How to find case law using printed sources

How to find a case report from a citation
A case citation usually contains a date, a volume number, an abbreviation for the title of the law report series and a page number. For example:

- McDonald v Fernandez [2004] 1 WLR 1027
  - McDonald v Fernandez are the parties involved
  - [2004] the year the case was heard or the date it was reported
  - 1 volume number (note that, in some series of law reports, there is more than one volume per year)
  - WLR the abbreviated title for the law report series, in this case the Weekly Law Reports (use the Cardiff Index to Legal Abbreviations to decipher the abbreviation [http://www.legalabbrevs.cardiff.ac.uk/].)
  - 1027 page number (as a general rule, a number before the law reports abbreviation refers to a volume; a number after the abbreviation refers to a page number)

- When the law report series has been identified from its abbreviation, search for it by title on the library catalogue. The Weekly Law Reports are located at LAW LB11
- Find volume 1 for 2004 and turn to page 1027.

How to find a case report from the party names
Use either the Law Reports Index (LAW G3, Abercromby Wing 1st Floor), the Current Law Case Citator (LAW G2.36, Abercromby Wing 1st Floor) or, for older cases, the Law Reports: Digest (LAW G3, Abercromby Wing 1st Floor),

- The Law Reports Index, known as the ‘red books’, has hardback volumes covering a decade from 1951 onwards and supplementary paperback volumes published quarterly, annually and bi-annually. The volumes include a list of cases alphabetically by name. Find the volume for the year in which the case was reported or work forwards chronologically through the volumes if the year is unknown. Look up the case by name in the alphabetical list.
paperback volumes from 2005 onwards and cumulative monthly digests. The volumes include a list of cases alphabetically by name. Find the volume for the year in which the case was reported or work forwards chronologically through the volumes if the year is unknown. Look up the case by name in the alphabetical list. See the guide Using Current Law for more information.

- To find case reports for the years 1865 - 1947, use the Law Reports: Digest. Find the Index volume for the year in which the case was reported or work forwards chronologically through the indexes if the year is unknown. Look up the case by name in the index. The index refers to a column number in the corresponding main volume.

How to find cases before 1865
Before The Law Reports series began in 1865, cases were reported privately by individuals. Collectively, these reports are known as the Nominate Reports. These have been reprinted into The English Reports, covering the period 1220-1865. See the guide Using The English Reports for more information.

How to find cases on a topic
Use either the Law Reports Index (LAW G3, Abercromby Wing 1st Floor) or Halsbury's Laws of England (LAW F3A, Abercromby Wing, 1st Floor).

- The Law Reports Index includes a listing of cases by subject.
- Halsbury's Laws of England covers all areas of English law and has comprehensive indexes to enable you to find the law on a specific topic. Relevant cases and legislation are listed in the footnotes. See the guide Using Halsbury's Laws of England for more information.

In addition, major textbooks include tables of significant cases and some textbooks have “Cases and materials...” in their title. Search the library catalogue by keyword for possible titles.

How to trace the judicial history of a case
It is important to be able to trace the history of a case to determine whether a case has been judicially considered in a subsequent case, if the case is still considered to be good law or if it has been overruled. Use either the Law Reports Index (LAW G3,
Abercromby Wing 1st Floor) or the Current Law Case Citator (LAW G2.36, Abercromby Wing 1st Floor).

- The Law Reports Index has a ‘Cases Judicially Considered’ section. Find the index volume for the year in which the case was reported. Turn to the Cases Judicially Considered section and browse the alphabetical list of case names. Repeat this process with subsequent volumes and paperback supplements up to the present day. An example entry is below:

- In the Current Law Case Citator, find the volume covering the year in which the case was reported and locate the case in the alphabetical table of cases. Following the party names there is a reference to the Current Law Yearbook in italics (Digested..) and then Yearbook references for cases that have subsequently considered the case. Use the Current Law Yearbook (LAW A3.1, Abercromby Wing 1st Floor) references to see how the case has been applied in subsequent judgments. Current Law Yearbook references consist of a year and paragraph number. For example:
  - 02/348 refers to paragraph 348 in the 2002 Yearbook.

- Repeat this process with subsequent volumes and paperback supplements up to the present day. An example Current Law Case Citator entry is below:
  - Douglas v Hello! Ltd (No.1) [2001] QB 967...Digested, 01/567: Applied, 01/2583, 04/1391, 08/1992: Considered, 01/1824, 03/2923, 03/2941, 03/4363.

See the Using Current Law guide for more help with using the Current Law publications and interpreting their definitions.

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