



First Steps in Family History

The first steps in researching your family history are important, start by writing down your own family's history. Include as much detail as you can:

- Date of Birth
- Where you were christened
- Where you went to school
- When and where you went to university
- Where you worked
- When and where you got married
- When your children were born

By writing your life story you are setting down your family's history for the future.

Collect together all relevant documents you can find, birth certificates, death certificates, marriage certificates, change of name, educational qualifications, etc.

Start a filing system; you can use your PC to put together all your information. Write your notes up on word; create a family tree using word or one of the commercial family tree maker software. Use databases to store details of the people in your family tree so you can access and cross-reference them. Put together folders to hold your information together in one place. If you don't want to use a PC then put your information in document wallets, start a card system with one card per person and fill all the details you can in the card. You will be surprised how much information you will have already at your fingertips without searching for anymore.

Talk to your relatives, the older members of your family are a mine of information about the members of the family you do not remember or know little about. But remember to proceed with care; what we take easily in our stride now about family structure could be cause for concern when they were born or in their youth. Not every generation is as liberal minded as the 90' and the 00's have been. Every family could have a skeleton in the closet.

Once you have put together all the information you have at hand you will need to start visiting archives, libraries and record offices.

When talking to your relatives try to keep the questions the same, but don't turn down any additional information that you can obtain in the pursuit of those questions.

The most important questions are:

1. Where and when were you born?
2. What was your father's full name?
3. What was your mother's full name?
4. Where and when did your parents marry?
5. What work did your father do?
6. Did your mother work?
7. Did your father serve in the forces?
8. Do you have any photographs of your parents; can I borrow them to copy?
9. When did your parents die and where are they buried?
10. Do you have any family documents, such as birth, marriage or death certificates and can I copy them?
11. Do you have any brothers and sisters?
12. Where and when were they born?
13. Did any of them die young?
14. Did the family attend church, if so, which church?
15. Do you have any memories of other relatives?

Ten top tips for starting your research

1. [Work Backwards in time](#)

Start with yourself then your parents, then their parents and so on do not try to jump generations as you may find yourself making false assumptions.

2. [Note every clue that may help you later](#)

Do as much work as possible close to home using the telephone, the Internet, etc. Make sure you note down any lead that may help you later.

3. [Tackle the home front first](#)

Dig out all you own papers and any others you can find that belong to the family.

4. [Research more than one family name.](#)

You may make more progress with some ancestral names than others, which will keep your research interesting.

5. [Start drawing up family trees.](#)

This helps you to see the gaps in your research.

6. Find out what others have found out about your family

Other members of your family may have already started on the family tree and this could save you some time and give you some leads.

7. Interview as many relatives as you can

Ask them about all members of the family

8. Visit your local library and local reference library

Some libraries hold archives of family history materials as well as books on tracing your family tree. Write with queries to the local reference library to check CD data. See if they have the Big 'R' index at the library and a list people researching family names in the area.

9. Start exploring documents kept in record offices, libraries and archives

Start with birth, death and marriage certificates, parish registers, census returns, St Cath index.

10. Plan trips further afield

The Internet does not replace having to visit the areas your ancestors were from. You may have to plan visits to areas quite far away, perhaps make it part of a holiday

Suggested websites for advice on starting your family tree.

www.bbc.co.uk/history/yourhistory - gives advice on how to start your search

www.genuki.org.uk - has a section on how to use genuki and how to start your family history