

For events before 1837 you will need to refer to Parish Records

Don't be daunted by the number of records available or worry about visiting a record office. Some records are available on the web but in the end you will need to visit a record office, library or family history centre where you can view copies of the records on microfilm or fiche.

7. Place your family in their historical context

You can use clues from certificates and census returns to find out more about how and where your ancestors lived. Placing them in their correct historical and social context is an important part of your research. Further research in specialist archives can help you to understand the events and circumstances that shaped their lives, and you can begin to relate to them as people rather than names on a family tree.

8: Using the Internet

The Internet is a very useful tool for Family Historians. Often however, others have introduced inaccuracies so be careful.

(See Separate leaflet).

9: You are not alone

Family history is a sociable pastime, and one of the best ways to find like-minded researchers in your area is to join a local Family History Society. Most societies run talks, lectures and workshops where members provide advice, guidance and help to less experienced members, and volunteer members often compile name indexes to local records. It may also be worth contacting the Family History Society in the area where your ancestors lived.

For information on a society in your area, visit

www.ffhs.org.uk

For details about Lancashire Family History and Heraldry Society, visit

www.lfhhs.org.uk

For details of LFHHS Chorley Branch and LFHHS Chorley Family History Research Centre see details on the front of leaflet.

Prepared by Steve Williams, Chorley Branch LFHHS

LFHHS Chorley Branch

LFHHS Chorley Family History Research Centre



Beginners

Contact Branch

Tel. 01257 262 028

Email chorleysecretary@aol.com

Contact Research Centre

Tel 01257 262028

Email chorleyresearch@lfhhs.org.uk

Websites

www.lfhhschorleybranch.com

www.cfhrc.com

Registered Charity No. 513437

Beginners

Introduction

If you are just starting to research your family's history you might be wondering just where to begin.

1: Start with what you know

Start in the present and work from what you know - the full names and dates of birth of your immediate family.

Gather together all the copies of birth, marriage or death certificates, that you have. Record full names (including middle names), dates of birth, marriage and death, and make a note of where these events took place - geographical clues can be very useful when you start your research.

2: Talk to your family

Try to talk to older relatives and focus on the names and relevant dates of their parents and grandparents - although you will probably have to check some of this data in official records. Also make a note of interesting anecdotes or stories, which you might want to follow up later on in your research.

Perhaps one of your ancestors or a relative has done some genealogical research before - this could save you a lot of time, especially if they have already obtained official certificates etc.

Ask elderly relatives about their memories - you will find out all sorts of useful information this way. You might find it useful to compile a list of questions before you start to help you focus on what you are trying to find out.

Remember to take notes during your talk and share new information you discover with your relatives - this might spark off more memories.

You might also find old family photographs, letters, diaries or a family bible which can also give you clues to the past.

3: Look for family heirlooms

Many people have wonderful collections of family photographs that often have names or dates written on the back. Similarly, personal correspondence not only gives you an insight into how your ancestors lived, but you can often discover where they were on a given date. Other objects might have been handed down from generation to generation - family bibles often contain the names of former owners, or are inscribed with personal messages.

4. Work out what you want to research

It's important to decide what questions you want to tackle - do you want to extend your family tree as far back as possible, or concentrate on one or two ancestors and find out as much as you can about them.

It is often a good idea to take small sections of your family tree with you on a research trip - this focuses your attention on the person you are researching.

5: Keeping your own records

You will want to start formally recording the information you have unearthed. You will need files to store your certificates, photocopies and letters. You will probably want to start charting a family tree and using a computer to help you.

Draw a family tree

This is the best way of organising your data, and allows you to see at a glance how family members are related.

6: Looking at official records

You can find out a lot of information from civil registration certificates for births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales from 1837. (See our separate leaflet)

Once you've located some of your ancestors, you can find out more about them using census returns. (See our separate leaflet)