were dealt with by assize courts. In Lancashire, the Palatinate of Lancaster had its own jurisdiction, until 1876 when it was replaced by the Northern Circuit of the assizes. Assize Court records are held at the National Archives.

Greater Manchester Police Museum holds Calendars of Prisoners for the Assize Court of Manchester 1882-1964 (with gaps). Their address is:

Greater Manchester Police Museum, Newton Street, Manchester, M1 1ES.

Telephone: 0161 856 3287

Fax: 0161 856 3286

E-mail: [police.museum@gmp.police.uk](mailto:police.museum@gmp.police.uk)

Web site: <http://www.gmp.police.uk/spages/history>

## **2. Manchester Quarter Sessions**

The Quarter Session Court dealt with less serious crimes than assize courts. It usually met four times a year.

The City of Manchester was granted its own Quarter Sessions on 1 April 1839.

Before 1839 Manchester cases were tried at the Lancashire Quarter Sessions. The Quarter Sessions records for Lancashire are held at the Lancashire Record Office, but we hold microfilm copies of the order books in the Microfilm Unit (MF 211-277).

We hold records of the Manchester Quarter Sessions, 1839-1951 (ref: M116). A catalogue for the collection is available in the archives search room and on the Access to Archives web site at <http://www.a2a.org.uk/html/127-m116.htm>

We also hold some Calendars of Prisoners tried at the Quarter Sessions of the County of Lancaster (Hundred of Salford), 1821-1840 (ref: L27).

## **3. Crown Court of Manchester**

In 1956 the Manchester Quarter Sessions and Assize Court were replaced by the Crown Court. We hold calendars of prisoners for the Crown Court of Manchester, 2 volumes, 1956-1960 (ref: M545).

#### 4. Prison Records

As the borough of Manchester had no gaol in 1839, agreement was made with the county magistrates of Lancashire that persons sentenced for up to 6 months should be housed in **New Bailey Prison**, Salford, while longer term prisoners went to the **County Gaol at Lancaster**. Manchester Archives holds the following records for New Bailey Prison:

General Registers (Male), 1859-1869; Nominal Register (Small Debts - Male and Female), Sep 1863-19 Nov 1864, 28 Aug-29 Oct 1868; Female and Male Register, 1847-1872; Female Register, Aug 1862-July 1867; Female Description Books, 1859-1867

The records of Lancaster Prison are held by the National Archives, but Lancashire Record Office hold microfilm copies of these.

**Belle Vue Prison (or Manchester Borough Gaol / Manchester City Gaol)**, Hyde Road, West Gorton was opened in 1849 by the Borough of Manchester. It was a short term Jail, but it proved inadequate and some prisoners were still sent to the New Bailey. It was demolished in 1892. The majority of prisoners were tried at the Manchester Magistrates Court or the Manchester Quarter Sessions (see above). Manchester Archives holds the following records for this prison:

General Registers (Male and Female), 1850-1880 (some gaps) (ref: M600/1)

**Strangeways Prison** in Southall Street, Manchester was built to replace New Bailey prison in Salford which closed in June 1868. It acted as the County Gaol for the Hundred of Salford (south-west Lancashire). It was renamed Her Majesty's Prison, Manchester in the 1990s. Manchester Archives holds the following records for this prison:

Female Registers, 1868-1875; Female Description Books, 1867-1879; Male Registers, 1869-1879 (with gaps); Male and Female Register, Dec 1878-Dec 1881.

We also hold a "Felony Register - Bolton and Salford Sessions & Manchester Assizes (Male) Jan 1863-Dec 1872" (ref: M600/4/1). This is probably New Bailey Prison and Strangeways Prison.

No other records are known to have survived. A full catalogue for our prison records can be viewed at <http://www.a2a.org.uk/html/127-m600.htm>

If you find an ancestor in Strangeways do not automatically assume they would have been tried at the Manchester Quarter Sessions. The Manchester Quarter Sessions only covered the City of Manchester and Strangeways Prison took prisoners from all over south-west Lancashire. It is more likely that they would have been tried at the Assize Court (see above) or if it was a short custodial sentence at their local Quarter Session Court.

## **5. Manchester Petty Sessions (Magistrates Court / Police Court)**

Petty Sessions Courts met daily and dealt with minor crimes, licensing, juvenile offenders and civil matters such as bastardy, child maintenance and adoption.

We hold some records for the City of Manchester Petty Sessions Court, 1839-1970 (ref: M117). Please note that some of the petty session records are uncatalogued and we recommend that you book in advance.

The Manchester Quarter Sessions and Petty Sessions area of jurisdiction was the Borough / City of Manchester.

## **6. Manchester County Petty Sessional Division (Magistrates Court)**

A growth in population of Manchester and Salford led to the formation of the Manchester County Petty Sessional Division in 1868. It met at the newly built Strangeways Court. Lancashire Record Office holds records for this division (ref: PSMA). The division's area of jurisdiction comprised areas outside the City of Manchester and the City of Salford. For example in 1885 it comprised of the following townships:

Barton-on-Irwell, Blackley, Burnage, Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Clifton, Crumpsall, Didsbury, Failsworth Flixton, Gorton, Great Heaton, Heaton Norris (that part outside The Borough of Stockport ), Levenshulme, Little Heaton, Moss Side, Moston, Newton Heath, Openshaw, Pendlebury, Prestwich, Reddish, Stretford, Urmston, Withington and Worsley.

By 1908 the townships in the Division comprised Barton, Clifton, Davyhulme, Failsworth, Flixton, Gorton, Heaton Norris, Irlam, Levenshulme, Pendlebury, Prestwich, Stretford, Swinton, Urmston and Worsley.

## **7. Manchester Court Leet**

The Court Leet of the Manor of Manchester was the ancient Court for the Manor of Manchester. It was abolished in 1846.

The Court Leet Records of the Manor of Manchester 1552-1846 have been published and copies are available in Manchester Archives and Local Studies (352.042 M4).

## **8. Salford and Manchester Court of Record**

Salford Hundred Court was originally the ancient Court for Salford Wapentake or Hundred covering one of the six administrative areas of the county. It continued to be held until the nineteenth century with the Molyneuxs the Earls of Sefton as hereditary stewards. By then however, its only residual jurisdiction outside the borough of Salford was where townships had no Court Leets of their own where it elected constables and dealt with minor nuisances. Its principal business in Salford after the establishment of the Police Commissioners had dwindled to the appointment of the Boroughreeve and other officials. Concurrently however, a Sitting of the Court for the trial of civil actions for debt or damage under 40/- was held every three weeks. In 1846, this Court was constituted a Court of Record and its jurisdiction extended to £50.

In 1868, the Court was amalgamated with the Manchester Court of Record which had its origins in Manchester's Charter of incorporation, 1838. At first, the jurisdiction of

the latter Court had been limited to £20, but in 1845, it was increased to £50. The new Court had jurisdiction in personal actions only and by 1911 its area became limited to the area of the Manchester and Salford County Courts.

The Court was abolished on the 31st December 1971.

Manchester Archives holds the following records of this court (ref: M123):

Acts of Parliament and rules of Manchester Borough Court of Record and Salford Hundred Court of Record 1845-1971; Other Acts of Parliament and Rules 1869-1920; Manchester City Council 1935-1936; Government Inquiries 1911-1969; Administrative Papers 1852-1956; Papers concerning officials of the court 1858-1926; Attorneys. Detailing the names of those serving the court [1838?]-1964; Business of the Court 1916-1971 including the names of those appearing before the court; Precedents and miscellaneous documents 1862-1971

Many of its earlier records were destroyed by enemy action during World War II.

## **9. Manchester County Court**

County Courts were formed in 1846 to deal with small debts and other civil claims. No records appear to have survived of Manchester County Court, but it may be worth contacting the court at:

The Court House  
184-186 Deansgate  
Manchester  
Greater Manchester  
M3 3WB  
England

Manchester also had its own District Court of Bankruptcy.

## **10. Manchester Coroners Court**

Unfortunately, coroners' records frequently have been destroyed. This is certainly the case with the records of the coroner for the city of Manchester, where the only 19th century records to survive are witnesses' depositions for the dates 22 August 1851 – 24 December 1852, held by us (ref M381/1/1/1-2). Greater Manchester County Record Office holds 20th century coroners' records, namely indexes 1918-1998 and inquests 1959-1998. Coroners' records are closed for 75 years, and permission to see records less than 75 years old would have to be obtained from the Manchester Coroner, and is only given in exceptional circumstances.

In the absence of coroners' records, a report of any inquest conducted by the coroner for the city of Manchester might be found in local newspapers. We hold a scrapbook of newspaper cuttings for the period 1900-1938 (ref M381/2), mostly concerned with coroners' cases. It is not clear how complete the scrapbook is and, in the absence of an index, we would not search this item on your behalf.

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