

## Useful Information

### Find My Past

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

### Ancestry

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

### The Genealogist

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

### Genes Reunited

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

### FreeBMD

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

### Lancashire BMD

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

### Cheshire BMD

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

### Lancashire Online Parish Clerks

[www.lan-opc.org.uk](http://www.lan-opc.org.uk)

### The National Archives

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

### National Archives of Scotland

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

### The National Archives of Ireland

[www.nationalarchives.ie](http://www.nationalarchives.ie)

### Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)

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

### Family Search

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

### Find a Will or Probate (Civil wills)

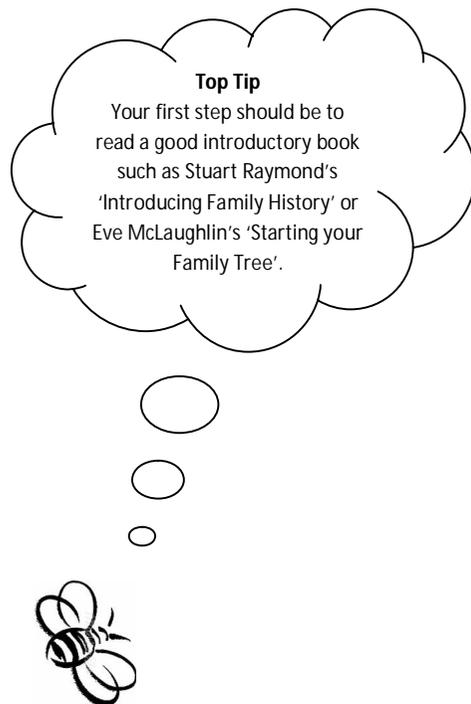
<https://www.gov.uk/search-will-probate>

For more detailed information

[www.mlfhs.org.uk/guides](http://www.mlfhs.org.uk/guides)

Archives +

Manchester & Lancashire Family History Society  
3rd Floor, Manchester Central Library,  
St. Peter's Square, Manchester, M2 5PD  
Tele: 0161- 234 1060 Email: [office@mlfhs.org.uk](mailto:office@mlfhs.org.uk)



#### Top Tip

Your first step should be to read a good introductory book such as Stuart Raymond's 'Introducing Family History' or Eve McLaughlin's 'Starting your Family Tree'.



## Beginning Your Family History

### Introduction

To trace your family history you will need to gather evidence, evaluate and confirm facts from different sources and then set down relationships which have been established beyond reasonable doubt. Your research should progress backwards in time from the present day and from the known into the unknown. The Internet has made it quicker and easier to access many of the sources needed but does not eliminate the need to learn how to interpret the information correctly.

### Family Sources

Your starting point will usually be what you know, however limited, about your family. You may have a wealth of information passed down by parents or grandparents or know little more than who your parents are. Whatever you know, you should begin to sketch a pedigree which you can develop as you learn more. Early on you should interview other family members, particularly the elderly whose memories might go back furthest, but don't ignore younger members who may know details which you had forgotten or never knew.

At the same time you should start to collect documentary evidence. Most families have documents such as birth, marriage and death certificates, baptismal certificates, WW2 identity cards, receipts, letters, photographs and much else. Originals or copies should be collected together and the information they provide added to your growing pedigree. Photographs can be a particular challenge and may need to be "hawked around" the family to identify the subjects.

Bear in mind that memories are often imperfect. Dates and relationships can become confused. Do not accept family stories at face value. They may

contain a germ of truth but sometimes "improve" in the telling. Be particularly cautious of reputed connections to famous families. As information is collected it is useful to feed it back to other family members since it may jog memories and produce further information.

### **Civil Records**

Births, Marriages & Deaths - The next step is to use records of civil registration of births, marriages & deaths to verify relationships in your pedigree and to work backwards towards earlier generations. You use information from a birth certificate to identify the parents' marriage and having obtained the marriage certificate use this information to identify the births of bride and groom. This is then repeated until a birth or marriage falls before civil registration was introduced in 1837. Death certificates are not usually needed to prove relationships but sometimes they can contain vital information so should not be ignored. Registration records are kept by local registrars but copies are held by the General Register Office in London. Indexes to these copies are available at local record offices and libraries. Several commercial and some free web sites offer access to indexes of both the local and national copy registers.

The Census - Once your family has been traced to people alive in the early 1900s you can use the census, which was held every 10 years from 1841 onwards. A 100 year closure applies, so only those up to 1911 are open to the public. Census returns give snapshots of households as constituted on census night. They are invaluable since they often show siblings of your direct ancestor and sometimes more distant relations such as grandparents or cousins. Details are given of each person's age, occupation and birthplace. Although microfilmed copies of the returns for a locality are usually available at record offices and local studies libraries it is now normal to access scanned copies online from one of a number of commercial web sites.

Wills - From 1858 onwards, wills were proved by civil probate registries. Do not assume that because your ancestors were not wealthy that they did not leave a will, though it is more likely if they had an estate worth bequeathing. Wills can provide evidence of relationships which may not be obvious from

other sources or can corroborate information obtained elsewhere. Indexes to wills are held by many local libraries and record offices but can be accessed on the internet.

### **Memorial Inscriptions (Gravestones)**

You may be fortunate enough to have records of your family literally "carved in stone". The value of memorials is that in addition to recording the date of death (and often of birth) of your ancestor, they will frequently record their spouse, children, parents and other family buried alongside. They may also record those buried elsewhere, possibly overseas. Memorials become common around 1600 but it is not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that they appear in quantity for the less wealthy. Many memorials have been recorded by family history societies. A number are beginning to appear on the internet.

### **Other Sources**

The sources discussed so far provide the backbone of records used to trace an English family but there is a vast number of other sources which can be used either to make up for weaknesses in the main records, resolve anomalies and ambiguities or to investigate particular aspects of your ancestors' lives. Examples include Poor Law documents, records of military, medical and clerical careers, school and university records. It is usually these sources which put flesh on the bones of a bare pedigree. Some material can be found on the internet but most are only accessible in record offices. Local and national newspapers are increasingly appearing online on both free and commercial web sites.

### **Conclusion**

Given reasonable luck you should be able to trace your family back at least to 1837 and possibly as far as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However far you get, you will find the search absorbing and may turn up some interesting and unusual details about your family.

If you are thinking of starting your family history then remember that older family members are not immortal and unless you record their knowledge, it may pass away with them.