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ENGLAND FOR BEGINNERS

Like all genealogical research, searching for ancestors in England begins at home. Look for records with information of your ancestors, certificates, letters, school reports, family bible etc. Talk to your elderly relatives for their memories of the past and their parents, and grandparents.

Record the information that you find. This can be done on paper using blank pedigree record sheets and blank family group sheets especially at the beginning of your family research. Keep a log of the records you have searched so that you do not duplicate your work. It is however recommended that you select a genealogy software program that you may use to record the information you have found. There are many available. Some are free or have free versions or trial versions. Check out Legacy, Rootsmagic, Ancestral Quest, Familysearch/family tree. <https://familysearch.org/apps/> to see examples of these programs.

What kind of records and where can I find the records?

Vital statistics

Census Records

Parish Records
Military Records
Wills and probate Records,
Cemetery records
Manorial Records
Newspapers, directories, gazetteers

England is divided into Counties, the boundaries and names at times have been changed. Some Counties have access to more records than others.

As beginners in English Research, we are going to focus today on the first three listed:

Vital statistics, Census Records and Parish Records

To begin to search go to <http://www.familysearch.org> where you may do simple searches for individuals, searching for birth, marriage or death records. You may do searches for children by entering the parents' names. You may search the sites record collections that are listed alphabetically by location and find both indexed records and original images of parish records on film that have not yet been indexed. Films that are not indexed may have a camera icon. Links are also provided to other sites for images of other records i.e. census records.

There are lessons available in Familysearch. To find them go to GET HELP (upper right of the screen), choose the LEARNING CENTRE from the drop down menu. From the left side panel on the Learning centre page choose England with 17 choices of lessons on

line. The Research WIKI in FamilySearch, which you can find at the bottom of the drop down SEARCH menu, has lots of information about the lives and places that our ancestors lived. Also Google.com has genealogical information and links to other sites.

Vital Statistics

Beginning in July 1837, English law required registration of births, marriages and deaths (bmd); although not everyone complied with the law. Registration occurs at Registration Districts throughout England and Wales with copies being sent to the General Register Office (GRO) you may order copies of certificates online from www.gro.gov.uk

There is a cost and you may pay online by credit card. Ordering a pdf is a cheaper alternative. The address is:
General Register Office
PO BOX 2,
Southport, Merseyside, PR8 2JD, England
Telephone: 011441 870 243 7788, Fax 011441 704 550013

Some local Registry Offices can be found on line with forms to order copies of certificates directly from them. You may search civil registration indexes on the internet. The indexes are kept for each quarter of the year. Each year will have four indexes labeled March, June, September and December for each of Births,

Marriages and Deaths. However, note that an event occurring in one quarter may not be registered until the next quarter. If you don't know the exact date you have to search all four quarters.

<http://www.freebmd.org.uk> is a site where volunteers have keyed in the indexes so you may search them for your ancestors. This enables you to find the district of registration, volume number and page number in the register, this information is helpful if you want to order a copy of a certificate. The sites have a link to where you may order a certificate.

Census Records

A census is taken, usually in April, every 10 years (except 1941, which was not taken because of WWII, but in its place the 1939 Register exists). The first National census that provides information on individuals is the 1841 census. Because of strict privacy laws in England the most recent census available is the 1911 census. Census records are released after 100 years.

A census record gives an excellent snap shot of the family as of the date of the census record. Keep in mind that some family members may be away from home on that date so are not recorded with the family.

You may find indexed census records at www.familysearch.org with links to other sites for original images. You may find images at

www.ancestry.co.uk, or .com and at www.findmypast.co.uk . Both of these sites are pay sites but available free of charge at Family History Centres and perhaps at your local public library.

PARISH RECORDS

England has a State Church, the “Church of England”, and in 1538 all parish clergy were ordered to keep records of christenings, marriages and burials. From 1754 until 1837 all persons were required to marry in the Church of England, except Jews and Quakers. So, although not everyone was a member of the State Church most people were christened, married and buried by its authority. Very few of the earliest parish registers which were written on paper have survived. In 1597 parish registers were required to be written on parchment, and from 1598 were supposed to be copied into parchment volumes.

In 1598 the clergy were required to copy their parish registers and send the copies to the Bishop of the Diocese. These copies are known as the Bishops Transcripts (BTs) sent yearly. There are also Archdeacon Transcripts (ATs).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints has filmed the records that remain available. You may go online to order a copy of these films to be sent to your local Family Search Centre or public library for viewing,

at <https://familysearch.org/catalog/search> you will find the Family History Library Catalog. There you may search under England (County) (Parish) for Church records in order to locate the film number you want to view. If the film has a camera icon next to it you can read that film on line on the FamilySearch site. Films are being indexed and digitized and added to the collection of records that can be found in the Records Collection on <http://www.familysearch.org> so be sure to check this site first to see if the records you want have already been added to this collection. You may find an indexed record or an original image of a parish record.

Marriage by banns means that for three consecutive Sundays the clergyman announced from the pulpit the names of the intended couple and a sign was posted on the church door announcing the intent of the couple to marry. This allowed others to “forbid the banns” meaning they could present evidence as to why the marriage should not go forward.

Marriage by license was used when a couple wanted to avoid the reading of Banns, did not want to wait the three weeks that banns required or if they wanted to marry in a parish where neither of them lived. Licenses were issued by several Church of England authorities. Two collections of marriage licenses are available on line at www.findmypast.co.uk.

Burials

Before 1813 information recorded is scant, simply the name of the deceased, burial date, age and residence. Later years show the name of deceased, date of burial, age, residence, occupation, and parents names if the burial is that of a child.

CALENDARS

Today we use what is known as the Gregorian calendar. Until 1582 the old Julian calendar was used. At that time, the European Catholic countries adopted the new Gregorian calendar. However England did not make that same change for a further 200 years. By 1752 the difference between the Julian and Gregorian calendar was 11 days. This discrepancy was resolved by making 14th September follow 2nd September.

The first day of the year in the Julian calendar was March 25th which is known as Lady Day, the name for Annunciation Day – a church festival commemorating Angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she was to give birth to Jesus. So until 1752 in England the first day of the year was March 25th.

The calendar change causes a lot of confusion for those researching in parish registers. How should researchers record dates from January 1 to March 24? When writing dates that fall between 1 January and 24 March in years prior to 1752, write the date as 4 Feb 1747/48. This is your indication that, while it was 1747

in Britain, according to the Gregorian calendar it was 1748.

Even after 1752, calendar issues cause problems for researchers, as many clergymen pretended that nothing had changed and for some years continued to start their yearly parish register on Lady Day but just changed the year at January 1.

Researchers need to exercise care in noting the change of year. Calendar changes are often the cause when two genealogists have both transcribed the same date but one researcher has the year a year earlier than the other.