

# 101 Top Tips to help you with your Genealogy Research Part 1

## **Starting Out: At Home And With The Family**

- 1** Start with yourself – write down when and where you were born and married and details about your children. Then do the same for your parents, grandparents and great-grandparents until you can go no further.
- 2** Sort out family papers, photographs and heirlooms. Some might seem unimportant, but you never know what may provide a clue further down the line.
- 3** Let everyone know you are researching your family tree. Ask to borrow family papers and heirlooms from relations. Naturally they may be unwilling to loan precious items, so offer to scan, photograph or photocopy them.
- 4** Take great care of family heirlooms. Store them in a dry room well away from sunlight or water pipes.
- 5** Photocopy any documents you are going to refer to again and again, to prevent damage to the originals.
- 6** Do not use sticky tape to repair damaged documents (or cheap plastic folders to store them) as it will cause irreparable damage.
- 7** Label and date any photograph you take and try to do the same for older family shots you come across. This will make it easier for your descendants to identify the family.
- 8** When possible talk to older members of the family about their memories of growing up and the relations who have passed on. They can provide information that you can't obtain from any other source. Remember, however, that memories can deceive.

## **Starting Out: Beginning Research**

- 9** Once you've exhausted the resources at home draw up a simple family tree to record what information you have already discovered. It doesn't have to be perfect or comprehensive, but it's a start.
- 10** Begin researching one ancestor or side of the family. Ideally choose somebody who lived an interesting life or about whom you already know something.
- 11** It is always easier to research people with unusual surnames.
- 12** Always work from known facts and move backwards. You should never assume anything or make links without the appropriate evidence.

**13** Divide up your research into manageable chunks. In general, simply decide which question you wish to answer, then work out the records that you will need to solve the problem.

**14** Choose an ancestor from your list and set about finding out, or confirming their date of birth. If you know an approximate date, find their name in the birth registers at the Family Records Centre (or online at [www.1837online.com](http://www.1837online.com)). If they do not appear, move forwards and backwards five years through the indexes until you find them. Once you have a reference, you can order a certificate. You're now on your way!

**15** The further back you go, the harder research becomes. This is because the records either don't survive or become increasingly difficult to use. However, with a bit of luck you should be able to trace several lines back 250 years.

### **Problem Solving**

**16** The more information you have about an individual or family the easier your search will be. At the very least you should know the name and approximate dates of birth, marriage and death.

**17** Surnames are constantly changing - in terms of their spelling. If the trail goes cold try all the variations you can think of. They may have been misspelt by a bureaucrat or your ancestor has chosen to use a different variant.

**18** Large registers often have indexes to names and subjects at the beginning or end of the volume. They are always worth checking, but remember that entries may be by initial letter only, not in strict surname order.

**19** Don't give up at the first likely entry: your ancestor may appear a page or two further on.

**20** If you're having trouble pinning down when an event took place there may be other sources which could hold the answer, such as monumental inscriptions (MIs), cemetery records, family bibles and letters, newspapers and service records.

**21** If you get stuck ask the staff in the reading room for guidance. It may be a common problem to which they'll know the answer.

**22** If an ancestor disappears, try looking for them in a 'strays' index. A 'stray' is an event (such as a baptism or an entry in the census) that takes place outside the county or area where the person usually lived or was born. Many family history societies have compiled such indexes.