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Welcome to China Families. On this site you can find a growing body of information about men and women of many different nationalities, professions and ages, who lived and worked in China between the 1850s and 1940s.

These records have been drawn from government department lists, legal and diplomatic records, [cemetery lists](#), and during research undertaken for a number of projects on the history of modern China and of the foreign relations of China.

Between 1843 and the early 1950s tens of thousands of foreign nationals lived in China. They worked for foreign companies, municipal administrations, the [Chinese Maritime Customs Service](#) (also known as the Imperial Maritime Customs), as diplomats and missionaries, or served in foreign armies and navies. The largest concentrations of foreign residents were in the cities of Shanghai and Tianjin, but there were smaller communities in many of the cities that were opened by treaty to foreign trade and residence, and which were known as Treaty Ports. More lived in the British Crown Colony at Hong Kong. Missionary societies were present much more widely across the country, and as well as evangelical activity, were engaged in education and medical work. After 1938, some 30,000 [Jewish refugees](#) came from central and eastern

Europe. Large numbers of Russian refugees ('White' Russians) also came to the city.

These treaty ports had been opened through agreements that had been negotiated in the aftermath of wars between Britain and China (in 1839-42), and Britain, France and China (in 1857-60). Originating in warfare, they were maintained by force, and it was not until the 1930s and 1940s that China was able to start to regain its sovereignty and overturn these impositions. For more on this history, and for hints about searching for records of these communities, see my article, republished here with permission from the *Genealogists' Magazine*, 33:2 (2020) on '[The British and the Chinese Treaty Ports](#)'.

Through China Families you can search for the names of people you think might have lived in China. The site is still under development, and in time some of the sets of records will be enriched with new information. Please use our contact form to let us know what you think of our site. We are also very happy to receive suggestions for new links to other resources. Our sister site, [Historical Photographs of China](#), provides free access to nearly 20,000 digitalised photographs of China that were shared with us by China families, and which might help you visualise the times and places in which the men and women whose details are recorded here lived and worked.

It is easy to forget the scale of the foreign communities that lived in China in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Very many families in Britain, across Europe, North America, and in Australia and New Zealand, can trace family journeys through China. Many lived there for decades, and some for up to five generations before 1949 and the establishment of the People's Republic of China. These lists are testament to the intimacy of the close relations that developed between China and foreign

**countries in this period, under the shadow of the might of the British and other empires.**

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