

GenGuide

The Genealogist's guide to reference sources and research material

<https://www.genguide.co.uk/source/stonemason-records-occupations/>

Stonemason Records (Occupations)

Nature of Source

Records of those occupied as stonemasons and related trades such as marble masonry. Stone masonry was considered a skilled trade, higher in ranking than a wheelwright or carpenter for example. Many craftsmen were self-taught and some developed their skills and later became architects and civil engineers. Some learnt their craft through the apprenticeship system either at the **parish level** or through the **guild system**. Parish apprentices were, however, often only used as cheap labour for the more wealthy in society. If the mason received an apprenticeship as part of the guild system, the local record office should have records on individual guilds but the survival rates of the actual indenture is very low. By the 19th century the strict control over trade exercised by the guild had largely broken down.

Some stonemasons were organised into local trade associations who regulated the industry and operated their own apprenticeship system. Existing records of these associations will be found at local record offices.

Also look for the records of those that joined the Friendly Society of Operative Stone Masons with the admission registers and obituaries especially useful. The society was formed around 1831. The society underwent a number of name changes from its inception and in 1919 changed to the Operative Society of Masons, Quarrymen and Allied Trades of England and Wales and finally in 1921 joined the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers. The **Modern Records Centre** located at the University of Warwick Library holds the records of the society along with the records of many other trade associations and trade unions. **The National Archives** also holds some documents relating to the society.

It is important to note that although stonemasons are associated with **freemasonry**, by the 19th century those connections were entirely historical and the two groups were no longer intricately linked. Although stonemasonry is an ancient craft, most records date from the 19th century. The work of a stonemason might be recorded in the parish surveyor's accounts as his skills were often called upon to oversee the repair of the highways. Check **census returns** and **directories** to track the career of a stonemason.

Use **newspapers** and **directories** to look for stonemasons' advertisements.

Also see

Apprenticeship Agreements, Trade

Apprenticeship Indentures, Parish

Business & Company Records

Directories, Trade, Professional, Telephone & Street

Friendly & Fraternal Society Records

Occupational and Labour Records (Includes links and guidance on calculating historical wage rates and the cost of living)

Trade Union Records

Where Found

County Record Offices (Guild records, parish apprenticeship records, local trade associations. Find the details of a local UK archive from a searchable list of over 2,500 archives hosted by The National Archives)

The National Archives (Friendly Society of Operative Stone Masons records)

Modern Records Centre (University of Warwick. Collections includes the records of the **Friendly Society of Operative Stonemasons** of England, Ireland and Wales and subsequent society/union records such as the Operative Society of Masons, Quarrymen and Allied Trades of England and Wales)

Working Class Movement Library (Records of stonemasons and building trade workers unions)

Trades Union Congress Library Collections

People's History Museum

Labour History Archive & Study Centre (The archive is home to the complete holdings of the national Labour Party and Communist Party of Great Britain, archives of trade unions and other left wing political groups and movements, personal papers of radical politicians, writers and activists, and over 95,000 photographs relating to the growth of democracy in Britain)

British Library Newspaper Collections (Including the journal 'The Stonemason' published in the late 19th century and other trade journals)

Websites

https://warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/research_guides/family_history/stone (Modern Records Centre Research Guide: Stonemasons and Quarrymen)

www.wcml.org.uk/our-collections/working-lives/stonemasons (Working Class Movement Library: Stonemasons)

www.wcml.org.uk/wcml/en/our-collections/working-lives/stonemasons/stonemasons-and-builders-unions (Working Class Movement Library: Stonemasons and builders' unions: A brief history)

www.unionancestors.co.uk/united-operative-masons-association-of-scotland (Trade Union Ancestors: United Operative Masons Association of Scotland. This is the story of the United Operative Masons Association of Scotland, also touching on the histories of other stonemasons' unions in Scotland)

www.finestoneminatures.com/dictionary.htm (A Stonemason's Dictionary: A pocket dictionary of masonry terms, names and expressions)

www.scan.org.uk/researchrtools/james_smith_diary.htm (Memoirs of James Smith, Stonemason, Dundee, 1805-c1869)

<https://boards.ancestry.co.uk/topics.occupations/mb.ashx> (Ancestry Message Boards: Occupations)

Online Databases

https://warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/research_guides/family_history/stone/obituaries (Modern Records Centre: Obituaries from the Fortnightly Returns of the Operative Society of Masons, Quarrymen and Allied Trades of England and Wales. This index is to the obituaries or death notices contained in the fortnightly returns of the Friendly Society of Operative Stonemasons of England, Ireland and Wales between July 1836-April 1921. The index contains over 25,000 entries and includes some additional information relating to applications for superannuation, accident benefit, etc)

<http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~stonemen/genealogy> (Stone and Quarry Men of the West Country: Index of Masons, Quarrymen, Builders, Carpenters and all related Occupations in Devon and Cornwall)

