

GUIDE TO TRACING YOUR FAMILY TREE

This a guide on how to get started and how to identify the main materials that you might look at. It is not fully comprehensive so there are other things to look at that depend on where you are searching. Throughout this guide you will find local record offices referred to; see their full titles and contacts here:

<https://hampshirearchivestrust.co.uk/about-hampshire-archives-trust/strategic-partners/>

When you start with this research you will find information in all sorts of places from family members, from documents, online and in books – **ALWAYS make a note about where you got the information**. It's hard to back track but easy to note when you find it! Indeed, make a note of where you have searched, even if you don't find anything useful, so that you don't retrace your steps unnecessarily.

GETTING STARTED AND HOW TO RECORD WHAT YOU FIND

- Download a free family history tree template from the web.
- Ask family members what they know: get them to name people, their approximate date of birth marriage and death, religion, occupations and where they were born or died. **ALWAYS** check this out as people's memories can be wrong even with names! For example, was Aunt Kitty really Catherine, Katherine, or Kathleen; was this her second name or a nickname, etc.? Ask to see family photographs, diaries, letters, and other objects too.
- Ask if anyone in the family has already done a tree. If so, you can check it out and build on it.
- Decide how wide your family tree is going to be, just immediate family or wider?

WHAT'S NEXT?

- In England and Wales, all births, marriages, and deaths since 1837 have been recorded. There is a free online resource available, but it is not complete (<https://www.freebmd.org.uk/>) even so if your ancestor is on it, it's an excellent free start.
- Birth and marriage records are especially useful in that they contain information on the people who are the subjects of the documents as well. Birth certificates usually name both parents, while marriage certificates can name occupations, the bride and groom's fathers' names and occupations, as well as witnesses who were usually friends and family.
- Official registrations of birth, marriage and death are available either by buying a certificate or through one of the two main online subscription sites: FindMyPast <https://www.findmypast.co.uk> or Ancestry <https://www.ancestry.co.uk> Both carry some information for free and offer a free 14 day trial. However, this can be expensive. A cheaper alternative could be to take the reference numbers you find here and put them into the GRO (General Register Office) website: <https://www.gov.uk/general-register-office>
- Look for wills too. Bear in mind that the very poorest would not make a will and the very richest often used other methods to bequeath their inheritance. All kinds of middling people, though, made wills. Take a look at this guide: <https://www.familyhistory.co.uk/wills-probate-archive-records/>
- Another valuable source is census records. The census records by address the people living at the household and their relationship to one another, it also lists occupation, age and where born – essential for tracing people who moved around. The census is done every 10 years starting in 1801 but only include names from 1841. There is a 100-year closure on them so, at the time of writing, only 1841-1921 can be accessed. Both the Ancestry and Find My Past sites listed above offer a search of the census just using a name, although some filtering to date and place can make your search more targeted. Many main reference libraries let you access the records for free, only charging for print outs – but check before you visit. (The recently released 1921 Census is currently only available pay per download online - not within any subscription - or at three sites across England. The closest to Hampshire is at The National Archives at Kew). There is a useful guide to census records on the Family Tree website: <https://www.family-tree.co.uk>

- The 1939 Register was a kind of Census taken at the outbreak of the Second World War. It is available on Ancestry and FindMyPast. It contains similar information to the census although it does not have details of serving military personnel and people who are thought to be still living today are obscured.
- One of your starter questions was about religion. If the family were Catholic, Quaker or other kind of non-conformist, then you will need to look at the records for these churches and that is usually in the local record office for where your family were living.
- If the family were Church of England, then the vast majority of baptisms (usually within weeks but sometimes years of birth), marriages, and burials were recorded in 'Parish Registers' and will be in the local record office. For Hampshire that is Hampshire Record Office, Portsmouth History Centre, or Southampton Record Office. These records are similar to birth, marriage, and death records with the advantage of going much further back – right back to 1537 if you are very lucky!
- Family Search is a brilliant way to access information and records. Their website (<https://www.familysearch.org>) tells you about many different types of records and how to use them, as well as what records survive for different places. They have digitised many themselves and have their own libraries where you can access them (as well as some online).

ADVANCED SEARCHING OR FILLING OUT THE BACKGROUND

At any point, you can trace more about any individual you find. Here are some examples:

- Military service. Again, this is usually via FindMyPast (<https://www.findmypast.co.uk>) or Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.co.uk>) but also cenotaphs, and printed books listing war dead, or the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. (* Please note that Ancestry are in the process of moving their military records to a separate website called "Fold3" (www.fold3.com) and so you may need to look there too). Search for WW1 medals, or WW2 medals or other campaigns. There are a number of useful searchable sites that will come up. For the Commonwealth War Grave Commission, see <https://www.cwgc.org>. See also the published Navy Lists and Army Lists.
- Occupations like merchant seamen can be traceable. The Central Index of merchant seamen 1918-c.1941 is arranged by name and covers all commonwealth sailors working on merchant ships. Go to Southampton Record Office or search via <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/merchant-seamen-serving-since-1918/>. The latter goes on to a later date.
- Other occupations, especially those requiring professional qualifications like clergymen, have their own records too. For clergymen, look at Crockford's Clerical Directory, which was started in 1858. Before that, alumni lists were published by Oxford and Cambridge universities from about 1500. These were compiled respectively by Foster (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alumni_Oxonenses) and Venn (<https://venn.lib.cam.ac.uk/>). There are searchable databases with links from the https links above.
- Occupations like game keepers and publicans required a licence – see local quarter sessions – and the latter often appeared for short measures in the prosecution records, or where there was a fight in the pub, etc.
- Prosecutions for crimes can appear in court records and newspapers, but you will need dates (even if only rough dates) to search. Historical newspapers can usually be found in local studies libraries/local record offices as well as digitised through the British Newspaper Archive (which can also be accessed through an advanced FindMyPast subscription).
- Check out the places your ancestors lived. Most record offices or local history libraries or local history societies have collections of postcards or images. Maps are also a great source, from 1867-1933 (and a few later years in some areas) every area of England and Wales was mapped in a large-scale map series 1:2500 (or 25") by the Ordnance Survey and, from 1953, in a 1:500 (or 50-inch series) – most record offices and local reference libraries will have them for you to see. For the 25", expect editions for 1867, 1897, 1910, 1933 (some areas have more). From these, you can see enough detail to build up a picture of the development of the area where the house is, or the village, or area of a town.

Lots of advanced searching is possible but ask at your local history reference library or record office, as much of this will depend on what you want to find out and where you are asking about.

You may find Hampshire Family History Society has useful links and tips <https://www.hgs-familyhistory.com> and the relevant local history society may provide useful background information too. If your ancestors came from other areas, other family history societies are available too. English ones are listed on the Family History Federation website: <https://www.familyhistoryfederation.com/>

Enjoy the detective work, and good hunting!