What is Papers Past?

Papers Past is a website containing digitised 19th and 20th century New Zealand newspapers, all of which can be searched by keyword. You can read over a hundred and fifty years of material, from 1839 to 1945, made up of millions of pages.

Papers Past is used by genealogists, archaeologists, writers, students, professional and amateur historians, museum staff, artists, journalists, curators, and more. The content is indexed by Google and other search engines, and cited in a wide range of resources, both online and printed.

Growing the collection

At the heart of the website is the content produced through the National Library's Digitisation Programme. We have three main workstreams:

1. National Library workstream for content selected and funded in-house. Anyone can nominate titles to be included in the selection process by emailing paperspast@natlib.govt.nz;

2. Collaborative Newspaper Digitisation Programme, where third-parties nominate newspaper titles and share the digitisation costs. This programme is currently limited to 80,000 pages a year in total. See our website for more: http://natlib.govt.nz/librarians/national-library-services/collaborative-digitisation;

3. Partnership Programme, where the National Library shares the digitisation costs with others, focusing on larger runs of newspapers over multiple years. Contact paperspast@natlib.govt.nz to find out more.

These three workstreams are complementary. Together they enable us to increase the newspaper coverage in Papers Past by using the combined resources of community groups and heritage institutions around New Zealand to maximise the digitisation workflow developed by the National Library.

This means more searchable content, more research, and more researchers - and this means a better understanding of who we are and where we come from.

Did you know?

Newspapers are often the first public documents of news and community events. They describe the notable highlights (and lowlights) of the day, and produce a rich reflection of a society and its values - and fertile ground for research.

Papers Past contains more than:
- 90 newspaper titles
- 500,000 newspaper issues
- 3 million newspaper pages
- 40 million newspaper articles

A study presented in 2012 had Papers Past ranked third globally for online visibility of historic newspaper information, behind only the New York Times and Google News.

There are nearly 10,000 links from Wikipedia to Papers Past, covering everything from racehorses to politics.

What the users say:

“Congratulations to all involved - this site is a national treasure!”

“Simple format with lots of options for searching. Has been good to use from day one. Whoever dreamed up this format knows their stuff”

“Could happily spend 24 hours a day on it.”

“I love finding ‘stories’ and data and find the searches very successful for even obscure topics.”