

EVERYONE HAS ROOTS

No. 7 Discovering more about your ancestors

This section provides a brief overview of some of the supplementary records you can use during research that will enable you to find out more about an ancestor. It is by no means comprehensive but covers some of the important records.

NEWSPAPERS

Newspapers can reveal the daily lives of our ancestors in relation to people, places and events. Most also provide an insight into national news events through the eyes of the local community. The growth of the newspaper industry was in the 19th century when the tax on paper was lowered and advertisements began to appear. Effectively this was the golden age but the early 20th century also saw a massive growth in provincial newspapers.

For the family historian perhaps the most important reason to look at newspapers is the obituaries and funeral reports. Many such reports included information on important happenings in the life of the deceased, as well as a potted history and list of attendees at the funeral, together with their relationship to the deceased. Such information is of great value in establishing family connections.

Most newspapers contain what can only be described as “genealogy gems”. Besides the obituaries the following may also reveal information:

Family Notices and announcements (hatch, match and dispatch).

News articles - national and local events so your ancestor may be mentioned in such reports as trade union meetings, sport reports, allotment association prizes etc.

Illustrations – photographs or engravings.

Advertisements – classified, shipping notices etc. If your ancestor was involved in business then the paper may carry an advertisement for that business. In many provincial newspapers of the time, advertisements appeared on the front page.

Letters – relating to contemporary debates etc. In the case of the First World War many letters from the front were published because they would have been of local interest. Letters to the editor are often full of information and include views expressed by our ancestors which help us understand their character and beliefs.

Crime and punishment – essentially the reports of court cases from the petty sessions to the assize. This is how many of us discover an ancestor’s involvement with the law.

Accidents – reports will give details of injuries, witness reports etc whether an accident occurred at work, or on the road. Coroners inquests were also reported.

Family history using newspapers can help flesh out the bones of your ancestry and very often contain information that is not found elsewhere. At least the information in a newspaper will supplement information found in official records (e.g. Court proceedings, divorce etc.). Very often they contain more details than official records.

There are many special interest newspapers which record information on individuals and progress in the sphere they cover. For example, if your ancestor worked on the railways or the Post Office then there may be a wealth of information in staff newspapers / magazines.

Many other occupation groups published newspapers or journals such as the Nursing Times & Mirror.

Sport (particularly football) was covered by specialist newspapers such as the Football Herald 1899-1939 and Ulster Cyclist & Football news 1888-1909.

If your ancestor was involved in any way with show business either professionally or as an amateur then journals like The Stage 1880-to date are essential reading.

County archives and local studies libraries usually hold microform collections of their area historical newspapers. Millions of newspaper pages are being added weekly to www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk which is a subscription website, enabling a search for information by both name or place. This can quickly lead you to information about ancestors who were criminals or the victims of crime, those who held sporting achievements, were involved with their local trade union branch and details of those killed in wars or families who suffered misfortune.

The British Library Newsroom in London and the National Newspaper Library in Lincolnshire allow access to something like 34,000 titles including Irish and many colonial newspapers.

One of the most important newspapers for official information is "The Gazette" published daily in London, Belfast and Edinburgh. It is the official journal of the British Government and includes masses of genealogical detail about an ancestor:

Despatches from the Admiralty and War Office, (mentioned in despatches).

Military appointments and promotions, particularly useful for wartime promotions. When members of the armed forces are promoted, and these promotions are published the person is said to have been "gazetted".

Civil service notices,

Names of people granted British citizenship,

Notices about deceased people's estates,

Notices of bankruptcies and insolvent debtors,

Notices of medals and meritorious actions,

Recipients of the Order of the British Empire and other honours lists,

Legal name changes,

Shipping Intelligence.

The Gazettes from 1665 to date can be searched online at <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/>

You will be surprised how many of your ancestors actually made the news. However, beware, as newspapers are one of a selection of records which very easily allow your research to get side-tracked!

ELECTORAL REGISTERS

Electoral registers were introduced in 1832 as a result of various electoral reforms.

Electoral Registers are listings of all those registered to vote in a particular area. The lists were annually produced to record the names of eligible voters and their reason for eligibility, such as their residence or ownership of a property. Registration for voters in England has been compulsory since 1832. They exist to the present day but can only be searched online until 1932 using the Findmypast website. However, registers were not published during the latter years of World War 1 (1916–1917) or during World War 2 (1940–1944).

The numbers allowed to vote have increased over the years. From 1884 around half the male population had the vote but from 1918 All males (21yrs) and females (30yrs) could vote. All people aged 21yrs and over could vote from 1928.

Certain codes were used in electoral registers which have significant importance when researching family history. The first set existed until 1928.

- R Residence qualification
- BP Business premises qualification
- O Occupational qualification
- HO Qualification through husband's occupation
- NM Naval or military voter

After 1928 the code system changed:

- R Residence qualification (man)
- Rw Residence qualification (woman)
- B Business premises qualification (man)
- Bw Business premises qualification (woman)
- O Occupational qualification (man)
- Ow Occupational qualification (woman)
- D Qualification through wifes occupation
- Dw Qualification through husbands occupation
- NM Naval or military voter.

871	NM	—	aAddy, Herbert George	3	
872	R	O	Hammond, Daniel	1	EAGLE YARD
873	HO	HO	Hammond, Sarah Ann	1	
874	R	—	Hammond, William Henry	1	
875	R	—	Lambert, Bertram William	1	
876	O	O	Webb, Fanny	2	
877	R	O	Hale, Samuel	3	
878	HO	HO	Hale, Betsy	3	
879	R	O	Uttridge, Alfred	4	
880	HO	HO	Uttridge, Florence Annie	4	
881	R	O	Clibbon, Joseph	1	FRANCIS ROAD
882	HO	HO	Clibbon, Rose	1	
883	O	O	Page, Sarah	2	
884	R	—	Page, Charles	2	
885	O	O	Sell, Clara	3	
886	NM	—	aSell, Wilfred	3	
887	R	O	Peacock, Edwin James	4	
888	HO	HO	Peacock, Priscilla Mary	4	
889	R	O	Andrews, Charles	1	GARLAND ROAD
890	R	O	Deville, Alfred William	2	
891	HO	HO	Deville, Alice	2	
892	O	O	Beard, Rosina	3	
893	R	—	Beard, Ernest William	3	
894	R	O	Skinner, George Thomas	4	
895	HO	HO	Skinner, Kate	4	
896	R	O	McDonald James	5	
897	R	O	Ketterer, Albert Frederick	6	

The period covered by the electoral registers incorporates the significant changes in the British electorate that occurred over the time period including the vote being extended to working class men and the reform of representation up until womens suffrage.

Electoral registers can be used to discover the date of your ancestor residing at a certain address and when they leave. They also identify which other adult members of the family were at that address. After 1918 this may include the names of females. The entry against an address at which an illegitimate child was born can reveal suggestions about the family circumstances at that time. When young people first appear, their year of birth can be estimated and when people disappear from the register it may be that their death dates may perhaps be assumed. Before 1918 the registers give a fairly precise indication of the family's property holdings.

When researching a family with a common surname, the information from an electoral register can be interpreted like a census to help identify other family members, to help find their descendants and to locate events such as birth, marriage and death.

HISTORICAL DIRECTORIES

Trade and place directories came into existence around the beginning of the nineteenth century but the majority only covered cities and larger towns. The first major county directories were published around 1820. In London, however, some directories were published much earlier and become useful from around 1766.

They can be searched online at ancestry and Findmypast as well as a specialist site run by Leicester University called "Historical Directories". Most libraries and record offices have a good run of volumes covering their areas.

The purpose of the early directories was to provide visitor information about towns and localities for merchants and other visitors. Most directories were split into three sections. A general and topographical description of the town or area. Details on local transport facilities and public buildings such as churches, schools and government offices. The last section included shops and businesses and information on specific people including those of the town who were businessmen, traders and shopkeepers.

Much later the directories started to include details of private residents, initially the more prominent and wealthier individuals. With the advent of Kelly's and Post Office directories they became more comprehensive and all householders were included regardless of social status.

Various types of directories of value to family historians exist including:

Street Directories which list residents, businesses, and tradesmen according to street address.

Commercial Directories which include businesses although they may also include private residences and are generally an alphabetical listing.

Trade Directories which are different to Commercial directories and include not just businesses but anyone with a recognized trade or profession, again as an alphabetical listing.

Court Directories list only wealthy residents and government officials.

Post Office Directories list householder's names and addresses and are perhaps the most informative.

All directories however are historic by the time they are published as they were usually compiled about 6 months before the actual date of publication. Nevertheless, they are an excellent finding aid.

Many directories are titled after their publishers, including Kelly and Pigot. Directories often include maps which by their nature are contemporary. Over time, many of these maps were removed.

Directories are a wonderful supplement to the census returns and a great source for locating people at a particular place and time. They become very useful between census years and in the earlier years before the censuses or when a census is missing for a particular location. They are also an excellent resource for details to help you place your ancestors in their historical environment. Because most directories include descriptive information about towns and the surrounding areas, they can help you visualise what life in that time and place might have actually been like for your ancestor families.

WHERE NOW?

The following guides are available to help you gain an understanding of how to research and what you can discover about your ancestors.

EVERYONE HAS ROOTS (a series of helpful research guides)

No. 1 It starts with you

No. 2 Ready to begin your research

No. 3 Birth, marriage & death certificates

No. 4 Grow your tree with census returns

No. 5 Baptism, marriage & burial registers

No. 6 Records created after death

No. 7 Discovering more about your ancestors

No. 8 The military connection

No. 9 Tracing your ancestors when they moved

No. 10 Proving your research is correct