

LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES

Information Leaflet Number 46

VEHICLE REGISTRATION AND LICENSING RECORDS



Hackney carriages

Hackney coaches plying for hire in London, Westminster and the surrounding areas were first required to be licensed in 1662. A licence cost £5 a year. From 1662, the minimum size of horse was specified, and from 1679, "conditions of fitness" were laid down by the Hackney Coach Commissioners regulating the size and construction of the coaches. Following an Act of Common Council of 13 March 1682/3 licensing was for a time by the Court of Aldermen of the City of London with a limit of 400 on the total number of coachmen, but by 1694 licensing reverted to the Commissioners.

In 1694 an Act of Parliament made the Hackney Coach Commissioners permanent and established the Hackney Coach Office. This and the Commissioners were abolished by the London Hackney Carriage Act of 1831. Previous limitations on the numbers of hackney carriages in London were removed. Licences for hackney carriages operating within a five mile radius of the General Post Office were in future to be issued by the Board of Stamps, which did not, however, inherit the regulatory powers enjoyed by the Hackney Coach Commissioners. In 1838 the Home Secretary was empowered to appoint a Registrar of Metropolitan Public Carriages who licensed hackney carriage drivers and conductors. The office of Registrar was abolished in 1850 and his responsibilities transferred to the Metropolitan Police. Jurisdiction over hackney carriage proprietors had remained with the Board of

Stamps, then from 1849 with the Board of Inland Revenue, who issued hackney carriage licences. From 1853 proprietors had to produce certificates to show that their carriages had been inspected and approved by the Metropolitan Police. The Metropolitan Public Carriages Act of 1869 transferred responsibility for licensing hackney carriages to the Home Secretary who delegated it to the Commissioner of Police. The Public Carriage Office was established to deal with this work. From 1843 the area of jurisdiction over hackney carriages had been extended to the Metropolitan Police District and the City of London.

The first petrol driven cab was licensed in 1903 and by 1914 the horsedrawn hansom cab was rapidly disappearing. In 1906 the Public Carriage Office drew up "Conditions of Fitness for Motor Hackney Carriages" which required amongst other regulations that vehicles should be capable of being turned within a 25 feet circle. In London, unlike other cities, a dual jurisdiction existed over motor cabs, as while the Public Carriage Office licensed the driver and the vehicle for use as a hackney carriage, the driver of any motor vehicle had also to be licensed by the London County Council and the cab had to be registered by the London County Council as a motor car. See below for further information.

Records

The surviving administrative records of the Hackney Coach Commissioners, the Board of Stamps (from 1833 the Board of Stamps and Taxes), the Board of Inland Revenue, and the Public Carriage Office are held by The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU, amongst the records of the Exchequer, Inland Revenue (especially IR51), Metropolitan Police Office, and the Treasury. They include minutes, accounts and correspondence of the Hackney Coach Commissioners and correspondence and files relating to the Public Carriage Office, but no registers of licences appear to have survived. Many records were lost when the office of the Hackney Coach Commissioners was destroyed by fire in 1770. The Public Carriage Office, 15 Penton Street, London N1 9PU, is currently responsible for the licensing of taxi drivers within the metropolitan area of London, but it retains records of individual taxi drivers for six years only after the death or retirement of a driver.

The records of the City of London include some records of the licensing of hackney carriages in 1678 and 1685 (COL/SJ/06/018-020, COL/SJ/06/024-025) as well as orders and regulations and other papers relating to hackney carriages 1682/3-1910 (COL/SJ/06/017-038). London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) holds no other records relating to the licensing of hackney carriages or taxi drivers.

Hackney Carriages Proprietors Benevolent Fund (ACC/3563)

This was founded in 1873 at the Royal Repository, Barbican, and was later known as the Hackney Carriage Proprietors' Provident Institution. The surviving archives, comprising minute books 1873-1904 and an account book 1874-1896, are held by LMA. As its name suggests, the Hackney Carriages Proprietors Benevolent Fund appears to have been open only to proprietors of hackney carriages rather than to all hackney carriage drivers. Clearly, however, many proprietors of only a few hackney carriages would also have been engaged in driving their own vehicles. The minute books record brief professional details of individuals wishing to join the Fund, brief reports on the circumstances of members or their dependants on their first application for a grant, and names of members or dependants to whom regular payments were made. They also include brief notices of members' deaths. Unfortunately the minutes are not indexed.

Vehicle registration and driver licensing

Under the terms of the 1903 Motor Car Act all motor vehicles and motorcycles had to be licensed by their local county or county borough council for use on public roads and were assigned individual registration numbers. All drivers were likewise to be licensed by their local authorities. The former London and Middlesex County

Councils were the licensing and registration authorities for their respective areas.

Local authority powers were consolidated by the 1920 Roads Act. The 1933 Road and Rail Traffic Act laid down that public service and goods vehicles were to be licensed by Traffic Commissioners who were appointed by the Ministry of Transport. The 1934 Road Traffic Act introduced driving tests from April 1934.

London and Middlesex County Councils continued to be registration and licensing authorities until their abolition. The Greater London Council assumed the role on 1 April 1965. On 1 November 1976 the Department of Transport's Driver and Vehicle Licensing Centre at Swansea took over the issue of drivers' licences. On 18 March 1978 the Department took responsibility for vehicle registration and licensing.

Records

The majority of records relate to the policies of the two county councils on these matters.

London County Council

Vehicle registration was dealt with by the Public Control Department. Surviving records are in the series LCC/PC/VR/1-2. Only one register of vehicle registration survives and this is for the period 1917-1919 (ref LCC/PC/VR/1/2). The index mark referred to is 'LT' and the register covers LT4001-LT4400.

No records relating to the licensing of drivers have survived apart from a very small sample of driving licences and some reports which are included in the series of files mentioned above.

Middlesex County Council

Vehicle registration was dealt with by the Local Taxation Department (reporting to the General Purposes Committee). Surviving records are in the series MCC/LT/VE. A variety of index marks was used, including 'H', 'MC', 'MD', 'MX', 'ME' (1922) and 'MF' (1923).

Only one register of vehicle registration survives (ref MCC/LT/VE/1). This is for the period 1916-1919 and covered the areas of Edgware, Kingsbury, Little Stanmore, Great Stanmore, Finchley, Hendon, Wembley and Willesden. The format of the register is that of a register of car owners rather than of index numbers. These index numbers are highly varied and of no set pattern.

No records of driver licensing have survived.

Greater London Council

Policy and administrative records survive among the records of the Director General's Department. Policy records will be found among the papers of the relevant GLC committees:

Licensing Committee 1965-1968
GLC/DG/AGE/127
GLC/DG/MIN/127
GLC/DG/PRE/127

Public Services Committee
1968-1977
GLC/DG/AGE/186
GLC/DG/MIN/186
GLC/DG/PRE/186

There are also a few administrative files in the series GLC/DG/PSFB/2. No registers of licences survive.

These records can be made available by prior appointment only.

Reading List

The LMA Library has the following works on London taxicabs and on motor vehicle registration. The library reference is given in brackets at the end of each entry.

GEORGANO, G.N. *A history of the London taxicab*. David & Charles, 1972. (27.22 GEO).

GEORGANO, Nick. *The London taxi*. Shire Publications, 1985. (27.22 GEO)

MAY, Trevor. *Gondolas and Growlers. The history of the London horse cab*. Alan Sutton, 1995. (27.21 MAY).

RIDEN, Philip. *How to trace the history of your car: a guide to motor vehicle registration records in Great Britain, Ireland, the Isle of Man and Channel Islands*. Academy Books, 1991. (60.36 RID).

WARREN, Philip and LINSKEY, Malcolm. *Taxicabs. A photographic history*. Almark Publishing, 1976. (27.22 WAR).

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