

Search Strategies for Finding British Commonwealth Author Death Dates: University of Michigan CRMS Grant

Prepared for the University of Michigan Library Staff

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I. Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to provide search strategies to locate the death dates of authors from the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth countries of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand who died approximately between 1870 and 1941. Although not exhaustive, this guide has been organized to list the most important resources, both web-based and printed, in order to identify the date of death.

The resources are divided into the following sections: Biographical Databases, which includes both freely accessible and subscription products; Library Catalogs and Authority Records; sources for Vital Records; and Bibliographies and Finding Aids. A sample search which outlines the steps and strategies that a Reference Specialist in the Library of Congress followed in pursuing the death date of an author concludes the document. The sections have been arranged to suggest a recommended order for the researcher to follow. The biographic databases and library catalogs will provide the greatest information for the effort; however, much more labor intensive research efforts will need to be employed to identify the lesser-known authors. For this reason, guidance on searching vital records will introduce the researcher to techniques used by genealogists in searching records that may be available online, but also those that may only reside in archives or repositories in the country where the death occurred. General Internet searching may also prove useful with particular attention to full-text sources found through Google Books (<http://books.google.com>), the HathiTrust (<http://hathitrust.org>), and the Internet Archive (<http://www.archive.org>).

Information regarding the copyright laws of the various countries has been omitted as that material is widely available elsewhere.

For a general overview, a perusal of *The Online Books Page: How Can I Tell When an Author Died*, a University of Pennsylvania website (<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/deathdates.html>), may also be instructive.

II. Biographical Databases

A. **World Biographical Information System** (subscription)

This is a subscription database produced by K.G. Sauer Company. It is based on extensive microform sets which, in turn, are based on hundreds of biographical dictionaries and encyclopedias from many countries. The *British Biographical Archive*, *Canadian Biographical Archive*, and the *Australasian Biographical Archive* are all included in WBIS. For this kind of research, it proved useful to search across all the archives rather than just focusing on Australia or Canada as 19th century authors might appear in the British Biographical Archive, even if they had primarily published in a Commonwealth country. More obscure people can be found in WBIS than in such databases as *Biography in Context* or the *Biography and Genealogy Master Index*.

WBIS is inconsistent in terms of full text. While the *British Biographical Archive* has all of the entries about the people fully digitized from the biographical dictionaries (from the microform set), the *Australasian Biographical Archive* simply indexed the people. The index entry usually contains birth and death dates and citations to the sources, but the sources themselves are part of the microform set and are not found full text online. As there can be more than one person by the same name, it can be helpful to read the full entry to verify that you have the correct person.

B. **Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online** (free access)

<http://www.biographi.ca/index-e.html>

Launched by the University of Toronto and the Université Laval in 1959, this source includes Canadians who played an important role in the formation of what is now Canada. It currently presents persons who died between the years 1000 and 1930 or whose last known date of activity falls within these years.

C. **Oxford Dictionary of National Biography** (subscription)

The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (U.K.) is a subscription database. In general, one must be more prominent to be in the DNB than in the Australian Dictionary of Biography or the Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online, but it would certainly be a source for this sort of research. WBIS draws from a great range of sources, so many less prominent people who can be found in the British Biography Archive do not appear in the DNB.

D. **Australian Dictionary of Biography** (free access)

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/> The ADB is produced by the National Centre of Biography at the Australian National University (ANU). This pre-eminent

dictionary of national biography includes more than 12,000 entries providing a cross-section of Australian society.

E. *Obituaries Australian* (free access)

<http://oa.anu.edu.au/> Obituaries Australian is freely available online through the Australian National University. In sample searches, there was overlap with WBIS and occasionally discrepancies in dates, but it is worthwhile to search both.

F. *Biography and Genealogy Master Index* and *Biography in Context* (subscription).

These two databases produced by Gale Cengage are more commonly found in university and public libraries than some of the other subscription sources. *Biography in Context* includes full text of the entries but mostly includes rather famous or prominent people. *BGMI* indexes hundreds of biographical sources, but many of the sources may not be found in all but large research libraries. Birth and death dates are sometimes given, but it is not consistent (dates are usually to distinguish individuals with the same name).

G. *New General Catalog of Old Books and Authors* (free access)

<http://www.kingkong.demon.co.uk/ngcoba/ngcoba.htm>

"The aim of this [U.K.] site is to catalog all deceased authors, all authors of books published before 1964, and at least some more recent authors, including their full name(s), date of death, date of birth, pseudonyms, sex & nationality (for those who died from 1920 onwards), and their books published before 1964."

H. Other Databases for More Extensive Searching

Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature from ProQuest

Biography Index from H.W. Wilson

Literature Resource Center from Gale

Modern Language Association International Bibliography through a variety of commercial vendors

Marquis Who's Who from Marquis Who's Who

III. Library Catalogs and Authority Records

A. Library of Congress

<http://catalog.loc.gov> and <http://authorities.loc.gov/>

Library of Congress Catalog and Authority Records

The birth/death dates in the Library of Congress catalog are generally regarded as fairly authoritative. They come, however, from such a wide variety of sources that absolute certainty in the correctness of the data can not be stated.

For the "newer" name authority records* (e.g., created in the last 30 some years), the cataloging practice is to record the dates used in the heading in a "source citation" field that indicates not just the date, but where the cataloger found the information. Sometimes the information comes from the book/item being cataloged, Cataloging-in-Publication information supplied by a publisher, or a vast array of reference-type sources that a cataloger may use in cases where a date would help them break a conflict between two people with the same name. These sources historically included national biographical dictionaries (e.g., DNB), general encyclopedias and works about authors, etc. These days, catalogers can often find the information on the Web (e.g., Wikipedia, online obituaries, Facebook pages, author's home pages, IMDb, Social Security Death Index just to name a few) much more easily than printed reference sources. Clearly, these sources themselves can vary in authoritativeness, but most catalogers are pretty good judges as to whether the source/information seems solid or not.

In terms of older authority records, when the old manual authority file was put online many decades ago, supporting information about the source of date information was generally not recorded. For these records, the date is recorded, but one is unable to determine the source used online. (In some cases, that information is recorded in a manual authority file which is still available at the Library of Congress as of 2011.)

Many of the Anglo national libraries (e.g., British Library, National Library of Wales, National Library of Scotland) also participate as contributors to the Library of Congress's Name Authority File. The British Library is the second largest contributor after LC and they sometimes also have very good information they cite in the record (e.g., British Cataloging-in-Publication, letters from authors).

B. Virtual International Authority File

Many national libraries also contribute to the Virtual International Authority File (VIAF), including the Library and Archives Canada and the National Library of Australia (all LC and NACO records are contributed to VIAF directly). Catalogers

also use dates in those records, but again, the sources used to record the dates vary.

The VIAF is found at <http://viaf.org>. After searching an author, one can click on the “About” tab and find links to such sources as Wikipedia and WorldCat Identities. “Countries of Publication” may also help with identifying individuals or specific publications.

C. National Library of Australia
<http://catalogue.nla.gov.au>

D. Library and Archives Canada
<http://amicus.collectionscanada.ca/aaweb/aalogine.htm>

Amicus includes the catalog of Library and Archives Canada and more than 1300 libraries throughout Canada.

E. COPAC
<http://copac.ac.uk>

COPAC includes the British Library catalog and those of 24 major research libraries in the UK.

Examples of catalog use: In addition to providing birth and death dates, library catalogs can be useful in identifying individuals. For example, the Library of Congress catalog was useful in helping determine the first and middle names for W.H. Davies. Once it was determined that he was William Henry Davies, the appropriate entry in WBIS could be found. (Similarly, a Wikipedia article on Henry Kendall indicated that the full name was Thomas Henry Kendall and again, this helped with the WBIS search.)

As another example of the usefulness of the library catalogs, a book simply titled *Maxims* was written by Edward Counsel. There were several people by that name, but the Australian Dictionary of Biography listed one as a surveyor. *Maxims* in the catalog of the National Library of Australia was grouped with several maps under a particular Edward Counsel author, so that helped identify the correct Edward Counsel.

IV. Vital Records

Death Records

To search death certificates, you need to know the death date (chicken or egg) and the place of death (which is often why genealogists search for obituaries, to find those two facts). For instance: the following illustrates what is needed for obituary searches

DEATHS: 1870-1941 (TO 1960)

Possible genealogical resources:

- Cemetery
- Death records (civil)
- Death records (church)
- Obituaries
- Probate (Wills)

FamilySearch

<https://www.familysearch.org/>

A. Australia and New Zealand

Australian family history and genealogy selected websites

<http://www.nla.gov.au/family-history/genealogy-selected-websites>

Birth, Death and Marriage Historical Records (New Zealand)

<https://www.bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz/Home/>

Cyndislist Death Records » Locality Specific: Australia and New Zealand

<http://www.cyndislist.com/death/australia-and-new-zealand/>

B. Canada

Canadian Death Records, Library and Archives Canada

<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/022/022-906.003-e.html>

Canadian Birth, Marriage and Death Records

Article updated: 24 February 2008

By: Fawne Stratford-Devai

from: Global Gazette

<http://globalgenealogy.com/globalgazette/gazfd/gazfd71.htm>

Internet sites which contain records:

Find Birth, Marriage and Death Records in Canada - Free

<http://sylviacruz.suite101.com/find-birth-marriage-and-death-records-in-canada---free-a236130>

Cyndislist Death Records » Locality Specific: Canada

<http://www.cyndislist.com/death/canada/>

Also, **Cyndislist Canada**, (<http://www.cyndislist.com/gencan.htm>), a Web site that offers a vast amount of information about Canadian genealogy information. Though not a Canadian site, its categorized and cross-referenced index to genealogical resources on the Internet is one of the best resources for Canadian genealogy found online.

Ancestry.ca (Subscription)

<http://www.ancestry.ca/>

Death, Burial, Cemetery & Obituaries

(<http://search.ancestry.ca/search/category.aspx?cat=125>) This category includes civil, church cemetery, obituary, and other death-related collections.

Canada Vital Statistics Agency

<http://vitalstats.gov.mb.ca/Genealogy.html>

Effective January 1, 2003, The Vital Statistics Act was proclaimed providing unrestricted access to some records. Restrictions will still apply for the following records:

Births less than 100 years ago

Marriages less than 80 years ago

Deaths less than 70 years ago

If either the party concerned or the immediate next of kin (spouse, children, parents, or siblings) are living, written proof of their consent to release the requested information is to be attached to the application.

Each province may also have online records, but one would have to know where the person died. Ontario and British Columbia are provided as examples.

Ontario

Finding a Death Registration - A Pathfinder

<http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/english/archival-records/interloan/v-dintro.aspx>

Archives of Ontario holds death registrations for the years 1869 to 1939. The 1940 registrations will be available to the public some time in 2012.

Online Death Indexes & Records for Canada: A Genealogy Records Guide

<http://www.deathindexes.com/canada.html>

Ontario Death Records

http://www.afhs.ab.ca/registry/regon_death.shtml

Ontario Court of Probate and Surrogate Court Records: Wills and Estate Files - A Pathfinder

<http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/english/archival-records/interloan/c-efile.aspx>

“This pathfinder explains how to find wills (usually within estate files) that were filed with the Court of Probate and Surrogate Courts between the years 1793 and 1963.”

Ontario Genealogy Records Online (<http://www.genealogysearch.org/canada/>) includes:

1. Ontario Deaths 1869-1947. Name index of Ontario, Canada death registration entries. Registration entries for 1939-1947 are for overseas deaths only.
2. Ontario Cemetery Finding Aid. The Ontario Cemetery Finding Aid is a pointer database consisting of the surnames, cemetery name and location of over 2 million interments from several thousand cemeteries, cairns, memorials, and cenotaphs in Ontario Canada.
3. Brant County: Brantford, Ontario, Canada Births, Marriages, Deaths Index. This index covers birth, marriage, and death notices appearing in the Brantford Expositor. 1852-1916 (weekly) (some years are missing on the microfilm), 1917-1940 (daily), 1960-1984 (daily), 1988-2004 (daily).
4. Additional categories.
<http://www.genealogysearch.org/canada/ontario.html>

British Columbia

British Columbia Archives' Vital Events Indexes

http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/textual/governmt/vstats/v_events.htm

Contains summary information on historical births, deaths and marriages that were submitted to Vital Statistics Registrars and registered by the Chief Executive Officer. This on-line information resource allows researchers to search the on-line indexes for summaries of historical birth, marriage, death registrations, and colonial marriage, and baptism records.

C. United Kingdom

Ancestry.co.uk (United Kingdom)

<http://www.ancestry.co.uk/>

Cyndislist Death Records » Locality Specific: United Kingdom and Ireland

<http://www.cyndislist.com/death/uk/>

GENUKI: UK & Ireland Genealogy

<http://www.genuki.org.uk/>

ScotlandsPeople

<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>

UK Genealogy Archives

<http://uk-genealogy.org.uk/>

V. Bibliographies and Finding Aids

If birth and death dates are not found in the biographical and genealogical sources listed above, the following print and online sources may lead to useful material from scholarly articles, books and encyclopedias.

Access Canada: Literature

<http://www.canadian-studies.net/accesscanada/portal/literature.html>

"An extensive repository for information about Canadian writers, Canadian novelists, Canadian poets, Canadian playwrights, Canadian essayists, Canadian literary organizations, Canadian magazines, Canadian publications, Canadian books, Canadian texts and Canadian library archives."

British Library Guide for Researchers in Canadian Studies

<http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelpregion/americas/canada/canadianstudies/canadianstudies.html>

Can Links–Can Literary

<http://lucking.net/canlinks/canlinks.htm>

Guide to Canadian Literature Sources

Guide to finding information in Canadian Literature using background sources.

<http://www.mcqill.ca/library/library-findinfo/subjects/humanities/canlit/>

Research Tools for Canadian Studies, University of California, Berkeley Library

<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/doemoff/canadian/sources.html>

National Library of Australia Guide to Biographical Sources

<http://www.nla.gov.au/app/eresources/item/1485?id=1485&loaditem=true>

National Library of Australia Guide to Australian Literature. Some sites include birth and death dates of authors, while others focus only on contemporary authors.

<http://www.nla.gov.au/oz/litsites.html>

Encyclopedia of New Zealand (a work in progress) includes a biographical section with birth and death dates of a wide variety of New Zealanders.

<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en>

British and Irish Authors on the Web. Dates are on the table of contents page, but the majority of listings are for prominent writers.

<http://www.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/UK-authors.html>

Dictionary of Irish biography : from the earliest times to the year 2002 / edited by James McGuire and James Quinn. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press : Royal Irish Academy, 2009

VI. Sample Search

Doorly, James Gerald St[okely], an Australian author published in London. This search illustrates the issue of cross publishing among the Commonwealth countries.

Google Search

James Gerald Doorly (also could use quotes, but note differing name configurations below) and found his dates in **Australian Dictionary of Biography** (1880–1956)....Death 3 November 1956, Wellington, New Zealand
<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/doorly-james-gerald-stokely-6002>

And..

Doorly, James Gerald Stokely (Gerald) (1880 - 1956)
James Gerald S. (Gerald) Doorly
Born: Port of Spain, Trinidad, 4 June 1880. Died Wellington, New Zealand,

3 November 1956.

(This same kind of information might be found in genealogical postings on the web.)

Library Catalogs

Search the **Library of Congress**, the **British National Library** and the **National Library of Canada**.

He is listed with dates (including death date) in the **Library of Congress Catalog**:

Doorly, Gerald S. (Gerald Stokely), 1880-1956 with a SEE reference from:
Doorly, James Gerald Stokely, 1880-1956

In the **Australian National Library**:

Gerald S. Doorly
(no death date)

In the **British National Library Catalog**:

DOORLY, James Gerald Stokely: But not with dates

Catalogue: National Library of Canada

Doorly, Gerald S. (Gerald Stokely), b. 1880