

## *TRACING YOUR FAMILY TREE*

Let's be honest - it's not quite as easy and straightforward as they make it look on "Who Do You Think You Are?" but once your journey of discovery begins you'll enjoy it so much you'll wonder why you didn't do it sooner. Of course, you'll have your share of frustrations as you come up against apparent brick walls and think you'll never find that missing piece of information you're looking for, but don't despair - there's always help and advice to be found on the internet. And the sheer thrill of making discoveries - and sharing them with family members - soon helps you to forget the times you thought of giving up.

This is just a *very* basic guide to how you can set about tracing your family tree - there are a great many more on the internet (the one available on [www.findmypast.com](http://www.findmypast.com) is particularly detailed) so you need never be at a loss as to what to do next.

### *STEP 1: Ask the family*

Find out as much as you can from family documents such as Birth, Marriage and Death Certificates and speak to older relatives - you could be surprised how much they know and they'll often have old photographs of family members. Cousins can often be particularly helpful.

Remember: it's very important right from the start to **keep a record of everything you discover** including a note of where you discovered it. A computer - with access to the internet and a scanner - can obviously be invaluable to your research and is particularly useful for storing copies of photographs and documents. It's so important to stay organised and, to help with this, you can download free Family Tree builders from sites such as [www.brotherskeeper.com](http://www.brotherskeeper.com) or [www.myheritage.com](http://www.myheritage.com) .

*Tip:* when it comes to photographs, don't forget that the backs can also have useful information on them, too.

## STEP 2: *The Internet*

Decide where you want to start your search. It's most usual to choose a person e.g. your grandfather and then start to work backwards in time and this can be done in several ways. If you have a copy of their Birth Certificate it will show you the name of their parents and from this you can search for *their* parents, and so on. It's almost always easier to start by tracing the male line of your family, mainly for the very obvious reason that the male line keeps the same surname through each generation.

But how do you actually search? One of the best ways is to use the resources of the internet. In this guide I've tried to concentrate mainly on free resources and the following are just a very few of the many websites that can help you with your research:

[www.genesreunited.co.uk](http://www.genesreunited.co.uk)

[www.cyndislist.com](http://www.cyndislist.com)

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)

[www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)

[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

[www.freereg.rootsweb.com](http://www.freereg.rootsweb.com)

[www.genuki.org.uk](http://www.genuki.org.uk)

<http://boards.ancestry.co.uk/surname.aspx>

Don't worry if you don't actually have access to the internet at home – all is not lost! Many libraries provide computers with internet access for you to use and some (though probably not many) have even got free access to websites such as [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) which you would have to pay for at home. This is most common, however, in County Record Offices.

It's particularly helpful if you can find out the name of a family member who was alive at the time of the 1911 census (the most recent one that we're able to look at). If you can find them in this census you should discover not only where they lived but also – if they were still very young at that time – the names of

their parents. And from this you can work backwards in time, searching previous censuses for information. Obviously, if they were already over the age of 10 you could start by finding them in the 1901 census.

National censuses were – and still are - carried out every 10 years and started in the early 1800s. It is really only those from 1841 onwards that can be searched online and which have any detailed information in them. Unfortunately, only one census can be viewed for free, the 1881 census. That can be found on the familysearch website (see above). The others can be found on sites such as [www.findmypast.com](http://www.findmypast.com) and [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) , among others.

These two sites can also be used to search through Birth, Marriage and Death Indexes but, again, you'll have to pay to see the actual pages from the General Register Office (G.R.O.) registers that show the information containing the person's name, sometimes their age, the District where the event was registered and the Volume and Page Number (however if you're lucky enough to have the surname "Norfolk" you can see FOR FREE all the Births, Marriages and Deaths for all Norfolks between 1837 and 1925 at [www.norfolkfamilyhistory.co.uk](http://www.norfolkfamilyhistory.co.uk)). If you want to order an actual Birth, Marriage or Death Certificate from the G.R.O. you can also do this online – currently they cost £7 – but you'll need to know the relevant District, Volume and Page Number. Of course, if you were able to visit the local Register Office where the event was actually registered you'd pay less than £7 but you'd probably still need the Volume and Page Number.

The familysearch site is also particularly useful not only for the 1881 census, but also because you can search the International Genealogical Index (I.G.I.) The I.G.I. contains records of Birth, Marriages, Deaths, Baptisms and Burials which go back several hundred years. But you certainly won't find information about everybody you're looking for in them – not by any means - and, in some cases the information can be either misleading or simply downright wrong, but it's a resource that can prove to be very helpful indeed, especially when you need information that pre-dates the 1841 census.

You can also sometimes strike lucky – particularly if your surname is uncommon – by simply entering the name of a family member into a search engine, e.g. Google or Yahoo! It may even be worth trying a search for an ancestor on "google books" – go to the "google" homepage, click on "more" and a box with options drops down; select "books" then on the next page type the

name of your ancestor into the “google books” search engine and see what comes up.

There are also a great many Surname Message Boards on the internet, e.g. at [www.rootsweb.ancestry.com](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com) where people looking for, or wishing to help share information, about a particular surname leave messages.

Take a look at your local Family History Society website, these offer a great deal of information, e.g. [www.yorkfamilyhistory.org.uk](http://www.yorkfamilyhistory.org.uk) . Some counties have a Family History website, as do a large number of individual towns and cities.

### STEP 3. *Get out and about*

Once you’ve managed to trace your family back as far as the 1841 census, how do you find out more about earlier times? Well, one great place to look is the County Record Office for the area that includes where your ancestors lived. The kinds of records you probably need to see now are Parish Registers and these are mostly kept at County Record Offices. Copies of them can also be seen at such places as The Borthwick Institute for Archives which is situated at York: [www.york.ac.uk/inst/bihr/](http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/bihr/) . It’s very useful to find out where the Parish Registers for a particular place are kept by visiting [www.genuki.org.uk](http://www.genuki.org.uk) .

County Record Offices may also hold details of Wills and Administrations (an Administration could be granted if the deceased person did not leave a valid Will). If your ancestor left a Will, you may well discover some really valuable information. They may not only contain detailed information about personal wealth but also about family relationships – you may find out what they *really* thought about their relatives -the names of friends, illness and place of residence. Before 1858, Wills were “proved” or validated by Church courts or, in some cases, Prerogative Courts (you can find details of these Courts on the internet). After 1858, Wills were dealt with in Civil Courts and these Wills can be looked up in the Probate Registry. Copies of Wills can be bought from the Probate Registry. You can find the address of the Probate Registry for the location you’re interested in on this site: <http://ancestor-search.info/NAT-probate.htm#pro> .

County Record Offices that hold copies of Wills usually have them on microfilm but some archives e.g. the Borthwick Institute at York, have many original copies of Wills, some of which date from many centuries ago.

A very useful place to visit is a Family History Centre run by the Church of The Latter Day Saints. A great many towns and cities in England have them and you can look them up in the phone book or visit this site to find them:

[www.familysearch.org/eng/library/fhc/frameset\\_fhc.asp?PAGE=library\\_fhc\\_find.asp](http://www.familysearch.org/eng/library/fhc/frameset_fhc.asp?PAGE=library_fhc_find.asp)

Information is free at these centres and includes access to microfilms.

Large cathedrals e.g. York Minster also have extensive archives that you can search for information.

If you know where your ancestors are buried, pay a visit to their graveyards or cemeteries – armed with a camera, of course! This may sound a bit ghoulish but they contain a really important resource for genealogists – Monumental Inscriptions (M.I.s). These can sometimes tell you so much more than simply dates of birth and death. They can reveal family relationships, causes of death and may even reveal the name of a family member you'd not previously heard of. And record the wording – M.I.s may be carved in stone but they're far from being permanent. They become eroded, they are sometimes vandalised and they are all too frequently removed or laid flat by local councils which seem to automatically assume that because a gravestone's at a bit of a rakish angle it must, therefore, be dangerous. And, of course, laying them flat makes mowing the grass a lot easier!

Once you have discovered where your ancestor used to live, it's great to actually visit the location. If you're very lucky, the property will still be there but, even if it's long been demolished you can perhaps still walk the same streets that they used to walk. Maybe even see some of the same sights.

And don't forget your local library – you may be very surprised to discover what books or documents they have tucked away in their reference section.

### **ONE WORD OF WARNING:**

**Be very careful as to what personal information you allow others see about you on the internet. Identity theft is on the increase so don't, for example, give away your exact date of birth. This applies not only to your own personal details but also to those of all other living people in your family tree.**

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[www.norfolkfamilyhistory.co.uk](http://www.norfolkfamilyhistory.co.uk)