

Starting Family History Research for Beginners



Starting Family History Research

“Back to basics” presentation of how and where to start researching your family tree... with some additional guidance on what not to do!

Starting Family History Research - Videos from the National Archives with Links

- Firstly, a general introduction from the National Archives (lasting around 17 minutes) showing how to research your family using 20th century sources

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xm97icVMSao>

- Then another video from the National Archives (lasting around 15 minutes) showing how to research your family from 1911 back to 1837

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XIE3wliySg>

- Finally, a good video from the National Archives (lasting around 20 minutes) showing how to research your family from 1837 back to 1792

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfwuzVzADql>

Starting Family History Research - Summary of how and where to start

- The first step in any family history research project is to gather as much information as you can about your family. This information can come from a variety of sources, including:
 - Your own memories
 - Your parents, siblings, and other relatives
 - Family heirlooms, such as photographs, letters, and documents
 - Public records, such as birth, marriage, and death certificates
 - Online resources, such as genealogy websites and databases
- Talk to your family members. Ask them about their memories of your ancestors - as below.
- Visit your local library or genealogy society. They may have records or resources that can help you get started.
- Search online genealogy databases. There are many free and paid databases that can help you find information about your ancestors.

Starting Family History Research - Summary of key resources for English & Welsh Ancestors (some applicable to Scottish & Irish ancestors) - Part 1

Civil registration records:

Births: 1837-present Marriages: 1837-present Deaths: 1837-1983

Church records:

Baptisms: 1538-1837 Marriages: 1538-1837 Burials: 1538-1837

Census records: These records were taken every 10 years from 1841 to 1911.

1841-1891: Household schedules 1901-1911: Individual schedules

Wills and probate records: These records document the distribution of a person's property after their death. They can provide information on the deceased person's family members, as well as their assets and debts.

Wills: 1384-present Probate records: 1275-present

Starting Family History Research - Summary of key resources for English & Welsh Ancestors (some applicable to Scottish & Irish ancestors)- Part 2

Land records: These records can provide information on a person's property ownership, such as deeds, leases, and mortgages.

Deeds: 12th century-present

Leases: 13th century-present

Mortgages: 14th century-present

Military records: These records can provide information on a person's military service, such as enlistment and discharge papers, pension records, and war medals.

Enlistment and discharge papers: 17th century-present

Pension records: 1688-present

War medals: 18th century-present

Starting Family History Research - Summary of key resources for English & Welsh Ancestors (some applicable to Scottish & Irish ancestors) - Part 3

Immigration records: These records can provide information on a person's immigration to England, such as passenger lists, naturalization records, and alien registration records.

Passenger lists: 18th century-present

Naturalization records: 1790-present

Alien registration records: 1906-1954

Starting Family History Research - Reminders of what not to do! Part 1

- Not starting with yourself. The best way to start your research is to create a family tree with yourself at the top and work your way back through the generations. This will help you to identify the names and dates of your ancestors, which you can then use to search for records.
- Assuming that names are unique. Common names can be found in many different families, so it's important to be careful when making assumptions about who your ancestors are. Always double-check the names and dates of your ancestors to make sure that you're not making a mistake.
- Trusting online trees without verifying the information. There are many online family trees that contain inaccurate or incomplete information. It's important to verify the information in these trees before adding it to your own tree.
- Not being aware of the different types of records available. These include birth, marriage, and death certificates; census records; parish registers; wills; and military records.

Starting Family History Research - Reminders of what not to do! Part 2

- Not being organized. It's important to keep track of your research. This will help you avoid making mistakes and wasting time. There are many different ways to organize your research, such as using a genealogy software program, a paper notebook, or a spreadsheet. Always record the date of each entry whichever method you choose to use.
- Not documenting your sources. It's important to document your sources so that you can verify your information and retrace your steps if necessary. This means recording the name of the source, the date it was published, the location where you found it (sometimes the address of the website page) and the date you recorded the information.
- Trusting everything you read. Not all sources are created equal. It's important to evaluate the reliability of each source before use. Consider the author's credentials, the purpose and the date of publication.
- Not asking for help. There are many resources available to help you with your family tree research. Do not be afraid to ask for help from libraries, archives, and other genealogy societies.

Starting Family History Research - Reminders of what not to do! Part 3

- Assuming a family name is only spelled one way. English surnames have a long and varied history, and they can be spelled in many different ways. For example, the surname "Smith" can be spelled "Smyth", "Smythe", "Smithe", or even "Smythes".
- Assuming you are related to a famous person. It is tempting to believe that you are related to a famous person, but this is not always the case. There are many famous people who have common surnames, and it is important to do your research to verify any family connections.
- Skipping a generation. It is easy to get excited about finding a record for an ancestor, but it is important to make sure that you are not skipping a generation. For example, if you find a record for your great-grandfather, you should also try to find records for his parents (your great-grandparents).
- Getting discouraged when you hit a brick wall. Everyone hits brick walls when they're researching their family tree. It's important to not give up and to keep searching for new records.

Starting Family History Research - How to talk to your relatives to get information

- Before you talk to your relatives, do some research so that you have a basic understanding of your family history (including maps of key areas). This will help you to ask informed questions and to make the most of your time with relatives.
- Be respectful. Remember that your relatives may be the only source of information about your ancestors, so respect their time and memories. Be patient and understanding if they don't remember everything.
- Be careful about sensibilities and family skeletons. Grandparents come from a different generation with possibly stricter morals sometimes!
- Be specific. When you ask questions, be as specific as possible. This will help your relatives to recall the information you are looking for. For example "Where was grandpa born, when did he move to Kent".
- Be open-minded. Don't be afraid to ask follow-up questions. Your relatives may remember something that they didn't think was important at first.
- Be grateful. Thank your relatives for their time and for sharing their memories with you.

Starting Family History Research - Suggested questions to ask your relatives

- What were the names of your grandparents?
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- Where and when were they born?
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- Who were their parents?
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- Where did they live?
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- What did they do for a living and did they serve in the military?
-
- Did they have any siblings?
-
- Did they have any interesting stories to tell?
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- Do you have any old photographs or documents that I could see?

Starting Family History Research - Recording your findings and especially your sources

- Family tree software: There are many different family tree software programs available, both free and paid. They can help you organize your research, create a family tree, and store your documents and images.
- Genealogy notebooks are a great way to keep track of your research notes, sources, and ideas. You can use a dedicated genealogy notebook, or you can use an ordinary notebook or journal.
- Spreadsheets can be a helpful way to organize your data, such as dates, places, and names. You can use a spreadsheet to create a family tree, or you can use it to track your research progress.
- Word processing documents can be used to create detailed research notes, such as transcriptions of documents or interviews. You can also use such documents to write stories or biographies about your ancestors.
- There are many online tools available to help you with your family tree research, e.g. Ancestry, FindMyPast. These tools can help you find records, transcribe documents, and collaborate with other researchers.

Remember

**Start with what you
think you know, prove
it, then work
backwards and record
everything as you go!**



Happy hunting!

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