



Family Records and their Layout

A FAMILY RECORD sets out ancestors and descendants. In doing so it should provide sufficient information to identify them all as positively as possible. Some description of their personalities gives the document added interest. Careful authentication of each fact makes it a work of scholarship.

Information Content

- **Individual identification** requires full names, with all changes due to marriage, alias, etc., as well as exact dates and places of birth and/or baptism, marriage, death and/or burial. To include all of these should be the aim, however hard to achieve. A name unsupported by date and place is of very little value. For spouses of the direct line give parents names with the maternal maiden name. Place names should always give the county for they are otherwise often ambiguous.
- **Individual description** requires such details as the occupation and place of residence, given in most modern and many older records. Less easily come by are comments on personality and appearance, photographs, signatures, anecdotes, qualifications, publications, war service, honours, etc. Retain the unfavourable, as well as conflicting versions.
- **Factual authentication** requires details of the source or evidence for each. Great care is needed in checking against your most reliable source every time any page is copied. Relationships need as much authentication as other facts: many pedigrees have confused fathers and sons, or even grandsons, of the same name.
- **Style** and arrangement of data should be consistent. Spell the names exactly as found in the records, even if these are inconsistent. Never expand any names you find abbreviated and never abbreviate names yourself. Surnames are necessary for every individual and are easier to distinguish if always in capitals, especially in families which use them as christian names. Dates should be in full, as day, month (preferably in words) and year.

Layout

No single layout can display all ancestors (male and female) as well as all cousins. For direct ancestry the 'birth brief' is appropriate. Descent layouts are based on the 'family tree' or 'indented narrative'. The latter provides ample scope for descriptive detail: the former displays relationships clearly and is valuable as a key to narrative accounts.

- **A Birth Brief** is basically a page divided into columns for generations, divided successively into **2, 4, 8**, etc. sections. Printed forms are available.
- **A Family Tree** chart, or 'Drop-line' pedigree, soon encounters practical difficulties of size and is best divided into sections. Any device will need adaptation to the space available.

Suitable conventions are that:

spouses are linked by '=';

children are set out in age order across the page, linked by a line to the parents' marriage above and illegitimacy is shown by wavy lines;

at least the dates of birth and death are given below each name and of marriage after 'm^t' below the bride (or below the '=');

multiple spouses are numbered beyond the '=' so that 'man = (3)' is followed by the name of the third wife;

unproven descent is shown by broken lines and uncertain facts by '?';

descent not displayed in detail is shown by an arrow pointing down with a reference to any other chart;

certainty that there were no children is shown by 'no issue' below the '=';

to bring cousin marriages together, the age order may be distorted, but revealed by numbering in age order;

if crossing descent lines cannot be avoided, the vertical line is broken or looped. The diagram illustrates how some problems can be solved. There are good examples in the *Visitations of England and Wales*.

- **An Indented Narrative** also gets out of hand for large families and is best divided into 'chapters'. Details of one individual are kept together, starting with birth, ending with death, and followed by data for the marriage before details of the spouse, all in one 'paragraph'. Each child, in age order, is then described in similar 'paragraphs' indented 2 or 3 spaces from the margin used for its parents. Grandchildren appear similarly indented immediately below their parents, and so on. *Burke's Peerage* provides good examples.
It is helpful to number each 'paragraph' (spouses share a number). Using 'decimals', or alternating figures and letters, makes the number as well as the indentation reveal the generation and aids clarity on later pages. Thus the first 'chapter' is 1 or I; its subject's children are 1.2 or I.B, etc.; 1.11.2.3 or I.K.2.c are great-grandchildren.
- **Compact charts.** Several devices are available for keeping unwieldy charts on smaller paper.

The width required for many children can be reduced by overlapping sheets from which the common ancestry is cut away. The bottom sheet displays the full descent through the youngest children. Other families overlie these with a tab for the parents in the exact position of their details on the lower sheet. All ancestors, uncles and aunt, are then always visible: cousins appear on higher or lower sheets.

Holes in the paper can reveal cousin marriages.

The same device can be inverted to display all the ancestors, with uncles and aunts. The bottom sheet has the all female line. Male lines appear on overlying sheets, with the common descent cut away and downward gaps for the linking spouses.

The greater height of the normal sheet of paper can be exploited by constructing the tree from left to right instead of downwards. It is also more compact.

A compact form of birth brief starts with the direct male line on successive lines, each generation indented by two spaces. Wives are linked to husbands by brackets, both the spouses being equally indented. This form can be useful to display collateral ancestries as footnotes to narrative accounts.

A diagram illustrating a family tree structure using nested brackets. A large left-facing curly bracket groups the following text: Thomas SMITH, ...s of; Peter SMITH, ...s of; { Thomas SMITH, ...; Mary WHITE, ...; Jane BAKER, ...dr of; { Simon BAKER, ...; Lily BROWN, ...; Elizabeth TAYLOR, ...