

# University of Strathclyde, Centre for Lifelong Learning

## Family History Research: An Introduction



University of  
**Strathclyde**  
Humanities &  
Social Sciences

### Week 1: Part 2: A Beginner's Guide to Genealogy

Knowing where to begin doing genealogy can be confusing – there are so many records to search for, so many databases to look at and so many ancestors to trace that it can make your head spin!

Never fear! There are a few time tested ways to go about approaching the situation and we'll explore them here...

#### **Start with what you know**

Begin by writing down everything you know about your family:

- Names
- Dates of birth, marriage, death
- Places of residence
- Stories of emigration and travel
- Occupations
- Family myths and mysteries
- Anything else that occurs to you

Even if all you have are rough dates and more questions than answers, it's a place to begin. This is a good time to use a blank Family Group Sheet (FGS) and Ancestral Chart (use a pencil!). These are handy 'thinking tools' and they are useful when you approach other members of the family for more information. As your research progresses and you find evidence to back up your findings, you can enter data into your Family Record booklet.

Be sure to note if you are unsure of any fact – this will help guide your discussions with family members and to choose which 'fact' to begin searching for.

#### **Interviewing family members**

Talk to your relatives – do this sooner rather than later! If no one in an older generation is left, try any older siblings or cousins.

Use FGSs, pedigree trees, family photos, etc. to kick start your conversation(s).

Have questions ready but don't feel like you need to stick to them if the conversation is flowing. Be sensitive to people's feelings regarding family 'secrets'.

Ask 'open-ended' questions – 'What do you remember about our grandfather?', etc.

Take notes or, even better, record the interviews, if that's comfortable.

Go back for more...people often remember the good stuff after you've gone! Visit them again.

#### **Searching for records**

Now that you have gleaned lots of information from yourself and your relatives, it's time to back up that family lore with documentary evidence.

Generally, you'll want to try and find BMD records for your ancestors and anyone else on your tree that is of interest. Plus, finding them on available census records is of primary importance as well.

It's best to **start as close to the present as possible and work your way back in time.** That way you can usually verify facts (and that you are finding the 'right' people) with your memories and records or by checking with other family members.

### **How far back can we go with standard records?**

Statutory records are available post 1841/1855:

- 1841 – Individuals identifiable within Census data
- 1855 – Statutory recording of Birth, Marriage, Death (Scotland)
  - Births index 1855 to 2015, images to 1915 (100 year cut off)
  - Marriages index 1855 to 2015, images to 1940 (75 year cut off)
  - Deaths index 1855 to 2015, images to 1965 (50 year cut off)

Old Parish Registers 1553/1563 to 1854 on ScotlandsPeople. These are Church of Scotland records:

- Births and/or Baptisms
- Banns and/or Marriages
- Deaths and/or Burials

Not all OPRs exist for all parishes. Some have not survived

Roman Catholic birth registers 1703-1908 (not all parish records survive)

### **Scottish BMD records**

Your birth record (if you were born in Scotland) will show your parents' marriage date (if they were married) and place of marriage.

From this you can find their marriage certificate, which will give their ages and their parents' names – including the mothers' maiden names. These pieces of information should allow you to find their birth certificates and the cycle repeats.

Death certificates have marriage details, names of parents and age of deceased...all can help find birth and marriage records. Again, repeat cycle...

This cycle is largely the same for English/Welsh/Irish BMD records.

### **English, Welsh & Irish records**

English, Welsh & Irish BMD records are less helpful:

- Birth certificates do not include the date and place of parents' marriage.
- Marriage certificates only give bride and groom's fathers' names, not mothers'.
- Death certificates do not give any parents' names.

You also have to order these records from the GRO or a local archive– there is no online repository of the certificate images. There **are** online indexes of names, however, and you can use these to identify a person and then order their BMD certificate. These can be found on Ancestry, FreeBMD, FindMyPast and many other websites.

## Census records

Census records are very useful as they provide information on a family group on one day in one place. They can identify unknown children, siblings, grandparents and other family members. They give information on birth place, occupation, type of housing, etc.

It's usually a good tactic to go back and forth between searching for BMD and Census records. That can help narrow the results down to the 'right' household in the census records, particularly if you are dealing with a common name.

## Where to find records

### Online

- [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk) (£) – the official source for (and the only place to find images of) Scottish records. Includes civil registration records, OPRs, probate records, Catholic registers, 1855-1925 valuation rolls, and the Scottish census 1841-1911. Use of the website involves registering and buying credits at £7 for 30 credits.
- [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk) (£) – better for English and Welsh records, does have transcribed Scottish census records 1841-1901. Good for military records. Can buy credits to view records, or take out a subscription (or join Glasgow and West of Scotland FHS, which has a subscription).
- [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) (£) – better for English and Welsh records, does have transcribed Scottish census records 1841-1901. Available in Glasgow public libraries for free use, or take out a subscription.
- [www.thegenealogist.co.uk](http://www.thegenealogist.co.uk) (£) – better for English and Welsh records, has non-conformist BMD records for England and Wales.
- [www.deceasedonline.com](http://www.deceasedonline.com) (£) – A UK-wide database of burials and cremations. Search registers by Country, Region, County, Burial Authority or Crematorium.
- [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) (free) - better for international and English and Welsh records. Does have Scottish census transcripts for 1841-1901 as well as a birth and marriage database.
- [www.freecen.org.uk](http://www.freecen.org.uk) (free) - transcribed UK census records, coverage varies by year.
- [www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk) (free) – English and Welsh BMD index.
- [www.freereg.org.uk](http://www.freereg.org.uk) (free) - transcribed parish records from England and Wales.
- [www.genuki.org.uk](http://www.genuki.org.uk) - information on UK genealogy by area. A great way of finding out what genealogy sources are in your area or an area of interest.
- [www.cyndislist.org](http://www.cyndislist.org) - list of genealogy links. Worldwide coverage.

### Physical

- Scotland's People Centre (GROS), Edinburgh (M-F; 9:00 – 4:30, £15.00)
- Registrars' Genealogy Centre (GROS), Mitchell Library, Glasgow (M-F; 9:30 – 4:00; £15.00)
- Local library – Most Glasgow public libraries offer free access to Ancestry. The Mitchell Library has microfilm of west of Scotland census & Old Parish Records and lots more.
- LDS Family Research Centres – Kelvinside, Glasgow, see [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) for times, phone number and address.
- Family History Societies offer records and support. Glasgow & West of Scotland FHS is a great one, with a resource centre in Partick. See [www.gwsfhs.org.uk](http://www.gwsfhs.org.uk).

## Where did you find it?

Be sure to write down where you found a piece of information, for example:

'My great grandfather, Charles SUNDERLAND, was born in Preston in 1823 – his father was from London and his mother was said to be from France.'

*Conversation with Bessie Smith, great aunt to Charles Morrison [yourself] on 12 July 2008.*

Or...

Robert CAMPBELL, b. 1871, emigrated to Canada 23 August 1899 from Glasgow.

*Passenger list, the Athena, sailing from Glasgow to Quebec, record found on Findmypast.co.uk.*

This is important, so that those who use your research after you know where the records were found, can find them again if necessary, and tell what record sets you've looked at. This is also useful for you to keep track of where you've looked.

Write down as many details as possible for each piece of information found, i.e. author/creator, website found on, date you found it, volume number, archive you found it in, etc.

## Summary

So, in short:

- Begin with what you know – write it down!
- Talk to any relations, find out what they know.
- Begin looking for records – BMD and census.
- Start as close to the present as possible and work your way back in time.
- Record where you find information.
- Use a filing system to store records and notes.

## Get Started

- Start by entering your family's information on to a Family Group Sheet, then complete an Ancestral Chart for yourself and add in any earlier ancestors you know about.
- Think about possible individuals or family branches to use in your final research project.
- Begin to organise any documents and other materials you have according to the method outlined in this class.
- Get registered on the ScotlandsPeople website ([www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk))

## Introduction to Family History Research - class 2

### Next time...

- Scottish Census Records
- Referencing for genealogists
- And we start finding out about **John McLaren Pearson (1894 – 1975)**