



## **Genealogy as a Career**

In spite of the great growth in interest in genealogy and family history since the mid-1970s careers in the subject scarcely exist. There are perhaps less than twenty or thirty full-time employees in the country and vacancies arise only every few years. The competition is considerable. Among the self-employed professionals, a few derive the greater part of their living from genealogy, but most work only part-time to supplement a pension or other income.

The Association of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives (known as AGRA) was founded in 1968 to promote and maintain high standards of professional conduct and expertise within the sphere of genealogy, heraldry and record searching and to safeguard the interest of its members and clients. The members and affiliate members are subject to a Code of Practice with which they agree to comply when accepting membership. This is open to well-qualified professional researchers who have been engaged as genealogists or record agents for a number of years. There are presently over a hundred members throughout the British Isles. A list, showing details of their special interest and the areas in which they work, is published regularly. It is available either from this Society or from the Secretary, Association of Genealogists and Record Agents, 29 Badgers Close, Horsham, West Sussex RH12 5RU, price £1.50 including postage (UK) or £2.00 or five International Reply Coupons (overseas).

In Scotland there is also the Association of Scottish Genealogists and Record Agents, founded in 1981, with similar aims. The address of the Secretary is P.O. Box 174, Edinburgh EH3 SQZ; send an sae for a list of members. In Ireland there is the Association of Professional Genealogists in Ireland, founded in 1989. The address is do Genealogical Office, 2 Kildare Street, Dublin 2; send an addressed envelope and two International Reply Coupons for a list of members.

In general terms a Genealogist directs the research, whereas a Record Agent undertakes it. The Genealogist therefore acts as a consultant, settling the line of enquiry and initiating, supervising and participating in the work that it entails. He then reports to the client and suggests possible lines of further research as appropriate. The work of the Record Agent lies in searching specified records for particular information which may be required by a genealogist, historian or biographer. However, many professional genealogists act in both these capacities as the need arises.

The fees of professional genealogists vary to some extent but are likely to be based upon an hourly rate for the time spent (including the giving of advice), to which is added the cost of disbursements (certified copies, search fees paid, photocopies, etc.). Most researchers are prepared to give an estimate for searching within a limited number of specified records, but in more open-ended cases a limit, perhaps the equivalent of one or two days' work is suggested. Because of the amount of unproductive correspondence attracted by advertising, and the time taken in reporting as against actual research, the financial rewards of genealogical research are never great.

There are no formal qualifications necessary to be a professional genealogist. It is not enough, however, to have researched only one's own family. A wide experience of many sources and areas is necessary. This is often best gained by working with another genealogist as an apprentice. Genealogical work requires a good basic education as well as a sound knowledge of social and local history sources. A knowledge of palaeography and some Latin is also essential. Clients, as with any other profession, will expect their reports to be typed.

It is an advantage to be able to drive a car to visit local repositories, though many genealogists specialise in relatively small geographical areas. A good memory, meticulous attention to detail, a tidy and logical mind and working habits are needed, plus a considerable scepticism in avoiding too easy and often fallacious solutions. Short courses in palaeography, local history and genealogy are organised by the Society of Genealogists, by many local family history societies (of which there is at least one in each county), by branches of the Workers' Educational Association and by University Extra-Mural Departments. The meetings of the Society of Genealogists and of the local members of the Federation of Family History Societies are instructive and provide opportunities to meet and discuss with other workers.

Details of classes organised by the Society of Genealogists appear in its annual Programme. A list of local family history societies is available from the Administrator FFHS, PO BOX 2425, COVENTRY, CV5 6YX. email or goto the website [www.ffhs.org.uk](http://www.ffhs.org.uk) , and appears on the back cover of its bi-annual publication *Family History News and Digest*.

Since 1987 the Centre for Extra-Mural Studies of London University has been running a two-year certificated course in Genealogy and the History of the Family which can also lead to a Diploma at the end of an optional third year. Details may be obtained from the Centre for Extra-Mural Studies 26 Russell Square, London WC1B SDQ (020 7631 6632).

If you are young, interested in genealogy and hoping to devote your life's work to it, you will be best advised to seek qualifications and first employment in some related field, such as archive administration, historical research or possibly librarianship or teaching. These offer careers in their own right, with opportunities for genealogy as a hobby.

While thus obtaining relevant experience there may be the occasional opportunity to search records to a clients instructions. In such ways you can acquire a suitable background from which to apply for the rare vacancies under an employer, or perhaps to start a small spare-time practice. In the latter case you will probably wish to specialise in a particular type of record, subject or area of the country. If you have compiled some specialised index relating in some way to persons in this group or area you will find it a useful tool which may later be exploited commercially for fees and, perhaps, used as a basis for articles and lectures as well as advertisements. Advertisements by many professionals will be found in the *Genealogists' Magazine* (only those of Members of five years standing, or of Members who are also members of AGRA, are accepted) and in *Family Tree Magazine*.

The Society of Genealogists, which was founded in 1911 to promote and encourage the study of genealogy and heraldry, publishes and sells a wide variety of books of interest to genealogists.