

How to get started with Family History

Getting started with family history can often feel overwhelming. Although record offices, archives, local studies libraries and museums are closed due to Coronavirus, there is still plenty you can do while social distancing.

Here are some top tips for how to get started on your family history:

1) Write down what you already know

Although it may feel like you don't know a lot about your family history, you may be surprised what you have picked up. Also, sometimes knowing too much information about your family history can be as overwhelming as knowing nothing! It's good to get everything you know down into writing. This stops you from forgetting potentially important information and helps you plan how you will tackle your family history research. Always start with yourself and work backwards when researching. You will probably know more about your immediate family in your own generation so this is a good place to start. Never jump a generation when researching to make your family tree fit.

2) Look at what you already have

If you have old photographs around the house that you haven't looked at for years, these could potentially hold a wealth of information. There may be photographs of weddings with dates and locations written on the back, pictures of newborn babies that help you work out approximate date of births for family members, and if your family were really organised, maybe the photos will even have names on them! You may also have some official documents such as birth, marriage, and death certificates that can be a big help to your research.

3) Speak to your family

Many people are now spending more time than ever in their homes, this is a great time to call your family and ask them what they know. You may find out someone has already researched your family, or made a start that you can build on. It is also helpful to find out what your 'family myths' are, so that you can either confirm or debunk them through your research! You may even come across a 'family bible', where family members' details have been written inside.

You could also ask your relatives if they would be happy to be recorded talking about their life over the phone or on a facetime chat. Having a recording can be helpful to refer back to, and you don't have to worry about missing something while making notes. You can find out more about recording oral histories on the Oral History Society website here: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/>

4) Think about what resources you want to use

There are several different family history research websites out there. Some are free, some charge subscription fees, and some have the option to 'pay per view' their records. You can gain free access via Doncaster Local Studies Library and other branch libraries. Due to Covid-19 and the closure of libraries free access to Ancestry has been extended to 31 March 2021. Access can be gained at the link <https://library.doncaster.gov.uk/web/arena/ancestry>

You will need to be a member of the library and have a membership card number and PIN. If you aren't a member and want to join or if you need any help then please visit the link here for more details: <https://library.doncaster.gov.uk/web/arena/online-membership-2020-temp>
Once you have your membership card and PIN then log in to the library pages and follow the instructions to the Ancestry link.

Searching on free websites like www.freebmd.org.uk can be a good starting point, but you may find that there are some records you need that you cannot access on these free sites. Pay-to-view websites like Ancestry and FindMyPast offer free trial periods, so you can see if they hold the type of resources, you are looking for. However if you've inputted your card details and decide that website isn't for you, don't forget to cancel at the end of your free trial! These sites automatically start charging you monthly when the free trial ends. The BBC family history guide has some great pointers on whether to pay for research websites.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/familyhistory/get_started/paying_for_research_01.shtml

5) Think about what organizations may be able to help you in the future

Local archives and museums often have a wealth of resources to help family historians. As they are currently closed, they may not be able to respond to enquiries, or give as full answers as they normally would do. Make a note of any organizations you may want to get in touch with in the future and what questions you would like to ask them. For example, if you were born and raised in Doncaster, but know that your grandfather was a miner who moved from Derbyshire, you may want to contact a local archive or museum in that area to see how they can help. Some archives have online catalogues that you can search to see if they have the records, you are looking for. You may also want to look for local history societies and groups for any towns/cities that your ancestors lived in, as they may be able to provide local specific knowledge to you.

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