

SOAS Special Collections Guides: *Tracing Your Missionary Ancestors*

If your ancestors were involved in the spread of Christianity around the world since the 18th century this guide aims to help you locate possible sources on their life and work at SOAS Library and beyond.

The Missionary Movement

From the 18th to the middle of the 20th centuries missionaries from the British Isles went in ever-increasing numbers to all parts of the globe, seeking converts to Christianity.

Many missionaries also went out as educationists, doctors and nurses.

At its height, between 1880 and 1920, some 60 British missionary societies were actively engaged in this work with many thousands of missionaries going out to the mission field. These societies have in many cases preserved large amounts of original materials comprising archives, personal papers, books and pamphlets, published annual



reports, missionary magazines, photographs, films, sound recordings and artefacts. These missionary collections constitute a wonderful research resource and attract many scholars from around the world.

A Word of Warning!

Researchers should be aware that biographical information within missionary archives is not always easy to find.

While missionaries wrote quite frequently to missionary officials at home those letters quite properly concerned the progress (or lack of progress) of missionary work rather than the details of family life. The personnel files of missionaries, containing applications forms and related correspondence, can be helpful about family background but are chiefly concerned with the applicant's suitability for mission work.

Most missionary societies have lists or registers of their missionaries but these are not always comprehensive and the amount of data varies considerably, especially for the earliest missionaries. It is sometimes limited to the actual service dates of the missionary, while in other cases dates of birth, marriage and death are recorded. Details about a missionary's family are usually only recorded where they became missionaries themselves.

Where To Begin?

A) If you are lucky enough to know both the name of the missionary and the society for which he/she worked, find out where the archives and useful publications relating to that society are kept. See page 3 onwards.

B) If, as is more usual, you know the region of mission work, e.g. India, China etc, but not the society for which your ancestor worked, you may find the list of sources on the following two pages useful.

Finding Your Ancestor's Missionary Society

If you do not know which missionary society your ancestor worked with, the following sources may help.

The Mundus Gateway to Missionary Collections in the UK,
<http://www.mundus.ac.uk>

An online listing of UK missionary society archive collections. It includes a searchable index of place names and an interactive world map.



Example: If you know your ancestor was a missionary in Zanzibar, use the Mundus place name index to find out which missionary societies worked in Zanzibar and where to find their archive records.

The World Missionary Atlas, Edinburgh House Press, 1925. [Classmark: SCRR Ref.136]

Gives details of the different missionary societies working at the date of publication, lists the areas in which each society worked and has an index of mission station locations.

Example: If your ancestor was a missionary in Bangalore, India use the atlas to find out which missionary societies were working in that area and at what dates.

The Missionary Register, 1813-1855 [Classmark: CWML H800]

Gives listings of UK missionaries and details of their society up to 1855.

The Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions ed. Gerald H. Anderson, Macmillan, NY, 1998 [Classmark: SCRR Ref.097]

Gives brief biographies of 2,400 prominent figures in the history of Christian missions. Note: most entries are for American missionaries

China Missions

A Century of Missions in China 1807-1907, ed. D. MacGillivray, Shanghai, 1907. [Classmark: CWML A.17/5 (SCRR)]

Lists protestant missionaries to China and their missionary societies.

The Chinese Recorder Index, a guide to Christian Missions in Asia, 1867-1941, ed. Kathleen Lodwick, Scholarly Resources Inc., 1986. [[Classmark: Per 24 /23723](#)]

This research tool has a person index and a list of missionaries to China by affiliation. The references take you to relevant pages in the periodical, The Chinese Recorder.

Repertoire des Jesuits de Chine de 1552 a 1800 by Joseph Dehergne, SJ, Rome, 1973. [[Classmark: CC266.2 /323988](#)]

Contains detailed biographical information about the early Catholic missionaries to East Asia.

India Missions

Indian Missionary Directory, ed. B. H. Badley, Lucknow, 1881 [[Classmark: CWML C.4/22 \(SCRR\)](#)]

Contains information on British, European and North American missionary societies and missionaries working in India from 1706 to 1881.

South Seas Missions

Messengers of Grace: evangelical missionaries in the South Seas, 1797-1860 by Niel Gunson, Melbourne, 1978. [[Classmark: HN266 /389089](#)]

Appendix contains lists of missionaries working in the South Seas.

Tracing your Ancestor in the Missionary Society Archives at SOAS

Over the last thirty years SOAS has built up a large collection of missionary society materials, comprising missionary society archives, personal papers, photographs and large quantities of printed materials.



If you believe that your ancestor worked for one of our missionary societies the following sources may help you locate further information:

China Inland Mission

Formed in 1865 by James Hudson Taylor to take Christianity to China and, particularly, the inland provinces. After 1951 forced to withdraw from China.

Published works:

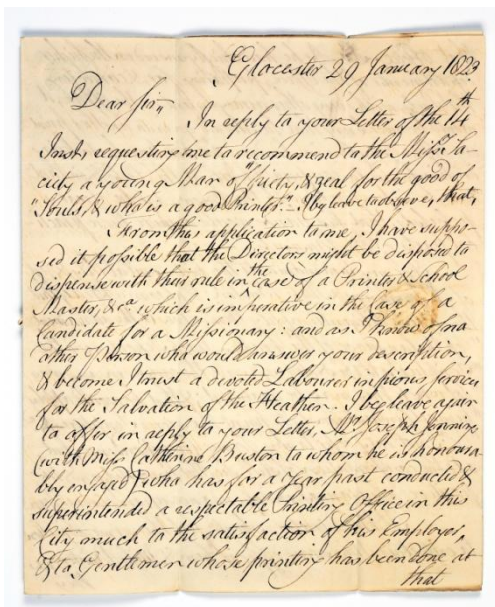
Hudson Taylor & China's Open Century by A.J. Broomhall, published 1981-89 (7 vols) [[Classmark: CC266.0092 /453138](#)]

Has a detailed 'personalia' section at the end of each volume.

Archive sources:

Registers of UK CIM missionaries, 1853-1895 ([Requisition as CIM Box 11](#)) and non-UK missionaries 1887-1970 ([Requisition as CIM Vol. 88](#))

See also the indexes to the CIM China Council and CIM periodical China's Millions published from 1875.



Council For World Mission (formerly the London Missionary Society)

Formed in 1795 as a non-denominational society, eventually became the missionary arm of Congregationalist Churches. Worked in China, India, Central and Southern Africa, Madagascar, the South Seas and the West Indies.

Published works:

London Missionary Society: a Register of Missionaries, 1796-1923, compiled by James Sibree. [Classmark: CWML R562 (SCRR)]

This has an alphabetical index of missionaries, missionary wives and missionary deputations and contains brief biographical summaries.

The History of the London Missionary Society, 1795-1895 by Richard Lovett, London, 1899 (2 vols).

History of the London Missionary Society 1895-1945 by Norman Goodall, OUP, 1954.

Lists missionaries working between 1895-1945 but without biographical details.

Gales of Change: The Story of the London Missionary Society 1945-77 ed. by Bernard Thorogood, London, 1994.

Lists missionaries working between 1945-1977 but without biographical details.

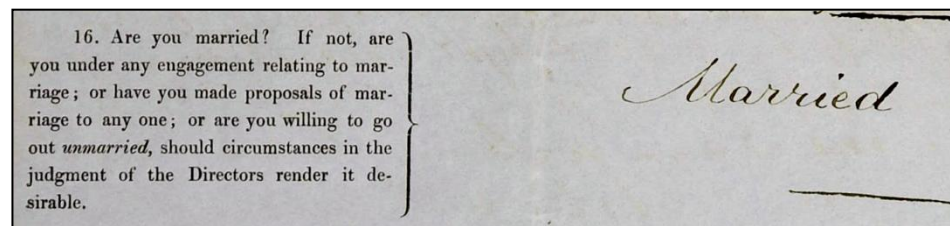
Obituaries and other personal information can be found within The Missionary Magazine and Chronicle of the London Missionary Society. SOAS has copies from 1822 to 1966.

Archive sources:

Candidates Papers: completed forms, papers and correspondence of applicants to the LMS (1796-1940).

Portraits and photographs of individual missionaries.

Register of Missionary Children (2 vols).



Japan Evangelistic Band

Founded at Keswick in 1903 by the Rev Barclay Buxton and Alpheus Paget Wilkes to evangelise Japanese living in South West Japan and on West Coast of North America.

Published works:

The Reward of Faith in the life of Barclay Fowell Buxton 1860-1946 by B. Godfrey Buxton, (1949).

Thank You Lord! The Eightieth Anniversary of the Japanese Evangelistic Band 1903-1983, by Eric Gosden, (1982)

Melanesian Mission

The Melanesian Mission was founded in 1849 by the then Bishop of New Zealand, George Augustus Selwyn (1809-1878), to evangelise the Melanesian islands of the South West Pacific Ocean (i.e. the Solomon Islands, Santa Cruz and Northern New Hebrides Islands).

Published works:

The History of the Melanesian Mission, by E.S.Armstrong, London, 1900.

God's Gentlemen: a history of the Melanesian Mission, 1849-1942, by David Hilliard, Queensland, Australia, 1978

Includes biographical notes on 27 missionaries.

Archive sources:

List of members of the Melanesian Church (Requisition as Mel.M. Box 23)

Methodist Missionary Society

The Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (forerunner of the MMS) was founded in 1813 though Methodists had been carrying out missionary work since 1786. The Society worked in the Caribbean, China, India, West and Southern Africa and Australasia.

Other Methodist Missionary work was carried by the Primitive and United Methodists. These merged with the WMMS in 1932.

Published works:

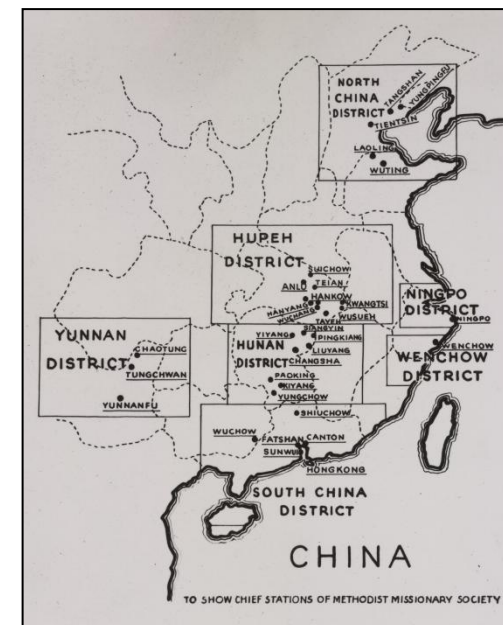
Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society

The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society by G.C. Findlay and W.W.Holdsworth, 5 vols. London, 1921 [[Classmark: CWML F472](#)]

Ministers and Probationers of the Methodist Church

Lists ministers (including missionaries) working for the Methodist church with details of their career history.

Obituaries may be located (if death date known) in the Minutes of Methodist Conference (MMS Library holds vols 1744-) and in the Missionary Notices



Primitive Methodist Missionary Society

Ministers and circuits in the Primitive Methodist Church: a directory 1819-present, by William Leary, Teamprint, 1990

United Methodist Missionary Society

United Methodist Ministers and their circuits, Compiled by Oliver A. Beckelege, London, 1968.

Presbyterian Church Of England Foreign Missions Committee

Founded in 1847.

Worked in South West China, Formosa (Taiwan), East India (Bangladesh) and Malaysia.

Published works:

Working his purpose out: the history of the English Presbyterian Mission 1847-1947 by Edward Band, PCE, London, 1948

Lists PCE missionaries working during that period.



Locating the Archives of Other Missionary Societies.- The Mundus Gateway

If you discover that your missionary ancestor served with a different missionary society, you will need to find the location of the archives of that society.

The Mundus Gateway enables researchers to locate the archive collections of missionary societies across the UK. To search the database go to <http://www.mundus.ac.uk>.

The Mundus Gateway contains descriptions of more than 400 collections held in over 40 institutions in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Mundus offers a wide range of searching tools including free-text, name, geographic and subject searches, and searches using clickable maps.

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