

A Beginner's Guide to Researching Family History

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Welcome to the History Centre

- Opened in 2007
- Replaced the existing Wiltshire Records Office in Trowbridge
- Funded jointly by Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council
- Includes archives, local studies, archaeology, conservation, Wiltshire Buildings Record, arts and museums advisory services

Today's talk

- Loosely based on a 6 week workshop provided by the History Centre “Sources for family history”
- Looking at basic and more complicated sources to get the most out of family history research and understand the records we have
- Lots of talks about more specific subjects take place at the History Centre
- Time for questions at the end but feel free to interrupt!

The first steps

- Try and work out as much as possible from talking to family members, examining old photographs, diaries and family Bibles etc - try and get a picture of your family as much as possible before moving on to other sources
- Then go on to other sources – online and visiting archives

Online records

- Once you have done the basic first steps, get a subscription to Ancestry or Find My Past
- WSHC and local libraries have a subscription to Ancestry which you can use for free

The Census

- First port of call is the census taken every 10 years from 1801-present day (available until 1911)
- Census records can tell us a person's age at the time of the census, where they lived, who they lived with, their occupation, and any servants or visitors to the property
- BUT be careful – not always correct!

Birth, marriage and death index

- Can be found on Ancestry and other websites such as freebmd, FamilySearch etc
- Births, marriages and deaths were registered from 1837
- From them, a copy certificate can be obtained for anyone which gives more detail
- Should be used alongside parish registers to confirm PR information

Parish registers

- Wiltshire parish registers went on Ancestry in June 2017; Gloucestershire in 2016
- Parish registers are most helpful for finding information from before 1837
- Only Church of England – nonconformists are different
- Earliest registers date from 1538 but many have not survived from the early period

Parish registers (2)

- Do not indicate dates of birth or death – only baptism and burial
- More recent baptism registers give names of both parents; older ones it is only the father's name
- Illegitimacy – father is not in the baptism register but can often be found in bastardy bonds

Parish registers (3)

- Problem with mother not being named in early baptism register = sometimes unable to trace family tree back through her side
- Marriage registers can help with this
- Transcripts by Wiltshire Family History Society available at WSHC

Bishops' Transcripts

- Useful for filling in gaps in parish registers and also confirming information in the registers
- Yearly copies of entries in registers returned to the Diocesan authorities
- WSHC holds transcripts for Salisbury Diocese so mostly Wiltshire parishes but also some in Hampshire, Dorset and Berkshire

Indexes

- Subject index (next to archive catalogues)
- Surname index (next to parish register transcripts)
- Online indexes – IGI (FamilySearch)
- Marriage licence indexes
- Parish register transcript indexes
- Prison indexes
- Lots more being added!

Nonconformist records

- “My Ancestors Were...”
- Good introduction to nonconformity in Victoria County History volume 3
- Nonconformist records are tricky because churches often did not keep records and are not obliged to pass them to us if they did
- Many baptism, marriage and burial entries will be in Church of England registers

Nonconformist records (2)

- Before 1837 all marriages had to take place in Church of England
- After 1837 chapels could be licensed for marriages
- Marriage notice books are helpful
- Parish churchyards often used for burials, or unconsecrated parts of cemeteries
- 1840 religious census – not complete

Wills

- Salisbury Diocesan probate collection held at WSHC (pre 1858)
- Wiltshire Wills are on Ancestry as of late 2017
- Post 1858 wills can be ordered from the gov.uk website - £10 charge
- Wills are often hard to read – don't be afraid to ask for help!
- Some wills include inventories
- Fewer wills for women

Kelly's Directories

- 19th and 20th centuries
- List business owners and some private individuals and where they lived / worked – great for finding out where someone worked
- Directories also give useful information about the place – short history of the village / town, information on politicians, schools, churches etc

Electoral registers

- Started 1832, copies held at WSHC until 2016
- Great for finding out how long someone lived in a property, or their exact address
- Not indexed
- If a person wasn't registered to vote they won't be on the register

Schools

- State-funded, independent, primary, secondary, special schools, technical colleges
- Log books – started in 1862, continued until 1980s (not all have survived)
- Admission registers
- Headteachers' reports and correspondence
- News cuttings
- Photographs
- Punishment and medical books
- Staffing records

Maps

- Great for local history but also helpful for family history – working out where people lived
- OS maps c1886, c1900, c1923
- Tithe maps c1840
- Andrews & Dury's 1773
- Lots more estate maps / surveys
- Know Your Place

Estate and manorial records

- Manorial – records of a manorial court overseen by the Lord of the Manor
- Records include court rolls, court books
- Excellent for filling in gaps in parish registers – working out who was related to who – and go back before 1538
- Latin until 1733 apart from Commonwealth

Estate and manorial records (2)

- Estate records – include title deeds, correspondence, accounts
- Great for seeing what tenants did for work, where they lived etc
- Do not give indication of the age of a person but can get an idea of their life

Newspapers

- Need to be patient but they can give a lot of information on family members if articles appeared about them
- Good for birth, marriage and death announcements

Workhouse records

- Can tell if someone was born or died in a workhouse with death certificates, and census records will say if they lived there
- Workhouse records are catalogued by poor law union and can sometimes be found in parish collections
- www.workhouses.org.uk – excellent website on workhouses and tells you where records are

Asylum records

- Potentially a lot of detail about a person and what was wrong with them
- Admission registers and case files
- Closed for 100 years but permission can be gained to access newer records

Great Western Railway

- Collection number 2515 – largest collection in WSHC
- Great for family historians if an ancestor was employed by the company or if they had legal agreements with them
- Lots of indexes available and lots of work still ongoing for the collection

Paid research

- £30 per hour
- Similar services at other record offices (maybe different prices) – please check with the office
- Useful if you live too far away or are finding it difficult interpreting / researching original documents

What WSHC do not hold!

- Divorce papers – rare before 1858 and held centrally at The National Archives, but usually destroyed 20 years after the divorce
- Land Registry documents
- Military records – Wiltshire Regiment
www.veterans-uk.info / National Archives / Find My Past / Ancestry / Commonwealth War Graves – though we do have Wiltshire Yeomanry / Militia indexes and records

The searchroom layout

- Help desk – first port of call
- Books on genealogy, directories, reference books, local history books
- Main archive searchroom to front of help desk
- Strongrooms
- This will be similar to other record offices, but not all record offices are the same – and none are the same as TNA!

Finish

- Any questions?