

Beginning Family History Research

1. Talk to your oldest relatives

Speak to as many relatives as you can – the older the better. Try taking a microphone and tape recorder – otherwise you will have to do a lot of note taking. Also take a camera with you to take a photo of your relative and of any photos that they may not want to lend you.

The information you will need is :

- Any family background such as occupations of family members, areas where they might have lived
- Where are family members buried
- Any dates of birth, marriage, deaths
- Any stories that would help build a picture of different family members
- Any documentation that family members left behind eg. Ration books, Armed Service records etc.
- Do they know any other relatives that you could visit
- Remember to be tactful. There are some events that relatives may not wish to share with you.

Also ask for any photographs they might have, especially of their wedding. These can be really useful as memory joggers – remembering old aunties and uncles etc. You can also scan these photos into a computer to make a more permanent record of your family history.

2. Has anyone else searched for family history?

Ask around as many relatives as possible to find out if anyone else has had a go at Family History research. They may have useful leads and wish to share what they have found.

Relatives may also be prepared to lend you photos or documents that you could scan or photocopy to add to your collection.

3. Using the Internet

Try searching for surnames and don't forget your mother's maiden name and grandmother's maiden name.

Try joining message boards such as Genesreunited to find other people who are researching the same names as you. You may even find someone who is looking for exactly the same family.

The following sites are easiest to start with :

www.familysearch.org

www.freebmd.org.uk

www.genesreunited.co.uk – register with your email address

4. Join a Family History Group (Mormon Church)

These groups are run by the Mormon Church (Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints). Parish registers from all over the country are being entered on an Internet database. The names of those entered are then baptised into the Mormon faith.

The Church also produces useful guides to family history research which you can order.

Details of your nearest church can be found in the phone book or the website:
www.lds.org.uk/

5. Join a Family History Society or Genealogical Group

People interested in local and family history often join clubs and pool resources, experiences and information. They can be a very useful starting point for your research. They usually cost about £10 for a year's membership – January – January.

Try contacting

The Federation of Family History Societies,
PO BOX 2425,
COVENTRY,
CV5 6YX

or the website : www.ffhs.org.uk.

6. Use your library/archive

Main libraries often include a Local History section which contains local census or parish records held on microfilm. There are also microfilms of newspapers that might hold birth, marriage or death notices.

Archives are sometimes attached to libraries. These hold a huge selection of local information.

A list of local archives can be found by contacting :

The National Archives,
Kew,
Richmond,
Surrey,
TW9 4DU.

Tel: 020 8876 3444

or using the website: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archon/>

7. War and Armed Services Records

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission and Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives at Kings College London hold a huge amount of information about members of the armed services.

Try the CWGC site: http://www.cwgc.org/debt_of_honour.asp?menuid=14

Or

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission
2 Marlow Road
Maidenhead
Berkshire
SL6 7DX.
United Kingdom

Or phone 01628 634221 for enquiries.

8. Cemeteries

See if you can find gravestones of relatives – you might find other relatives mentioned on headstones. You would also get an accurate idea of dates of birth and death. Churches should hold more details in their register of deaths but sometimes these have been sent to a local archive.

9. Keep All Information Safe in a Folder

Keep all your research records safe and in one place. If you have a computer you could type up all details found or try buying or downloading specific family history software which will help you keep clear, well organised records. And don't forget to keep backups and photocopies!

10. Try using the Internet or other sources to search :

- Birth Certificates
- Marriage Certificates
- Death Certificates
- Census (latest version on the Internet is 1901)
- Church/Parish Records
- Family History – asking relatives
- Military Records – eg. CWGC
- Occupational Records
- Probate Records, Pre-1858
- Probate Records, 1858 to Present
- Cemetery Records
- Monumental Inscriptions/Church Monuments
- Newspapers – birth, marriage and death notices
- Biography
- School and Alumni Records – www.friendsreunited.co.uk
- Poor Law Records
- Quarter Sessions - courts