

Civil Registration

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The first and best source to begin with is birth, marriage and death (BMD) certificates. As we stated earlier, you should start with yourself, and if you have never had a full birth certificate that shows your parents names, then it is imperative that you obtain this first. There is no other way to begin your research tahn with yourself, because there isn't. You don't want to spend years researching your family tree only to find later that you had been adopted!

Next you need to know the date of your parents' marriage, and then their respective dates of birth, followed by the same details of your grandparents and great-grandparents, and so on. This part of your research is unfortunately the most expensive, that is why it is so important to obtain as many BMD certificates as possible from members of your family.

The civil registration system, from which the BMD certificates are extracted, began in England and Wales on 1 July 1837, in Scotland on 1 January 1855 and in Ireland in 1864. This registration system required all local register offices to supply duplicate copies of their birth, marriage and death registers each quarter year to the General Register Office (GRO) in England & Wales, Scotland or Ireland as appropriate. Each GRO prepared quarterly indexes which records alphabetically by surname, the forename(s), registration district, volume number and page number.

From these indexes you are able to extract the information required to order the BM&D certificates. For England and Wales, the GRO Indexes are held at the Family Record Centre (FRC) in London. Copies of these indexes are also available in microfilm format and held by many reference libraries. They can also be viewed at Family History Centres (FHC) run by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). There are over 75 FHC's situated around the country, and they are open to the general public.

If you have Scottish ancestry, then you need to go to Edinburgh to search the records or hire the services of a locally based researcher. Alternatively, the General Register Office for Scotland has on-line computer access facilities that can be connected to via the Internet.

Those with Irish ancestry would, in our opinion, be best not to tackle them initially if they have English or Welsh ones to 'practise on' as Irish ancestry can be notoriously difficult and frustrating to trace. A fire at the Four Courts in Dublin In 1922, destroyed a great many records - some of these have been replaced by duplicates from other sources, but gaining experience by using archives in England and Wales will at least give you a little more confidence to eventually tackle your Irish ancestry.

If you are certain that your family has lived locally for a long time, then it may be possible to use the local register office to obtain copies of birth and death certificates. Marriage certificates are more difficult to obtain through a local register office because you must know beforehand the exact place, either a church or the register office, where the marriage ceremony took place.

If your ancestors moved around the country, as many did when they needed to find work, then the FRC must be your starting place for BM&D certificates.

Always take one step at a time. Information on a birth certificate will lead to details of parents and, if the parents married, their marriage certificate should give you enough information to obtain their respective birth certificates. A death certificate also gives a number of other useful clues, such as addresses, spouses, and sometimes children.