



## Tracing your ancestors before Parish Records 1538

Most people researching their family history can't get back beyond the Parish Records and I know it is very difficult to trace your ancestors in the period before the commencement of parish registers in the mid-16th century. Before then, you may locate sporadic references to your ancestors or to people who could be your ancestors, in wills, tax records or court documents. However, you are unlikely to be able to trace a line of descent in that period or find documents that one man was related to another, unless you find your ancestors in property records.

Property law has always been complex, and in order to understand property law, it is necessary to start in about 1066, with the start of the manorial system, which was well established throughout England by the time of the Domesday Book survey in 1086.

Manorial records are held in many archives, particularly County Record Offices (CRO), TNA, the British Library, Oxford and Cambridge University libraries and the Lambeth Palace Library; but many records are also in private collections and regrettably, some records are missing.

First, how far back have you got with the Parish Registers 1538, which did not get fully established until after 1558 to 1750. Hopefully, you have got back as far as you can, and with the name of your first parish, go to [www.freereg.org.uk](http://www.freereg.org.uk) click on the link 'Transcriptions' at the top of the home page and follow the instructions. This will give you information about your parish or county and there is also a link to the relevant [www.genuki.org.uk](http://www.genuki.org.uk) page for each county, and look for the names of the manors near your parish.

Then, start your search with the **Manorial Documents Register** held at The National Archives [www.discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/manor-search](http://www.discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/manor-search) hopefully, some documents will be available. However, this is where your search online will possibly stop because you usually need to visit the CRO for the county in which the manorial documents are located, and that CRO may be able to tell you where other surviving records are held.

Next, look at [www.discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/find-an-archive](http://www.discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/find-an-archive) with a searchable list of over 2,500 archives in the UK; enter the location which interests you for your research, check out their website and then plan your visit but do check if they are members of the '**Archives Card**' scheme or have other reader's ticket requirements.

The **ARCHIVES CARD** is a single archive reader's ticket which gives you access to a wealth of original documents held in archives and county record offices across the UK. You need to apply for a card online if you wish to view the documents in any of the archives participating in the scheme, and to apply for a card which is free and valid for 5 years, just log into the link <https://archivescard.com> for more information.

**Citation:**

Herber, Mark. 2005. *Ancestral Trails: The Complete Guide to British Genealogy and Family History*. 2nd ed. Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd., in association with the Society of Genealogists, London