

BOOKHAM U3A Family History Research Part 1

What is the difference between Family History and Genealogy?

The latter is the retrieval of data from records such as Census returns, birth, marriages and deaths records to construct family trees showing ancestors and descendants in meaningful relationships.

The former is the conversion of this into a narrative. Part of the records and narrative is available to you with the paper and photographic records you have access to as part of your own family records, old papers, old photographs, old certificates for example. This may include details of births, marriages and deaths.

It will be a good idea to organise this on a short [pedigree chart](#). Print this chart out from the link. Decide on your starting point. I chose to start with my parents as the Family Member so this chart will go back to my great great grandparents and I have two of these trees.

I also suggest for each marriage use a [First Information Sheet](#). You will need seven if you are able to fill or partially fill the pedigree chart.

Talk to your relatives; sooner rather than later. Use the charts you have started to stimulate ideas and memories. Capture the anecdotal as well as the factual information.

You now might like a first search of official records. I recommend three free websites to start with. You are going to have to make a substantial financial investments at some point but it is a good idea to try out the free websites first. You will then be able to make a more informed choice.

www.familysearch.org is the website run by the Church of the Latter Day Saints and is a global database of records. One limitation is that it appears you are only allowed one tree per log in. A major advantage is that it allows you to view and print out four common formats for trees, Portrait, Landscape, Fan and Descendants. Try it to see the various alternatives. You will need to enter some minimal information.

Another part of this site is the Research Wiki. This is a global database of records and resources to help you in Family History research. Possible overwhelming at first. Use the "how the use the Wiki" Tutorial first.

The BBC have a good site introducing the [topic of Family History](#). As well as stories searches of well know people's families there is a "Family First" section on how to get started.

www.freebmd.org.uk provides lists to indexes for births marriages and deaths. Before entering a name take a little while to read the explanations available on the site. This site uses transcriptions of the General Records Office (GRO) register entries which were (and are) compiled every quarter.

www.freecen.org.uk provides access to transcripts of some UK census returns. The value of census returns is that you see everyone else who was living in the residence with their relationship to the head of the household. "Transcripts" means that someone has typed every entry which may lead to mistakes. The free sites are mainly run by volunteers, indeed most of the on-line Family History data has been produced by volunteers. Freecen does not provide full coverage.

Get as much knowledge as you can from present survivors of earlier generations and your siblings still alive and cousins you are still in contact with. At all stages it is important to record what you discover noting where and from whom you obtained the information. Having done this, start on making a tree looking at it closely to see what follow up questions are needed to fill in gaps or sort out anomalies.

At an early stage the recommendation is to work on paper. This gives you a choice on how you will record your tree, continue on paper, with a computer based package, or on-line with a paid site or with FamilySearch.

Try and identify information you hold or find as:

Primary source: made at the time as a fact rather than something copied or transcribed after the event. Even primary sources may conflict with a perceived truth. Census returns prior to 1911 were written by the enumerator who may have misheard the householder or members of the household may have misinterpreted their age or used a nickname instead of a birth name.

Secondary source: a document that was copied or interpreted after the event. The GRO index is a secondary source. Newspaper articles might be secondary sources. A photograph is a primary source.

Tertiary source: usually a book or article interpreting facts either at the time or subsequently.

All sources are subject to error some more than others. Understanding how they were created may help you unravel truth from fiction.