

Archival Research Report

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During 2017-18, I visited the French, British, and Scottish national archives. This was a learning experience, and I hope that other scholars can use what I have learned to make the best use of their time.

Before You Leave

Before you leave, you should become familiar with the requirements. **ALWAYS CHECK NATIONAL HOLIDAYS BEFORE YOU TRAVEL.** The archives will be closed. Generically, I would recommend using the catalogues to find all the call numbers you will need before arriving, to save time.

In the British National Archives, you can pre-order up to 12 original documents so that they are already pulled for you when you arrive. However, to place that order, you will need a reader's ticket. This is the standard ID card that archives issue. Thankfully, in the British National Archives, you can pre-register online, which results in a temporary reader's ticket number. It usually takes 1-2 business days after registration for the temporary number to be activated. You can order documents as early as six weeks in advance, until 4pm the day before your visit (in London time, obviously). It is important to keep in mind when planning your visit, that you must always order your documents for the next day by 4pm. Also of note, the archives are closed on Sunday and Monday, but open until 7pm on Tuesday and Thursday. However, the 4pm deadline still applies for ordering documents. Once you have registered for your reading ticket, you should then prepare two forms of identity to bring with you on your trip: (1) proof of your name with a valid signature and (2) proof of address. The acceptable forms of documentation are found here: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/visit-us/researching-here/do-i-need-a-readers-ticket/>. Personally, I used my passport (since I needed it anyway) and a credit card statement.

In the National Records of Scotland, the search rooms are open 9am-4:30pm, Monday-Friday. When I was there, they closed early due to snow, so take care in travelling during winter months. You cannot pre-register for a reader's ticket. To receive one upon arrival, you will need: (1) photographic proof of identity, (2) proof of current address such as a utility bill (must be originals), and (3) two passport-sized photographs. They took my photo there for 2 pounds, even though I came with passport-sized photos that I had agonized over.

For the Archives Nationales in Paris, you may pre-register online. This pre-registration permits you to reserve two documents before your arrival. Requests to reserve documentation must be accomplished before 3pm (in Paris time) the working day before your arrival. Although they are open on Saturdays, this is for pre-requested documents only and they do not process any new requests. When you arrive at the Archives, you will need a valid proof of identity with a photo. I used my passport or driver's license, I can't remember. They take your photo there. Unlike other archives, these reader's tickets are only good for one year, but can be renewed.

Upon Arriving

What to pack:

- A package of pre-sharpened or mechanical pencils.

- Your laptop or tablet and charger.
- Your cell phone or a digital camera (without flash) to take photos of documents.
- Pocket tissues.
- Your change purse/wallet.

Throw these into a tote or backpack that you feel comfortable stuffing in a locker. You will have to keep your jacket, scarf, and other banned items in your locker. Move the items you are allowed to bring with you into a large plastic tote, which is provided.

The Kew campus of the British National Archives is a beautiful, huge building with a garden tucked away at the end of a suburban street, filled with million-pound homes. Upon entry, there is a bag search. In the back of the room is an information desk, which will tell you where to go from there. If I remember correctly, you will proceed to the second floor to get your ID made, but the information desk will be able to tell you more confidently. Most documents of traditional size are processed on the second floor, but documents of a certain age/size are processed on the third floor. After you get your ID card, you will need to return to the first floor to the locker room. Every time you enter or leave a reading room, you will go through a bag check. Even if you just need to go to the restroom. The British National Archives are nice in that there is a café in house. If you are alone, as I was, you might want to bring something to read during lunch. The first time I visited the Archives, I was too poor to be spending 8 pounds on lunch every day, so I would leave the Archives and walk down to the grocery store in the center of Kew next to the train station. Like many grocery stores in the United Kingdom, they have 2 pound meal specials, which allow you to have a sandwich, fruit/chips/vegetables, and a drink.

The Archives Nationales in Paris are divided into two campuses: There is one campus in the suburbs and one campus in the center of Paris. You will need to check where your desired documents are stored. Because my research was very old, I needed to go to the Archives in the center of the city, but I only figured that out after going to the wrong campus first. The entrance to the Archives is not intuitive. There is a back entrance for research, which is a door that leads to a courtyard filled with intimidating security personnel. This then leads to a door, to your left, which is the entrance to the Archives. When you enter, there is an information desk to your right and offices directly ahead. The office directly ahead is the person in charge of making your identification card and generally telling you all of the rules of the Archives. Once you have finished creating your ID card, there is a locker room under the stairs. This is to the right of the main entrance but to the left of the office you've just exited. Once you have emptied everything in your locker except for the items you need to conduct research, you may ascend the stairs to the proper floor (there's a map in the packet you're given). I worked in microfiche (which was not intuitive— at first I thought they would be actual documents, but apparently different letters lead to paper versus microfiche). The microfiche coordinators were not very patient that I did not understand all of the terminology for operating a microfiche machine in French and generally thought I was unqualified, but it is not unbearable, and there are generally only historians in the room.

The National Records of Scotland are the easiest to navigate. It's a rather small archive, comparatively, and the front desk workers are very helpful at familiarizing you with your surroundings.

Making the Most of Your Time

So, now you're ready to begin researching. Assuming that you have to collect a large amount of information in a small number of days— take copious notes, using the names of files, and LABEL EVERYTHING. If the document can be photographed, take a photograph rather than reading through the document, and come back to it later. At the end of each day, upload your photos to your computer, and rename them to correspond with the file name. This will make citation much easier later, and also keep you from forgetting what it is. If the document cannot be photographed due to age or protected status, transcribe, take notes, or ask if it can be photocopied for a small fee.