London Maps Online

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It's hardly surprising that there many maps of London. In the two map bibliographies of James Howgego and Ralph Hyde (see Further Reading), over 700 general maps of the city are listed from the mid 16th century to 1900. And that's not counting special purpose maps, and those for smaller areas.

The problem is, however, determining which ones will be worth looking at for a particular genealogical purpose. In any case many of them can only be found in major London libraries such as the British Library, the Guildhall Library, the London Metropolitan Archives, or, if you are lucky, borough public libraries. The National Archives itself has a good collection of London maps, notably those in class ZMAP 4 Maps of London Reproduced by the London Topographical Society. If you can't easily get to London, though, and are reliant on your local reference library, you may well find it has few maps for a city outside the area it serves.

The web, however, has completely revolutionised access to London maps, since many of the most important are online in one form or another. The best digital scans are at very high resolution and make seeing the original quite unnecessary; but even a low resolution scan or a digital photograph will often be sufficient to indicate whether it will be worth your trouble to plan a visit to a library.

Of course, what counts as London, has changed over the centuries. The early maps concentrate on the City itself or on London, Westminster and Southwark, but even as early as the 18th Century, you can find maps of "Greater London".

Main Collections

Although there are many different sites that have one or more London maps available, there are a handful of sites which have significant collections of professionally digitised maps, and which are by far the most useful. You can, of course, use a search engine, to hunt down online maps on other, but without the name of a map maker and a year of publication, a search for just "London map" will give you an unmanageable list of search results.

The [London Ancestor](#) has a small collection of London maps at. The most useful are the 1885 Boundary Commission maps for the London metropolitan boroughs, based on the 6" Ordnance Survey map, and there are also detailed maps of individual City wards.

MOTCO has half a dozen of the most important London maps discussed below. Place name indexes are available for purchase on CD. (The site also has many topographical prints of the capital.)

MAPCO has over 30 maps of London, starting from the Tudor period, and an impressive list of planned additions to the site.

Maps of London concentrates on the 20th Century with maps of the Greater London area from Collins Bartholomew.

Old London Maps a small collections of maps and views, mainly of local areas, but including some the most important general maps discussed below.

One of the most unexpected sources for London maps is the website of the Department of Epidemiology at UCLA. This has a set of pages devoted to the medical pioneer John Snow, responsible for identifying water-pumps are the sources of cholera outbreaks. UCLA's John Snow site has good scans of maps for the period 1818–1872. It offers both high and medium resolution images, the latter perhaps useful if you have a slow internet connection.

Maps also form a significant part of the image collections at two of the capital's most significant libraries. Collage is the image database of the Guildhall Library, the record office for the City of London. Most of the materials from the Print Room collection are engravings of particular locations. The easiest way to find general maps is just to search on the word "maps", or a mapmaker but a "Places" index lets you select maps of specific areas or streets, and in particular the large scale maps of the individual wards will be useful if you have an ancestor from the City of London itself. The images are not at very high resolution, and don't show much detail, but the site will allow you to plan what you want to see on a visit to the Guildhall Library, and you can also order prints direct from the site.

The British Library's Crace Collection covers the period 1570–1860. It is not strictly comprehensive in that some notable maps are absent, but the collection comprise around 1200 items, most of which do not seem to be available elsewhere on the web, though most are for particular areas rather than the whole city. Unlike the other main sites, it includes different editions of particular maps, which allows you to see very clearly how an area has changed over time. You can view a straightforward image in JPG format, but these do not have the highest resolution, but there is a special zoomable viewer which offers higher resolution images with more detail (you need to have the Adobe Flash viewer installed on your computer. With such a large collection, it can be hard to find what you are looking for unless you already have a mapmaker and a date to search for.

Probably the most comprehensive site for UK maps is Genmaps which has links to a large number of London maps . However, Genmaps is less useful than the sites just mentioned because the maps themselves are represented by amateur scans and digital photographs and
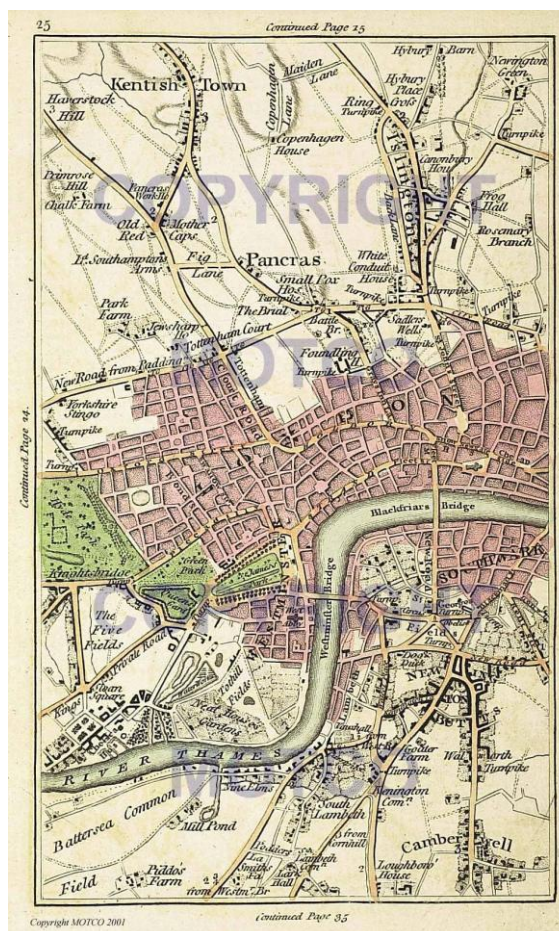
simply do not have the high resolution or quality of the professional scans at the other sites. However, it's still well worth visiting to see what other maps are available, even if you have to seek out a physical copy to see the full detail.

Usefulness

Although each old map has its own interest from the point of view of local or social history, not every map is useful for the genealogist. Many are at too small a scale to provide the sort of detail the genealogist is looking for

Generally, for family history, you will want to be able to identify individual streets by name and perhaps major buildings, particularly schools, hospitals, workhouses, prisons, asylums and the like, especially where they are no longer in existence. (Churches have greater longevity and can usually be found on modern maps.) But less detailed maps may still be of interest for showing the nature of the area in which ancestors lived.

This is most obviously the case for the areas beyond the traditional core of the city in London, Westminster and Southwark. If your ancestors were living in, say, Camberwell or Hornsey in the 18th or early 19th century, you will want to discover how rural the area still was when your ancestors were living there. So, for example, John Cary's 1786 map of 15 Miles Around London, at a scale of one inch to a mile (and available at MOTCO and Old London Maps) does not name any individual road, but shows clearly the rural nature of most London "villages" at the period. (If you have a publican ancestor from the area, though, there's a good chance his pub is marked!) The figure above shows the area between Kentish Town and Camberwell. James Wyld's 1872 map of 25 miles around London fulfils a similar function the later 19th century (UCLA, MAPCO).
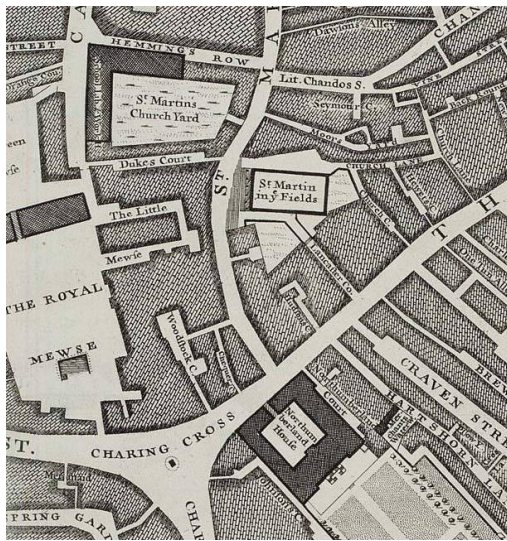
Large scale maps

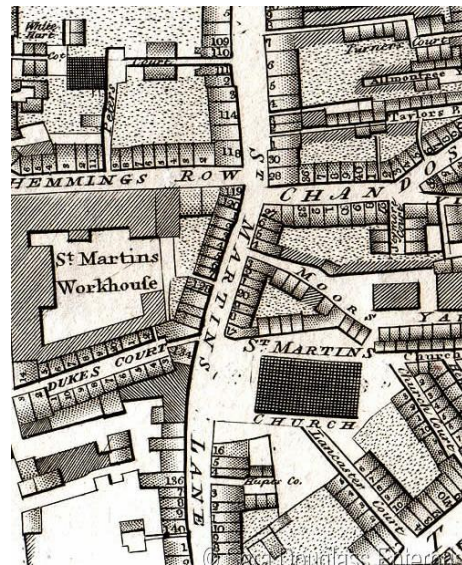However, the most generally useful for genealogists are the major large scale maps:

- A highly detailed map of the City before the Great Fire in 1666 is Newcourt's extremely rare "An Exact Delineation of the Cities of London and Westminster and the Suburbs and all the throughfares, highways, streets, lanes and common allies".

This 1658 map shows every individual building, though only public buildings are individually labelled. An 1863 facsimile by Edward Stanford is available on the Old London Maps site.
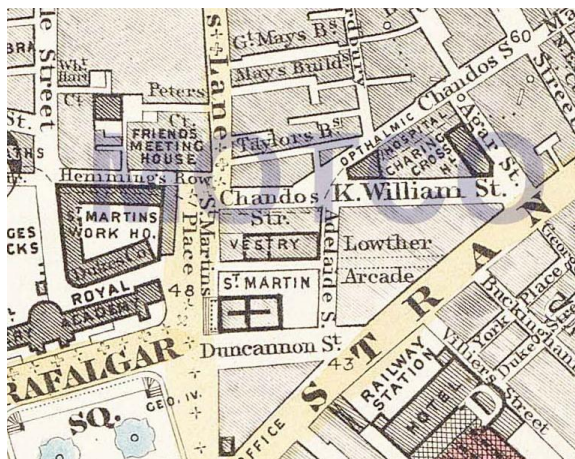
- A good map for the period immediately after the fire is John Ogilby and William Morgan's 1676 "Survey of the City of London" , at an extraordinary scale of 100 feet to the inch, completed in 1676.. It is available on the [British History](#) site, but this can be quite tricky to use (you need to click on a centre point before zooming, and there is no pan facility), though worth because of the very high resolution.

- John Roque's 1746 map of London Westminster and Southwark (MOTCO) is at a scale of 26" to the mile with all but the tiniest passages named.

Roque (1746)

Horwood (1799)

Stanford (1862)

Weller (1868)

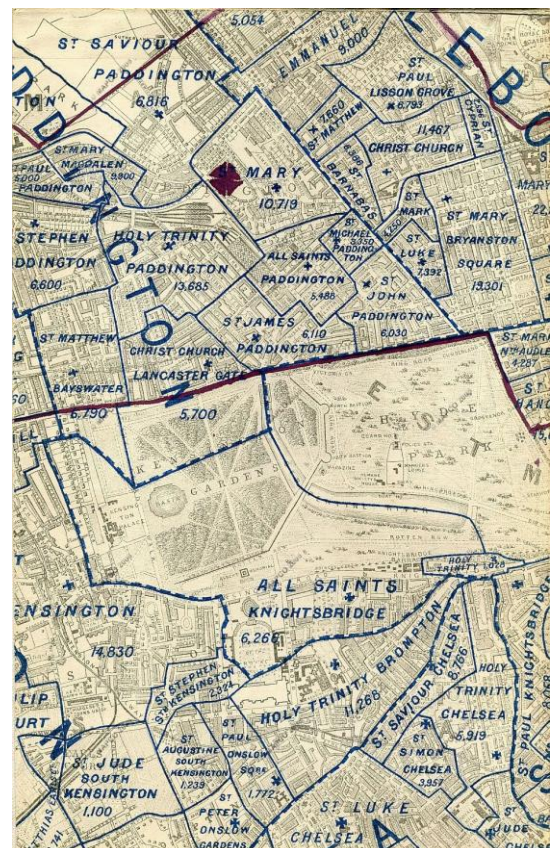The area around St Martin-in-the-Fields in four London maps

- Horwood's 1799 map of London Westminster and Southwark (MOTCO, Old London Maps) is one of the most extraordinarily useful of all historical London maps because it shows every individual house, and on many streets gives the house numbers.
- Greenwood's 1827 map (Old London Maps, and also at [Bath Spa University](#)) is at a scale of eight inches to a mile, but is less clearly engraved than Horwood and the smaller streets are not always named
- Stanford's 6" Library Map of London and its Suburbs, was first published in 1862 and frequently reprinted, making it the standard London map of the period (MOTCO, and [Map of London](#)). This names all but a few small passages, and even then the tenements accessed via a passage are often named, as are a whole host of public buildings, including schools and chapels.
- Edward Weller's 1868 Map of London (Old London Maps) at $9^{3/8}$" to the mile, though larger scale than Stanford's, is less clearly printed, though, interestingly, it indicates the route of Underground lines.
- For the early 20th century Bartholomew's 1908 Handy Reference Atlas Of London & Suburbs (MAPCO) at 3¼" names all streets, but doesn't name passages and alleys.

Overlays

All these maps are general topographical maps, but there are a number of maps which overlay demographic or other information of interest to the genealogist. Stanford's Library Map of London was widely used for such purposes in the latter half of the 19th century. So for example, MAPCO has an 1877 edition of Stanford map "showing the boundaries of parishes, ecclesiastical districts, and poor law division" at that date (though it doesn't show the City parishes themselves), seen right.

Stanford also produced a series of "School Board Maps" showing the districts covered by the capital's schools (Old London Maps, MAPCO). The London Ancestor's Boundary Commission maps have already been mentioned — these show the boundaries of the metropolitan boroughs in 1885.

The most famous demographic map is undoubtedly Charles Booth's map of [London Poverty](#), which has been digitised by the LSE along with the accompanying notebooks.

Of course, this is only scratching the surface, and doesn't even begin to take account of the many maps of individual areas within the capital. Such maps are inevitably rarer, both in libraries and online, but the Collage and Crace Collection sites are good places to start.

Further Reading

Although some of the map sites mentioned have detailed information about the individual maps, print is still the best source for information about the mapping of London in general. The definitive bibliographical works are:

James Howgego, *Printed Maps of London circa 1553-1850* (Dawson, 2nd edn 1978)

Ralph Hyde, *Printed Maps of London: 1851-1900* (Dawson, 1975)

With the details from these books, you can do an effective web search for a specific London map, if you can't find it on the major sites mentioned in this article. Both also have useful introductions. For broader introductions, see:

Peter Whitfield, *London: A Life in Maps* (British Library, 2006)

Simon Foxell, *Mapping London. Making Sense of the City* (Black Dog, 2007)

The London Topographical Society has published a series of six historical street atlases of the capital (some of which reproduce maps now available online, though with the advantage of a street index). The LTS site also has reproductions of a number of important London maps for sale.