

A beginner's guide to
**British and Irish
Genealogy**



an Unlock the Past
guide book...

Chris Paton —

About the author



Chris Paton

Originally from the Northern Irish town of Carrickfergus in County Antrim, Chris holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Genealogical Studies and runs the Scotland's Greatest Story family history service

(www.ScotlandsGreatestStory.co.uk). He has regularly written for *Ancestors*, *Irish Roots*, *Discover my Past Scotland*, *Family History Monthly*, *Family Tree*, *History Scotland*, *Practical Family History*, *Who Do You Think You Are*, *Your Family History*, *Your Family Tree*, and his own The GENES Blog (Genealogy News and Events) at <http://britishgenes.blogspot.co.uk>.

Chris teaches online Scottish based family history courses through Pharos Teaching and Tutoring Ltd (www.pharostutors.com) and has previously tutored on the University of Strathclyde's Postgraduate Genealogical Studies courses. He is a director of the Scottish Archive Network Ltd trust, and a member of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland's stakeholder forum. Chris currently lives in North Ayrshire, in the west of Scotland.



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Chris Paton

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COVER PHOTO

St. Nicholas Church in Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim, an Anglican church which originates from the Norman period

Contents

Introduction	5
Acknowledgements	7
1. Researching your family tree	8
Documentary sources	8
Gateways	9
Record your finds	10
Gadgets	11
Brick walls	11
Overcome mistakes	12
Question everything	12
Make your ancestors real	13
Damn the rules!	13
Further reading	13
2. Civil registration records	14
Basic information	14
England and Wales	15
Scotland	16
Ireland	17
Certificate exchange sites	18
Further reading	18
3. Parish registers	19
Baptisms	20
Marriages and banns	20
Burials and deaths	21
Locating state church records	22
Records of church governance	23
Non-conformist churches	25
Further reading	26
4. Monumental inscriptions	27
English and Welsh gravestones	28
Scotland	28
Ireland	29
Further reading	29
5. Censuses	30
What censuses contain	30
Online records	31
Scotland	33
Ireland	33
Census substitutes: directories	34
Further reading	36

6. Wills and testaments	37
Forms of estate	37
Probate and confirmation	38
England and Wales	39
Recent wills	40
Scotland	41
Ireland	42
Further reading	42
7. Maps and gazetteers	43
Modern maps	43
Ordnance Survey maps	44
Other maps	45
Gazetteers	46
Further reading	46
8. Occupations	47
Ancestral context	47
Understand the job	48
Newspapers	49
Dig deeper	49
Further reading	50
9. Societies, archives and libraries	51
Umbrella bodies	51
National societies	53
Special interest groups	54
Archives	54
Catalogues	56
Libraries	56
Further reading	56
10. Social networking	57
Facebook and Twitter	57
Blogs	57
Message boards and forums	58
Family tree networks	59
Further reading	60
11. DNA tests	61
Types of DNA	61
Testing companies	62
Further reading	62
Appendix: The Crown Dependencies	63
Isle of Man	63
The Channel Islands	63
Index	65

Introduction

Why research your family history? It may be that you have a genuine personal curiosity about your past, perhaps driven by tales told to you by older relatives beside a fire when you were a child. You might wish to pass on such knowledge to your own children, to let them know about the rich heritage from which their own creation has arisen. It may be quite simply that family history provides a more satisfying pursuit than the *Times* crossword, or that you become increasingly addicted, as with soap operas, to the continuing revelation of ancestral detective stories, with every brick wall solved providing two more to then stick your teeth into. (For those in the latter category, the correct term for this condition is ‘progonoplexia’!)

For some people, however, it may be that a barrier was created at some stage in life that disconnected them from the original families and cultural environments to which they were originally linked. Adoptees and foster children are examples, for whom there is often a yearning to understand who they are and how they came to be, to resolve a confusion over their sense of identity. In 1964, a psychologist called HJ Sants gave such a sense of disconnect felt by some adoptees the term ‘genealogical bewilderment’, noting that it lay at the heart of stress felt by many of those who found themselves in such circumstances. Others may also feel a similar sense of ‘genealogical bewilderment’, for example the descendants of immigrants and emigrants, who may feel out of place in their new family environments, even though to outsiders and friends they may seem perfectly assimilated.

Family history research can help to tackle such issues of identity, for through an understanding of ancestry, connections can be formed to a place and to a community of kinship, to provide a comforting continuity from what came before to what is to be. To know where you are going, it is said, you need to first know where you have been. No matter what your motivation is for carrying out your family history, however, there is one absolute certainty that will emerge as you engage with the process. The more that you discover about your past in the pursuit of such objectives, the more that will in turn affect how you might think of yourself and your understanding of your own identity.

In early 2000, with the forthcoming arrival of my first son Calum, I started to research my family history. At that stage I had been working for a few years as a television documentary researcher. Having uncovered some truly extraordinary tales from members of the public, it occurred to me that I still had little

understanding about my own background, as my parents had divorced when I was young, and both sets of their parents had done likewise when they were young. I wanted to do something about that, to provide my own children with a better sense of their ancestral heritage than I ever had. What started initially as curiosity soon became a fairly addictive hobby, and later from 2006, a full time career.



My wife Claire, and sons Calum and Jamie

For several years now I have been writing detailed guide books for *Unlock the Past* on particular aspects of Scottish, British and Irish ancestral research, taking the beginner to the next levels of understanding beyond the basics. These books, however, have always assumed that the reader is familiar to some extent with the basics about genealogical research within the subjects covered. This book, by contrast, is the one I perhaps should have started with – a complete introduction to the basics of family history research in Britain and Ireland. As a complete newbie to family history, what records do people need to look for to get them underway, where are they located, and what do they reveal?

This is a book specifically designed for beginners, but *Unlock the Past* has an entire catalogue of detailed family history titles to help steer you well beyond the basics. At the end of each chapter in this book I have therefore added a *Further Reading* section which suggests many further titles from the company that may be relevant to the topic under discussion, should you wish to develop your skills further.

NB: Two commercial genealogy websites are occasionally referenced in this book, Findmypast and Ancestry, which have different addresses depending on where in the world you live. There are four domains for Findmypast – Findmypast.co.uk (UK), Findmypast.ie (Ireland), Findmypast.com (USA) and Findmypast.com.au (Australasia). For Ancestry there are several more, but the key ones are Ancestry.co.uk (UK and Ireland), Ancestry.com (USA), Ancestry.ca (Canada), and Ancestry.com.au (Australasia). Whilst the content is the same on each, there may be differences in the subscription access from where you are based. Also falling into this world of many possible website endings are Google based addresses, such as Google Books or Google Maps.

Additional websites regularly referred to in this book are as follows:

FamilySearch	https://familysearch.org
TheGenealogist	www.thegenealogist.co.uk
FamilyRelatives	www.familyrelatives.com
MyHeritage	www.myheritage.com
Internet Archive	www.archive.org
ScotlandsPeople	www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk
Genes Reunited	www.genesreunited.com

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Chris Paton BA (Hons), HND, PgDip Genealogical Studies
Scotland's Greatest Story: www.scotlandsgreateststory.co.uk
The GENES Blog: www.britishgenes.blogspot.co.uk
E-mail: enquiry@scotlandsgreateststory.co.uk

1. Researching your family tree

The art of researching your family history boils down to finding out about possible events which may have involved your ancestors and relatives, and then proving that they did in fact occur, whether they be births, marriages, or the exploits of the supposedly famous or infamous. It is easy to claim that your forebears once fought at Culloden with Bonnie Prince Charlie, or with William the Conqueror at Hastings, but the more medieval your ancestors seem to appear, the more medieval you will need to get with your efforts to prove it, for the simple fact exists that the further back in time you go, the harder the relevant documentation becomes to find.

Before you look for the records needed for research, however, there is a vital piece of equipment that you will need to learn to use. It is biological in origin, it has taken years to develop, but it still needs to be trained. It's called a tongue. If there is one skill that any genealogist needs more than another, it is an ability to ask questions, and to never stop. How, why, when, what, where, who, and occasionally, seriously?

Start with your immediate family. Ask your relatives about who married whom, how many children they had, where they settled, etc. Write it all down, but bear in mind that not everything you are initially told may be accurate, as in many cases you may be hearing about family myth as opposed to family fact. Once you have all the basics, try to sketch out a basic family tree drawing on a page from what you have been told. This will act as a useful guide, which you can update as you progress.

Documentary sources

With the oral history documented, you now need to corroborate the information provided. In addition to any family letters and documents that your family members might already possess, you will need to look for birth, marriage and death certificates to confirm the suggested family relationships. If your relatives do not have copies, these will need to be obtained from the relevant local or national registrar's office (see p.15).

It is worth remembering that the accuracy of all records must always be open to question. Death certificates, for example, rely on informants to pass on information about the deceased—when my own aunt informed the registrar about my grandfather's death, she not only got his date of birth wrong by a year, but also the country of his birth. Birth and marriage records tend to be more accurate,

but not always. If possible, corroborate your finds with as many sources as possible, such as newspaper notices, memorial inscriptions on graves, wills, etc. The right name in the right place at the right time does not necessarily mean that you have found the right person!

Many sources can be consulted online, with many free and subscription based websites that can help. A question I am often asked is ‘which commercial site should I subscribe to—Ancestry, TheGenealogist, Findmypast, FamilyRelatives, MyHeritage, etc.?’ (See p.7 for the relevant website addresses.) The answer to that one is easy—you choose the site that has the records you are looking for! That response may be about as useful as a hole in a spacesuit, but it is a question that can only be answered by yourself when considering the various offerings available on each. Several of the key record sites, such as those just mentioned, may carry the same record sets, but what additional records do they also hold that might be relevant to your geographic or subject area of interest?

You might find that there is a trial version of a subscription site that you can access, which may be worth exploring, though bear in mind that some vendors ask for credit card details up front and automatically make a charge at the end of your initial free period (so cancel your subscription before the trial period is up). Sites such as Ancestry may also offer free limited access via a ‘library edition’ at your local library, which is worth sussing out. At particular times of the year, for example the Armistice commemorations in November, some sites may offer records free on a temporary basis by way of a promotion, so be vigilant, and perhaps subscribe to one or more genealogy news blogs (see p.57) for daily updates.

Sometimes you may need to look beyond the internet for sources, but thankfully plenty of help is around, from key institutions such as family history societies, libraries and archives. Details on these for Britain and Ireland are outlined in Chapter 9. Check out what resources they might have—you may well save money if such an institution has parish records or censuses on microfilm for your area, for example, rather than you having to purchase access to such collections online. Bear in mind also that only a small percentage of resources *are* online.

Gateways

The growth of web based resources has dramatically changed how we can pursue our ancestry, but if there is one key lesson to learn about online research it is to remember that we should not become subservient to specific websites only. There are many sites out there, and many different types of site.

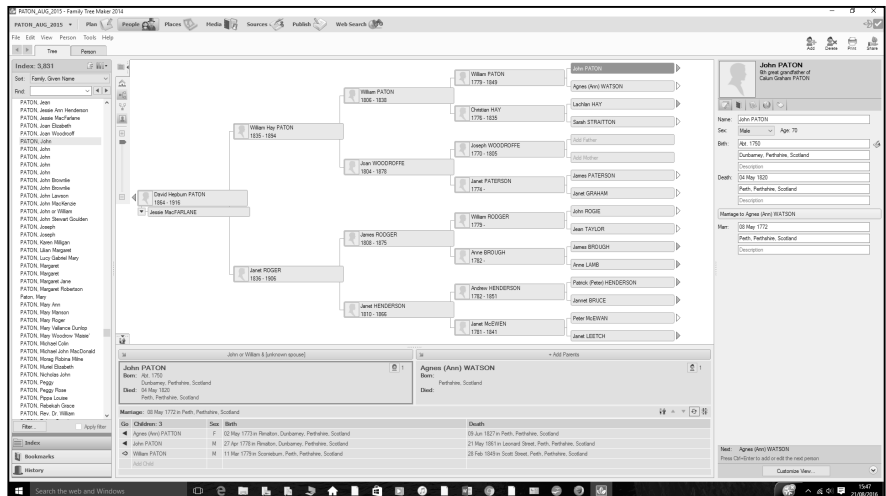
The best way to understand the wider genealogical environment online is to spend time exploring certain gateway platforms, essentially directories of available resources. There are several online, with two of the best being Cyndi’s List (www.cyndislist.com) and GENUKI (www.genuki.org.uk). Cyndi’s List is

a long running project by US based Cyndi Ingle, who has for many years been collating website links and placing them into various categories on her site, creating one of the world's largest super-directories for genealogical research (covering just about any topic imaginable). GENUKI is a similar venture which takes Britain and Ireland and breaks them down into countries, counties, towns and villages, with various resources listed for each.

Record your finds

As your research progresses, it is a good idea to keep a record of every search and discovery that you make on a 'family search sheet' or 'family group record', explaining what you were looking for, where you searched and what you found (or did not find). Useful examples of such sheets can be freely obtained online from https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Genealogy_Research_Forms. It is worth keeping separate sheets for each family group you are looking into—one for your aunt's family, one for your great uncle's, and so on. You will be surprised at how quickly they get filled up, so it is best to keep them as simple as possible.

A family tree program for your computer is not absolutely essential, but can be helpful in charting your progress. Some of the best programs on the market include Family Historian (www.family-historian.co.uk), Family Tree Maker (www.familytreemaker.com), Legacy (www.legacyfamilytree.com), RootsMagic (www.rootsmagic.co.uk), Heredis (www.heredis.com), TreeView (<http://treeview.co.uk>), and Reunion (www.reunion-for-macintosh.com). If you do wish to use a computer program, make sure to back up everything that you save from time to time, as there is nothing worse than losing everything if your PC fails.



The main dialogue screen on Family Tree Maker

Gadgets

When I visit an archive (see p.54) I always take a digital camera with me, as well as my iPad. Some archives will allow you to take pictures of old documents, so long as you don't use a flash. Unfortunately this is one of those areas where there is no consistency between archives. Those that are progressive will offer camera stands and lights to help you get the best results; those still working to a 20th century rule book may not.

In addition to a camera, there are also portable scanners that can be used—again, you may need to check whether the use of such devices is allowed. A Flip-Pal (<http://flip-pal.com>) portable scanner is a great tool, for example, but only if you're allowed to use it. The reason my iPad has become so useful is that increasingly when doing archive work, I need access to online resources to corroborate certain finds there and then. Not every archive offers internet access, so having something with me that can do the job really helps—it doesn't have to be an iPad or tablet, a mobile phone with internet access can also help out (but set it to silent!).

Ultimately many people will peddle you with long lists of key resources that are 'essential'. Some will be, some will not—the bottom line is, whatever tools you wish to throw into your toolkit, make sure they work for you. There are of course some fundamentally crucial assets for research that are never mentioned in any text book and which just cannot be bought. Take, for example, my wife Claire, who has perfected an exemplary and highly motivating delivery of the phrase 'Chris, it's three in the morning – I *really* think you should go to bed now.' (Don't ask me why she's up at three; I agree, it's really weird). You will also rarely find endorsements for coffee or white wine as useful research aids, but they do have their moments.

Brick walls

From time to time you will come across difficult problems that seem impossible to surmount—the so-called 'brick walls' on each ancestral line. In the first few months of research, such problems may simply be because you do not know where certain records may be found, or you may lack some basic understanding about what specific documents actually contain. Remember when looking at records on websites to check out the Frequently Asked Questions or Help sections, to understand how the website itself is arranged, and for information about the records that have been hosted, including the all-important source details, which you should always take a note of for every record you use.

It helps to share your research online with others, through a website or a discussion forum (see p.58), but if people contact you with a tree that they believe you are connected to, double check everything in it, no matter how compelling it may seem. Remember that just because something is in print, or has been compiled by someone else, it does not necessarily mean that it is accurate.

Overcome mistakes

Bear in mind that most genealogists will acquire some of their ancestral education through the School of Hard Knocks. You will make mistakes.

One of the earliest errors I made with my own research concerned my Rogers line from Perthshire. Not paying too much attention to the context of the records, and far too eager to place a round peg into a square hole, I fairly quickly derived a line of ancestry back to the 1600s, and slapped myself on the back for my ingenuity. A couple of years later I paid closer attention to the line, and suddenly realised that I had one of my ancestors in the 1700s marrying his niece. In polite society this was really not the done thing, not least because it was forbidden under Canon Law (Leviticus, Chapter 18) and Scots Law in equal measure! In unpicking this I soon realised that I had made a series of bad assumptions – people with the right names in the right places, but not the right people – with the net result being that I then had to ditch about a hundred years' worth of lineage.

Nothing makes a genealogist weep more than seeing a large chunk of hard-worked family tree detached and cast adrift like a fragmented iceberg on an ocean of ancestral despair. All genealogists make mistakes—but the ability to take that mistake, to unpick it and to recognise where things went wrong is as much a part of the learning process as any other.

Question everything

A key skill for any genealogist is to question absolutely everything. Are the records that you are looking at accurate? Are they primary records, the very first incarnation of the information ever to have been put down on a page, or transcripts or information secured second or third hand? Is there a source citation given, or some clue as to where the information was first found? If not, why not—and if not, can the record be trusted? When your elderly aunt or uncle tells you about what her grandfather was believed to have done in the Boer War, is she telling you what actually happened, or is she suggesting what she thinks happened? They may not be the same thing.

Remember that any genealogical record that you will come across will not have been found deposited on top of a mountain in a divinely carved stone tablet, but will have been written or spoken by a human being. People make mistakes, events are misremembered, details are wrongly conveyed. Several years ago I was asked to carry out research for a local businessman in my current home town of Largs. In the first record that I found, a marriage certificate for his son, my client was noted as deceased. This was as much of a shock to him as it was to me, but I had at least had the foresight to secure a deposit in advance.

Similarly, do not judge the spelling of a name to be constant across time in different documents—it may well be recorded with a different spelling (MacDonald and McDonald), or even under a variant (Daniel instead of O'Donnell). I once chased a gentleman from Ireland with the first name of Eoin through the Scottish records, his forename being an Irish equivalent of 'John'.

The confused registrars of Glasgow did what they could upon hearing his name and accent, noting him invariably as John, Owen, Iain, and just for good measure, Yohan—which was probably the closest record of them all, in at least matching the pronunciation of his original Gaelic name.

Make your ancestors real

Remember that as passionate as you may become about your pursuit, you may be considerably more interested in it than others in your family. People within extended families may well be easily turned off if you keep telling them about the names and dates of people they have never heard of, day in, day out.

If you want to share your research, you need to do so in a way that makes them sit up and take notice. In short, you need to tell your ancestors' *stories*. Great uncle Jimmy may have been an agricultural labourer, but his life must have been so much more than just those two words. What did that mean as a career, what was his daily routine, where did he live, what did he live through, what were the rude jokes that he told, and the songs that he sung in the village pub? Your ancestors were people, not facts and statistics. To fully appreciate them and their contributions you should try to portray them as such when sharing their lives, whether in a written account or over a drink by the fireplace.

Damn the rules!

There are no rules in genealogy, but there are several practices that are always highly recommended to be followed when carrying out ancestral research. An obvious one is to start from the most recent generations and to work our way back, rather than to claim that William the Conqueror was an ancestor and to then work your way forward to try and prove it. Another is to respect the privacy of those still alive in terms of what you might publish or place online. With respect to the latter, privacy is an issue that is increasingly raising its head within the genealogical world. For most of us, it is perhaps something that we might come across when asked to upload information in a family tree program, where we are invited to respect the details of those still alive by making them private.

Further reading

500 Best genealogy and family history tips, Thomas MacEntee

Citing historical sources: a manual for family historians, Noeline Kyle

How to write your family history: a guide to creating, planning, editing and publishing family stories,
Noeline Kyle

Organising a family reunion, Leslie Berry

Writing and publishing your family history: a labour of love, Leslie Berry

Pitfalls in family history, Graham Jaunay

Your family history archives: a brief introduction, Shauna Hicks

2. Civil registration records

To help place your ancestors within a family tree you first need to find their birth, marriage and death records. The civil registration by the state of such events commenced in England and Wales in July 1837, and Scotland in January 1855. In Ireland, there was a more staggered start, with the state registration of non-Roman Catholic marriages beginning in April 1845, and then full implementation for all births, marriages and deaths in the country from January 1864.

The following chapter provides a brief introduction on how to access the basic birth, marriage and death records from across the UK and the Republic of Ireland. For considerably more detail on legal aspects of civil registration, my Unlock the Past book *Discover Scottish civil registration records* (see p.71) carries an extensive guide to the many additional record types gathered in Scotland, as well as the law surrounding the information that needed to be recorded. (Despite the title, as many Scots lived elsewhere in Britain and Ireland, these areas are also covered!)

Basic information

Civil registration records vary in their detail across the individual countries within Britain and Ireland. Here is a short summary of what to expect:

Birth records: Within a civil birth record you will find the names of the child and both parents, the date of birth, where the child was born and the family's place of usual residence (if different). The date and place of registration, and the name of the informant, are also recorded.

In Scottish birth records the date and place of the parents' marriage is also noted, and the exact time of birth. The time is only given in English, Welsh and Irish records if there is a multiple birth instance, e.g. twins.

Marriage records: In civil registration marriage records you will find the names and ages of the two prospective spouses, their residences and occupations, details of their fathers, the names of the witnesses and the celebrant, and by which means the marriage was contracted, i.e. a church ceremony or through a civil ceremony.

In Scotland there was a third means by which marriage could be contracted from 1855 to 1939, the option of marrying 'irregularly'—usually by the mutual declaration of consent to marry between spouses, in the presence of witnesses, and without a celebrant. From 1940 most forms of irregular marriage were abolished in Scotland, and marriage by registrars was introduced.

The records will also give the age of the spouses, although in historic Irish records this is usually noted as 'Full' (meaning over 21), or 'minor' (under 21, for which parental permission was required). (This sometimes happens with English and Welsh certs also).

Scottish records uniquely also provide details of the spouses' mothers, including their maiden names, as well as their fathers.

Death records: Death records will note when and where a person died, their presumed age at death, details on their occupations and marital status, the cause of death and the informant. Again, Scottish records are a little more detailed, providing the names of both parents also. Elsewhere, a parent may only be mentioned if he or she was the informant to the registrar.

Historically, all of these events were initially recorded at a local registration office within the city, town or village where your ancestor lived, or the office they were nearest to if in an isolated rural spot. In England, Wales and Ireland copies were sent every three months to a superintendent registrar for the relevant district, which were forwarded to the relevant national General Register Offices in England or Ireland (and from 1922, Northern Ireland), where a national index was compiled. In Scotland, where there were no superintendent registrars, local registrars instead kept duplicate registers which they transmitted to Edinburgh annually.

England and Wales

The General Register Office (GRO) for England and Wales is based at Southport, from where you can obtain the respective records. Its website is located at **www.gro.gov.uk**. Before you can obtain a certificate you first need to identify when and where an event occurred using a series of indexes. Several family history websites offer these online, but the best to start with is the FreeBMD site at **www.freebmd.org.uk**. This free project is a long running volunteer led program to transcribe the information from the original national GRO index volumes from 1837 to 1983, which were compiled on a quarterly basis from July 1837. At the present time the transcribed indexes are fairly complete up to the 1970s, but work is still continuing to complete the task.

You will need the following information from these indexes to order a certificate—the name of the person, the year of the event's registration and the quarter (for example, January-March, or April-June, etc.), as well as the registration district, the volume number and the page number on which the original record entry is located. You can then fill in the online application form and make payment, with the record soon arriving by post shortly after. Bear in mind that registration may have occurred several days after the event in question—if someone was born in late December 1890, for example, the birth may not have been registered until January of the following year, something to bear in mind when considering which year and quarter to search.

From the 1970s onwards you will need to visit a commercial genealogy website to obtain the more recent indexes, such as Ancestry, Findmypast, TheGenealogist, FamilyRelatives or MyHeritage. These host the indexes up to 2005, with the certificate ordering process the same as previously described. More recent indexes after this have not been made available online. Instead, you will need to visit one of several designated repositories in England to gain access on microfiche—see **www.gov.uk/research-family-history**.

It is worth bearing in mind that certificates can also be ordered from local superintendent registrars offices in England and Wales, in the districts where they were originally compiled before being copied through to the national GRO. This is useful as sometimes errors were made in the copies that were made, whilst some entries were missed altogether. To find these visit UKBMD (**www.ukbmd.org.uk**) for a list of authorities offering local indexes to their holdings, though bear in mind that obtaining the records from here will be a little more expensive.

Scotland

For many Scottish records, access is considerably easier and cheaper for what have been classified as ‘historic’ records, namely civil birth records older than 100 years, marriage records 75 years or older, and death records 50 years or older. Access to digitised copies of these records is available via the ScotlandsPeople website at **www.scotlandspople.gov.uk**. To search for a record costs 1 credit, and to view the original entry costs 5 credits. Indexes to more recent records are also available on the site, but to view the full entries you will need to pay for certified copies from the National Records of Scotland, which will then be posted out to you. Whilst most irregular marriages were registered with the state, there was no legal compulsion to do so, meaning some gaps may exist pre-1940. The records can also be accessed at the ScotlandsPeople Centre in Edinburgh (**www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/visit-us/scotlandspople-centre**), for the payment of a fee of £15. Once in, you will have access to all records almost to the present day, without any closure periods. Note also that additional centres across the country provide access to the ScotlandsPeople datasets on a similar basis for the same fee. These are located at Glasgow, Kilmarnock, Hawick, Alloa and Inverness—for details, see **www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/local-family-history-centres**.

The FamilySearch website (**<https://familysearch.org>**) offers free indexes to Scottish civil registration births and marriages from 1855 to 1874/1875, included within its *Scotland Births and Baptisms, 1564-1950* and *Scotland Marriages, 1561-1910* databases. For births you will get the name of the child, his or her parents, date of birth, and registration district, whilst for marriages you will get the spouses’ names, the date of the marriage and the registration district. Death record indexes are not available on the site.



The National Records of Scotland, home to Scotland's national archive and the ScotlandsPeople Centre.

Ireland

Northern Irish marriage records from 1845, and births and deaths from 1864, are similarly available from the GRONI's new GENI platform (<https://geni.nidirect.gov.uk>). On this website, digitised record images cost 5 credits each, although basic incomplete transcripts can be viewed for just a single credit. The closure periods on the site are the same as ScotlandsPeople, but unlike the Scottish site, there are no indexes online for the more recent records. Instead, you will need to apply to the GRONI in Belfast for an official certificate with the information that you have.

For the Republic of Ireland, there are many ways to access indexes to records. GRO Ireland indexes from 1845 to 1958 are available via FamilySearch, Ancestry and Findmypast, although a newer and different index system for historic records is also now available at www.irishgenealogy.ie. Both sets can be used.

At the time of writing, digitised records are not online. Certificates from GRO Ireland can be ordered online via www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/General-Register-Office.aspx. An alternative and cheaper method is to download an application form from the site and to ask for a photocopy of the desired entry instead, which costs about the fifth of the price of a certified extract—you will need to post or fax this application through, however, with your credit card details written down on the form. Transcripts for some civil registration records are also accessible via RootsIreland (www.rootsireland.ie).

FamilySearch offers some basic transcripts for Irish births for 1864–1870, marriages for 1845–1870, and deaths for 1864–1870. These are included within the datasets entitled *Ireland Births and Baptisms 1620-1881*, *Ireland Marriages 1619-1898* and *Ireland Deaths 1864-1870* (the wider year ranges are accounted for by the inclusion of indexes to some parish entries also).

Certificate exchange sites

One useful way to save on costs is to try a certificate exchange site, where many volunteers offer access to information from certificates that they have previously purchased. For England and Wales visit www.certificate-exchange.co.uk, for Scotland try www.sctbdm.com, and for Ireland <http://vicki.thauvin.net/chance/ireland/bmd>.

Further reading

Death certificates and archaic medical terms 2nd ed., Helen V Smith

Discover Scottish civil registration records, Chris Paton

Irish family history resources online 2nd ed., Chris Paton

ScotlandsPeople: the place to launch your Scottish research 2nd ed., Rosemary Kopittke

Til death us do part: causes of death 1300–1948, Janet Few

Tracing your English ancestors, Graham Jaunay

3. Parish registers

As you venture further back before the era of civil registration you will need to turn to parish registers to continue the journey further, to look for records of baptisms, marriages (including the calling of banns beforehand), and burials.

The established state church in England and Wales was, and remains, the Church of England, or ‘Anglican’ church. Its registers commenced in the reign of Henry VIII in 1538, although many of the earliest records have not survived. In some cases, where the original parish records have been lost, the information contained within them may still be located in what were known as Bishops’ Transcripts, made for local diocesan purposes. There are other reasons why some records may not have been recorded also in the first place. During the republican Cromwellian era, for example, there was a short period of civil registration imposed in the 1650s, leading to a great many missing records (sometimes referred to as the ‘Commonwealth gap’); whilst for 1783–1794, a Stamp Act, which required a duty of three pence to be paid for the registration of all vital events at churches across Britain, led to many poor parishioners not bothering to inform their minister when births took place.

In Ireland, the Anglican church was also the state church until 1871, despite the fact that the majority of religious adherence on the island was to the Roman Catholic faith, in addition to a substantial following for Presbyterianism in Ulster. In terms of available records the situation is much poorer, with most registers for the various religious denominations in existence commencing from the 18th and 19th centuries only. Just to compound the difficulties, in 1922, a substantial number of Anglican church records were destroyed during the Irish Civil War, though records for many parishes have survived.



St. Nicholas Church in Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim, an Anglican church which originates from the Norman period

In Scotland, the earliest surviving register dates back to 1553. Where England, Wales and Ireland were once governed by state churches of the Anglican faith, Scotland has been a predominantly Presbyterian country since its Reformation in 1560, led by the Church of Scotland, better known as 'the Kirk'. The Anglican Church, like the Roman Catholic Church, is hierarchical in nature, with a monarch at the top, then archbishops, bishops etc., down to the humble minister. Presbyterianism by contrast works the other way around, where theoretically the right to decide the church's business is ultimately vested in the congregation, which selects its own elders and appoints its own ministers.

Baptisms

Churches were more concerned with recording details of the baptisms of their parishioners than with their actual births. Church of England baptismal registers state the name of the child, the date of baptism, usually the father's name and occasionally the mother's name (particularly if the child was illegitimate). Some also list witnesses or godparents. With the passing of Rose's Act in 1812, which applied only in England and Wales, parishes were supplied with specially printed registers to be filled in which required additional information, including the mother's Christian name, the father's occupation and abode. As this act did not apply in Scotland, the amount of detail in baptismal registers north of the border continued to vary from parish to parish.

With some of these records you must be prepared to encounter difficulties. A common problem is that several people may have been christened with the same name within a particular parish at the same time, making it impossible to confirm an ancestor as definitely being yours. Other issues include early Anglican parish registers being written in Latin, handwriting that is difficult to decipher, or in some cases, entries that are vague in the information supplied by the informant, e.g. 'John Smith had a daughter', with no actual name recorded for her!

Marriages and banns

Weddings usually occurred in the bride's parish church, but they can often be frustratingly difficult to find. In England and Wales, prior to 1754 a regular marriage was performed at the local parish church. Irregular alternatives also existed through non-conformist denominations (see p.25), or outside prisons by churchmen imprisoned for debts, most notoriously at the Fleet Prison in London. Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753 changed this, requiring all future ceremonies in the two countries to be performed by an Anglican clergyman in the parish church before witnesses, after banns had been called or a marriage license issued (Quakers and Jews were exempted). Parental permission to marry was also now required if spouses were not of full age, i.e. 21 years old. Note that registers may

exist for both the calling of banns and the subsequent marriages, whilst separate records noting the issue of marriage licenses can also be consulted.

Before 1754, the information noted within English and Welsh marriage registers was often quite basic, usually the names of the spouses and the date. After the Act, the parishes of residence, the groom's occupation, and conditions as to marriage (i.e., bachelor, widow, etc.) were also recorded.

As Hardwicke's Marriage Act only applied south of the border, many Scottish border towns suddenly became host to a thriving irregular marriage trade, with English couples eloping north to marry, thanks to a major difference concerning marriage under Scots Law. Although the main regular form of marriage in Scotland was through the Church of Scotland, marriage could also be contracted irregularly in the country without the need for a celebrant or any parental permission. The Kirk loathed this provision and, as such, if it found members of the congregation had had an irregular service, it would haul the offenders up in front of the kirk session, the lowest of the church courts, for punishment. Whilst marriage registers existed in Scotland, in many cases the record of a regular marriage being carried out may simply be a note of the first time that the banns were called, as recorded in the kirk session registers or accounts (see p.24).

Across the water, marriages through the Anglican based Church of Ireland were similarly the only legally valid form of the institution, prior to civil registration. As such, sometimes weddings from other denominations were recorded within the established Irish church registers to legitimise them in law.

Burials and deaths

In England and Wales, the clergy recorded burials rather than the dates of death, with details often sparse, merely noting a name and a date. This means that other records may need to be consulted, such as wills, to confirm the person found to be the correct individual. Occasionally spouses were noted, or the names of a child's parents, and causes of death are sometimes given, particularly in times of plague or rebellion. From 1812, Rose's Act required the name of the deceased, their residence, age and date of burial all to be recorded in pre-printed registers, standardising the information recorded across all parishes (in England and Wales only).

The Anglican based Church of Ireland also recorded burials, usually giving names, ages and townlands (subdivisions of an Irish parish), but sometimes noting deaths from those of other faiths, who were often buried within Church of Ireland graveyards. Few Roman Catholic churches kept burial registers prior to 1829 (the year of Roman Catholic emancipation from the so-called 'Penal Laws').

In Scotland, most Presbyterian parishes did not record deaths or burials as such, but they did sometimes record the payments made for the hire of a 'mortcloth', a shroud used to drape over the deceased's coffin. These records, located within the kirk session registers or accounts (see p.24), usually list just a

name and the fee paid, and so it can be incredibly difficult to work out whether the record belongs to your ancestor. Some churches did record deaths and burials, but the level of detail in the registers varies between parishes.

Locating state church records

The easiest way to start searching for entries from parish registers is to consult the various indexes to baptisms, marriages and burials that now exist online. A good starting point for Britain is the free to access International Genealogical Index (IGI) at the FamilySearch website, also available in libraries on microfiche and CD-ROM. However, this is just an index, and if you decide not to subsequently locate and consult the original source from which the entry has been identified, you do so at your peril, for they may contain additional information of use. Microfilms of such records are available for consultation at a FamilySearch Family History Center (see <https://familysearch.org/locations>), whilst many are now being digitised and being made available free of charge to view on the website.

In England and Wales, most surviving original parish registers are found at local and county record offices (see p.55), though some remain in private hands. The location of all registers which existed up to 1832 can also be established from *The Phillimore atlas and index of parish registers* (2003), which additionally includes detailed maps of all British parish boundaries. Many registers, including bishops' transcripts, are increasingly being digitised by commercial websites such as Ancestry, Findmypast and TheGenealogist. Various family history societies have also published transcripts of registers and bishops' transcripts, whilst The Joiner Marriage Index is another useful site at <http://joiner-marriage-index.co.uk/history-of-parish-registers>.

The screenshot shows the website interface for 'The Joiner Marriage Index'. At the top, it says 'The Joiner Marriage Index' and 'Search for marriage records in England before 1837'. Below this is a navigation menu with 'Info', 'Search', 'Results', and 'Contact us'. The main content area is divided into several sections. On the left, there is a 'Search our Counties for Marriage Records' section with a map of England and a search box. In the center, there is a 'Surname Search' section with a table for entering search criteria (Surname, Dates, Year, Range, Year) and a search button. Below that is a 'Full Name Search' section with a similar table for entering search criteria (Husband, Wife, Forename, Surname, Dates, Year, Range, Year) and a search button. On the right, there is a 'The Joiner Marriage Index Recommends' section with a book cover for 'Ancestral Trails: The Complete Guide to British Genealogy and Family History by Mark Herbert'. At the bottom, there is a 'Find Birth Certificates' section and a 'Death Records Search' section. The footer contains copyright information: 'Copyright © 2006 - 2016 Joiner Marriage Index'.

In Scotland the state church records are referred to as the 'OPRs' (Old Parish Registers), with the historic pre-civil registration records held by the National Records of Scotland (see p.54). Registers prior to 1855 have since been digitised and made available on the ScotlandsPeople website, as well as at the ScotlandsPeople Centre in Edinburgh (based at the NRS). The parishes have been retrospectively given identification numbers, starting with the Shetland parish of Bressay as 1, and working south to the Borders parish of Wigtown as 901. The earliest surviving registers date back to 1553 for Errol in Perthshire, but it was not until the 17th century before they became more regularly kept across the country; in some areas, such as the Western Isles, many did not start until the 19th century. Not every register has survived, and there are gaps for many parishes—you can check what does exist at www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/guides/old-parish-registers/list-of-old-parish-registers.

Unlike England and Wales, the Kirk's registers were usually the only written record for the baptism and marriages which they recorded. This is because the Presbyterian church did not utilise bishops, meaning that there was no need for bishops' transcripts. Scottish Roman Catholic Registers are also available on the site, where they are known as the 'CPRs' (Catholic Parish Registers).

The situation in Ireland is more fractured, with records held at various locations across the island, such as at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland and the National Library of Ireland in Dublin. John Grenham's *Tracing your Irish ancestors* is an excellent authoritative work useful for identifying the locations of many of these, with particular detail on the records which survive for the Roman Catholic parishes. Two websites of particular use will be RootsIreland (www.rootsireland.ie), which has transcripts from various denominations, and Catholic Parish Registers at the NLI (<http://registers.nli.ie>), hosting free to access digitised scans of pre-1880 Catholic registers. Indexes to the NLI registers have been created by both Ancestry and Findmypast, although many entries were overlooked during the indexing process, meaning that the original site should still be browsed for additional possible entries.

Records of church governance

Before the era of civil registration, the various state churches also had a much more substantial role in society that went far beyond recording the population's vital records. As well as dealing with matters of the soul, they were responsible for administering poor relief, determining the right to settle in a parish, and maintaining discipline within their flocks.

Servicing each established parish church in England, Wales and Ireland was the **vestry**, essentially the church's council, which dealt with day to day business. Often chaired by the minister, it worked in conjunction with the local justice of the peace on a range of issues. Once you have exhausted the BMD registers,

your first port of call should be the vestry minutes, which may include details of practically anything that was ever discussed in a meeting, from the setting of rates to the non-attendance of parishioners at church.

Note that vestry records were kept in the **parish chest**, a strong oak box that was secured by three locks, alongside other parochial records, such as those of the overseers of the poor. The role of such overseers was first established in 1572, drawing officers from both the vestry and important local landowners to look after the parish poor. It was their job to raise and distribute funds for the parish needy, such as the sick and the elderly, but they could also demand that able-bodied claimants worked to pay back the amount. Records of poor relief claims and the basis on which payments were made can be found in overseers' account books and poor books, and usually include the recipients' names.

There were other officers of the church, such as churchwardens, elected by the minister and the parishioners. The churchwardens' job was to oversee the infrastructure of the church building, to arrange baptisms and burials and to look after charitable funds. Also working for the church were specially appointed parish or petty constables, to look after law and order.

In most cases, English and Welsh parish chest records are likely to be in the possession of your local county archive (see p.55). Some may be indexed through the websites of volunteers colloquially known as 'online parish clerks' at www.ukbmd.org.uk/online_parish_clerk, and again, some are available to browse or search via the commercial genealogy record sites. In Ireland, you can find the equivalent records on microfilm at PRONI, the National Archives in Dublin, the Representative Church Body Library in Dublin (see <http://ireland.anglican.org/about/168> for details), or still held in local custody. Note that in most cases parish chest records will not necessarily be indexed, and you may need to browse through them chronologically for periods when you know or suspect that your ancestors were present within the parish.

In Presbyterian Scotland, the equivalent of vestry records are the **kirk session minutes** and **kirk session accounts**. In addition to recording cases of church discipline, other activities can be found within them, such as evidence for a marriage presented in the form of a 'pledge money' payment, whilst records of the hire of a mortcloth to drape over a coffin can make a useful substitute for burial records (see p.21). The kirk session minutes for most parishes have been digitised, though at present can only be consulted in the National Records of Scotland in Edinburgh (there are plans to make these available on ScotlandsPeople in the near future). The records can also be accessed through the Scottish Documents website (www.scottishdocuments.com), but only at selected county archives (see p.55). Whilst they are not yet accessible from home, it is intended that they will join the ScotlandsPeople website in due course. Some session minutes can be consulted also on microfilm through FamilySearch's network of family history centres (see FamilySearch's home page).

In addition, the records of **heritors** may assist. These were the landowners who held land within Scotland's parishes, and who had an obligation to contribute towards the running of the parish church, including the ministers' stipends, schools provision and poor relief payments. Some records are available at the National Records of Scotland (catalogued under HR), whilst others may be in estate record collections within archives, or still held in private hands.

Non-conformist churches

In Britain, the majority of our ancestors were adherents to state based religious denominations, whether that was the Anglican church of England and Wales, or the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. In Ireland, the majority of the population was Roman Catholic, despite the Anglican Church of Ireland being the official state church. However, in both Britain and Ireland there were several other Protestant 'non-conformist' or 'dissenting' denominations, such as Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists and Quakers, as well as other faiths such as Judaism.

The most useful site in England and Wales for non-conformist births, marriages and deaths before 1837 is the pay-per-view BMD Registers site at www.bmdregisters.co.uk, the records of which can also be viewed on TheGenealogist website as a part of its subscription offerings. This contains registers for many different faiths held at The National Archives in Kew, including records from Dr Daniel Williams's Dissenters Library in London, listing events from Baptist, Congregationalist and Presbyterian congregations from 1743 to 1837 (with some entries as far back as 1716), various Wesleyan congregations, such as the Wesleyan Methodist Metropolitan Registry from 1818

The screenshot shows the BMDregisters.co.uk website. At the top left is the logo 'BMDregisters.co.uk'. To the right, it says 'In association with the national archives' with the National Archives logo. A navigation bar contains links for 'Home', 'Buy Credits', 'Buy Credits', 'Help', and 'Log In / Register'. Below the navigation bar, the main heading is 'The Official Non-Conformist and Non-Parochial BMDs Service'. Underneath, it states 'For records of birth, baptism, marriage, death and burial taken from non parish sources'. A search form is centered on the page, with fields for 'Surname' and 'Forename', and options for 'Names may include wildcards', 'Exact match', and 'Event type'. A 'Search' button is at the bottom of the form. To the right of the search form, there is a sidebar with a 'Learn more about:' section listing various record types like RG5, RG6, RG7, RG8, RG22, RG23, RG24, RG25 - NEW, RG26, and RT Series. At the bottom of the page, there is a footer with a link to 'Guide to BMD Registers'.

The BMD Registers website

to 1838, records from the Society of Friends (Quakers) from 1578 to 1841, some Roman Catholic records, Clandestine marriage registers from the Fleet Prison, the Russian Orthodox Church, hospital registered events, and more. Another useful site for locating births, marriages and deaths is the FreeREG site at <http://freereg.org.uk> which contains an index to both state and non-conformist church entries from various counties across the UK and Ireland. The database is searched by name, event and place.

The FamilySearch website hosts an index to many non-conformist birth, baptism and marriage records for England and Wales, including about 80% of the records held at The National Archives, although it does not include burials. Some specific record sets from non-conformist churches have also been digitised and can be found on the site, such as the *England, Cheshire Non-conformist Records, 1671-1900* collection. The GENUKI website (see p.9) can be helpful in identifying some non-conformist records, and it is worth checking the websites of the local family history society (see p.51) for the area in which you are interested, as some have online transcription projects and links to useful sites.

In Scotland, a large proportion of registers belonging to non-conformist factions which split from the Kirk, as well as from some non-Presbyterian based denominations, are held at the National Records of Scotland (see p.54), and are expected to go online via ScotlandsPeople in due course. Some have been indexed as part of the International Genealogical Index (see p.22), whilst others are held at archives across the country; to locate these, consult the SCAN catalogue (see p.56).

Some Irish Presbyterian records are transcribed on RootsIreland (see p.17), with others available to consult at PRONI in Belfast. Additional non-conformist records are held at PRONI and at the National Archives in Dublin. For Irish Catholic records, see p.26.

Further reading

- Buried treasure: what's in the English parish chest*, Paul Milner
- Death certificates and archaic medical terms* 2nd ed., Helen V. Smith
- Discover English parish registers*, by Paul Milner
- Discover protestant nonconformity in England and Wales*, Paul Blake
- Discover Scottish church records* 2nd ed., Chris Paton
- Down and out in Scotland: researching ancestral crisis*, Chris Paton
- Irish family history resources online* 2nd ed., Chris Paton
- ScotlandsPeople: the place to launch your Scottish research* 2nd ed., Rosemary Kopittke
- Til death us do part: causes of death 1300-1948*, Janet Few
- Tracing your English ancestors*, Graham Jaunay

4. Monumental inscriptions

The information found on gravestones, known as monumental inscriptions, can be another important resource for family history research, particularly if local parish records have not survived. Details about entire family groupings may be recorded, and members of the family who left or emigrated may also be commemorated, even if not buried with the rest of the family. The very designs of the stones themselves may give clues to trades and occupations, and in some cases, humorous messages or deeply religious sentiments can give a sense of what the person lying beneath your feet was once like.

In some cases the stones can also tell you much about the survivors of the deceased, giving you an impression of their wealth and social status. The church beside which a grave is found may likely be the very building that your forebears once worshipped within. On the spot where you may find yourself standing, your ancestors' relatives may have once gathered to say their final farewells, and like you, they may have made many return visits to attend to the graves of their dearly departed.

A word of warning though, in that on many lines in your family you may be extremely lucky to find a headstone or burial location at all. For some, the cost of a stone was just too much, whilst for others, markers may have been erected that were made from impermanent materials such as wood. Your ancestors might have even been buried in a famine or plague pit in the direst of circumstances, and more recently, may have been cremated. Surviving stones may be heavily eroded and illegible, overgrown with moss or ivy, or leaning so dangerously that it is not safe to go near. And even if your ancestors did have magnificent stones, some overly eager council official may have simply removed them in a frustratingly keen safety initiative!

Monumental inscriptions can provide useful genealogical information



If you are able to locate your ancestors' headstones, or even if you are just able to find the graveyard or cemetery within which your ancestors were interred, you will likely wish to visit. In many monumental inscription and lair register books, a key will be found showing the location of the lair in question, but you may also find a plan in the church if you are lucky. In municipal cemeteries, some local authorities can even arrange to have somebody show you where the relevant lair is, if it no longer holds a stone or marker. If you cannot visit, try using the Street View facility through Google Maps (www.google.co.uk/maps) to gain some visualisation of the area.

English and Welsh gravestones

Before searching for a monumental inscription you need to first know where, and indeed, if, your ancestor was buried. The Federation of Family History Societies (see p.51) has a National Burial Index located on Findmypast, which contains basic information on some 13 million English and Welsh burials, as extracted from parish and printed registers, as well as Bishops' Transcripts. It is not complete in its coverage; for example, much of northern Wales has yet to be surveyed. The index lists the names of those in the database, their date of burial and age at death, where the burial took place and which family history society holds the full record.

Many family history societies (see p.51) have for decades been steadfastly transcribing the information to be found on headstones and other monuments, and publishing the information on a regular basis. These actual transcriptions of gravestones may be all that in fact survives, if the stone has been since destroyed or the lair register has gone missing. In some parishes, the graveyards may have had their stones recorded on a few occasions. Start by consulting the record that was written as close to your ancestors' death as possible—the stone may have been so worn that it did not warrant an inclusion in later editions. At the same time, it may have been missed the first time around, or may contain errors, and so it is worth consulting later editions.

Scotland

In Scotland, burials were rarely recorded in registers, and in some parishes, there is no record at all until 1855, when civil registration commenced. As with the case south of the border, there is a thriving effort to record monumental inscriptions, with many having been published.

A useful resource is the Burial Grounds guide from the Scottish Association of Family History Societies (see p.52), located at www.safhs.org.uk/burialgrounds.asp. This identifies more than 3500 known graveyards and cemeteries in Scotland, and whether inscriptions have been recorded for them. If so, it will further note whether these are published or unpublished, and where they

may be located. Many collections are available for sale by the relevant societies, or accessible in libraries across the land, whilst the Scottish Genealogy Society (see p.53) has a substantial collection of inscriptions at its library in Edinburgh.

Scottish Monumental Inscriptions (**www.scottish-monumental-inscriptions.com**) offers a substantial collection of data CDs carrying photographs and monumental inscriptions from across the country. PDF downloads of the inscriptions are also available for digital download, but without the photographic images.

Ireland

For Ireland, north and south, there is no national database or inventory as found across the water in Scotland, England and Wales, but there are some significant online projects offering transcriptions. In Northern Ireland, a useful web resource is the History from Headstones site (**www.historyfromheadstones.com**) which hosts over 50,000 transcripts of gravestones from over 800 graveyards in the country, whilst the Ulster Historical Foundation (see p.53) has a small number of gravestones inscriptions books for sale at **www.booksireland.org.uk**. The North of Ireland Family History Society (see p.53) does offer a look up service for members to its holdings, with many inscriptions collections available to browse at its research centre.

Two useful online resources are the free to access Discover Ever After project at **www.discovereverafter.com**, which carries records predominantly from across Ulster, and the Irish Graveyards Surveyors site at **www.irishgraveyards.ie**, which has an extensive free to access database of burials in many graveyards north and south, though with the largest coverage in counties Donegal, Mayo and Galway. These contain searchable databases, and in many cases present both memorial inscriptions and photographs of headstones. The From Ireland website at **www.from-ireland.net** offers 19,200 monumental inscriptions from across Ireland. Its coverage is very hit and miss, but it is nevertheless free and worth a shot. The Ireland Genealogy Project Archives site at **www.igp-web.com/IGPArchives/index.htm** contains considerably more cemetery and monumental inscriptions sets—check each county's offerings for both the Cemetery Records and Headstones categories.

Further reading

Discover Scottish church records 2nd ed., Chris Paton

Irish family history resources online 2nd ed., Chris Paton

London and Middlesex family history resources online, Alan Stewart

5. Censuses

The decennial censuses, recorded every ten years from 1801 were initially designed to provide the government with an idea of how many mouths they needed to feed and how many men were potentially available for a military draft during the Napoleonic Wars. They evolved across time to provide further useful information on which the government could base decisions such as the development of public services. From a family history point of view they helpfully allow us to work out where our ancestors were based on a particular census night every ten years.

What censuses contain

The earliest censuses from 1801 to 1831 were purely statistical in nature, and as such are of little use for family historians (there are some exceptions, where local enumerators did compile lists of names from which to draw the relevant numbers, which have survived—if so these will be at local county record offices). The first really useful census for genealogists is that from 1841, but it should be noted that this was slightly different in format to its later siblings. The ages of people over 14 were rounded down by the enumerators to the nearest multiple of 5, and when asked where they were from, the question was simply asked if they came from the county in which they were enumerated, or if they were from Ireland, Scotland, England, or ‘Foreign parts’. No relationship was recorded between individuals in a house, and the head of the household was often the only person to have an occupation listed.

In subsequent censuses, the records became more detailed. Questions were asked about what all of the residents in a household did for a living, as well their actual ages, their parishes of origin, their relationship to the head of the household, their state of health, and even the languages that they spoke. The following summarises the key details to be found in the decennial censuses for England, Scotland, and Wales:

1801-1831: Statistical enumerations that are of little use, other than providing background information for a particular area.

1841: The first useful census, listing individuals, addresses, and whether born in county of residence, or if Foreign, English, Irish, or Scottish (if away from their native country). Adult ages were recorded down to the nearest five years.

1851: This further recorded correct ages, parishes of birth, relationship to the head of the house, occupations and whether blind, deaf or dumb.

1861: As 1851, with additional questions on whether the house was inhabited or uninhabited, and condition as to marriage.

1871: Similar to 1861, although the last column now asks if deaf or dumb, blind, imbecile or idiot, or lunatic.

1881: This census asked the same questions as that for 1871.

1891: Further questions on the number of rooms occupied, whether Welsh or Gaelic was spoken (Wales and Scotland only); and whether employed.

1901: As before, with more questions on the condition of the property, and whether a person was working at home.

1911: This introduced the 'fertility questions' for married women, asking how many years they had been married, how many children they had had borne to them, and how many were still alive.

Note that in Ireland, information on members of households was recorded from 1821 (the first year in which it was recorded), and with considerably more detail. Unfortunately, most pre-1901 Irish censuses have not survived (see p.33).

Bear in mind that whilst everybody was supposed to be enumerated, not everybody actually was. It is estimated, for example, that there are 5% fewer children in the 1841–71 censuses than actually existed at the time. In 1911, many Suffragettes also refused to fill out the form. Conversely, sometimes an individual will pop up twice in the same year, having been present at two different houses when the enumerators arrived at different times! Some census returns also do not survive or have been damaged. Several London districts such as Kensington and Paddington are missing from the surviving 1841 returns, for example, as are many parishes within Fife, having been lost overboard whilst en-route to Leith on a sailing vessel. Transcription errors and misinformation should also be watched for when trawling the censuses.

Note also that the information in a census is only as accurate as the informant who provided it. For example, if I come across an age for a person given as 70 in a census, I don't automatically assume that this was correct—simply that this was what the enumerator was informed the person's age was at that time.

Online records

When wishing to look at these records online, there are two major considerations to take into account, namely access to the records and the accuracy of their content. If a record is a transcription and not an original image, it may contain errors, but at the same time if an image is poorly scanned it may prove to be illegible. The effectiveness of the search fields provided is equally important.

For England and Wales, Ancestry offers access to both original images and transcriptions drawn from the 1841 to 1911 censuses, under the slightly incorrect title of the *UK Census Collection* (there are no records in this collection for Ireland, whilst the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man are included, which are not part of the UK!). Access is either by subscription or pay-to-view, though the 1881 census has a free index. The search fields available for each census are different depending on the year selected, helpfully reflecting the actual boxes filled in within the enumerators' returns from year to year. Searches can be performed using fields such as birth and residential locations, age, occupation, and additional household members (both parents and spouse). TheGenealogist, Findmypast, MyHeritage and Genes Reunited offer similar access. FamilySearch offers partial access through an index, and if a find is made here, a link will be presented allowing access to the image on Findmypast (if you have a subscription), or the image can be viewed if consulted at a family history centre (see p.24). In addition, FreeCEN (www.freecen.org.uk) also has some transcriptions for censuses across Britain from 1841 to 1891, though is incomplete.

FreeCEN - Search Results

New Query Revise Query

1841 Census

3 Records found

Previous Household Next Household

Place: SCT1841/387 Place: Perth-Perth Enumeration District: 4
 Civil Parish: Per East Church-Ludwad Ecclesiastical Parish, Village or Island: Perth - St Leonard's
 Folio: 6 Page: 1
 Address: -

Surname	First name(s)	Sex	Age	Occupation	Where Born	Remarks
PATON	Willm	M	63	Hand Loom Weaver	Perth	
PATON	Bety	F	45		Perth	
PATON	Mary	F	24		Perth	

Previous Household Next Household

FreeCEN Home Page
 Search engine, input and database Copyright © 2003-2011 The Trustees of FreeCEN.
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 We make no warranty whatsoever as to the accuracy or completeness of the FreeCEN data.

Whilst the FreeCEN website provides some of the most accurate transcriptions online, its coverage is limited.

Whichever source you use, remember that if you cannot find the record you are searching for on one particular site it is always worth checking another, as no site is infallible. It is worth noting that the above noted sites provide the data contained in the censuses, but not the collated information gathered from them (their original purpose). If you want to find out more about the context of the censuses and the information they gave to the government, visit both *A Vision of Britain Through Time* (www.visionofbritain.org) and *Histpop* (www.histpop.org).

Scotland

For Scotland, only transcriptions of records are presented on Ancestry and Findmypast for the years 1841 to 1901 (TheGenealogist has a small number of entries from 1851 only). These transcripts are incomplete, with missing data such as marital status, ability to speak Gaelic, medical data and details on the residences. It should also be noted that the source citations on Findmypast cannot be trusted, as they do not use the cataloguing system from the National Records of Scotland which holds them. Instead it bizarrely tries to use a citation that applies only to the English and Welsh returns from The National Archives at Kew, or offers no citation at all.

The only available online resource offering access to the original images from the 1841–1901 Scottish censuses is ScotlandsPeople (see p.7), along with the returns from 1911 enumeration. Microfilms of censuses from 1841 to 1901 are also available at various libraries. The 1911 census was digitised by the National Records of Scotland, and is unavailable on microfilm.

Note that with the Scottish 1911 census, the original household schedules have not survived, as is the case with the rest of Britain. Instead, a two page enumerator's entry is presented, although this does include the same fertility census information as recorded elsewhere in the UK. The website also provides two methods for accessing the 1881 Scottish census, via an original image, at five credits, or a transcription made by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, cheaper at just one credit.

Ireland

The real tragedy on the census front lies with the 1821–1891 returns for Ireland, most of which were destroyed through a combination of pulping by the British Government and destruction during the Irish Civil War. However, the returns for the surviving 1901 and 1911 censuses are freely available online at **www.census.nationalarchives.ie**, along with fragments of earlier returns. Nothing exists from 1861 to 1891, but some returns from 1821 to 1851 have survived, including enumerators' returns for County Londonderry in 1831, a substantial part of the 1851 County Antrim census, fragments from County Galway in 1821, and a list of heads of households in Dublin from 1851. Third party indexes for these same Irish censuses also exist on Ancestry, Findmypast and MyHeritage, but unlike the National Archives of Ireland website, these sites helpfully allow you the option of searching for more than one person at a time. If a find is made, you will then be given the option of seeing the original image at the NAI platform.

Some additional Irish census information has survived in the form of Old Age Pension applications after 1908. Claimants had to be 70 years old or over, but unlike in England and Wales, where civil registration commenced in 1837, it was impossible to prove age with a birth certificate, as civil birth registration

in Ireland did not start until 1864. There were different ways that you could obtain proof of age, including the use of parish registers, but the 1841 and 1851 censuses were also used. When the censuses were later destroyed, the information copied into these applications survived. Surviving records are now held in both PRONI and the National Archives of Ireland (see p.54), with the collection for the latter now digitised and freely available online at <http://censussearchforms.nationalarchives.ie>.

Census substitutes: directories

The decennial censuses from 1841 to 1901 are remarkably useful genealogical resources in providing a snapshot of life once every ten years. In between such years, however, and before and after the censuses, how can you chart the progress of a family or a business at more frequent intervals? There are many forms of 'census substitute' which can assist, including electoral records, but undoubtedly some of the most useful are trade and Post Office directories. Not only have these records listed the proprietors of houses and businesses on an annual basis from the 18th century to the 20th, in many cases they have also recorded information on the social and communication infrastructure on which much of our historic society operated.

Trade directories for many parts of the country date back to the early 18th century, though a London merchants' directory exists from 1677, with Henry Kent's annual editions for the city appearing subsequently from 1734 to 1828. Other cities soon picked up on the idea—a directory for Dublin first went to print in 1751, in Birmingham in 1763, whilst Edinburgh was initially served from 1773, and Glasgow in 1783. Belfast, by comparison, was a late starter in 1807. County directories also existed, with Hampshire the first to be served in 1784, whilst the *Universal British Directory* was the first national example in 1793. Many different individuals and companies competed to provide commercial and post office directories, including Slater's, Pigot's, Watkin's and Kelly's.

The contents of such directories evolved over time. Early editions listed those in the gentlemanly and professional classes—merchants, landowners, ministers of the church and local council members, as well as members of the judiciary. If your ancestor was not from the wealthiest landowning or merchant classes, and was perhaps instead an agricultural labourer or a miner, the chances of him being recorded in these early volumes is virtually non-existent, though you might still find useful information, such as the names of local farms or mines which may have perhaps employed him.

The earliest directories usually list people in alphabetical order, with their residence and/or occupation, but as the postal service developed, particularly in the 19th century, they expanded both their content and usefulness. In later editions you will find many heads of households alphabetically listed by name at an address in one section, further recorded by occupation type in another section,

and again by residence and business address in a further section listing street names alphabetically. Each listing may well provide additional details missing from the other, so all should be checked. Furthermore you may be lucky to find a contemporary advert for the factory or company worked for, often lavishly illustrated with etchings of premises and logos. As a volume designed specifically for communication, you will even find detailed gazetteer accounts of many of the towns or villages being served, with descriptions of local industries, electoral ward descriptions, detailed fold out maps, tide, ferry and tram times, and more.

One of the most useful collections for England and Wales is Historical Directories, from the University of Leicester. Located at <http://cdm16445.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p16445coll4>, the collection carries 675 volumes from the 1760s to 1919, though mostly from 1850 onwards. The plan when originally created was to provide at least one directory for each English and Welsh county for the 1850s, 1890s and 1910s, though there are considerably more for some areas.

Ancestry has several directories holdings available in a range of different databases. Its *UK City and County Directories 1600-1900* collection carries a substantial number of volumes from across Britain (though not Ireland, despite the title), whilst the *UK and US Directories 1680-1830* database includes some biographical extracts from over 140 directories in England. The website's *British Phone Books 1880-1984* collection, is another major resource on the website with some 1780 volumes.

FamilyRelatives has a fair collection of 19th century Pigot's and Post Office directories for England and Wales, with a few examples from Ireland and Scotland also. Included on the site also are several medical directories, Directories of Directors (listing company directors of Joint Stock Companies from 1897-1946), and Anglican clergy lists for England and Wales. TheGenealogist also carries a large collection of transcribed and scanned directories, including over 80 editions from 1677 to 1940 for London, and select holdings for Scotland and Wales.

For both Scotland and Ireland there have been some impressive nationwide developments in the last few years on various fronts. The National Library of Scotland (see p.56), working in partnership with the Internet Archive, has digitised over a thousand Post Office Directories (aka 'PODs') and presented them online on two separate platforms. The NLS has its own dedicated website available at <http://digital.nls.uk/directories> which hosts some 700 of the directories from 1773 up to 1911, the latter year having been chosen to respect an unofficial closure period mirroring that of the 1911 census. However, the Internet Archive has placed all of the volumes onto its website in a special 'Scottish Directories' sub-collection within its NLS category at <https://archive.org/details/nationallibraryofscotland>. For many of the largest cities in Scotland you will find annual directories available up to the 1940s.

In Northern Ireland, a similar national project was created by the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (see p.54), which digitised over 30 directories for Belfast and the province of Ulster from the 19th century. The volumes are hosted at www.nidirect.gov.uk/proni in the *Street Directories* collection. In parallel to this, an excellent volunteer transcription effort is also available at Mary Lennon's site at www.lennonwylie.co.uk, which carries material from directories mainly for the north, but also including Waterford from 1894, and a telephone directory for Belfast, Cork and Dublin from 1913.



19th century directories from Belfast and Ulster are available on the PRONI website

For the whole of Ireland, Findmypast has a growing collection of directories online from across the island within its *Newspapers and Directories & Social History* sections.

Further reading

Discover English census records, Paul Milner

Discover Irish land records, Chris Paton

Irish family history resources online 2nd ed., Chris Paton

ScottlandsPeople: the place to launch your Scottish research 2nd ed., Rosemary Kopittke

Tracing your English ancestors, Graham Jaunay

6. Wills and testaments

Written to express the wishes of the deceased concerning the disposal of his or her estate after death, a will can often be a genealogical goldmine, providing the names of relatives, clues about the life of the deceased's lifestyle and even an idea of his or her wealth at the time of death. Often the document can go further, indicating the relationships between the deceased and potential beneficiaries. In the case of Aberdeenshire based farmer Adam Mackie in 1850, for example, a generous amount of money was left to each of his children, with the exception of one who had moved to America, against the wishes of his father.

To my son Adam, now or lately of Newbedford, United States of America, I give three hundred pounds, provided there be funds sufficient to give each member of my family double that amount, because I wish not to send money abroad and leave poverty at home.

On a lighter note, a will can at times contain a hint of humour. When Somerset based actor John Bliss drew up his will he expressed a wish to continue acting post-mortem: 'I leave my skull to the Crewkerne Players, in the hope that its appearance on stage during public performances may attract more favourable criticism than I did while appearing alive'!

Forms of estate

During their lives your ancestors could accrue two forms of estate which could be passed on following death. The first concerned the ownership of physical property or land, which was known as 'heritable estate'. In medieval England and Wales, the law of primogeniture required that freehold property should go to the first born son. Not everybody wished to dispose of their property in such a way, and it was not long before a neat form of legal trickery was devised which could bypass the strictures of the law. A landowner could elect in his lifetime to transfer his property into a trust called a 'use', retaining only a nominal interest in it. By leaving instructions in his will he could say how he wished for this use to be disposed of after his death, thereby bypassing the rules governing the land's inheritance.

So popular did this method of disposal become that in 1540 the disposal of some forms of freehold land through a will became formally legalised in England and Wales (and all forms by 1837), although copyhold land could not be bequeathed until 1926. In feudal Scotland, the disposal of land followed a very different course, and it would not be until 1868 that a Scot could actually

bequeath any form of land in a will. It should be noted that as well as land, other 'immoveable' possessions such as a coat of arms could also be classed as 'heritable' property.

The second form of estate was known as 'moveable estate', and concerned the deceased's personal possessions (his 'personalty'), such as the fine china, the bed linen, the money in his or her account and any clothing.

Probate and confirmation

If a person left a will, he or she was said to be a 'testator' or 'testatrix', and to have died 'testate'; if not, then that person was considered to be 'intestate'. For the terms of the document to be enacted, or for an estate to be passed on legally without a will, the deceased's estate would have to be inventoried and passed to the courts through a procedure known as 'probate' in England, Wales and Ireland (if the value was small, however, people would often settle estates away from the courts to save on the expense). In most of the United Kingdom the courts responsible from medieval times were ecclesiastical in nature. Scotland was the sole exception. From 1564, four years after the Reformation, the entire system (known as 'confirmation' north of the border), was changed from an ecclesiastical process to a civil based system.

No matter which court was responsible, its duty was to oversee the appointment of executors to convey the estate, either those named by the deceased in his or her will, or in the case where no will was left, by the appointment of the court directly. In the latter case, these could be close members of the family but they could also be creditors to whom the deceased owed a large sum of money. The executors' first task was to oversee the creation of an inventory of the deceased's possessions, and to establish what money may have been owed to the deceased, or indeed by the deceased.

Once the court was satisfied that the inventory was conclusive the decision would then be made to prove the will and to administer the estate to the relevant beneficiaries named in the document, or to those that the court decided should be beneficiaries if there was no will. In England, Wales and Ireland, if a will was proved a 'grant of probate' was issued; without a will a 'letter of administration' (aka an 'admon') was instead issued. Similarly in Scotland, the document for the confirmation of an estate with a will by the court was known as a testament testamentar; without one it was known as a testament dative.

The deceased's wishes may have changed prior to death, and he or she may have sought to make a correction—if so, a document known as a 'codicil' would be drawn up noting the change or perhaps further elaborating on a situation not clearly explained in the previous document.

England and Wales

In England and Wales, finding early wills before 1858 is not always easy. To find when and where a grant of probate may have been issued, you need to know the name of the deceased, where he or she lived, and roughly when death might have occurred. An idea of wealth and status may also help.

Prior to 1858 the Church of England was responsible for granting probate, but there were many different levels of ecclesiastical court within the Anglican hierarchy where this could happen. The highest were those of the archbishops based in York and Canterbury, with the Prerogative Court of York (PCY) responsible for the north of England and the Isle of Man, and the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) for the English south and Wales. Canterbury was the superior of the two, and in addition to dealing with wills within its jurisdiction it was also responsible for proving military and naval wills for servicemen who died overseas. Beneath the Prerogative Courts there were then the Consistory Courts and also the Archdeacons' Courts. The location and extent of the deceased's assets determined within which court probate was eventually granted.

As a rule of thumb, if your ancestor was extremely wealthy, the will would be proved at the Prerogative Court level. Normally the value of an estate's most noteworthy goods (known as 'bona notabilia') had to be worth £5 or more for probate to be granted in the Prerogative Courts. For London, the threshold was even higher at £10.

Lower down the hierarchy, a bishop's diocese was then made up of more than one archdeaconry. If an estate involved assets in more than one archdeaconry, then the will would be confirmed at the Consistory Court. If, however, it was all held within a single archdeaconry, then the Archdeacon's Court would handle the process. God certainly moved in a mysterious way when he designed the system, but fortunately there are several projects that are beginning to make the task of locating a will and its probate just a little less daunting.

Records for the Prerogative Court of Canterbury from 1384 to 1858 have been digitised and made available online through two separate sources. The National Archives at Kew (see p.54) has digitised the records and made them available for purchase at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/wills-1384-1858. The Genealogist and Ancestry have also hosted the collections on their respective sites, where they can be accessed as part of a subscription.

For the Prerogative Court of York, the original records are held at the York based Borthwick Institute for Archives (www.york.ac.uk/borthwick). An index for the records from 1688 to 1858 is presented online at Findmypast as the *Prerogative & Exchequer Courts Of York Probate Index, 1688-1858* collection. Each entry lists the testator's name, places associated with the person, a place of death, date of probate and other details, including the original reference number for the document as held at the institute, which allows you to order up a full copy of the original if desired.

If you cannot find your ancestor in the Prerogative Courts, you will need to look more locally for records of the lower courts. County record offices are a useful first step, with many making indexes to their records available online, such as Gloucestershire Archives' *Genealogical Database* at ww3.gloucestershire.gov.uk/genealogy/Search.aspx which includes details of wills and administrations from 1541 to 1858, and inventories from 1587 to 1800. Another major project is Durham University Library's *North East Inheritance* project at <http://familyrecords.dur.ac.uk/nei/index.htm>, with over 150,000 wills from across Northumberland, Durham and Tyne and Wear from 1527 to 1857. For Welsh processes, over 190,000 wills proven in the lower ecclesiastical courts prior to 1858 have been digitised and made freely available by the National Library of Wales at <http://bit.ly/NationalLibraryWalesCatalogue>.

A useful resource for identifying where probate may have been granted is the *Index To Death Duty Registers 1796-1903*, published at Findmypast. The original records are held at The National Archives (p.54), and record any legacy duty due on any monetary sums bequeathed in an estate, but handily they also identify where an original will or administration may have been probated. Digitised images from the registers from 1796 to 1811 are also available from the National Archives via <http://bit.ly/TNADeathDutyRegisters1796to1811>.

Recent wills

From 1858 onwards, the civil court based Probate Service (www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-courts-and-tribunals-service) has been

35 pages returned for **SMITH** and the year of death **1895**

< Previous year Next year >

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 ... 34 35 >

Click to activate zoom

1895.

SMITHURST Henry of Brittain Quondam engineer died 10 May 1895 Probate London 13 November to Mary Jane Stapthorn widow Effects £139 16s.

SMITHURST James of Leightonstone Thermal Limestone Limestone waster died 8 August 1895 of Pulphol workhouse Great Lever Lancashire Administration London 19 September to John Smithurst millwright Effects £26 0s 6d.

SMITHURST John of Boudart-avenue Brooklands Chesham died 13 March 1895 Probate Chester 23 July to Adeline Smithurst spinster Effects £220.

SMITHURST Joseph of 18 Montagu-square Soho Lancashire bleacher's pressman died 23 May 1893 Probate Manchester 9 July to Ann Smithurst widow Effects £28 6s 6d.

SMITHURST Knight William of 83 Haddenfield-road Oldham tin-plate worker died 26 June 1895 Probate Manchester 30 September to Charles Smithurst iron and tin-plate worker Effects £120 16s 6d.

SMITHURST William of the house of the Spanky cotton mill Schalkensberg-road St. Petersburg Russia died 21 March 1895 Probate London 9 July to Henry Smithurst brother and John Smith confessor Effects £2079 0s 6d.

SMITHS John Thomas of 24 Cranford-road Huddersfield house died 10 December 1894 at Stoughton Lancashire Probate Wakefield 19 March to Ellen Ellen Smith widow Arthur Smith house and William Whitely Smith accountant Effects £7540 0s 6d.

SMITHS Percy Hamilton of 14 Southfield Lane house gardener died 13 May 1895 as Chiswick house Chiswick Middlesex Probate London 9 July to Eleanor Pinder Smith widow Effects £222 0s 6d.

SMILEY John of Poplar-road Oxton Birkenhead joined died 7 April 1895 Probate Chester 1 June to Lavinia Smiley widow Effects £48 0s 6d.

SMITH Abraham of Billington-street Hill top Lew more Bradford Yorkshire coal merchant died 28 January 1895 Administration Wakefield 1 April to Hannah Smith widow Effects £23 19s 6d.

SMITH Abraham of Loughborough Leicestershire butcher died 24 May 1895 Probate Leicester 7 November to Elizabeth Smith spinster Effects £169 7s 11d.

SMITH Ailsa Sarah of Ipswich spinster died 1 May 1893 Administration Ipswich 21 June to Sarah Smith widow Effects £165.

SMITH of HALDAN Agent of Brunel's Art widow died 23 February 1893 Confirmation of Thomas Gossnell baker and David Dashiell and Lewis Denny witnesses Issted London 9 July.

SMITH Agent of Buckley Ship spinster died 1 August 1893 Probate Shrewsbury 16 October to Pansy Smith (wife of Charles Smith) Effects £20 1s.

SMITH Agent of 123 Park-road Brompton Surrey widow died 6 October 1895 Probate London 28 October to Alice Edward Koss 19/4

Date of probate

Date of death

Surname
smith

First name(s)

Registry

Folio Number [Folio Help](#)

Add to basket

English and Welsh probate indexes are freely available on the *Find a Will* website

responsible for probate in England and Wales. As part of the Family Division of the High Court, the service holds copies of all wills and administration recorded from this date, each of which has been indexed and included in the National Probate Calendar. The online Find a Will service at <https://probatesearch.service.gov.uk>, allows you to search the probate calendars, and also to order digital copies of the relevant original documents via three separate databases, 1858–1996, from 1996 to the present day, and for soldiers' wills 1850–1986.

To purchase the document of interest you will need to pay a set fee of £10, and then download it from the website within 31 days of purchase. Purchased documents will not be available immediately, with a wait of about ten days before being made so.

The National Probate Calendar can also be searched on Ancestry.

Scotland

If your ancestors are Scottish, searching for wills that underwent confirmation is extremely easy, as all surviving documents for 1513–1925 have been digitised and made available through the ScotlandsPeople website, at a price of 10 credits per document, irrespective of how long it may be. The digitised records can also be freely viewed at the National Records of Scotland, and within the ScotlandsPeople Centre in Edinburgh, and similar centres across the country (see p.16).

Until 1823, Scottish wills were confirmed in a series of civil based Commissary Courts, but for 1823–1830 the role of the Commissary Courts was gradually transferred to the Sheriff Courts. Following an act of 1876, a series of books was published annually by the commissary clerk in Edinburgh from 1877 to 1959, known as the Calendars of Confirmations and Inventories, the Scottish equivalent of the National Probate Calendar. These contain basic summaries of all confirmations to have been made in Scotland in each year, and are indexed by the name of the deceased (with women indexed under their married names). They record the deceased's name, date and place of death, whether testate or intestate, the value of the estate, the date on which confirmation was made, and at which sheriff court. From 1921 there were two volumes a year, the first containing entries for all surnames beginning with the letters A to L, the second from M to Z. Many Scottish libraries have copies of these bound volumes, and microfilmed copies up to 1939 can be ordered using the catalogue of the FamilySearch website (see p.7) for consultation at a local family history centre. Ancestry has also digitised the calendars up to 1936, and presented them in a collection called *Scotland, National Probate Index (Calendar of Confirmations and Inventories), 1876-1936*.

From 1960 to 1984 a microfiche card index for wills can be further consulted at the National Records of Scotland, and the original documents then consulted.

From 1985 the records are indexed by computer, but the most recent wills for the last ten years are still retained at the relevant sheriff courts, for which you will need to contact Edinburgh Sheriff Court.

Ireland

The system of probate in Ireland was similar to that in England and Wales, with the main Prerogative Court based in Armagh, the seat of the Anglican based Church of Ireland. In 1858 this ecclesiastical court based system was also replaced by a civil based court in the form of the Principal Registry in Dublin. Unfortunately, the bad news is that in 1922 most wills were destroyed in the Four Courts fire in Dublin during the fighting which kicked off the Irish Civil War. Calendared extracts did survive for many wills, however, and copies of wills were also held across the country, with a great deal of effort since the war seeing much of this material collated and replaced at the National Archives of Ireland (see p.54).

Calendars from 1858 to 1920 are freely searchable at **www.genealogy.nationalarchives.ie** and via FamilySearch at **https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1921305**. Later wills for the Republic of Ireland can be searched via the catalogue of the National Archives of Ireland (**www.nationalarchives.ie**), from where original copies can also be ordered.

For Northern Ireland, calendar records from 1858 to 1965 are available on a database through PRONI (see p.54), with digitised copies of original surviving wills also freely available. These come from transcripts sourced from the following district registries—Belfast (1858–1909), Armagh (1858–1918) and Londonderry (1858–1899). Later surviving wills and calendars must be consulted at PRONI. Some earlier pre-1858 wills are indexed also on the site's *Name Search* database, and if the original documents have survived, this will be noted.

Further reading

Discover Scottish land records, Chris Paton

Irish family history resources online 2nd ed., Chris Paton

ScotlandsPeople: the place to launch your Scottish research 2nd ed., Rosemary Kopittke

Tracing your English ancestors, Graham Jaunay

7. Maps and gazetteers

Knowing who your ancestors were, and when they existed is half the battle when it comes to genealogical research. But if you truly want to understand who they were, another important element is to discover the contemporary environment within which they once lived, and how that may have changed throughout their lifetime. The industrial and agricultural revolutions saw a massive expansion in urban settlements and enclosure of land in the countryside, whilst natural disasters such as the Irish Famine and man-made catastrophes such as the Scottish Clearances also helped to dramatically redefine the British and Irish landscapes. To comprehend such ancestral environments there are several useful maps and gazetteers resources available online and offline.

Note that administrative regions have changed across time, from religious and civil parishes to electoral divisions and registration districts. Understanding boundaries may help in the pursuit of locating records, particularly county boundaries, which can determine which archives may hold relevant resources for an area.

Modern maps

Perhaps the most useful sites to start with are modern platforms such as Google Maps (www.google.co.uk/maps) and Streetmap (www.streetmap.co.uk). Modern maps are usually portrayed in full colour and can be easier to understand because we can relate to them more from our present understanding of the areas depicted. Sites such as Google Maps also have many additional bells and whistles, such as the useful satellite overview and the ability to virtually walk through an environment at street level via its 'Street View' application, where you may be lucky to still find the ancestral home still standing tall and proud. If you are really keen, you can even view some images on Google Maps in 3D, though you will need to wear the appropriate glasses!

One of the biggest disadvantages of modern maps is of course the fact that they are modern—many historic places will no longer exist, and streets may have completely disappeared. In some cases whole settlements formerly in the countryside will also have been swallowed up by expanding towns and cities. Note however, that in many cases, an old farm name may still be commemorated in a street that now runs through its former location, and buildings may still be named after edifices or features that existed centuries ago but which no longer

exist. Be warned though that some modern maps also have deliberate minor errors introduced as a means to detect copyright infringement by other map providers, and some are not quite as good as others. For a slightly different perspective of the land, several aerial photography sites provide a bird's eye view of Britain, including <http://ncap.org.uk> and www.oldaerialphotos.com.

Ordnance Survey maps

With regards to earlier maps, by far the most useful and accessible are the Ordnance Survey maps, first created in the 19th century, but whose mapping techniques were in fact developed by mapmaker William Roy in Scotland in the previous century, following the Jacobite rebellions. Modern OS maps for Britain are accessible at www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/shop/os-maps-online2.html but the Old Maps site at www.old-maps.co.uk carries the earliest County Series maps for Britain at 1:10 560 scale. A Vision of Britain Through Time at www.visionofbritain.org.uk also carries the First Series of the OS for England and Wales from 1805 to 1869, maps from the Revised Series for 1902–05, and several British wide collections.

North of the border, the superb National Library of Scotland maps platform at <http://maps.nls.uk> has yet to be rivalled, with over 150,000 digitised maps from across the country from the late 16th century onwards, including many OS series. Scottish Ordnance Survey town plans from 1847 to 1895 are at <http://bit.ly/SCRANTownPlans>, whilst ScotlandsPlaces (www.scotlandspplaces.gov.uk) also hosts Ordnance Survey Name Books, the original field notes used to determine correct spellings of various places and features.

The Irish Ordnance Survey for the Republic of Ireland has an online site at www.osi.ie. Additional historic OS maps are available on the University College Dublin website at <http://digital.ucd.ie/view/ucdlib:40377>, covering several southern cities, towns and villages between 1837 and 1896. The historic six inch series for Northern Ireland is available online at <http://maps.ehnsni.gov.uk/SixInchSeries> whilst at the time of writing a new presentation of these maps will soon be available online via the PRONI website (see p.54).

For the whole island, Ask About Ireland (www.askaboutireland.ie) provides a full colour edition of the very first Irish OS map, as part of a database offering a collection called Griffith's Valuation. This was a property valuation carried out between 1847 and 1864 to determine the level of rates that should be charged, and for which the OS maps were used to identify the relevant properties. You can also directly compare the historic site with its location on a modern map to help you find the same place today, should you wish to visit. Ordnance Survey field books for Ireland are also available through the site.

Other maps

Many useful town and county plans from 1910 from across Britain can be found at Baedeker's Old Guide Books <http://contueor.com/baedeker/index.htm>, including maps for the Channel Islands. For London, a particularly useful resource is Charles Booth's Poverty Map of London from 1898 at <http://bit.ly/BoothPovertyMap> which graphically depicts each street by colours to show the levels of income and class of the inhabitants. A more recent map from 2000 is also shown for comparison.

GENMAPS (<http://bit.ly/GENMAPS>) is particularly useful for identifying maps from across Britain back to the 17th century, but the scanned resolution of many is quite low, making some of them difficult to use—it remains an impressive collection nonetheless. Mapseeker (www.mapseeker.co.uk) also offers a variety of additional maps for towns and cities across the country. John Ball's Welsh Family History Archive provides additional resources at www.jlb2011.co.uk/index.html, including a glossary on how to interpret Welsh place names.



Map of the burgh of Perth from 1774

Gazetteers

Maps provide a great physical image of a landscape at any one time, but for an impression of contemporary life and an idea of what made a community tick, you will need to consult parish histories and gazetteers. For Britain as a whole both the Gazetteer of British Place Names (www.gazetteer.org.uk) and A Vision of Britain Through Time (see p.32) are well worth consulting, with many contemporary descriptions of areas across time. For England in particular, Samuel Lewis's *Topographical Dictionary of England* from 1848 is available at British History Online (www.british-history.ac.uk), as are many volumes of the Victoria County History series (www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk).

The closest equivalent in Scotland to these are the contemporary descriptions of very parish in the country by Church of Scotland ministers in the 1790s and 1830s–40s, known as the Statistical Accounts of Scotland, which are freely available at www.edina.ac.uk/stat-acc-scot. The National Library of Scotland also hosts twenty 19th century gazetteers online at <http://digital.nls.uk>, whilst for Wales you should visit the National Gazetteer at <http://bit.ly/GazetteerWales>.

Three volumes of the *Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland* from 1846 can be found on Google Books and via the Internet Archive at www.archive.org. The Ask About Ireland Reading Room at www.askaboutireland.ie/reading-room also contains various digitised statistical accounts and gazetteers for many counties in the Republic of Ireland. For the north, a series of Ordnance Survey Memoirs were created in the 1830s which were similarly designed. These can be purchased from the Ulster Historical Foundation's bookshop at www.booksireland.org.uk, whilst an idea of what is covered can be gleaned from Queens University's Irish Studies Gateway site at <http://bit.ly/ISG-OrdnanceSurveyMemoirs>.

Finally, getting away from the land, you can also visit the National Maritime Museum's maps collection at <http://collections.rmg.co.uk> which hosts many charts of the coastlines of Britain and Ireland. Amongst its treasures are also several maps of Irish counties from circa 1600.

Further reading

Discover Irish land records, Chris Paton

Discover Scottish land records, Chris Paton

Irish family history resources online 2nd ed., Chris Paton

Tracing your English ancestors, Graham Jaunay

8. Occupations

When you look back to your ancestors' lives it can wrongly be assumed that somehow their existence was much simpler than that which you experience today. A census entry describing a relative as an agricultural labourer, a soldier, a domestic servant or a factory worker is often as far as can be determined from the records, and yet those occupations defined who they were. Whilst it may be that an agricultural labourer may not seem to be recorded much beyond his vital records and those of his family, it is often possible to read between the lines with such records to tell a story in its own right. If every one of his children was born in a different location, for example, why might that be? Could it be that the labourer was constantly migrating to look for work? Similarly if a person is referred to as a salmon fisherman in some records, but as a labourer in others, why the disparity? Perhaps because salmon fishing was seasonal? Pursuing the stories of your ancestors' work lives can often transform your understanding of who they were and how they lived from day to day.

Ancestral context

There are many good books and gazetteers that can provide an overview of the industry in which your forebear worked, with many ways to find them—you can try simple keyword searches on Google Books or the Internet Archive for starters, to see if any useful texts have been digitised, or through your local library catalogue. These books will usually not name your relatives, but will certainly help to provide useful context. When you then read that British weavers in the 1820s suffered a massive problem in finding work and a desperate drop in wages as a consequence, it might help to explain why your ancestor moved from that as a cottage based industry in a village and into factory work in a city, or perhaps why he or she emigrated. If your ancestor was a member of a particular Regiment of Foot, a simple regimental history will explain where its various battalions were posted, and the campaigns they fought within.

Note that the main records vendors, such as Ancestry, Findmypast, and TheGenealogist have many occupational records collections digitised, notably for various military services, but also for university graduates, nurses, railwaymen, postmen, and many, many other walks of life. Some careers are of course better recorded than others—craftsmen, for example, may have an apprenticeship record—and increasingly a great deal of material is available online that can help

you to get under way in tracing their careers. Both Ancestry and Findmypast, for example, carry records of stamp duty payments made from 1710 to 1811 for the completion of apprenticeships by the masters who trained their students.

Understand the job

There are various things to be aware of when using such online resources, however. If you find your ancestor in a specific collection, does that mean you have found all that can be found about them—or simply that you have found all you can about them in that digitised collection? And are such collections complete? If you do find an apprentice, then he will likely have joined a guild or trade incorporation, and these can have many records naming your ancestor personally. They may not be online, however, but in a local archive (see p.55). And if your ancestor's apprenticeship is not recorded in such a collection, does that mean he did not serve an apprenticeship—or was he perhaps trained up by his father or another relative, with no stamp duty paid?

It is easy to be conditioned into believing that the collections of the commercial online records vendors are definitive, and that you need look no further than what they provide. The conventional wisdom is that army service records are online for the First World War, for example, but there are omissions, and not just because over 60% of them were destroyed by fire in the Second World War. Not all land based forces are actually included in the collection, as I discovered with my own great-great grandfather, an Irishman who served in France with the Royal Marines Labour Corps. To locate his service record I had to travel to The National Archives at Kew (p.54), as it had not been digitised.

Even if you do find what you have been looking for, have you understood how the records are actually presented online? To give another military example, a great uncle of mine who served with the Royal Army Medical Corps was indeed found on Ancestry's First World War service records collection. When I searched using his name, I followed through to the original digitised documents and found a four page record, starting with his attestation record in 1914. It wasn't until a couple of years later, however, that I discovered that the records sourced from microfilm were sometimes not in a set order when originally photographed. Returning to Ancestry, I thus repeated my search, but this time when I landed on the first page, showing his attestation paper, I decided to view the page *before* the one being viewed, instead of those after. What I had originally found to be a four page service record now in fact turned out to be some 40 pages long. His attestation record, which Ancestry had guided me to as a 'landing page', was in fact one of the last pages of his record. It is a trick to be aware of with other collections on the site, such as its *UK and Ireland, Masters and Mates Certificates 1850-1927* collection for merchant seamen.

Newspapers

There are many other resources that can help you to plot an ancestor's career, with newspapers in particular being an important aid. Online offerings such as the *London Gazette*, and its Belfast and Edinburgh based equivalents (www.thegazette.co.uk), provide details about military promotions, business partnerships and bankruptcies. For day-to-day life, your ancestor, even if in a seemingly mundane job such as a miner, a domestic servant or an agricultural labourer, may have been recorded in the local newspaper.

Three major online resources on this front are the pay-per-view British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.com) and Irish Newspaper Archives (www.irishnewsarchive.com), and the free to access Welsh Newspapers Online (<http://newspapers.library.wales>). Your agricultural labourer may have been the best ploughman in the district, winning competitions left, right and centre!

Dig deeper

If you truly want to find all that can be found, the best thing to do is to get your hands dirty in an archive (see Chapter 9) by looking for the original records of the employers. Not everything may have survived, but you may find that a great deal of material that does may never be digitised and placed online—consult the relevant local archive catalogue near the place where your ancestor worked as a starting point. In many cases, archives provide useful guides on their employment records online—for example, the Scottish Business Archive at the University of Glasgow has a detailed website at www.gla.ac.uk/services/archives/collections/business.

If you do find records concerning a firm, factory or estate, don't just look at the obvious records listing payments, consult as much as you can within the whole collection, for sometimes the most innocent looking document may be the one that provides the genealogical gold dust. To cite another example, my great grandfather worked for a Glaswegian shoe manufacturing firm, running two shoe shops on its behalf in Belgium. His death there during the First World War was in fact confirmed from the company's AGM minutes from 1916. Another ancestor signed up for a militia unit in 1797 in Perthshire, which was a regiment run by the Earl of Breadalbane. Although I located a great deal about his career from muster rolls and attestation papers, I found considerably more from the Earl's own private papers. They included details on how the soldiers were to be dressed, paid and fed, providing wonderful contextual detail that really brought his unit's daily routine to life. Rather sensationally though, it also included a letter from one of the Earl's sergeants detailing how my ancestor, a weaver, had actually refused to go with him on his day of attestation to the regimental base at Edinburgh Castle until he had finished working on a web. If he did not finish the cloth on his

loom, he would have been fined—and as such, until he finished, he wasn't going anywhere!

If you put the effort in, you will reap the rewards. Understand the industry or lifestyle in which your ancestors worked, by reading up on relevant occupations with books such as the useful *My ancestor was a...* range from the Society of Genealogists (www.sog.org.uk), which can help you to track down records in the right areas of interest—titles include occupations such as coalminers, lawyers, merchant seamen, railway workers, agricultural labourers and domestic servants, amongst others.

Further reading

British and Irish newspapers, Chris Paton

Down and out in Scotland: researching ancestral crisis, Chris Paton

Finding the family Redcoat: tracing your British military ancestors in Australia, Lieutenant Col. Neil C Smith, AM

Irish family history resources online 2nd ed., Chris Paton

London and Middlesex family history resources online, Alan Stewart

The ones that got away: tracing elusive ancestors who move into, out from and within Britain, Janet Few

9. Societies, archives and libraries

Modern family history societies first began to flourish in the 1960s. In England, one of the original key motivators in their establishment was a surgeon, Dr Stuart Kingsley Norris, who with John Sharp founded the Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry (www.bmsg.org), still going strong today. The idea was so popular that it was subsequently picked up in Manchester, and soon spread further afield. Similarly in Scotland, the chairman of the Scottish Genealogy Society, Donald Whyte, established the Glasgow & West of Scotland Family History Society (<http://gwsfhs.org.uk>) in the 1970s, with the movement soon gaining equal traction with additional societies established in Aberdeen and beyond.

Although they may vary in how they do it, what all societies aspire to do is to provide a forum to offer advice and resources relevant to their particular area, through a group of dedicated volunteers and with the expertise of their wider membership. As well as providing access to a range of resources such as parish and census records, they also encourage members to deposit copies of their family tree research, and to contribute to their journals and projects. Each will usually offer a program of monthly talks by speakers on topics of potential interest to their members, whilst several have their own dedicated premises for their members to drop in and use at their convenience. Some of the larger societies may even host their own family history fairs and conferences, providing a further chance to meet up, learn and to engage with topics and resources of interest. Many societies also collaborate with each other, making their journals and publications available for sale at their monthly meetings, and on some occasions even hosting joint meetings, allowing members to meet other enthusiasts from neighbouring areas.

If planning to subscribe to a society check its membership pages first. Some societies offer fixed membership terms, so there is no point joining in November if your membership might expire two months later. Note also that some areas may be represented by more than one society, particularly where parish and county boundaries may have changed at various points in the past. It may be worth consulting holdings of surrounding societies also, in case of overlapping interests.

Umbrella bodies

The easiest way to locate which groups might be able to assist with your personal research is to consult with the umbrella organisations to which many belong. The Federation of Family History Societies (www.ffhs.org.uk) predominantly

covers England and Wales, though has affiliated member groups from across the world. Its website very much acts as a gateway to its constituent members, but also provides many free resources, such as a regular news service, a free monthly e-magazine (an 'ezine'), book reviews and more. Its home page also carries a free 'really useful information leaflet' which does what it says in the title, offering advice on research, lists of useful websites, details on members, and more.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Federation of Family History Societies (FFHS). At the top, the logo features a silhouette of a person's head and shoulders. The main header reads "FEDERATION OF FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETIES" in large, bold, black letters, with the tagline "FFHS - supporting family historians for over 40 years" below it. To the right of the header are social media icons for Twitter and Facebook, and a "Sign up for our Newsletter" button. Below the header, a navigation bar includes "You are here: Home", "Free Phone 0800 0856322 | Contact Us | Site Map", and a "Sign up for our Newsletter" button.

The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Find a Family History Society:** A sidebar menu with links to "Federation", "About Us", "FFHS Services Ltd", "Members Login", and "Projects".
- Articles:** A section titled "Sources" with a list of links: "Articles", "Book Reviews", "Courses & Events", "Find a Speaker", "Free Websites", "National Burial Index", "Research Tips", and "WWI Centenary".
- "Magic Torch" lights the way:** A featured article with a black and white illustration of a person in a futuristic, armored suit. The text describes the project as using comics and sequential art to explore history and folklore. It mentions that the website offers readers the chance to download a range of publications free of charge, as well as presenting the outcome in traditional printed versions. A "Read more...." link is provided.
- Find A Family History Society:** A section with a black and white photograph of a group of people sitting around a table. The text states: "We have over 180 member societies, all helping their members to research their ancestors in England, Wales, Ireland and beyond." It includes a search prompt: "Search our lists of member societies to find a family history society near you or in the area you are researching." and a link to "Search our database....".
- Fairs and Open Days:** A section with a black and white photograph of people at a fair. The text says: "Many of our member societies organise or have stands at Fairs or Open Days around the country." It adds: "These events offer great opportunities for veteran researchers and newcomers to family history to follow their interests and meet fellow enthusiasts."
- Free Newsletter:** A section with a black and white photograph of a person reading. The text asks: "Globe trotting ancestors?" and provides information about the newsletter, including a "Subscribe to our free bi-monthly newsletter for all the latest family history news." link.

The Federation of Family History Societies website

The Association of Family History Societies of Wales (www.fhswales.org.uk) carries additional details for those members not represented on the FFHS website. A previous version of this website also offered a brilliant guide to 1911 census householders' schedules that were written in Welsh, including translations of listed occupations and other terms. This can be viewed at <http://bit.ly/Welshcensus1911>.

North of the border, the Scottish Association of Family History Societies website at www.safhs.org.uk offers similar details on its participating members, and a twice yearly bulletin summarising recent activities. The site also offers some basic research tools, such as a handy guide to the existence of monumental inscription records from graveyards across the country (see p.21). A separate group of historical societies in Scotland, which covers the Western Isles, are the predominantly island based 'comainn eachdraidh' (Gaelic for 'historical societies'), a listing for which can be found at www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/gaidhlig/buidhnean/eachdraidh.

Northern Ireland is slightly different, in that it only has one main society, the North of Ireland Family History Society (www.nifhs.org), with various regional branches, some of which also have their own websites and/or Facebook pages. The main society website offers some free research tools, such as an index of census strays in Britain from Ulster, but once you join you can also access many unique 'members only' goodies online, such as certain monumental inscriptions, and access to the incredibly useful JSTOR Irish Journals collections. It also runs a research centre in Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim. In the Republic of Ireland there is the Council of Irish Genealogical Organisations (www.cigo.ie), an umbrella group which has several organisations amongst its membership. The Irish Family History Foundation is a cross-border co-ordinating body for several county based genealogy centres across Ireland, and hosts an online platform called RootsIreland (www.rootsireland.ie) for their transcribed records, which are accessible for a fee.

National societies

There are many 'national' societies across Britain which, like the NIFHS, equally offer many valuable resources online. The London based Society of Genealogists (www.sog.org.uk) holds over a century's worth of genealogical material at its library, with its online catalogue, SOGCAT, a particularly useful tool to help you identify holdings of potential interest. Also on the site, you will find many free research guides, and detailed sets of notes from speakers at the annual Who Do You Think You Are? Live show, at which the society runs a talks program. The Edinburgh based equivalent is the Scottish Genealogy Society (www.scotsgenealogy.com) which provides several online offerings such as 'The Black Book', detailing records it holds on various death related records across the country, as well as a 'Family Histories' page indexing all the compiled pedigrees which have been deposited with the group over the years since it was established some 60 years ago. It too has a library that can be visited.

In Ireland, the Belfast based Ulster Historical Foundation (www.ancestryireland.com) offers a range of transcribed records on a commercial basis, and regularly publishes books and lectures across the world. Further south, the Genealogical Society of Ireland (www.familyhistory.ie) has a dedicated research and archive centre in Dún Laoghaire called An Daonchartlann.

Note that many family history societies compile their own genealogical records publications, in both print and on CD formats. These can be purchased from the groups in question, and also through third party market sites in the UK such as GENfair (www.genfair.co.uk) and Parish Chest (www.parishchest.com), and overseas from organisations such as Global Genealogy (www.globalgenealogy.com) in Canada, and Gould Genealogy & History (www.gould.com.au) in Australia.

Special interest groups

Some family history societies, particularly some of the larger overseas based groups, may have what are known as 'special interest groups' or 'SIGs'. These are sub-groups that take an interest in a particular topic, for example, a Scotland SIG, an Ireland SIG or a Cornwall SIG. In some cases they may arrange their own speaker program and newsletters in addition to the main parent society's regular fare.

There are also many family history societies that are based on a specific subject rather than a geographic area, for example the Catholic Family History Society (www.catholicfhs.co.uk), the Families in British India Society (www.fibis.org), or the Romany and Traveller Family History Society (<http://rtfhs.org.uk>). Another thematically based historical interest group is the Western Front Association (www.westernfrontassociation.com), which supports remembrance and research projects, battlefield memorial renovations and more.

Equally helpful is the separate historical society movement across Britain and Ireland. Details on the various groups can be found via the British Association for Local History at www.balh.co.uk, the Federation for Ulster Local Studies Limited at www.fuls.org.uk and the Federation of Local History Societies (Conascadh na gCumann Staire Áitiúla) at www.localhistory.ie.

Archives

Some of the greatest repositories you will need to visit and love are the relevant archives for the areas within which your ancestors once resided. Archives can be national or local authority based, or belong to a private institution, such as a university, religious order, or a family estate.

The National Archives at Kew (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk), the National Records of Scotland in Edinburgh (www.nrscotland.gov.uk), and the Belfast based Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (www.nidirect.gov.uk/proni), are the main 'national' repositories for the United Kingdom. In the Republic of Ireland, the National Archives in Dublin (www.nationalarchives.ie) fulfils the same function, but also holds some records for Northern Ireland from the pre-Partition period (prior to the 1920s). Their primary mission is to preserve state generated records, such as court registers, censuses, military records and more, but they also hold a significant quantity of privately deposited collections, such as estate papers and business records.

Many records collections have been digitised and made available on their websites. In Ireland, north and south, these tend to be freely available; the NAI has a dedicated free to access resource site at www.genealogy.nationalarchives.ie, whilst PRONI hosts them on its main platform. In England, The National Archives has digitised many records which can be accessed on its website for a fee, or through commercial partnerships with sites such as Ancestry, Findmypast and

TheGenealogist. In Scotland, some digitised records can also be paid for through the ScotlandsPeople website or ScotlandsPlaces (www.scotlandspplaces.gov.uk).



The National Archives based in Kew, England

Whilst the NRS and PRONI very much concern Scotland and Northern Ireland, The National Archives at Kew, in addition to its role of preserving materials for England and Wales, also acts as an umbrella repository for collections concerning all nations within the UK, for example, the records of the British army and civil service. Note that although Wales does not have its own dedicated national archive, with that function covered by The National Archives at Kew, its National Library at Aberystwyth (www.llgc.org.uk) does act to some extent as a national repository for a great deal of genealogically useful resources. The body hosts a great deal of digitised material online via its website's family history section.

At a more local level across Britain are the county record offices, which hold local government materials and privately deposited records at a regional level (PRONI also acts in this capacity for Northern Ireland). Many other institutions exist independently of government altogether, such as the UK's university archives and special collections repositories, which can usually be accessed also, even if you are not a student. For England and Wales, Ancestor Search (www.ancestor-search.info/LOC-INDEX.htm) provides directory information for all county based libraries, record offices, family history societies and research centres. In Ireland, the Learn About Archives site (www.learnaboutarchives.ie) provides a handy map to locate repositories across the island, whilst the Scottish Council on Archives' interactive map at www.scottisharchives.org.uk/map has details of local collections also.

Catalogues

To help locate the relevant holdings at an archive in advance of your trip, you will need to consult the relevant catalogue.

The three national repositories in the UK all have excellent catalogues online. The National Archives' catalogue, called 'Discovery' (<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk>), not only describes records held at its facility, but also many holdings from county record offices across England and Wales. The National Records of Scotland has a catalogue page at www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/catalogues-and-indexes which provides links to its own catalogue, a separate catalogue called the National Register of Archives for Scotland (listing privately held documents and collections), and the Scottish Archive Network (SCAN), which holds details for many local archives across the country.

Across the water, the PRONI catalogue for Northern Ireland is accessible at www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/search-archives-online/ecatalogue, whilst the catalogue for the National Archives in Dublin, the least developed of all the national archive offerings, is constantly being updated at www.nationalarchives.ie/search-the-archives; however, many of its records are catalogued on paper at the repository itself.

Note that for more localised holdings, the relevant county record office websites may have their own online catalogues. However, their holdings may also be included in platforms such as AIM25 (www.aim25.ac.uk) for Greater London, the Archives Wales / Archifau Cymru website (www.archivesnetworkwales.info), which allows a keyword search to help you find the locations of records held from archives across the country, and the Scottish Records Association (www.scottishrecordsassociation.org), for records not included on SCAN. In Ireland, consult RASCAL (www.rascal.ac.uk) and the Irish Archives Resource (www.iar.ie).

Libraries

As with archives, there are national libraries and more localised institutions. The national repositories include the British Library in London (www.bl.uk), the National Library of Scotland (www.nls.uk), which hosts many equally important digitised record sets such as maps, gazetteers and post office directories, the previously mentioned National Library of Wales (www.llgc.org.uk), and for the Republic of Ireland there is the Dublin based National Library (www.nli.ie).

For Northern Ireland there is no national library as such, but Belfast's Linen Hall Library has much to offer at www.linenhall.com.

Further reading

Cracking the code of old handwriting, Graham Jaunay

Family history trippin': a guide to planning a genealogy research trip, Thomas MacEntee

London and Middlesex family history resources online, Alan Stewart

10. Social networking

Since the launch of the internet in the late 20th century there have been many wonderful online collections created that can help you with your genealogical research, from the rise of digital record supplying giants such as Ancestry, Findmypast and TheGenealogist, to interactive information portals such as Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org). But if there is one thing that can be singled out as a truly 21st century phenomenon, it is the continuing rise of the online social network, changing the very way you can engage with the sources required for your endeavours.

Facebook and Twitter

Social networking sites can exist in many forms, but all have one thing in common—an ability to allow communication and the flow of ideas. You can use such sites to create a family tree with distant relatives on the other side of the world, or to simply ask how they are keeping; and in many cases, it will not cost you anything other than your time. The most popular and well known sites tend to be those offering instant messaging and multimedia applications. These include Facebook (www.facebook.com), which has more than 150 million subscribers around the world, and Twitter (<http://twitter.com>), which allows users to produce messages of up to 140 letters in length, known as ‘tweets’. These tweets can convey a surprisingly detailed amount of information in an instant, such as a newflash, a link to a website or a photograph hosted online. One of the joys of any new service is the way that others can then take it and push it to produce more creative applications. In summer 2010, for example, the National Archives in England (<http://twitter.com/UKNatArchives>) started to post short real time updates of the Second World War as fought 70 years ago using cabinet minutes, a novel way to allow the people of today to experience the conflict of yesterday.

Blogs

An equally popular format is the ‘blog’ (short for ‘web log’), essentially an online diary which allows the user to post experiences, news, multimedia items (such as short YouTube films), usually for free. Two main providers of free to use blogs are Google’s Blogger service (www.blogger.com) and Wordpress (<http://wordpress.org>). These can be used to share a daily holiday experience, create a research journal for your family history endeavours, announce the latest CD

or book release from your family history society, and more. On the news front there are several blogs of interest for genealogists, such as *Eastman's Online Genealogy Newsletter* (<http://blog.eogn.com>), *Grow Your Own Family Tree* (<http://growyourownfamilytree.wordpress.com>), *Canada's Anglo-Celtic Connections* (www.anglo-celtic-connections.blogspot.com), and my own The GENES Blog (<http://britishgenes.blogspot.co.uk>).

The GENES Blog

The GENES Blog (G^Enealogy News and EventS): Top stories concerning ancestral research in Britain, Ireland, and their diasporas, from Irish born Scottish based professional family historian, author and tutor Chris Paton. Feel free to quote from this blog, but please credit The GENES Blog if you do so. To contact me please email chrismpaton@outlook.com.

Home	Books	Research	Chris Paton	Courses	Diary	Kiva	Links	Irish probate	Kirk History	Pinterest boards
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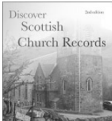
New book out now:



Discover Irish Land Records

Discover Irish Land Records

Now on sale



Discover Scottish Church Records


Sunday, 21 August 2016

WW2 Merchant Navy deaths and Bexley records join Ancestry


The following collections have been released by Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk):

UK, Merchant Seamen Deaths, 1939 - 1953
<http://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=61094>
Source: Lists of Merchant Seamen Deaths. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, UK.

This collection details the names of over 60,000 merchant seamen who lost their lives during and just after WWII. The Merchant Navy during this time was made up of approximately 185,000 seamen, including 40,000 men of Indian, Chinese and other nationalities. When war broke out, the merchant fleet, which was the largest in the world, was put under the control of the Ministry of Shipping, later part of the Ministry of War Transport. The most significant battle that involved the merchant navy was the Battle of the Atlantic, during which the merchant fleet, with its naval escorts, struggled to bring food, fuel, equipment and raw materials from America and elsewhere across the Atlantic, while Germany mobilized U-boats, battleships, aircraft and mines against them in an attempt to sever Britain's supply lines.



When the chips were down...



Down and Out in Scotland

Down and Out in Scotland

Now on sale



Researching Ireland

The Genes Blog, one of many news platforms providing regular news updates from the genealogy world in Britain and Ireland

Digital records suppliers are also increasingly utilising their own blogs to announce product updates, such as Findmypast (<http://blog.findmypast.com>) and Ancestry (<http://blogs.ancestry.com>). Useful directories of genealogy blogs can be found at Alltop (<http://personal-history.alltop.com>) and GeneaBloggers (www.geneabloggers.com).

Message boards and forums

Whilst these sites are great for facilitating instant communication, the real workhorses of social networking for genealogy tend to be the sites that allow for detailed collaboration and problem solving. The excellent Rootsweb message

board site (**www.rootsweb.ancestry.com**), which is still going strong, was one of the first to provide such a facility, and allows you to look for topics grouped under the heading of a surname or geographic location. Using a message board, a problem may be solved within minutes, or many years later, as all posts remain filed online.

The modern development of the message board is the discussion forum, with one of the most successful being RootsChat (**www.rootschat.com**). The site has various sections dealing with England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland, as well as many overseas territories with a strong British connection, and provides a flexible board on which any topic of your choice can be created, whether that be a discussion on what you thought of the latest episode of *Who Do You Think You Are?*, or an in-depth analysis of various topics relating to a particular county or country. On a forum you can personalise your online profile with the use of photos or images known as 'avatars' which appear with each post you make, answer other people's comments with your own observations, and even add photographic content or other images.

Similar boards include the British Genealogy forum (**www.british-genealogy.com**) and Genealogy Forum UK (**www.genealogyforum.co.uk**), whilst TalkingScot (**www.talkingscot.com**) is a smaller and more basic forum specifically related to matters Scottish. Additional forums exist for specific areas of interest, including the mighty Great War Forum (**<http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums>**), for all you need to know about the First World War.

Family tree networks

One of the key tools for the family historian is of course the family tree. Whilst it is possible to buy software to display your family tree (see p.10), many sites also offer tree building capabilities online, accompanied by means to communicate with other tree builders. Genes Reunited (**www.genesreunited.com**) is one example of a site that offers an online tree building facility through a paid subscription. The site does more than this though—once you have uploaded your tree, you can then search the trees of other members and look for potential 'hot matches'. You will also be notified by e-mail of potential matches with other trees, and if such a match can be found, you can communicate with the owner of the other tree. The site further allows access to various records sets, such as the English and Welsh censuses (including the 1911 census) as well as BMD indexes for the two countries. Ancestry and MyHeritage also offer a similar tree networking facility, as does TheGenealogist through its TreeView subscription (**www.treeview.co.uk**).

Many other sites push the boat further in using research sources to make connections with other possible family members. Lost Cousins (**www.lostcousins.com**), for example, uses information supplied by members from

various censuses to look for matches with possible distant cousins who may have input the same details. On a more geographic basis, Ancestral Atlas (www.ancestralatlas.com) uses maps as the starting point, allowing users to tag a location on an interactive map and to add appropriate genealogical information, which other users can see when consulting the same area. If there is a connection with their research, they can then contact you to discuss.

Curious Fox (www.curiousfox.com) is a similar forum based site which allows you to forge connections with other researchers by identifying a shared village or town of interest. A more novel project is Historypin (www.historypin.com) which allows users to upload historic photos onto a site that matches the same modern image as viewed by Google's Street View application, providing for a real then and now comparison, but one which again allows for the addition of further information and an ability to consult the image submitter.

Further reading

Evernote for family historians, Carole Riley

Google: the genealogist's friend, Helen V Smith

Opening doors to Family Tree Maker: or how to enter your information correctly, John Donaldson

Pinning your family history, Thomas MacEntee

So you are totally new to Family Tree Maker 2nd ed., John Donaldson

Social media for family historians 2nd ed., Carole Riley

11. DNA tests

An increasingly important development for family history research, which can establish connections even when the documentary evidence fails, is the use of DNA testing. DNA is short for ‘deoxyribonucleic acid’, which carries important genetic instructions for our cells, instructing them how to grow and function. We inherit different types of DNA from our ancestors in different ways, but all can be tested and the results then used to try to find connections with cousins who may also carry the same DNA signatures.

There are two main aspects to any DNA test which need to be followed to establish possible connections. The first is to do the test itself. Normally this may involve contributing a swabbed sample from the inside of your mouth, or a small deposit of saliva in a vial. The second part is to then input the results of the test when received into a DNA database. If potential relatives do the same thing, then the database should flag them up as potential matches—at this point, it is then up to you to try to work out where the connection lies using more traditional documentary means.

Types of DNA

There are currently three main types of DNA that can be tested for family history purposes, as follows:

1) **Y-chromosome DNA (Y-DNA)**

This is DNA that is passed from fathers to sons only, and which should therefore follow the surname line, making it particularly useful for one-name studies (such as Scottish clan histories). Once tested, the results are presented as a series of numbers, which relate to specific points or ‘markers’ on the DNA chain. Comparison of these marker values on a database will show how closely or distantly someone else may be related to you. The more the numbers match, the closer the relationship, whilst the more markers you have tested, the more accurate the result.

2) **Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA)**

Mitochondrial DNA is the DNA which acts like a sort of battery within cells. It can only be passed on by a mother to her children, so men cannot pass it on any further. Your mother will have inherited her mtDNA from your maternal grandmother, who in turn inherited it from her mother, and so on, meaning that

the information obtained will refer to maternal line ancestors, in much the same way as a Y-DNA test works only for paternal line ancestors. Whilst such DNA has its uses in the genealogical world (it was used to confirm the identity of the remains of Richard III, for example), its slow rate of mutation makes it the least useful test at present for family history research.

3) **Autosomal DNA**

The most recent development in the genealogy testing world is that for autosomal DNA, which is inherited as a mixture from both parents. This type of DNA is located within one of our chromosomes within the cell nucleus, though not the sex chromosomes (i.e. the X or Y chromosome). Autosomal DNA is most useful for testing for connections within the last four or five generations, as the fragments of DNA you may share further back than this will be so small that they will be incredibly difficult to find a match for.

Testing companies

There are many companies now offering DNA tests. FamilyTreeDNA (**www.familytreedna.com**), for example, offers Y-DNA, mitochondrial and autosomal tests, as well as combination packages allowing you to test for more than one form of DNA at a time. The website also hosts various projects for trying to establish connections with other testers. Ancestry's offering, called AncestryDNA (**<http://dna.ancestry.co.uk>**), is by contrast now concentrating solely on autosomal tests. It allows you to host your results on your Ancestry account and to establish connections through other testers.

Further reading

DNA for genealogists 3rd ed., Kerry Farmer

Appendix: The Crown Dependencies

The Isle of Man and the Channel Islands are not part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but instead form independent ‘Crown Dependencies’, inextricably connected with its history.

Some records for both territories, such as decennial censuses, were recorded alongside collections for England and Wales, and can be found with them on the mainstream genealogy record websites. For other records, such as those for civil registration, the situation is not so straightforward. The Isle of Man started civil registration in 1849 (see www.gov.im/registries/general/civilregistry), whilst on the Channel Islands, birth registration began on Guernsey in 1840, Jersey in 1842, in Alderney in 1850, but not until 1925 on Sark (see <http://bit.ly/ChannelIslandsCivilRegistration> for details on how to access copies of records).

Isle of Man

Located within the Irish Sea, the Isle of Man has its own legislative parliament, known as the Tynwald, and at one time also had its own native language, Manx, a variant branch of Gaelic (closely related to its Irish and Scottish cousins). Various record sets are available for the island online, including four separate datasets on FamilySearch, as follows:

Isle of Man Births and Baptisms, 1607-1910

Isle of Man Deaths and Burials, 1844-1918

Isle of Man Marriages, 1606-1911

Isle of Man Parish Registers, 1598-200

The island’s national archive forms part of Manx National Heritage at www.manxnationalheritage.im, with many datasets and guides available online, whilst Manx Newspapers and Publications from 1792 to 1960 is an online subscription based platform accessible via www.imuseum.im. The Isle of Man Family History Society is online at www.iomfhs.im.

The Channel Islands

FamilySearch offers a fairly limited collection entitled *Channel Islands Births and Baptisms, 1820-1907*.

A series of old maps depicting the Channel Islands can be found via GENMAPS at <http://bit.ly/ChannelIsalndsOldMaps>, whilst a broad history of the region is available on the Island Life website (www.islandlife.org/history.htm), with a dedicated section for each island. For general resources, the Channel Islands are represented on GENUKI at <http://chi.genuki.weald.org.uk>. Additional resources are freely available at <https://sites.google.com/site/channelislandsfreeancestry>.

The Channel Islands Family History Society has a website at www.jerseyheritage.org, whilst the Société Jersiaise (www.societe-jersiaise.org) has both library and photographic archive catalogues.

Index

A

Aberystwyth 55
AIM25 56
Alloa 16
Ancestor Search 55
An Daonchartlann 53
archives 54
 Archives Wales 56
 Borthwick Institute for Archives 39
 Discovery 56
 Gloucestershire Archives 40
 Irish Archives Resource 56
 Learn About Archives 55
 Manx National Heritage 63
 National Archives (Kew) 25, 26, 33, 39, 40,
 48, 54, 55, 56
 National Archives of Ireland 26, 33, 34, 42,
 54, 56
 National Records of Scotland 16, 23, 24, 25,
 26, 33, 41, 54, 56
 National Register of Archives for Scotland 56
 Public Record Office of Northern Ireland 23,
 26, 36, 54
 Scottish Archive Network 56
 Scottish Business Archive 49
 Scottish Council on Archives 55
 Scottish Records Association 56
 Welsh Family History Archive 45
Armagh 42
Armistice 9
Australia 53
A Vision of Britain Through Time 32, 44, 46

B

Baptists 25
Belfast 17, 42
Birmingham 34
births, marriages and deaths
 Ancestry 16, 17, 22, 23
 banns 19, 20
 baptisms 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 63
 births 8, 14, 16, 17, 18, 25, 26, 63

bishops' transcripts 19, 22, 23, 28
BMD Registers 25
burials 19, 21, 22, 24, 26, 28, 29, 63
Catholic Parish Registers 23
certificates 8, 18
civil registration 14, 16, 17, 19, 21, 23, 28,
 33, 63
deaths 8, 14, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 25, 26, 63
FamilyRelatives 16
FamilySearch 16, 17, 18, 22, 26, 63
Findmypast 16, 17, 22, 23, 28
Fleet Prison 20, 26
FreeBMD 15
FreeREG 26
General Register Offices 15
GENI 17
GRO Ireland 17
GRONI 17
Hardwicke's Marriage Act (1753) 20, 21
International Genealogical Index 22, 26
irregular marriages 14, 16, 21
Joiner Marriage Index, The 22
marriage licenses 20
marriages 8, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 25,
 26, 63
mortcloth 21, 24
MyHeritage 16
Old Parish Registers 23
parish chest 24
parish registers 19, 20, 22, 34
registration district 15, 16
RootsIreland 17, 23, 26
Rose's Act (1812) 20, 21
ScotlandsPeople 16, 23, 24, 26
TheGenealogist 16, 22, 25
transcripts 22
UKBMD 16
Black Book, The 53
Bonnie Prince Charlie 8
Booth, Charles 45
Borders 23
boundaries 22, 43, 51
brick walls 11

British army 55
British History Online 46

C

Canada 53
Canterbury 39
catalogues 56, 64
censuses 9, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 54, 60, 63
 Ancestry 32, 33
 FamilySearch 32
 fertility questions 31
 Findmypast 32, 33
 FreeCEN 32
 Genes Reunited 32
 Ireland 33
 MyHeritage 32, 33
 National Records of Scotland 33
 Old Age Pension 33
 ScotlandsPeople 33
 TheGenealogist 32, 33
census substitutes
 Ancestry 35
 FamilyRelatives 35
 Findmypast 36
 Historical Directories 35
 Internet Archive 35
 phone books 35
 post office directories 34, 35, 56
 TheGenealogist 35
Church of England 19, 20, 25, 39
Church of Ireland 21, 25, 42
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 33
Church of Scotland 20, 21, 25, 46
churchwardens 24
civil service 55
coastlines 46
coat of arms 38
comainn eachdraidh 52
Commonwealth gap 19
Congregationalists 25
constables 24
county record offices 22, 30, 40, 55, 56
Crown Dependencies 63
 Alderney 63
 Channel Islands 32, 45, 63, 64
 Guernsey 63
 Isle of Man 32, 39, 63
 Jersey 63
 Sark 63
 Tynwald 63
Culloden 8
Cyndi's List 9

D

DNA 61
 AncestryDNA 62
 autosomal DNA 62
 FamilyTreeDNA 62
 mitochondrial DNA 61
 Y-chromosome DNA 61
Dún Laoghaire 53

E

Edinburgh 34
emancipation 21
England 15, 18, 21, 25, 28, 30, 37, 39, 63

F

family group record 10
family historians 30
family history centres 24
family history societies 26, 28, 58
 Association of Family History Societies of
 Wales 52
 Catholic Family History Society 54
 Channel Islands Family History Society 64
 Council of Irish Genealogical Organisations
 53
 Families in British India Society 54
 Federation of Family History Societies 28, 51
 Genealogical Society of Ireland 53
 Glasgow & West of Scotland Family History
 Society 51
 Irish Family History Foundation 53
 Isle of Man Family History Society 63
 North of Ireland Family History Society 29,
 53
 Romany and Traveller Family History Society
 54
 RootsIreland 53
 Scottish Association of Family History
 Societies 28, 52
 Scottish Genealogy Society 29, 51, 53
 Soci t  Jersiaise 64
 Society of Genealogists 50, 53
 special interest groups 54
FamilySearch 24, 42
family search sheet 10
family tree
 Ancestral Atlas 60
 Ancestry 59
 Genes Reunited 59
 Lost Cousins 59
 MyHeritage 59

TheGenealogist 59
TreeView 59
family tree software
Family Tree Maker 10
Heredis 10
Legacy 10
Reunion 10
RootsMagic 10
TreeView 10
First World War 48, 49

G

gadgets 11
cameras 11
Flip-Pal 11
iPad 11
scanners 11
tablets 11
Gaelic 13, 31, 33, 63
genealogical bewilderment 5
GENfair 53
GENUKI 9, 26, 64
Glasgow 13, 16, 34
Global Genealogy 53
Gould Genealogy & History 53
Grenham, John 23

H

Hastings 8
Hawick 16
Henry VIII 19
heritors 25
historical societies
Western Front Association 54
Histpop 32

I

Inverness 16
Ireland 15, 17, 18, 19, 29, 31, 32, 38, 42, 53
Irish Civil War 19, 33, 42
Irish Famine 43

J

Jews 20, 25
JSTOR 53

K

Kent, Henry 34
Kilmarnock 16
kirk session registers 21

L

Lennon, Mary 36
libraries 56
British Library 56
Dr Williams' Library 25
Durham University Library 40
Linen Hall Library 56
National Library of Ireland 23, 56
National Library of Scotland 35, 44, 46, 56
National Library of Wales 40, 55, 56
Representative Church Body Library 24
local history societies
British Association for Local History 54
Federation for Ulster Local Studies Limited 54
Federation of Local History Societies 54
London 20, 25, 31, 34, 35, 39, 45, 53, 56
Londonderry 33, 42
London Gazette 49

M

maps and gazetteers
aerial photography 44
Ask About Ireland 44, 46
Baedeker's Old Guide Books 45
Gazetteer of British Place Names 46
gazetteers 43, 46, 47, 56
GENMAPS 45, 64
Google Books 46
Google Maps 28, 43
Griffith's Valuation 44
Internet Archive 46
Mapseeker 45
Ordnance Survey 44
Ordnance Survey Memoirs 46
Streetmap 43
Street View 28, 43, 60
membership 51, 53
Methodists 25
mistakes 12
monumental inscriptions 27, 28, 29, 53
Discover Ever After 29
From Ireland 29
History from Headstones 29
Ireland Genealogy Project Archives 29
Irish Graveyards Surveyors 29
memorial inscriptions 9
Scottish Monumental Inscriptions 29
museums
National Maritime Museum 46

N

Napoleonic Wars 30
National Burial Index 28
newspapers 9, 49
 British Newspaper Archive 49
 Irish Newspaper Archives 49
 Manx Newspapers 63
 Welsh Newspapers Online 49
Newtownabbey 53
non-conformist churches 25, 26
Norris, Dr Stuart Kingsley 51
Northern Ireland 15, 17, 29, 36, 42, 44, 53, 54,
 55, 56, 63

O

occupations
 agricultural labourers 13, 34, 47, 49, 50
 Ancestry 47, 48
 apprenticeships 48
 coalminers 50
 domestic servants 47, 50
 factory workers 47
 Findmypast 47
 Google Books 47
 Internet Archive 47
 landowners 34
 lawyers 50
 members of the judiciary 34
 merchants 34
 merchant seamen 48, 50
 miners 34
 ministers of the church 34
 nurses 47
 ploughmen 49
 postmen 47
 railway workers 47, 50
 soldiers 47
 TheGenealogist 47
 weavers 47
online parish clerks 24
oral history 8
overseers of the poor 24

P

Parish Chest 53
Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland 46
Penal Laws 21
Phillimore atlas and index of parish registers 22
Presbyterians 25
primary records 12
privacy 13

prognoplexia 5
publications 51, 53

Q

Quakers 20, 25, 26

R

RASCAL 56
Reformation 20, 38
registration district 43
Republic of Ireland 14, 17, 36, 42, 44, 46, 53,
 54, 56
Roman Catholics 19, 20, 21, 23, 25, 26
Royal Army Medical Corps 48
Royal Marines Labour Corps 48
Russian Orthodox Church 26

S

Scotland 16, 21, 23, 26, 28, 30, 33, 41, 55
ScotlandsPeople 55
ScotlandsPlaces 44, 55
Scottish Clearances 43
Scottish Documents 24
Second World War 48, 57
Sharp, John 51
Shetland 23
social networking 57, 58
 Alltop 58
 Ancestry 58
 avatars 59
 Blogger 57
 blogs 9, 57, 58
 British Genealogy 59
 Curious Fox 60
 Facebook 53, 57
 Findmypast 58
 First World War 59
 forums 58, 59
 GeneaBloggers 58
 Genealogy Forum UK 59
 Great War Forum 59
 Historypin 60
 message boards 58
 RootsChat 59
 Rootsweb 58
 TalkingScot 59
 Twitter 57
 Wordpress 57
 YouTube 57
Society of Friends 26

SOGCAT 53
spelling 12, 44
Stamp Act 19
Statistical Accounts of Scotland 46
stories 13, 47
subscription sites 9
 Ancestry 9, 54, 57
 FamilyRelatives 9
 Findmypast 9, 54, 57
 MyHeritage 9
 TheGenealogist 9, 55, 57

T

Topographical Dictionary of England 46
townlands 21

U

Ulster 19, 29, 36, 53
Ulster Historical Foundation 29, 46, 53
University College Dublin 44
University of Glasgow 49
University of Leicester 35

V

vestry 23, 24
Victoria County History 46

W

Wales 15, 18, 21, 25, 28, 30, 37, 39, 63
Wesleyan Methodist Metropolitan Registry 25
Wesleyans 25
Western Isles 23, 52
Who Do You Think You Are? 53, 59
Whyte, Donald 51

Wigtown 23
Wikipedia 57
William the Conqueror 8, 13
wills and testaments 37, 39, 40, 41, 42
 Ancestry 39, 41
 Archdeacons' Courts 39
 bona notabilia 39
 Calendars of Confirmations and Inventories
 41
 codicil 38
 confirmation 38, 41
 Consistory Courts 39
 copyhold land 37
 death duty registers 40
 executors 38
 FamilySearch 41
 Find a Will 41
 Findmypast 39
 freehold property 37
 grant of probate 38, 39
 heritable estate 37
 intestate 38, 41
 letters of administration 38
 moveable estate 38
 National Probate Calendar 41
 North East Inheritance 40
 Prerogative Courts 39
 primogeniture 37
 probate 38, 39, 40, 42
 Probate Service 40
 ScotlandsPeople 41
 testate 38, 41
 TheGenealogist 39
 wills 9, 21

Y

York 39

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British and Irish newspapers



The collage features several newspaper pages and digital interfaces. On the left, a page from 'The Times' is visible. In the center, there's a screenshot of 'The Newspaper Archive' website showing a historical newspaper page. Below that, another screenshot shows a digital newspaper page with the headline 'THE TIMES'. To the right, a page from 'The London Advertiser' is shown. The background is a light, textured surface.

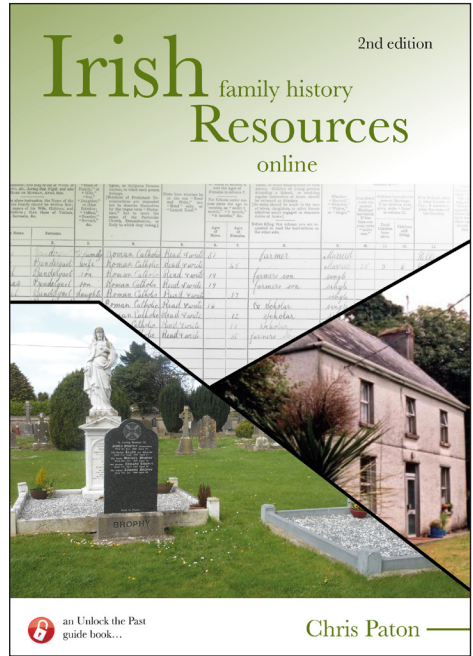
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2nd edition

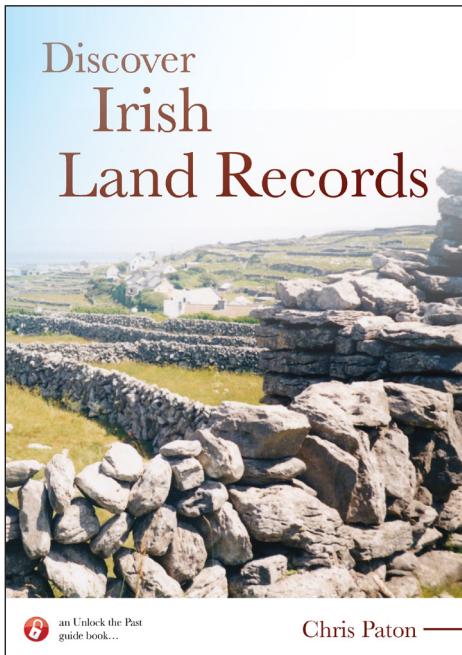


The cover features a large, detailed table of names and dates, likely a family tree or a list of records. Below the table, there's a photograph of a cemetery with a prominent white statue on a pedestal. To the right, a portion of a two-story brick house is visible. The background is a light green gradient.


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Discover Irish Land Records



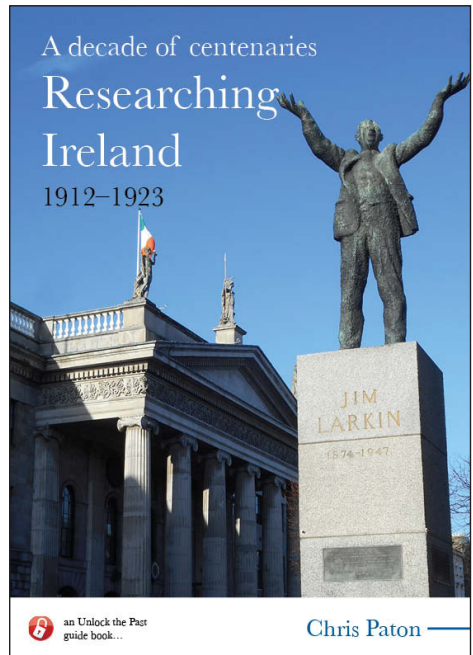
The image shows a scenic view of a rural Irish landscape. In the foreground, there are several stone walls made of large, rough-hewn stones. The middle ground shows rolling green hills with scattered houses and fields. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

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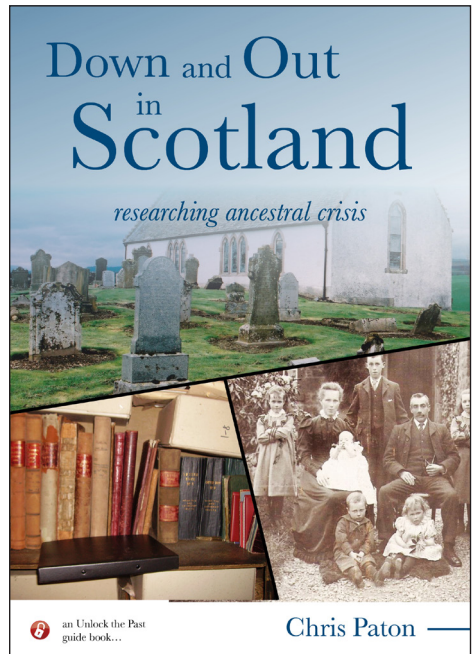
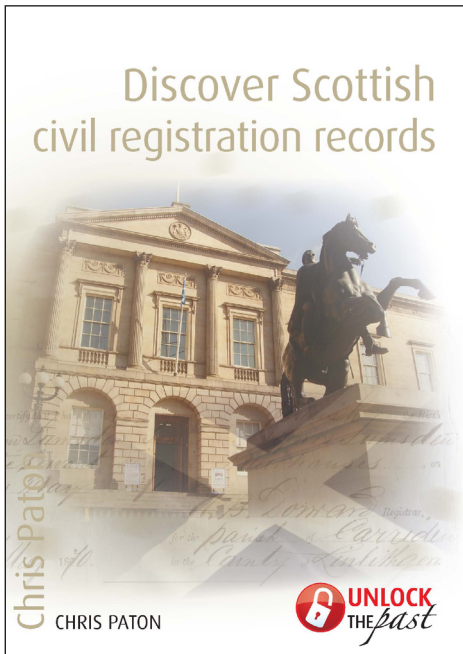
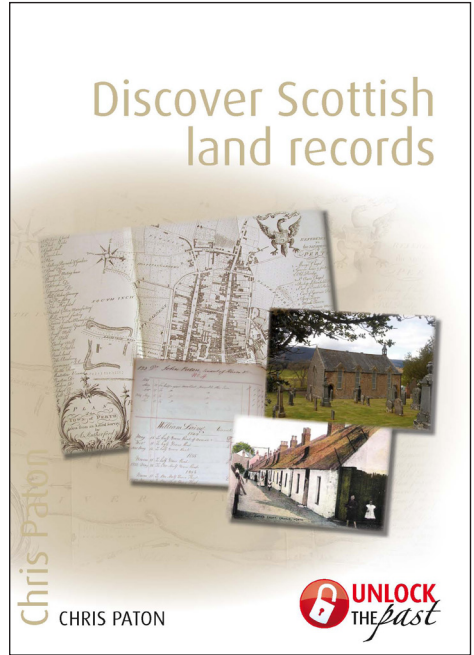
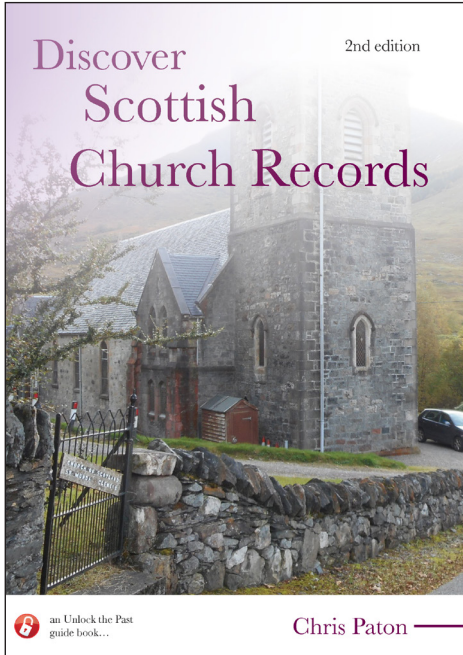
The image shows a large bronze statue of Jim Larkin, a prominent Irish labor leader, standing on a tall stone pedestal. The pedestal is inscribed with 'JIM LARKIN 1874-1947'. In the background, there's a classical building with columns and a pediment. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

 an Unlock the Past guide book...

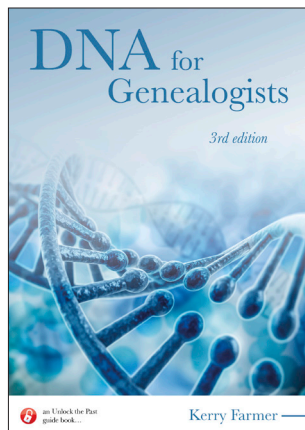
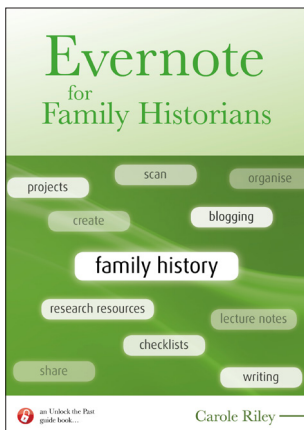
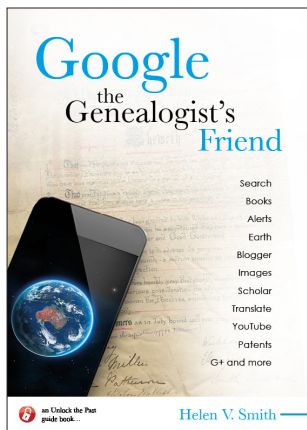
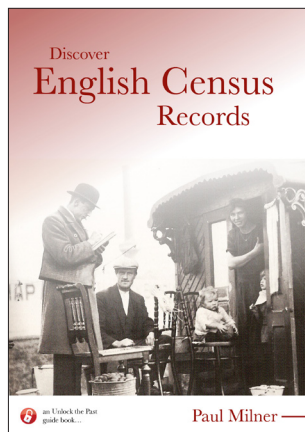
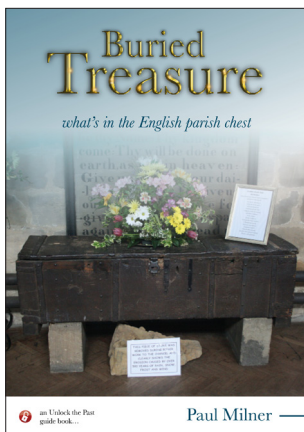
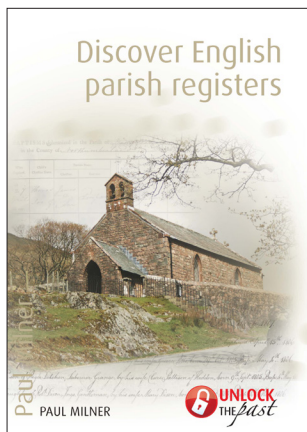
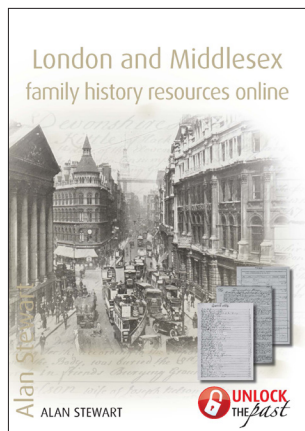
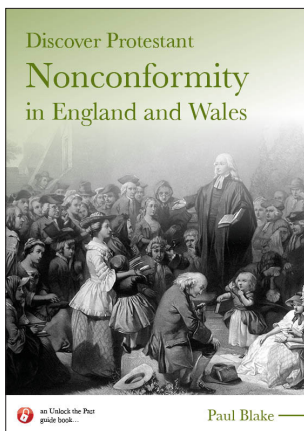
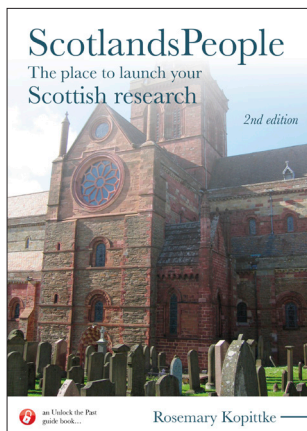
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You've decided that you want to trace your British and Irish family history, but have absolutely no idea where to start. If only there was a handy beginner's guide...?

In this latest Unlock the Past guide, genealogist Chris Paton takes you through the key record sets that will help you get underway with your family history research. He will introduce you to the family history societies and archives that can assist your efforts, and provide a little context to the ancestral landscape within which your ancestors once lived, and into which you will soon be immersed. Along the way he will point out some of the major differences in record types to be found in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and the Crown Dependencies of the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

In each chapter Chris also provides a steer towards further books within the Unlock the Past range which can further develop your skills as you become more experienced with the subject matter, making this an invaluable introduction.

Warning – once you get started with your family history research, you will never stop...!

