

## GETTING STARTED

1. Make notes, starting with yourself and by working backwards – parents, grandparents and great grandparents until you can go no further. Always work in reverse order of life's events (start with a death and then work your way back to find a marriage and finally a birth). As you progress and get beyond 1837, you will then be looking more for baptisms and burials as you will find births and deaths recorded only very occasionally, sometimes not at all.
2. Decide if you are going to use traditional paper based recording methods or computer methods. You will probably use both.
3. Let everyone in your family know you are researching your family history, as some relative may have already done some research. Consult even with wider members of the family, contact distant cousins and get to know them better.
4. Ask questions of your older family members and note down what they recall, think about what you are going to ask them before starting, this will help you to get the desired information.
5. Talk to other family members, even those you do not know very well, write letters to those in more distant parts, always including an SAE if you want to get a reply. Remember that they will not have the same interests as you and have pressures you are unaware of. They may take time in responding to your enquiries.
6. The information required is - Names (including nicknames and maiden names) / Birth (date and place born) / Marriage (date and place) / Death (date and place and cause of death) / Occupation (often ran in the family) / Religion etc. Do not be too blunt or inquisitive in your first communication or you may get the cold shoulder.
7. Not all you will be told will be accurate. Stories passed down through families can get exaggerated, some get glossed over or even hidden.
8. Collect up all the old documents from the family that you can find and they will allow. Where possible, copy any that family members will not release. Records such as birth, marriage and death certificates, burial grants, memorial cards, family bibles, photographs, letters, birthday cards, wedding/christening invitations, diaries, address books, birthday diaries, newspaper cuttings, apprentice indentures, wills, Forces service papers, etc. Log and catalogue everything.
9. Start to draw up a family tree. Allow space to add information and be prepared to have to redraw it from time to time. Wall lining paper is a good raw material. Have plenty of pencils and rubbers.
10. You will need to decide which line of the family you are going to trace. Often we do not have much choice as available resources and materials govern our research. Some people like to trace the family surname – especially if it is unusual. If you are struggling, then try a different 'branch' of the family.
11. But, always ask yourself and others in the family, has anybody else already done it? And when they produce their work and pass on copies to you, do not take it all at face value. Question everything.

12. Join a Family History Society. A good one for the West Midlands is Midland Ancestors. For other areas see here - <https://www.familyhistoryfederation.com/societies-az>
13. Sign up to a family history course. Some are one day events, some will run probably for 5 or 6 weeks.
14. Most importantly, start your new hobby as soon as possible, whilst your older relatives are alive !
15. You will be surprised how infectious it is and how obsessive it can become.

### **SOURCES TO CONSULT**

1. Civil Registration – In the U.K. registration of births, deaths and marriages was established in 1837 but was not compulsory for births until 1874. Some births between those years may be missing
2. Parish Registers – registration of baptisms marriages and burials began in 1538, but not all have survived.
3. Census Records – the first detailed national census was taken in 1841 but are subject to the 100 year closure rule. To go with these is the 1939 Register.
4. FamilySearch – The worlds largest free genealogical database. Available on-line.
5. Monumental Inscriptions – Collated records of inscriptions on tombstones and memorials in churches, churchyards and cemeteries.
6. Wills – Don't think that your family were too poor to make a will. Even people with not very much money made wills. To go with these records, you can also find in some cases Inventories of the deceased persons property. You won't get family links from them but you will learn how your ancestor lived.
7. Local Directories – a list of tradespeople in local areas.
8. Electoral Registers – the registers show only those entitled to vote. Before the early 1800s you will look for Poll Books
9. Military Service papers. Your ancestor may have been a soldier, sailor or airman. Recent records require that for access you need to prove you are a relative.
10. Remember that none of these records were created for the benefit of family historians. Nor will the records all be complete. Indexes and Finding Aids produced by humans will have errors in them. You have to do the detective work.

A guide to help the beginner is Notes To Help With Family History Research by Joyce Finnemore. Available through the Midland Ancestors on line shop for just a few pounds.

See here - <https://midland-ancestors.shop/D503D>