

EVERYONE HAS ROOTS

No. 9 Tracing your ancestor when they moved

EMIGRATION & IMMIGRATION

It is more than probable you will encounter a family member who emigrated from our shores during the period from the mid-1800s to early 1900s. Similarly, you may find that you have immigrant ancestors during the same time period and even earlier. There is often more information in archive records in the destination country than in the archives of the country of origin, so when trying to trace the origins of an ancestor you should be prepared to also use information sources that are available in the country to which they emigrated. This will help you confirm where in the British Isles your emigrant originated.

Passports

Most researchers would perhaps expect that emigrants would have held a passport. Passports were not mandatory for British travellers until 1914. Unfortunately, historic records for United Kingdom passports are few and far between. Very few original passports survive and most records are indexes of, or registers only, of names and passport numbers.

On FindmyPast there are the Registers of British Passport Applicants from 1851 to 1856, 1858 to 1862, and 1874 to 1903 searchable by name. Later passport applications 1904 to 1983 can be researched at the National Archives. There are no travel details within the records and the only information is to confirm that a passport was issued. Few emigrants before 1914 held passports. Most, if they were issued were for merchants or travellers on the “world tour” and the like.

Emigration

There was no systematic official method of emigrating from England. Millions of people left Britain to seek a new life in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, India and the United States. Apart from searching the available census returns for these countries on Ancestry, you can also investigate records held by the National Archives of the respective country where your ancestor would have become an immigrant. Naturalisation records in the destination country may also be an excellent source for determining your ancestor’s place of origin.

Free emigrants. From as early as the 1600s emigrants left England to promote trade or set up military outposts and bases for merchant ships. Emigrants also sought opportunities in a new land or fled poverty or oppression in England. The height of emigration in this class of emigrant was after the end of the Industrial Revolution.

Assisted emigrants. From 1815 to 1900, many emigrants received financial assistance and/ or land grants in the destination country as an alternative to receiving poor relief. Even in post war Britain emigration to places like Australia (£10 Pom) was very much in vogue. Although there are few, if any, records available in Britain, the Australian National Archives have records for passengers arriving by both sea and air up to 1972.

You will need to know the port or airport that your ancestor arrived at in Australia and date of arrival (or at least the month and year) to access the records.

The Assisted Emigrants Registers which can be searched on FamilySearch shows persons who applied for assistance to emigrate and which contains name, age, occupation, residence, destination, name of sponsor, address of relative and size of family.

Transported prisoners. Up until 1869 more than 160,000 prisoners were transported to Australia. Records of these together with information on their crime, court appearances and incarceration prior to transportation can be researched at the National Archives or online at both ancestry and FindmyPast.

In general terms to search emigration records effectively, you need to know the approximate date of emigration, if possible, the name of the ship, reason for emigration and the emigrant's place of residence when in England.

Passenger Lists

Both inbound and outbound passenger lists are searchable on FindmyPast and Ancestry. Outbound passenger lists cover 1890 -1960 whilst inbound lists cover 1878 – 1960. Most pre-1890 passenger lists were destroyed. Passenger lists not only cover those who permanently emigrated but those who travelled for business or holiday. It is important to find your ancestor both leaving and returning in the case of the latter.

There was no standard format for the lists, so details included will vary. Many will show base information as follows:

Name – which may be initials and surname only or even Mr & Mrs -----
age at departure
male or female
occupation
last address in Britain
country of permanent residence
country of intended permanent residence
port of departure
date of departure
port of destination
ship name
shipping line.

There are separate outgoing passenger lists for United Kingdom war brides covering the period 1946-1947 where they married a Canadian in this country and subsequently moved to Canada.

Thousands of English women married soldiers during World War Two including American servicemen. Most of these entered the United States through New York. When husbands returned to their own countries, many wives were left behind to wait to join them. An Internet index gives you a surname, first name and destination of war brides.

Canadian war brides – 47,750 <http://www.canadianwarbridesandfamilies.ca>
GI war brides – 70,000 <http://uswarbrides.com/WW2warbrides>

Ellis Island

Ellis Island was the gateway for millions of immigrants to the United States as the nation's busiest immigrant inspection station from 1892 until 1924. Prior to this many entered through Castle Garden, its predecessor. Over 1.5 million British immigrants entered the USA through these immigration centres. Immigration inspectors at Ellis Island used the passenger lists they received from the shipping companies to process each immigrant to the United States. These were the sole immigration records prepared by companies such as Cunard, White Star Line, etc. In some cases, families Americanised their surnames, but this was usually after the immigration process, or even by the second or subsequent generations born there. However, many surnames were altered slightly because of the disparity that existed between English and other languages in the pronunciation of certain letters of the alphabet.

The immigration records for both centres can be freely searched on FamilySearch although both Ellis Island and Castle Garden also have their own website databases.

For anyone entering the USA post 1924 you will need to search New York Passenger and Crew Lists 1925–1957. These post-Ellis Island lists include nearly 29 million names of arrivals at both New York Harbour and New York international airports. They are linked to images of the original records and are also searchable at no charge using FamilySearch.

When searching these collections, use whatever clues you already know about your immigrant ancestors to identify them on passenger lists. Their year of arrival will more than likely be included on subsequent U.S. census returns. Overseas birthplaces may also appear in obituaries, church records, or other records but may just say “England”.

Immigration

Researching an immigrant is considered to be more complex in England because of the maxim that the destination country generates more records than the country from which your ancestor would have immigrated from.

For those settling in the UK or returning from a failed emigration your first avenue of research is the UK Incoming Passenger Lists, 1878-1960 available on Ancestry.co.uk and FindmyPast. The database is an index to the passenger lists of ships arriving in the United Kingdom from foreign ports outside of Europe and the Mediterranean from 1878-1888 and 1890-1960. There are no lists for those arriving from European countries. Information on incoming passenger lists includes name, birth date or age, ports of departure and arrival, date of arrival, and ships name. Some may also include their proposed address in the UK, occupation and last country of residence.

However, until after the Second World War most immigrants came from continental Europe. These included war refugees or those entering because of religious persecution such as Huguenots and Jews.

Also searchable on Ancestry, specifically for England, there are records of Alien Arrivals 1810-1811 and 1826-1869 covering all non-British citizens. Information listed on the records includes: name, port and date of arrival, ship, country of origin, age, and occupation. Aliens Entry Books 1794-1921 also exist which consists of correspondence and other documents relating to aliens and naturalisations.

Not all immigrants availed themselves of naturalisation but those who did can be confirmed by searching the London Gazette. The National Archives also holds naturalisation files up to 1934. Ancestry can be searched for Naturalisation certificates and declarations between 1870 and 1916. Naturalisation certificates typically contain name of the immigrant, residence, birthplace, age, parents' names, occupation and names of any children. Later naturalisation papers up to 1996 can be researched at the National Archives.

Tracing both emigrant and immigrant ancestors requires a meticulous search of a variety of records. Once again, the National Archives research guides should be followed.

ONE FINAL ESSENTIAL – CONTEMPORARY MAPS

It will help your research significantly to become familiar with the area from which your ancestors originated and more importantly to understand the topography by using contemporary maps. There are various sources for finding old maps online and it is useful to know which parishes, registration districts and poor law unions that your ancestors lived in. One extremely useful resource is the maps available via FamilySearch which allow you to overlay boundaries of parishes, registration districts and administrative units based on the 1851 jurisdictions throughout the country.

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

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