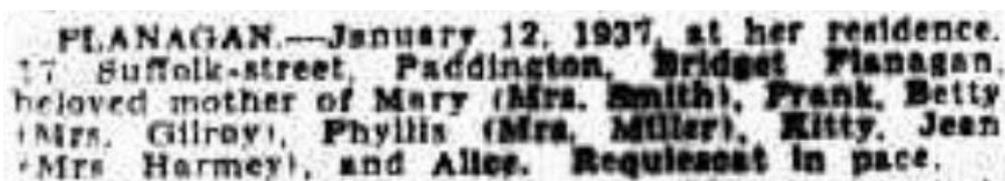


# USING NEWSPAPERS IN FAMILY HISTORY

DANIELLE LAUTREC

Newspapers are well recognised as a valuable source of information for family history and much is written about where to find them and how to search them. It is also important to know how to use them and that is the focus of this article.

Perhaps the main reason we use newspapers in family history is that they often provide information we may not find in other types of sources, such the names of extended family members, descriptions of events other than birth death or marriage, and even physical descriptions of the people we are researching. This information can be a useful supplement to the information we already have, or it may even help to corroborate or refute conclusions about people or events.



*Death notice of Bridget Flanagan helped to corroborate a conclusion that the Phyllis Flanagan who married Mr Miller was part of this family (Sydney Morning Herald 13 Jan 1937)*

Newspapers also provide valuable historical context and social information, which helps us understand the times that our ancestors lived in. Interpreting newspapers gives us an insight into the events and forces shaping their lives, the beliefs and view points of that time period, language, customs and lifestyles.

## GOULBURN.

### DESTRUCTIVE FLOOD, TUMUT.

*(From a Correspondant of the Goulburn Herald.)*

I am sorry to have to report the occurrence of one of the most extraordinary floods that has been known on the Tumut river, and one likely to be serious in its consequences. It is seldom in my power to communicate any intelligence worthy a place in your columns, and I deeply regret an opportunity of doing so is afforded me by the events of the present week. The 19th of August, 1851, will be long remembered by many from their sufferings, and by more from the astonishing scene to which they have been eye witnesses.—There are

*Freemans Journal 4 Sept 1851*



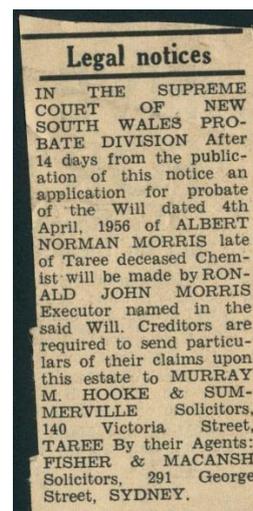
## Tips for using newspapers in family history

Before analysing the newspaper item itself you need to analyse the newspaper that it came from, as this provides valuable contextual information.

What newspaper is it? Where was it published? Over what timeframe? How widely circulated was it – was it a local paper, a regional paper, statewide, national? Local newspapers tend to have greater knowledge of local places, people and events, while national newspapers tend to have greater knowledge of national and world events. If your newspaper item is an article, rather than a notice or advertisement, it may be worth investigating who published it, their values and perspectives, and the intended audience for the newspaper.

Now you have the context you can analyse the newspaper item itself.

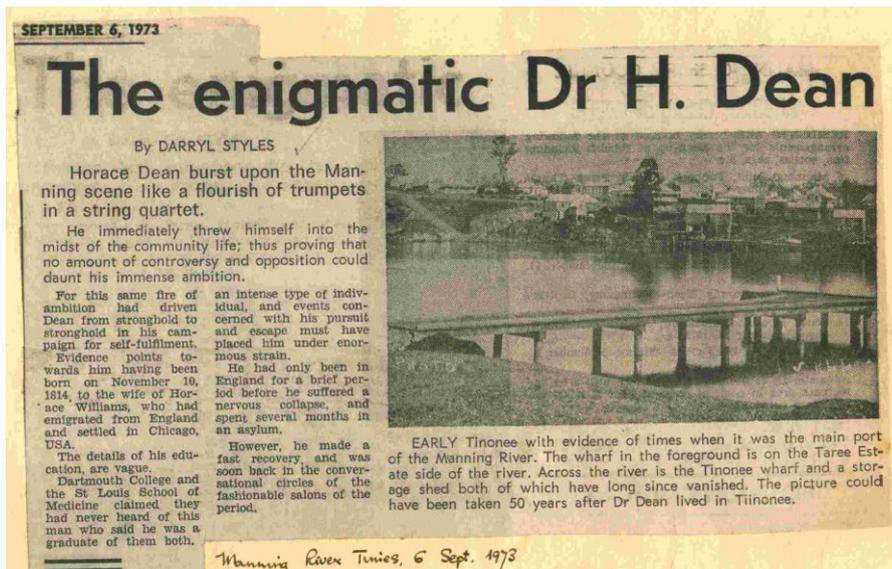
What type of item is it and what was the purpose? A family notice was published to notify family and friends of an important event, such as a birth, marriage, death or funeral. Obituaries and memoriums had similar functions. Other types of newspaper items that may be useful for family history are advertisements, legal notice, notices of auctions and land sales, police notices and articles. The purpose provides an insight into the accuracy of the information and also hints at the possibility of other newspaper items or other types of sources that may exist for the same event.



If the author is identified, consider their background and their motivations in writing the item. Are they trying to persuade, incite, enlighten, explain, deceive, inform? Is the author describing what happened or providing an opinion?

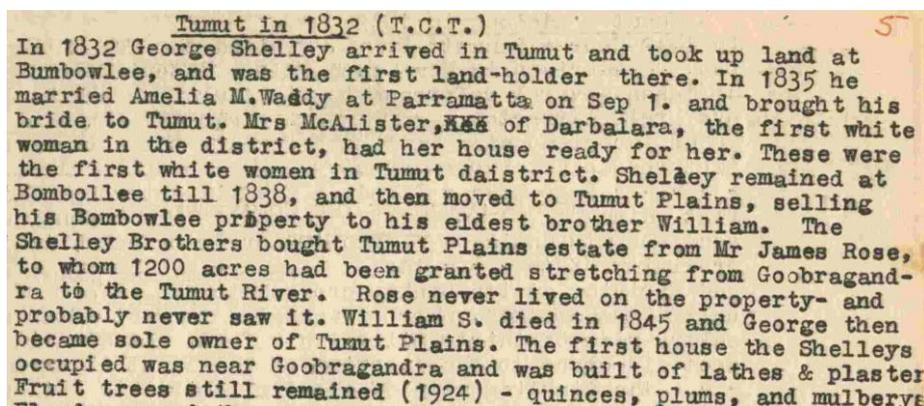
When was the item written in relation to the event? Most of the items listed above will be contemporary with the event, but articles may be written years or even decades after the event and this information is critical to our interpretation of the article. Some items may be a contemporary reprint and could be important too. A regional or national paper may reprint an item from a local paper. Changes may be made to the information during this process, so in these situations it would be a good idea to track down the original item in the local paper.





*Manning River Times, Dennes Collection, Society of Australian Genealogists*

Changes to a newspaper item may also occur during the process of making it accessible to researchers. Are you viewing the original paper, an image of the paper, or a manual or OCR (optical character recognition) transcription? If the content is critical to your research it might be worth examining all three versions of an item.



*Extract from a transcript of newspaper articles, Perkins Papers, Society of Australian Genealogists*

If possible, identify where the author of the item got their information. Was the author an eye witness to the event (primary information) or is the information secondary? Who was the informant and how likely are they to have accurate information?

Read the newspaper item critically and with scepticism. Highlight any words or phrases that might indicate bias or intention, or give a clue to the authenticity. Remember that newspapers do print fiction and opinion pieces.



### **The Australian, 24/7/1843**

“There was a most desperate murder committed about the 1st of June last, near the Tumut River, beyond the limits of the Colony, at a known sly grog shop. I am surprised that I did not see it noticed in any of the public newspapers, which is my reason for reporting it to you, hoping that when his Excellency the Governor sees this, he will cause some steps to be taken to put down the sly grog selling at all events.”

### **SMH 15/9/1843**

“The Jury then instantly found the prisoner guilty of manslaughter, and he was sentenced, on account of his excellent previous character, to the lenient punishment of six months imprisonment in Berrima Gaol.”

*Two different articles about the arrest and conviction of Patrick Dwyer*

If there is a photo or image, analyse that separately and investigate how it relates to the rest of the newspaper item.

After you have analysed the item, return to the context and consider that again in more detail. Look for other items in that newspaper and in other papers that may shed more light on your item or help you to understand it better, and then compare the information from your newspaper item with information from other sources. If you found your newspaper item in a collection, examine that collection for other newspaper items or pieces of information that may be related. The article above about Mr Dean, for example, comes from the Society of Australian Genealogists' Dennes Collection about Scottish settlers in the Manning and Clarence Rivers region.

### **Tips on caring for newspaper clippings**

Usually the newspaper itself is not intrinsically valuable, so the best way to conserve newspaper clippings is to digitise them. If you do want to keep newspapers or clippings, keep them away from valuable original documents and photographs as the newspaper ink can damage them. Store newspapers flat in an archival box or folder. For added protection you could place acid free paper between the pages. Fragile pieces can be placed in archival sleeves.

### **Citing newspapers**

The usual practice for a Bibliography is to just list the titles of newspapers used. A footnote needs to provide a full citation. The format is: Author, article heading, title of paper, details of issue, page, column. If author is unknown, put Anon.

### **How and where to find them**

To maximise your results, use a combination of searching, browsing, using indexes and using collections that others have compiled.

Useful family history portals –

Cyndi's List <https://www.cyndislist.com/newspapers/> and <https://www.cyndislist.com/australia/newspapers/>



FamilySearch wiki [https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main\\_Page](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page) – select the country of interest then click on Newspapers under Record types, for example Australia:  
[https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Australia\\_Newspapers](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Australia_Newspapers)

Other great repositories and websites -

British Newspaper archive <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>

National Library of Australia, Trove, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/>

University of Washington, mostly American newspapers  
<https://guides.lib.uw.edu/c.php?g=341342&p=2303512>

Society of Australian Genealogists archives <https://midas.sag.org.au/>

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## Generations Genealogy

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