Research Guides

Introduction to Family History
Step 1. Prepare yourself!

- Read through some of the magazines and publications written about Family History. You can borrow these from your local library.
- Decide if you are going to use a computer package or notebook and pen.
- Learn how to plan, carry out your research and how to use and store your findings.
- Check out your nearest Family History Society, has your family been researched before?
- Decide which line of the family you want to trace.

Step 2. Ask the family!

- What can they remember? Who married whom? Where did they marry? Where were the children christened?
- Have they any surviving birth, marriage and death certificates?
- Have they any old documents that the family have kept over the years such as wills, funeral cards and photos?

Step 3. What have you got?

Check all of the documents that you have collected for useful information.

A full birth certificate will give you:

- When and where the child was born.
- The names of both parents.
- The father’s occupation.
- The former name of the child’s mother.

Using this information will help you to trace the parents’ marriage.

A marriage certificate will give you:

- The date and place of the marriage.
- Ages, occupations of the bride and groom and where they were living.
- When they married.
- The names and occupations of their fathers.

By using certificates it is possible to trace your family back to 1837. Remember that registration of births was not completely enforced until the middle of the 1870s. Indexes to Civil Registration can be found in County Record Offices and some libraries so do ask.

To get copies of certificates you will need to apply to the local registrar or to the General Registry Office.

www.worcestershire.gov.uk/waas
Step 4. Where to look next.

The following sources may be difficult to read but the more practise you have the easier it becomes.

Census

Censuses of the population have been taken every 10 years since 1801, but names for individuals are only given from 1841.

The Census returns are government records and the originals are held in London but copies of local Censuses can be found in County Record Offices and some libraries. These are very useful records for the family historian. They give each household giving personal details of name, age, occupation, place of birth and relationship to each other.

Some Census returns have been indexed either locally or on the Internet and you should ask which indexes may be available.

Census returns are not accessible to the public for 100 years, so the 1911 Census is now the latest available.

Parish Registers

Parish Registers of baptisms, marriages and burials generally began around 1538. Unlike civil registrations, which note all births, marriages and deaths, parish registers are lists of those who were baptised, married or buried in an Anglican parish church. The early registers were sometimes written in Latin and usually all of the events would be registered together. After 1754, marriages were registered separately and in 1813 burials and baptisms had their own registers and these later registers give very useful information.

Non-Conformist Records

These records should not be overlooked. Most were sent to London in 1837 but copies on microfilm of some registers are to be found in County Record Offices. It is worth remembering that between 1754 and 1837 apart from Jews and Quakers, everyone was obliged to marry in the Anglican parish church.

Microfilmed copies of most non-conformist records before 1837 are held at the Family Records Centre.

Wills and Probate Records

These are a good source for family historians as they can reveal information about family members and their relationship to the deceased. Inventories of those who died without making a will can show their possessions and can describe what was left in each room. Inventories are more likely to be found in the 16th, 17th & 18th centuries, becoming more scarce after this.
Trade directories

These began to be published in the 18th century and list private residents and tradesmen for each town and village in the county. Although not everyone in the town or village would have been included in these lists, they give a very good description of the area and include information about schools, churches and public buildings around at that time.

Directories can be found in County Record Offices and libraries.

Step 5. The Internet

A few words about websites!

The Internet has very many genealogical websites and the information available for family historians is enormous. However, a great number of these websites are not complete and it is always advisable to check the coverage given for the information they contain.

Some useful free websites:-

http://www.familysearch.org/
http://www.freecen.com/
http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/
http://www.direct.gov.uk/gro

Finally, www.ancestry.co.uk is a major website for family historians. The England and Wales census, 1841-1911, is available on here. At the Hive you can search this site for free, using a Worcestershire library card.

Remember that all information taken from the Internet should be confirmed by looking at original documents.

A selection of useful books that you can find in the local studies library:

- Interviewing Elderly Relatives by Eve McLaughlin, 1999
- Journeys in Family History by David Hey, 2004
- Writing up your Family History, a practical guide by Deborah Cass, 2004
- Ancestral Trails by Mark D. Herber, 2000
- Making sense of the Census by Edward Higgs PRO guide, 1988
- Using Birth, Marriage and Death records a pocket guide by the Public Record Office 2000.