

Magistrate Court (Petty Sessions) Records

Background

Petty Sessions Courts, now known as Magistrates Courts, dealt with minor criminal cases, licensing, and civil matters. Although they existed in the 1600s, no records before the 1800s have survived. Originally there were four divisions based on the grouping of various “hundreds” (ancient groupings of parishes). These divisions were reorganised in 1840, although some earlier records survive from the old districts. Some districts were merged in the late 20th century.

The Petty Sessions dealt with the licensing of alehouses, highways, appeals against poor rates, adoptions, bastardy cases, and minor crimes (usually those which carried up to a 2-year sentence).

What records are there and what information will they contain?

It was not until the Summary Jurisdiction Act 1879 that standard registers and recordkeeping was put in place. Earlier records developed casually and vary between districts.

Survival rates for each district vary widely. You will need to check the catalogue to see what has survived. The collection may include:

<u>Type of Record</u>	<u>Ref.</u>	<u>Information</u>
Minute Books	M	A more detailed account of the court than the summary jurisdiction registers.
Court Registers before 1879	RA	Information recorded was not standardised.
Summary Jurisdiction & Court Registers	RM1 & RM2	These list cases heard by the court. They are in chronological order and list the name of the defendant, informant or victim, the offence, verdict and sentence.
Registers of Explosives Stores	RM3	Record stores selling explosives and firework factories.
Register of Clubs	RM5	Clubs which sold alcohol to members required a licence. These are similar to the Alehouse Licences.
Juvenile Court	RM7	Similar to the Summary Jurisdiction register, except defendants are minors.
Adoption	RM8	These list the name of the child.
Domestic Court Registers	RM10	Cover cases relating to domestic and family issues.
Alehouse Licenses after 1872 ¹	RL	List the name of the establishment, the owner and the individual who held the licence. Licences had to be renewed every quarter.
Fines and Fees	F	These are general accounts of money held by the court.

¹ For more information about alehouse licensing see Research Guide: *Alehouse licensing*.
Research Guide: Petty Sessions

How to Find the Records

Petty Sessions records are kept under the reference “**PS**”. They are then sorted by district. Each district has a two letter reference, see the table below. Records of the Gloucester City Petty Sessions are also held under the reference **GBR/G4**.

There are also records of the Petty Sessions within the minutes of the City Quarter Sessions **GBR/G3/SM**.

District	Reference
Avon North	PS/AV
Berkeley	PS/BE
Campden	PS/CA
Cheltenham	PS/CH
Cirencester	PS/CI
Coleford	PS/CO
Dursley	PS/DU
Fairford	PS/FA
Gloucester	PS/GC
Gloucestershire County Court	PS/GL
Lawford's Gate	PS/LA
Lydney	PS/LY
Moreton-in-Marsh	PS/MO
Nailsworth	PS/NA
North Cotswold see also Stow & Winchcombe	PS/NC
North Gloucestershire	PS/NG
Newent	PS/NE
Newnham	PS/NM
Northleach	PS/NO
Stroud	PS/SD
Sodbury	PS/SO
South Gloucestershire	PS/SG
Stow see also North Cotswold	PS/ST
Thornbury	PS/TH
Tetbury	PS/TT
Tewkesbury Borough 1872-1956	PS/TW
Tewkesbury County	PS/TW/C
Whitminster	PS/WH
Winchcombe See also North Cotswold	PS/WI
Wotton-Under-Edge	PS/WO

Records of the Courts are closed for 30 years.

Adoption Registers are closed for 100 years.

If you are looking for information about yourself in a register you will need to submit a Subject Access Request. To find out more, visit: <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/access-to-information/access-my-personal-information/how-to-submit-a-request/>

If you are looking for your adoption records, you will need to contact Adoption West. For more information, visit: <https://adoptionwest.co.uk/privacy-policy/>

Some recent registers are still held by the Courts service.

Please email us on archives@gloucestershire.gov.uk for more information.

You can view a list of records in these collections via our online catalogue, which can be found on our website at: www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives . Use the collection references given above as your search term. You can refine or sort your search in various ways, for example by date.

For more guidance on using our online catalogue please see the Help page and FAQs. Or you can watch our YouTube tutorial.