



101 Genealogy Top Tips

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101 Top Tips to help you with your Genealogy Research

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). 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.

A Problem Shared

23 Join a family history society. They organise regular meetings which offer the chance to talk through your problems with fellow enthusiasts. Many publish newsletters and indexes to records not available elsewhere.

You can find more details at www.genuki.org.uk/societies.

24 Sign up for a family history class run by the local adult education centre or WEA branch. Here you can learn about the sources in a structured way and in a convivial atmosphere.

25 Buy 1 or 2 Family History / Genealogy Magazines every month! The articles, and other features such Q&A and Suggested Websites, may provide the answer you are looking for.

26 Some ancestors just don't want to be found. Don't waste your time fruitlessly looking for one person, move on to another side of the family.

27 Abbreviations

Ag Lab	Agricultural Labourer
BL	British Library
BLNL	British Library Newspaper Library ('Colindale')
BT	Bishop's Transcript
CEB	Census Enumerators' Books (the documents in which census data was recorded)
CRO	County record office
FFHS	Federation of Family History Societies
FHS	Family History Society
FRC	Family Records Centre
FWK	Frame Work Knitter
GOONS	Guild of One-Name Studies
GRO	General Register Office
GROS	General Register Office of Scotland
IGI	International Genealogical Index
IHGS	Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies
IWM	Imperial War Museum
MI	Monumental Inscriptions
NAI	National Archives of Ireland
NAS	National Archives of Scotland
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PRO	Public Record Office
SOG	Society of Genealogists

Archival Resources

28 The top British archive is The National Archives (TNA), formerly the Public Record Office. If you have ancestors who served in the forces, born or died overseas, were criminals or ended up transported then you'll need to visit Kew.

29 On your first visit to TNA take the orientation tour, as this will explain how to make the best use of the office.

30 If you know the references you can order documents in advance so that they will be ready when you arrive at Kew.

31 The catalogue to TNA's records is online at <http://catalogue.pro.gov.uk>. This can help you find what you want before you arrive. It even includes some names.

32 TNA also has sets of Parliamentary Papers and The Times from 1785 with indexes on microfilm.

33 On the ground floor of the Family Records Centre (FRC) in central London you will find the central set of registers to births, marriages and deaths since 1837. You can also order certificates.

34 TNA also has a set of registers to births, marriages and deaths on microfilm.

35 A complete set of census records between 1841 and 1901 can be found on the first floor at the FRC.

36 Both the FRC and TNA have copies of nonconformist parish registers and the Prerogative Court of Canterbury wills.

37 Every English county (and many in Wales) has a record office, which has local parish registers, poor law documents, and records of local businesses, landed estates and societies. www.hmc.gov.uk/archon.

38 Most towns have a local studies library with collections of newspapers and photographs and other material about the area. They almost all provide computer terminals with access to the internet which can be used free or for a nominal amount. www.familia.org.uk.

39 The largest collection of the parish registers and indexes is held by the Society of Genealogists (SoG). Their Library also has a huge number of other resources to help family historians. www.sog.org.uk.

40 Family History Centres, maintained by the Church of Jesus Christ and the Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), are dotted all over the UK. You can order printed or microfilm copies of any of the genealogical sources stored in the Family History Library in Utah (including 2.2 million rolls of microfilm) at any centres. You do not have to be a church member to use them. www.lds.org.uk.

Visiting Archives

41 Call in advance to make sure that they have what you are looking for and there is space for you.

42 You can make the most of precious time at the record office by carefully planning your visit. Have a short, achievable list of specific goals - facts to check, sources to view.

43 Many archives produce leaflets (both printed and online) about their sources and how to use them.

44 An increasing number of catalogues are online, which can help you pre-plan your trip. www.a2a.pro.gov.uk

45 Many local record offices have detailed card indexes to their holdings. It is always a good idea to check them in case you uncover a reference to an ancestor or the place they lived.

46 Take pencils, a notebook and any notes you may have. Pens, pencil sharpeners and erasers are frowned upon, so leave them at home.

47 Don't forget some identification, including something which shows your home address. You may need this to obtain a reader's ticket.

48 Record offices and family history societies often offer research or 'look up' services. However they will need a minimum amount of information for an individual - name, approximate birth date, etc.

49 Always send an SAE with any request for information. Overseas enquiries should be accompanied by two International Reply Coupons (available from post offices).

Recording Sources

50 Common TNA Lettercodes

ADM	Admiralty (i.e. Royal Navy)
AIR	Air Ministry (i.e. Royal Air Force)
BT	Board of Trade(including merchant seamen)
CO	Colonial Office
FO	Foreign Office
HO	Home Office (including much about crime)
RG	Registrar General (including census and pre-1837 nonconformist registers)
WO	War Office (i.e. Army)

51 Note down as much as possible - there's nothing more annoying than realising you had the answer in your hands but failed to realise its importance.

52 Watch your handwriting - it's easy to let it slip when you are making lots of notes and not be able to read them when you get home.

53 Each archival item will have a unique reference. It is important to record this information in case you need to see the document again.

54 If you find useful information in a book, note down the title, author, publisher, page number, publication date and, if the book is borrowed, where it came from.

55 For websites, write down the URL, date, and if applicable, contact names and email addresses, although it's probably simpler to print out the page itself.

56 Bring plenty of change for the photocopier and a pound coin for the cloakroom locker.

Building Blocks

57 After 1837 it was a legal requirement in England and Wales to register births, marriages and deaths. They are indexed alphabetically for each quarter of each year from 1837 to date.

58 Microfilmed copies of the registers are widely available at large reference libraries. They can also be found at www.1837online.com.

59 Once the reference number has been found, the certificate can be ordered direct from the GRO in Southport or in person at the FRC.

60 Before 1837, you will need to look at parish registers, which officially start in 1538. Few survive before 1604.

61 Look out for bishop's transcripts (BTs) - duplicates of parish registers which may survive even if the original has been destroyed.

62 Many family history societies have transcribed and indexed local parish records, while others are available at local record offices and the Society of Genealogists. To find out what is available consult The Phillimore Atlas and Index of Parish Registers.

63 Try taking a genealogy course designed for beginners - the Society of Genealogists runs a selection of courses suitable for both beginners and more experienced genealogists: www.sog.org.uk.

64 The Church of Jesus Christ and Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) has transcribed many parish records in the International Genealogical Index (IGI) and the more recent British Isles Vital Records Index. The IGI is available free online, or on CD-ROM and microfiche. These indexes are very useful, but riddled with errors.
www.familysearch.com

65 A census has been taken every 10 years since 1801. They are available between 1841 and 1901. Earlier ones have largely been destroyed, while more recent censuses have yet to be released.

66 Copies of census records are gradually appearing online and CD-ROM. At present certain parts of the 1911 census www.1911census.co.uk the 1901 census www.census.pro.gov.uk and an index to the 1881 census www.familysearch.org are available.

67 The 1841 census is less informative than later ones and is harder to read.

68 After 1851 extra information is given - relationship to head of household, whether married or single, actual age and place and county of birth.

69 About 10 per cent of the 1861 census is missing.

70 An address on a certificate may help you locate a family in the census. Similarly a birthplace in the census should lead you to a pre-civil registration parish register.

Fleshing Out

71 Try to visit the cemeteries in which your relatives are buried. Inscriptions on graves can sometimes hold information not recorded elsewhere. And it can be moving to see the setting where our ancestors were laid to rest.

72 It's much easier to find out about male ancestors, particularly heads of households, than their wives and daughters.

73 You may be able to find more about an ancestor's occupation from records at the National Archives and elsewhere.

74 However, before the 20th century most men were employed as labourers of one kind or another, while women were servants or farm workers. As few records were kept it is almost impossible to find out much about them.

75 Until the Second World War only about 10 per cent of people left a will. Where one exists it can provide a unique insight into an individual's possessions and how he saw his family and friends.

76 Before the 1880s very few women made a will as their possessions passed automatically to the husband on marriage.

77 By researching the community your ancestors lived in, you can out a lot more about their lives and the world they lived in.

78 Local Studies Libraries often have collections of indexed newspaper clippings, which can be a good place to start.

79 Trade and street directories can be found in most local archives. They should mention heads of households and their occupations and can be useful tracking down where people lived.

80 Poll books and electoral rolls contain lists of who could vote in elections. They can be found in large libraries and record offices, but remember that before 1928 not everybody had the right to vote.

81 Before researching a military career you need to know in which service the individual served, whether he was a rating/other ranks or an officer, approximately when he served and in which unit or ship.

82 Service records for both the Army and Navy up to about 1920 are held at The National Archives.

83 TNA also has other records which will flesh out a man's military career even if his service record is still closed.

84 For a fee of approximately £25 the Ministry of Defence will search more recent service records. Write to MOD CS(RM)2, Bourne Avenue, Hayes UB3 1RF.

85 Never underestimate the value of lesser-used sources. There are many different types of records and indexes that could provide a vital clue. Articles in Family History Magazines, books or websites can provide clues about where to look.

Computers And The Internet

86 A computer is a useful tool, but it is still perfectly possible to compile your family tree without one. Despite the resources on the internet and on CD, nothing beats handling original documents!

87 All modern computers are powerful enough to handle your family history. However you'll need a more advanced machine if you plan to manipulate images.

88 There may already be programs on your computer which can be a great help in organising your research, such as word processors, image editors and spreadsheets.

89 Be aware of the limitations of online sources. Even the most established online indexes may be riddled with errors. Use them as a guide and always check the original.

90 The internet is a great way to share your researches - either by setting up your own website or by providing material to an online database.

91 There are increasing numbers of pay-per-view databases. However, much of the data they are offering may be available for free somewhere else.

92

21 Essential Websites

Five free sites

www.genuki.org.uk

For British and Irish research.

<http://www.cyndislist.com>

Links to 200,000 genealogical websites.

<http://www.familysearch.org>

For the online IGI and 1881 census index.

<http://www.freebmd.co.uk>

Indexes to births, marriages and deaths between 1837 and 1903.

<http://www.rootsweb.com>

An excellent site but with a US bias.

<http://genealogy-family-history.info/>

Five official sites to archives and archival resources online

<http://www.a2a.pro.gov.uk>

Indexes to the holdings of many local record offices.

<http://www.pro.gov.uk>

The Public Record Office's website.

www.familyrecords.gov.uk

Links to government departments and museums with family history holdings.

<http://www.cwgc.org>

The Debt of Honour database to Britain's war dead.

<http://www.gazettes-online.co.uk>

Scans and indexes to the London Gazette.

Five miscellaneous sites with lots of resources

<http://www.movinghere.org.uk>

The experiences of migrants to Britain.

www.historicaldirectories.org

Scanned images of selected trade directories.

<http://www.britishpathe.com>

View 20th century newsreels.

<http://www.oldbaileyonline.org>

Old Bailey criminal proceedings 1660-1834.

<http://www.sog.org.uk>

The Society of Genealogists.

Six pay-to-view sites

<http://www.ancestry.co.uk>

Contains 1.5 billion names worldwide in hundreds of different databases.

<http://www.1837online.com>

Indexes to GRO registers from 1837 to the present day.

www.1911census.co.uk

1911 census

www.census.pro.gov.uk

1901 census.

<http://www.documentsonline.pro.gov.uk>

Scans of pre-1858 wills and other documents.

<http://www.familyhistoryonline.net>

The resources of family history societies.

<http://genealogy-family-history.info/>

Scots And Irish Research

93 There are three major sources for Scots research: civil registration from 1855, the census between 1841 and 1901, and old parish registers which begin in the 16th century.

94 Indexes to Scottish events are available at General Register Office for Scotland. A fully searchable and comprehensive index of Scottish records from the 16th century is online. www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk.

95 Wills, deeds, valuation rolls and pre-1855 baptismal records of churches other than the Church of Scotland are with the National Archives of Scotland. www.nas.gov.uk

96 Irish research is tricky because so much was destroyed in a disastrous fire in 1922. In addition there are few parish records before the 19th century.

97 The 1901 and 1911 censuses for all of Ireland (and much more beside) are available at the National Archives in Dublin www.nationalarchives.ie. The Six Counties are covered by the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland in Belfast www.proni.gov.uk

98 Civil registration in Ireland began in 1864 (with Protestant marriages in 1845). For details visit <http://www.groireland.ie> and for the North (from 1922) www.groni.gov.uk/index.htm

99 The Irish Origins website includes searchable databases of census data, Griffith's Valuation, ships' passenger lists and convict records www.irishorigins.com.

Ten Essential Reference Books And CDs

It's worth looking out for these books and discs in larger reference libraries...

Books

Dictionary of National Biography

Lists of thousands of famous and not so famous Britons. A new much expanded edition is has recently been published.

Phillimore's Atlas and Index of Parish Registers

A comprehensive guide to parish registers and their location.

Burke's or Debrett's Peerage

Listing the aristocracy and their antecedents.

Directories to the professions, such as:

Crockford's Clerical Directory,

The Imperial Calendar and the

Army and Navy Lists.

Books of old photographs.

CDs

Who Was Who, 1897-1980

also available in book form

Palmer's Index to the Times,

1790-1905; 1906-1980

Soldiers Died in the Great

War Army Roll of Honour 1939-1945

Passenger and immigration lists to North America and the Caribbean, 1607-c1800

101 Above all family history is a hobby - enjoy it! It's meant to be a challenge, but you can do as much as (or as little) as you like whenever it suits you. And if you get side-tracked into some other historical research, well, that's all part of the fun.

Extra's

Free Genealogy Software

You can obtain a free copy of Legacy Family Tree Software from [Here](#)

Free Photo Editing Software

Click [Here](#) to download a free edition of Serif Photoplus SE Photo Editing Software

Free Drawing – Chart Making Software

Click [Here](#) to download a free edition of Serif DrawPlus4 Vector Drawing Software