

Researching your Family History

Many people have asked how to get started and to use the various on-line resources that are available. Where to start depends a great deal on what information you have to hand already.

The major hurdle is to get back to the 1921 census, then you will be able to use census information to refine your searches, though the release of the 1939 Register has made it easier, unfortunately only paid for access is currently available, but it is possible sometimes to access from your local library.

For most people it is fairly easy to get back to 1921, but I will cover the problems here as well for those people who have very little information. Unfortunately getting back to 1921 may cost you some money, even if you do it all yourself there will be the cost of certificates to verify your findings, prior to that there is a good chance that you can get the information you need on line without charge, though again depending on how thorough you wish to be there will be the cost of certificates.

There are two ways at looking at family history research, if you are doing it just for a little fun you may not be so concerned out the validity of your findings, but as you do more research it is quite likely you will become more serious about the provenance of your data so I suggest from the very start that as much as possible you document the source of your data and where possible keep copies of it. This particularly applies where it comes from websites sources, particularly small websites run by individuals, the website may not be there when you return to it in a few years' time.

Not all records are free of course, but there are many web sites out there from large to small containing a whole host of data, all you have to do is to find it.

If only using free information, then you can generally find the following:

- Birth/Marriage/Death registration (note registration not actual birth) to the nearest quarter.
- Family details and approximate ages from the 1881 census.
- Some but not all Baptisms, Marriages and Burials before the early 1900's

It can of course be invaluable to join the local history society of the area you are looking in and possible even a local one. Also join the email lists for that area or for the types of searches you are doing, there are lists for most counties as well as more specialised ones.

Website information

There are a number of websites that can be used for information, some are free some are not.

The main ones to get started are

<https://www.freebmd.org.uk/> this has transcripts of Births Marriages and Deaths, it is a totally free website, the only caution is that not all years may have been transcribed, most of the 1800's have been done but you would need to check if you are using it for the later 1900's , the coverage charts

can be found at <https://www.freebmd.org.uk/progress.shtml> . At the time of writing, you will find most entries transcribed from July 1837 to 1983 but it tails off after that, but it is an ongoing project.

<https://www.familysearch.org/> This is the home of the IGI (International Genealogical Index) and contains many records. It is a good place to start but many records may not be validated and some are just wishful thinking, make sure you check the source of the record. This is also a totally free website but you need to register to use it but it is free to do so. Some of their records are only available if you are accessing from one of their library centres, there are several in the UK and details can be found on their website.

<https://www.gro.gov.uk> You will need to register but this is free. You can search for Births (to 2021) and Deaths (to 2021) but not marriages which are not yet on line. This is also the place to order certificates if you want copies. Full certificates are £11 if ordered on line with a reference and £14 if no reference is supplied, more expensive if ordered by phone, but there is also a service where you can get an electronic copy of a certificate emailed to you for £7, though they have no legal value, they are a copy of the same certificate you would get if you paid the full price. Note this is for England and Wales, for Scotland use <https://www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk/> basic listings showing if names are in the register are free but you will have to pay for detailed information, this is £1.50 if viewed on line, or £12 plus postage if you order an actual certificate.

<https://www.freecen.org.uk/> This is a database of census information, although there are over 45 million entries it is by no means complete. Check the 'database coverage' link on the main page to see how well your area is covered for each year. It covers all census years from 1841 to 1911 but may or may not cover the area you are looking at.

<https://www.freereg.org.uk> This is a database of Parish Records with over 56 million records covering Baptisms, Marriages and Burials. Coverage can be patchy in some areas.

<https://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/group/1881uki> This is the Ancestry website but specifically the 1881 census which is free access. Ancestry makes some areas free of charge though the majority of the site is by subscription only. Watch out for special offers where they open up certain parts of the site for free access, typically on holiday weekends. In some cases, you can get basic information free but details need a subscription.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> . The National Archives website, they have an index of over 9 million records held by the National Archives and by more than 2500 archives across the country. This will in general link to the catalogues for the individual archive, each county in UK has one.

<https://one-name.org/> Guild of One-Name studies, is useful for looking up specific names, collators will have consolidated all known information on a surname into a single record. Some information is free, but you will have to join and register to make full use of the facilities, membership is about £18 a year.

<https://mailinglists.rootsweb.com/listindexes/> Used to run various mailing lists on many different topics, but these lists closed in 2018 though the old messages still remain accessible and contain quite a lot of information. In some cases the last messages on the list tell you where the list has moved to as many lists moved to new locations when Rootsweb closed down the facility.

For a printable booklet to keep a record of your research

<https://www.familyhistoryfederation.com/resources/wiki/my-family-tree-booklet-v2.pdf>

For a list of other useful sites visit www.cumbriaffhs.com or www.ffhs.org.uk

Where to start

So, let's get down to the basics of where to start, first it is recommended that you get a program to let you keep all the data you find, there are many around and there are some free ones, but the free ones are basically a reduced function version of programs for sale, for example they will often not print charts or have other advanced features, this is to encourage you to buy them, but they are good for a start. You can try ANCESTRAL QUEST <https://www.ancquest.com/index.htm> or LEGACY FAMILY TREE <https://legacyfamilytree.com/> or ROOTS MAGIC <https://rootsmagic.co.uk/>.

Though there is no reason you can not at least start off using hand written notes and some example forms are included in this pack. They can be downloaded and printed from the www.cumbriafhs.com website or you can photocopy them.

If you are an Ancestry subscriber it can be worth looking at Family Tree Maker, this is now maintained by Mackiev <https://www.mackiev.com/ftm> though it was originally an Ancestry product, it does have links to your main Ancestry account which will prompt you with tips about your family members or potential family members. It now also links to Familysearch.com and will provide tips from there as well.

But be careful as each of these sites also has versions for sale and you sometimes have to look carefully to find the free one. All of them allow the export of GEDCOM files so at a later date you can transfer to another program if you wish without losing too much basic information.

GEDCOM is just a plain text format file with all your data identified by labels so that it can be exported from and imported into any other program, all programs will normally support GEDCOM, but some may require a specific version, as it has gone through many revisions, when importing a GEDCOM to your program, never forget to back up the data file before you do it, in case of corruption and I would recommend you import the GEDCOM to a separate database until you are sure it is importing OK, before importing it into your real database.

While the programs are excellent for keeping your data it can be a bit confusing at first, especially when researching new branches, as to what exact relationships are, a suggestion is to use a large board and write names and details on different coloured post it notes (maybe pink for female and blue for male), you can then move these around the board until you sort out relationships and then transcribe the details to your program. It can also be useful to keep record sheets, to assist in this you can use the forms at the end of this article.

Family history is a bit like a jigsaw puzzle, you will have a lot of pieces but working out exactly where they fit can often be tricky.

Now you have your program or record sheets ready you can start to put in the data, why not start with yourself and then you can work your way backwards and as far to each side as you care to research. Assuming you have no data other than your own, you will need to carry out the following process. You can of course start as far down this list as you wish if you have more information to hand.

Suggested methods

First talk to all your living relatives and see what you can get from them, in many cases birth, marriage and death certificates may be hanging around in a drawer somewhere or you will be at least able to get approximate dates for major events. Look for School Certificates, Forces Service Records, National Health Cards, Address Books, anything that can help you to pin down a date and event and make notes of all these details and if the documents are not yours then make copies. The golden rule of research is never throw anything away, keep copies of anything that is not yours and make a note on it where it came from. Grandma may still have a biscuit tin full of everything you need to get started.

- Obtain your own birth certificate and extract your parents' names.
- If you do not have your parents birth dates then you will need to work back from their marriage certificate, as a rule of thumb people generally get married in their 20's so look back 20 to 30 years from the marriage, if you don't find anything then expand your search.
- If they are deceased, then work back from their death certificates which in all probability will have an age at death on it, though never take it as gospel, they are known to be wrong as no proof of age is required when registering a death.
- Once you have found your parents birth dates then you must repeat this process with your grandparents. In most cases this will get you back to the 1939 Register or the 1921 Census, in some cases you may have to go through a further generation to get there.
- For further details on Births Marriage and Death certificates and registration, go to the FreeBMD Website or the GRO Website. Bear in mind registration only started in July 1837 and possibly had people missing until after 1875. Note in Scotland registration did not start until 1855.
- By now you should have people who were born prior to 1921 and if lucky before 1881 which is the next main census that is freely available on line.
- Censuses will essentially take you back to around 1841 and can be used in conjunction with BMD's to establish your tree. There are Censuses prior to 1841 but these only cover some areas and are not full country Censuses. 1841 was the first national Census.
- Prior to 1837 you have to start using Parish Records. In general, these records can be available and go back to the 1500's, though there are some gaps. Many of these records have been transcribed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and are freely available on line. This is the International Genealogical Index referred to as the IGI. Note that though registration of Births Marriages and Deaths was introduced by law in July 1837 some events may not be recorded as it relied on the registrar finding out and making the entry and many people were wary of registration, it was not until 1875 that registration became compulsory. After 1853 there was hesitation to register births because of the compulsory vaccinations that came in during that year.
- Once you have exhausted BMD, Parish Records and the IGI you will have to fall back on other information that is available and may contain information on your families. You should be getting quite expert by the time you have reached this point. You will now have to possibly look at wills, manorial records and if lucky family trees that have already been done, there are many websites around from personal family related ones, through to military and railway sites which can have personal details of staff.

- Getting back further than the start of parish records in 1538 can be extremely difficult , unless you are fortunate enough to have connections to families that have built up personal family trees over the ages. You will need to check what records are available at the archives for the area you are looking at. Many records are catalogued, though not all will be fully indexed so it may require some manual effort to go through the records. The starting place will be the Access to Archives website of the National Archives <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> though can also check if the archives for the areas you are interested in have an on-line catalogue.

The above assumes you will have some kind of access to the census, if you do not have this then you have to rely on Births Marriages and Deaths until you can get back to the 1881 census. It can be slightly trickier to do and establish who is in the family, but it can be done. The advantage of the census is that it provides details of family groups which can help determine which family is yours.

Time Line

1538 - Introduction of parish records by Thomas Cromwell

1598 - Introduction of bound volumes for records

1662 - Act of Uniformism (All priests must adhere to Church of England Doctrines)

1689 - The Toleration Act (Gives more freedom to non-conformists)

1754 - Marriage act of 1753 required all marriages to be in a separate ledger and for the first time introduced standard printed form. This required the recording of the parish of residence, names of two witnesses and whether the marriage was by licence or by banns.

1778 - Catholic Relief Act.

1786 - Some dioceses introduced the recording of the mother's maiden name on each baptismal entry, this was discontinued following the Parochial Registers Act of 1812

1813 - From 1813 baptisms and burials must be in separate registers, as marriages had been separated since 1754 all events were now in separate registers with the exception that banns in some cases were still in the marriage registers.

1823 - The Marriage Act of 1823 now required banns to be in a separate register.

1837 - The introduction of the Marriage Act of 1836 and the Births and Deaths Registration Act of 1836 which established civil registration in England and Wales on 1 July 1837. Scotland introduced registration from 1st January 1855 and in general their registration contains more information than the England and Wales one.

1853 - Closing of urban churchyards started and burials transferred to the local authority cemeteries.

Important Notes

It is very useful to join a local family history group and attend meetings, even if you are not researching in that area, you can make contacts who can help you with ways to research.

Never take information on the web as definite. Always try and go back to the source of that information and verify it. For example, the IGI has different kinds of records, some of which can be traced back to official records such as Bishops Transcripts, some however is from personal family trees with no validation and may or may not be accurate.

Keep a record of all research, even hand written notes should be kept so you can refer back to them and make a note, or better still a printed copy of any website you obtain information from. Websites do come and go and may not be there when you want to refer back to them. Though sometimes you can recover old websites no longer there from the internet archive <http://archive.org/web/web.php>

Ideally develop a formal method of citation of sources, see [https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Cite_Your_Sources_\(Source_Footnotes\)](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Cite_Your_Sources_(Source_Footnotes)) for examples, though many of the computer programs do have facilities for citing your sources.

All Counties have record offices, but due to cut backs they may have limited opening times or you may have to book in advance for certain facilities, check with them before going, especially if you are making a long trip to get there. Most will respond to simple requests for information, but if it is a job likely to require more than a few minutes of work expect to have to pay research charges.

It is very difficult to positively prove relationships, especially as you go back more in time. In many cases it is a case of proving people can not be related rather than proving they are and it can be a bit of a puzzle working out details where there are related families in one area who reuse the same names.

When keeping documents of any kind keep them in acid free files and folders to prevent them fading or discolouring over time. Whilst you can get them from specialist shops, they can be a lot cheaper on E-Bay or Amazon especially if you get together with someone to buy larger quantities.

If keeping information in electronic format note that normal CD/DVD's have a limited life which can be as little as 3 to 5 years, similarly memory sticks may lose information in the same sort of time frame if not used. For long term storage use M-Discs or other Archive quality disks, either CD or DVD which have a life of hundreds of years, though you may need a special disk writer, many newer computers are compatible.

When you get large family trees and want to print them, you can print them yourself and tape the parts together, but many local computer shops will print large format (A3 or A2) at reasonable prices, branches of Ryman for example charge around £2 for an A3 colour print.

Reference Sheet for the _____ Family

<p>_____</p> <p>Full name of husband</p> <p>_____</p> <p>His father</p> <p>_____</p> <p>His mother with maiden name</p>	<p>Birth date</p> <p>Birth place</p> <p>Source</p> <hr/> <p>Death date</p> <p>Death place</p> <p>Burial place</p> <p>Source</p>
<p>_____</p> <p>Full maiden name of wife</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Her father</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Her mother with maiden name</p>	<p>Birth date</p> <p>Birth place</p> <p>Source</p> <hr/> <p>Death date</p> <p>Death place</p> <p>Burial place</p> <p>Source</p>

<p>Other Spouses</p> <p>Source</p>		<p>Marriage date, place, etc.</p> <p>Source</p>	
Children of this marriage	Birth date & place	Death date, place & burial place	Marriage date, place & spouse

Any additional children continue overleaf.

Source	Sources (Documentation)

Other Information

INDIVIDUAL WORK SHEET

Full Name <p style="text-align: center;">First, middle, last, nickname, maiden name</p>
Spelling Variants of Surname
Date and Place of Birth <p style="text-align: center;">If exact date of birth is unknown; give approximate five-year range</p>
Sources (Documentation)
Physical Description
Marital Status <p style="text-align: center;">Details of Spouse or ex-Spouse, Marriage Place and Date etc.</p>
Occupations
Employers <p style="text-align: center;">Include any information known about employment</p>
Location <p style="text-align: center;">Any address or country or other location information e.g. from census etc.</p>
Prior Telephone Numbers
Schooling <p style="text-align: center;">School, University or any other information</p>
Religion
Children: All Information of children
Other Notes:

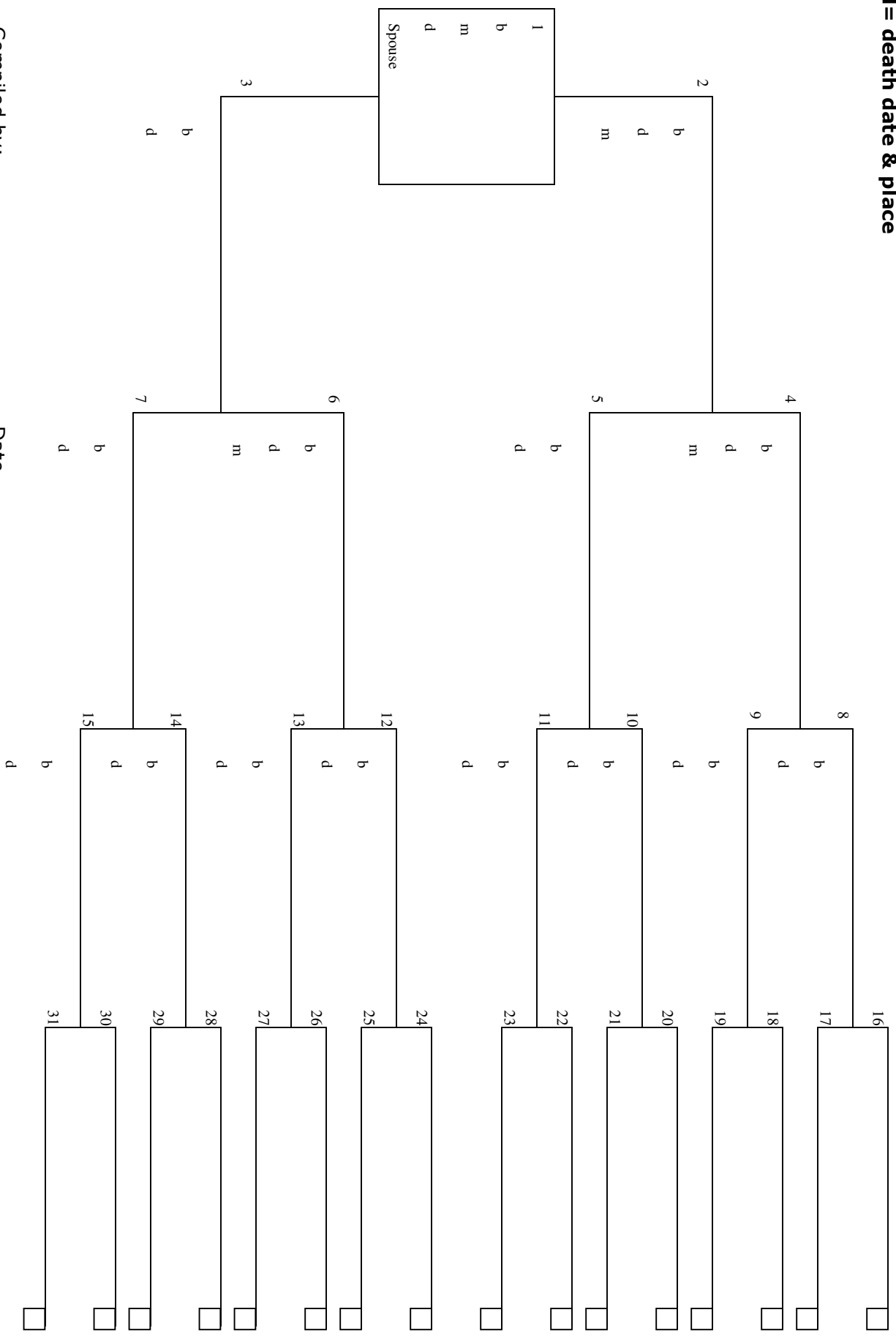
Completed by _____ date _____

Ancestor Chart Number _____

Number 1 on this chart is the same as number _____ on chart number _____

Continued on
Chart Number

b = birth date & place
m = marriage date & place
d = death date & place



Compiled by: _____ Date _____