



Tracing your family history – a general guide

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First steps

Homework and advice: Study the subject, visit your local library to find out what literature exists, or see what is available to buy from the bookstall at the Record Office. For initial help and advice contact your local Family History Group: your local record office or library should have current lists.

Family: Remember the rest of the family! Check with other members of your family and note all names, dates, places (family bibles are a good source).

Research Service: We offer an in-house research service into the documentary sources in its care. Please ask for further details.

Sources from 1837 to the present day

Civil registration (documents not held at record offices): From July 1837 all births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales **should** have been registered with local registrars whose registers are, except for marriages, more informative than parish registers held at record offices. Copies of certificates may be obtained for a fee by application to either the General Register Office, PO Box 2, Southport, Merseyside PR8 2JD (www.direct.gov.uk/gro), or for local registrations only the relevant Superintendent Registrar. Copies of the national indexes are available at The National Archives and The Brighton History Centre. There are many on-line versions of the index, one is free (<http://freebmd.rootsweb.com>) and the others are commercial (eg www.ancestry.co.uk); at present there is free access to the Ancestry website at this office. There is a useful list of the registration districts, and the parishes within them, on the GENUKI website (<http://www.ukbmd.org.uk/genuki/REG/districts/>).

Records of civil registration in Scotland, which started in January 1855, are held by the General Register Office for Scotland, New Register House, 3 West Register Street, Edinburgh EH1 3YT (www.gro-scotland.gov.uk). Civil registration in Ireland started in January 1864 and the records for the whole of Ireland, 1864-1921 and for the Republic from 1922 are held by the General Register Office of Ireland, Joyce House, 8-11 Lombard Street East, Dublin 2 (www.groireland.ie/), while records for Northern Ireland from January 1922 are held by the General Register Office (Northern Ireland), Oxford House, 49-55 Chichester Street, Belfast BT1 4HL (www.groni.gov.uk).

Cemetery records: Some cemetery registers are available at this office and details are included in the *Guide to registers*.

Census: Census returns are a useful source of genealogical information. From 1851 they

give the parish of birth of individuals as well as age, occupation and relationship (if any) to the head of the household. They are arranged by area so you do need to know which parish to search (street indexes for some areas are available). We hold microform copies of the census returns for eastern Sussex, 1841-1891 and for both East and West Sussex, 1901.

At this office there is a partial surname index to the 1841 census returns for eastern Sussex (it does not yet include Brighton) and a surname index to the 1851 census returns for eastern Sussex; there are also national on-line indexes to the 1841-1901 census returns (www.ancestry.co.uk) and 1911 (www.findmypast.co.uk); at present there is free access to the Ancestry website at this office. A few earlier parish censuses are available at the record office (details are included in the *Guide to records of rating and taxation*).

Other sources: We hold copies of 19th and 20th century trade and street directories and some local newspapers. Also available are electoral registers from 1832 (please note that universal male suffrage was only granted in 1918 and universal female suffrage in 1928), log books and admission registers for many local authority maintained schools and an index to obituaries in the *Sussex Express*, 1880 to 1920.

Wills after 1858: Since 1858 wills have been proved in civil probate registries. Indexes to wills proved in England and Wales from 1858 to 1943 are available on fiche in the Search Room. For copies of these wills apply to the Principal Registry of the Family Division, First Avenue House, 42-49 High Holborn, London WC1V 6NP.

Sources before 1837

Parish registers: The registers of baptisms, marriages and burials (and banns from 1754) which have been kept by Anglican Clergy since 1538 are the main source for genealogical information before 1837. Those that have been deposited at this office are listed in the *Guide to registers* and also in the *Handlist of registers*, both of which you can view on our website (www.eastsussex.gov.uk/familytree). You can also view the detailed lists of all parish records (registers and other records) on the Access to Archives' website (www.a2a.org.uk).

Baptism index: *The East Sussex Baptismal Index* is available at the record office. It consists of three parts; 1700-1789 (on slips, produced in the Search Room on request; covers all parishes), 1790-1812 (on slips, produced in the Search Room on request by surname; all parishes and most nonconformist registers), pre-1700 (on slips, produced in the Search Room on request by surname; covers only 12 parishes).

Marriage index: The Sussex Marriage Index, 1538-1837 on CD is available for use via our in-house Research Service.

Burial index: Covers Sussex from 1813 to 1841; send £5.00 search fee per name (up to 10 entries) to Lord & Lady Teviot, 28 Hazel Grove, Burgess Hill, West Sussex RH15 0BY (lady.teviot@census-searches.co.uk). We hold an interim (and incomplete) copy of the Sussex Burial Index, 1538-1900 which can be searched at this office only as part of our in-house Research Service.

IGI: The International Genealogical Index has been compiled by the Genealogical Society of Utah from British parish registers and other sources. The entire IGI is available on-line (www.familysearch.org).

Bishops transcripts: Until the mid-19th century incumbents had annually to forward copies of all their register entries to the diocesan registrar. Although these bishops' transcripts are kept at West Sussex Record Office (records.office@westsussex.gov.uk), transcripts of some of them are available in the Search Room.

Marriage licences: Some marriages took place by licence rather than by banns. Those for the Chichester Diocese (Lewes Archdeaconry) have been published by the *Sussex Record Society* in volumes 1 (1586-1642), 6 (1670-1732), 25 & 26 (1771-1837), and the Chichester Archdeaconry in volumes 9 and 12 (1575-1730), 32 (1731-1774), 35 (1775-1800). The few records which have survived are at the West Sussex Record Office.

West Sussex parishes: This office holds transcripts of some West Sussex parish registers and details can be found in the *Handlist of registers*.

Non-conformist records: Dissenting chapels, whose members were often drawn from a wide area, maintained their own registers, more especially after 1785. Most of the pre-1837 registers are at The National Archives and are available on-line (www.BMDRegisters.co.uk). An index to and transcripts of some of these records are available in the Search Room, as is a copy of the *Guide to non-conformist and catholic registers and transcripts*. Details of these holdings are included in the *Handlist of registers* and on A2A.

Wills before 1858: Copies of wills and letters of administration proved in the Lewes Archdeaconry Court and in the peculiar courts of Battle and of South Malling are available on microfilm and fiche at this office.

PCC Wills: Until 1858 the Prerogative Court of Canterbury proved the wills of the wealthy, those who owned land in more than one diocese, or who died abroad or at sea. These records are at The National Archives; a copy of the index can be viewed free while images of the wills can be ordered for a fee (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/). Copies of the published indexes are still available on request.

Other indexes and sources: If you 'lose' your family, consult all our indexes. These include an index to surnames compiled from the lists of documents deposited at this office, and indexes to Eastern Sussex settlement certificates, 1670 to 1832, to Eastern Sussex removal orders, c1670 to 1832 and to Sussex quarter sessions criminal cases, 1810 to 1854. The court rolls and books of many East Sussex manors are available at this office; they often contain useful genealogical information, but remember that before 1733 they will be in Latin.