



Start Genealogy with the Society of Genealogists



SOCIETY OF GENEALOGISTS
FAMILY HISTORY LIBRARY & EDUCATION CENTRE





Ask the Family

Searching for your ancestors must begin with what you know. Collect all the family documents you can and question your relatives: the older ones may know about letters, diaries, papers and dated photographs, while, if you are lucky, the Family Bible will have vital dates. They may be able to estimate ages and suggest locations, even if they cannot give exact details of births, marriages and deaths. Every fact and its source should be noted, as well as vague remarks which can prove unexpectedly useful at a later stage (such as 'that was before the war', 'she was grey at your aunt's wedding', 'I believe an elder brother lived on the south coast and went to Australia or New Zealand').

Start Reading & Recording

While you are visiting older members of the family record what you learn about each relative on a dedicated family history computer software package or else use separate cards or pages of a loose-leaf notebook. There are many books and websites that will give you advice and tips for your next steps. www.genuki.org.uk or <http://www.bbc.co.uk/familyhistory/> are useful online guides. The following books are useful: *First Steps in Family History* (Society of Genealogists, 2005); M Herber *Ancestral Trails* (Alan Sutton, 2005);

You may want to buy at least one of these, but they should all be available from a public library. You don't have to use a computer for family history but one could certainly be of great help. There are several magazines available from good newsagents that regularly review genealogical software programmes, websites and include cover discs so you can find which software is right for you. The Society of Genealogists' online bookshop stocks useful titles and software

Censuses

If you know an ancestor that was alive a hundred or more years ago, you can consult the official census returns for 1901, 1891, 1881, 1871, 1861 1851, which record the members of each household, their relationship to its head, ages, occupations and birthplaces. The 1841 census is also available, but is less informative. Freedom of Information searches can be made in the 1911 census if you know where your ancestor lived and are prepared to pay a fee. Microfilms or microfiche of census returns are often held by County Record Offices, Local Libraries or the Society of Genealogists. A complete set for England and Wales, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands can be seen without charge at The National Archives in Kew. The Scottish returns for 1841 to 1901 are available at New Register House, off Princes Street, Edinburgh, where a fee is charged. The first complete Irish

census extant is that for 1901, which, with that for 1911, can be seen at the National Archives, Bishop Street, Dublin 7, Eire. Online links for Irish censuses centre can be found at <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie>

Name indexes make searching the censuses much easier. There are a lot of indexes available on the Internet, many of which can be searched free at the Society of Genealogists. Links to indexes for England and Wales can be found on The National Archives website at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/census/> Scottish census indexes can be linked from Scotland's People at <http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk>.

Certified Records

Births, marriages and deaths have been officially recorded by the General Register Office for England and Wales since 1 July 1837. The certificates give details of names, dates, ages, addresses and occupations. Each certificate currently costs £7 and takes four days to prepare. You will need the appropriate reference from the indexes to order the certificate. Copies of the indexes are available in some libraries on microfilm or microfiche; there are sets at the Society of Genealogists and The National Archives. Information from the indexes can be found online.

www.freebmd.org.uk, a collaboration between family historians to transcribe the birth marriage and death indexes entries from 1837 up to about 1929 onto the Internet. Not all the indexes are available yet, but there are about 170 million entries and the work is growing all the time. This site has some images of the original indexes as well.

Some commercial organisations such as www.findmypast.com, www.ancestry.co.uk www.bmdindex.co.uk or www.familyrelatives.org have launched digital images or databases compiled from all the indexes for England and Wales to use on a pay per view basis. All these

sites will give the reference needed to obtain a certificate. Prices to view the indexes vary. Some of these sites can be viewed free of charge at the Society of Genealogists.

If there is more than one likely entry in the indexes for the event you require you may ask for the GRO to check each reference against a known fact (e.g. exact date of birth or name of father). If an entry does not agree with the facts you have given £3.50 is then returned to you. Certificates of birth, marriage and death can be ordered by post, by telephone or over the Internet via the General Register Office providing you have the appropriate index references. See <http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/>

The postal address is General Register Office, PO Box 2, Southport, Merseyside, PR8 2JD. The cost of a certificate ordered by post if the index reference is known is £8.50. If the reference is not known the fee is £11.50 (includes a three year search in the indexes). Alternatively fax your order on +44 (0) 7104 550013. Telephone orders can be made using a debit/credit card from their call centre. Opening times Mon-Thur 8am-6pm, Fri 8am-5pm, Sat 10am-4pm. Tel +44 (0) 870 243 7788.

Such events in Scotland from 1855, are available at New Register House, Edinburgh EH1 3YT (for details of opening times and search fees see <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/famrec/hlpsrch/leaflet3.html>) There are copies of the indexes 1855-1920 on microfilm at the Society of Genealogists in London and on the Internet (Births 1855-1906, marriages 1855-1931 and deaths 1855-1956 only) via the General Register for Scotland website (www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk); there is



a charge of £6.00 for a seven consecutive day search period or thirty page credits.

The General Register Office for Northern Ireland was instituted after the creation of Northern Ireland in 1922. However the General Register Office in Belfast has computer indexes of births, Catholic marriages and deaths that occurred in the Province from 1864 and Protestant Marriages from 1845. The General Register Office for Northern Ireland is located at:- Oxford House, 49/55 Chichester Street, Belfast, BT1 4HL. Telephone No:- 028 90 252000. See <http://www.groni.gov.uk/> for details of search facilities, search fees and opening times.

Certificates for the remainder of Ireland from 1864 (and Protestant marriages from 1845) can be obtained in person from the search room of the General Register, Eire at 8-11 Lombard Street, Dublin 2, Eire. Postal enquiries should be addressed to General Register Office, Government Offices, Convent Road, Roscommon. Tel: 090 6632900. See <http://www.groireland.ie/> for information about fees, opening times and search facilities.

Wills

Much useful information can be gleaned from wills and administrations, copies of which for England and Wales back to 1858 may be seen and photocopies obtained (£5.00 each) at the Principal Registry of the Family Division, First Avenue House, 42-49 High Holborn, London WC1V 6NP (open Mon-Fri 10-4.30). If you cannot visit the Principal Registry yourself the copies may be obtained by post from the Postal Searches & Copies Dept, York Probate Sub-Registry, 1st Floor, Castle Chambers, Clifford Street, York, YO1 9RG) giving the full name, address and date of death of the deceased, stating what you require and enclosing the appropriate fee. For those with something to bequeath, the annual will indexes are often more informative than death certificates. Wills before 1858 were under the

jurisdiction of church courts and are mostly in local repositories, described in J. Gibson and E Churchill, *Probate Jurisdictions: Where to Look for Wills* (FFHS, 5th edn. 2002). The Society of Genealogists has indexes for wills proved in most church courts. The records of the highest church court known as the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) can be searched on line via the National Archives Website at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/>



Church Registers

Before general registration started (1837, 1855, 1864) births and deaths were not recorded as such, but baptisms, marriages and burials were entered in the registers of the appropriate churches or chapels. Some parish (Church of England) registers date from 1538. Most over a hundred years old are now deposited in County Record Offices, though a few remain in parish churches. Access to original registers in public hands is mostly free; for those at the church the clergy are allowed to make a charge. The whereabouts of any register may be determined from C R Humphery-Smith, *The Phillimore Atlas and Index of Parish Registers* (Phillimore 2003). Links to all record office websites can be found via The National Archives ARCHON directory at <http://www.archon.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archon/>.

Over the years a great many parish registers have been copied (perhaps to 1812 or to 1837 or later) and the largest collection of these copies is at the Society of Genealogists. Hundreds of millions of baptisms and marriages from parish registers between 1538 and 1875 have been collectively indexed, by the Genealogical Society of Utah (Mormons) into the International Genealogical Index which is available free on line at <http://www.familysearch.org>. Most surviving nonconformist registers in England and Wales before 1837 are at The National Archives and the majority (other than Quaker) have been indexed into the International Genealogical Index. Some nonconformist records are available on the Internet on www.bmdregisters.co.uk. For further detail see *My Ancestors were Methodists*, *My Ancestors were Baptists*, *My Ancestors were Quakers*, *My Ancestors were Congregationalists* and *My Ancestors were English Presbyterians/Unitarians*; all published by the Society of Genealogists. All Scottish parish registers are at New Register House in Edinburgh. Few begin before 1750 but all the baptisms and marriages prior to 1855 have been indexed by the Genealogical Society of Utah and again are available on microfiche at various libraries and Family History Centres. They are also available through the GRO Scotland website www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk.



Many Irish registers have not survived: in the rural areas those which have date only from the early 19th century. In the Republic of Ireland many Church of Ireland Registers have been deposited at the Representative Church Body Library, Braemor Park, Rathgar, Dublin 14 and most of those of the Roman Catholics are on microfilm at the National Archives, Bishop Street, Dublin 7. Records from parishes in Northern Ireland, which are not retained in parish custody, are deposited in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast. For further details about research in Ireland consult J Grenham, *Tracing your Irish ancestors* (Gill and Macmillan Dublin, 2002).

Local Records

When you have exhausted the records of civil registration and have begun to look at the parish registers of the area from which your family came you will need to consult the other sources available in the County Record Office. Here you will find other parish records, the local wills proved before 1858, the records of the administration of the county (including the Land Tax records, at least from 1780 onwards), and the records of local land or estate owners.

The Society of Genealogists

Anyone starting their family history should consider visiting the Society of Genealogists at 14 Charterhouse Buildings, Goswell Road, London EC1M 7BA (open Tues, Wed, Fri, Sat, 10-6; Thur 10-8). www.sog.org.uk. Its remarkable library of over 120,000 books, CDs, databases and microform holds many local sources for the places where your ancestors lived. It collects research notes and published family histories and biographies along with special collections of genealogical research compiled over the last century. Free Internet access is given to certain genealogical pay per view or subscription sites. There are sources for the armed services, professional

and trade directories; apprenticeship records, school and university lists, will and marriage licence indexes and much, much more. Information on using the library can be found on the Society's website www.sog.org.uk where you can also find links to its on-line library catalogue and information on the Library search/copy service. Internet access to many SoG indexes and databases is available at <http://www.britishorigins.com> & <http://www.findmypast.com>

You need not be a member of the Society of Genealogists as the collection is open to all searchers at a minimum charge of £4 for one hour, £10 for four hours or £18 all day. If, however, you join (details available on the SoG website) you also benefit from the quarterly Genealogists' Magazine, access to SoG data online, discounts on some publications, lectures and seminars, courses for beginners and for more advanced searchers. Free tours and family history advice sessions are held on alternate Saturdays. Details of the SoG's telephone family history advice line can be found on the SoG website.

The Genealogical Community

In addition to the Society of Genealogists there are many local family history societies and membership of those in your area and where your family came from may be helpful. A full list can be obtained from the Federation of



Family History Societies, website www.ffhs.org.uk. The Federation has no library and does not undertake research.

The World Wide Web is becoming the most popular means of communication between family historians. Two useful genealogical information services are GENUKI (<http://www.genuki.org.uk>) and Cyndi's List (<http://www.cyndislist.com>). Social network sites such as Genes Reunited and Rootsweb can be a good way to contact other researchers. The Society of Genealogists has its own website <http://www.sog.org.uk> and its members forum is a useful way of seeking support and help from other SoG members. If you are not in a position yourself to trace your family, or if you need help in distant parts of the United Kingdom, or with documents in Latin or difficult handwriting, there are professional searchers who undertake such work. The Association of Genealogists Researchers in Archives (AGRA) was founded to promote high standards among genealogists and publishes a list of members who undertake research. This is available from the AGRA website <http://www.agra.org.uk/>



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