

# Genealogy - How You Begin

## How You Begin:

Family history can be an extremely interesting and absorbing hobby. However, if not tackled in a methodical way, it can also become very frustrating and even expensive.

To avoid such pitfalls it is important to go through this time honoured list of preliminaries.

- 1) Note the names of your close family and draw a rough family tree, starting with yourself at the bottom. If you are only able to go back as far as your grandparents, you are doing alright, particularly if you can fill in most or all of the birth, marriage and death (BMD) dates. A great many people will not be able to get this far back at first so, if you are one of them, don't let it bother you, for some don't even know the names of one or both of their parents. This is where Family History UK can help you get started.
- 2) Write down the names of all older relatives who are still left in the family; such relatives can be a mine of information. They may have BMD certificates, in which case, begging copies of these will save you time and money. Perhaps they will also have family bibles containing family history information going back many years, or photo albums or other documents that could help. You may find a relative has already started researching part of your family tree and will be willing to share this information with you. It will pay to contact them, either in person or by phone or letter, as soon as possible. Once a person has died, then you lose a valuable link with the past. Don't be afraid to ask whether you may use a tape recorder; conversations can often be referred back to in years to come, when much of the dialogue will become more relevant. See our list of interview questions to help you with this task.
- 3) Look in telephone directories for other possible family contacts; this is particularly important if you have an unusual surname. If you are a Smith, Jones, Brown or have a similarly common name, this is less likely to be worthwhile, unless you are sure that you know that certain people have connections with your own particular lines.
- 4) Visit your local library and see if they have a selection of books on how to trace your family tree. Eventually, it will pay to purchase a good "Howto" book of your own but, for a start, read as many of the ones in the library as you can. Whilst at the library, ask if they have any copies of the Genealogical Research Directory (GRD). This is an annually produced book into which people insert their names and interests. If they do not have one in stock, perhaps they could order one through the inter-library loan system. Alternatively, you can purchase a copy and, if you wish, have your own interests inserted in the next issue. If you can establish contact with someone else who is researching the same lines as yourself, it will be a great help.
- 5) Locate your nearest family history society. Even if your family does not originate from the area in which you now live, you will find meeting fellow family historians helpful and listening to talks by knowledgeable speakers a bonus. If your ancestral area is a long way from home, joining that local society could prove useful. Each group publishes its own periodical, and virtually all produce a list of members' interests. Membership generally costs about ten pounds a year.
- 6) There are numerous British family history magazines published each month ~ Practical Family History, Family Tree Magazine, and Family History Monthly. WH Smith's usually stock copies of these magazines or you can order them from your local newsagent. Reading these on a regular basis will enable you to keep in touch with what is happening in the world of British family history. After you have exhausted the foregoing sources, the family tree chart you started in (1) above should have gradually expanded, and it is now time to take stock of what you require to fill-in the missing information.

This is generally done using four basic sources:

Civil registration  
census returns  
Parish records  
Probate documents.