



A Guide to... researching your ancestors

Bookbite

People love to hear about their ancestors. It takes us on a journey into past lives, times and places. And it's fascinating to discover what we've inherited – whether it's a family heirloom or the family chin.

START THE QUEST

The best place to start is – you! Write down everything you know about yourself and your family, noting:

- Full names
- Dates of birth, marriage and death
- Places they've lived.

Ask your relatives for this information too, and see how far back their memories can stretch. But remember to be tactful. What's an intriguing piece of history to you might be a painful memory for them.

PICKING UP CLUES

When you speak to family members, ask if you can look through their official documents – often stuffed in boxes, briefcases and drawers! Particularly useful are:

- Birth, marriage and death certificates
- Wills
- Records of employment
- Pension payments
- Educational and professional qualifications
- Military service papers.

Check out heirlooms such as bibles, too, as people often recorded family trees on the inside cover.

Photo albums are another great source of information. If possible, write people's names in pencil on the back. If you can borrow the photos, you could scan them into your computer, or have someone do it for you. A picture really brings your family tree to life.

DRAW YOUR FAMILY TREE

Armed with this information, you can now start drawing your family tree. Take a blank sheet of paper:

- Write your name and date of birth in the bottom half.
- Above you, write the names of your mother and father, and above them their parents, and so on.
- Also include people's dates of birth and death if you know them.

GETTING HELP

At some point you'll need to look beyond the family to fill the gaps in your research. There are many sources of information – and people willing to help you find it.

YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY

A treasure house for anyone researching family or local history. Ask the librarian to show you how to use the catalogues. They can also tell you about local societies and other useful organisations.

UK Online centres, some of which are located in libraries, will help you to research using different websites.

Call free on 0800 77 1234 to find the nearest centre to you.

BOOKS AND MAGAZINES

We give a basic list in this section. Why not see if your library has them, or can order them?

Writing up Your Family History: A do-it-yourself guide by John Titford

Track Down Your Ancestors: How to Research Your Family History Using Archives & The Internet by Estelle Catlett

Who Do You Think You Are?, from the BBC series in which celebrities trace their family trees.

Ancestors Magazine, from The National Archives, is packed with the news and online resources, articles and expert advice about tracing your ancestors.

FAMILY HISTORY WEBSITES

A lot of the information you'll need is available online. Some is free, some you have to pay for.

www.bbc.co.uk/history/familyhistory (free).

The BBC website is a great place to start researching your family history. You can sign up for a free newsletter too.

www.ancestry.co.uk (paid for).

The largest family records site in the UK, with records dating back to the 1300s. Also available free in local libraries.

www.genesreunited.co.uk (free in part).

Lots of useful information and resources.

www.genuki.org.uk (free).

A huge store of tips, advice and information.

CULTURAL HISTORY WEBSITES

www.besthistorysites.net

www.movinghere.org.uk

USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

The National Archives – the UK government's official archive, containing over 1,000 years of history.

Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU.

Tel: 020 8876 3444

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Society of Genealogists – the national library and education centre for family history.

14 Charterhouse Buildings, Goswell Road, London EC1M 7BA.

Tel: 020 7251 8799

www.sog.org.uk

People's Network – gives online access to a range of public library services, including personal enquiries.

www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk

