

"I want to Research my Family History – How do I Start?" Lorraine Stewart

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STEP 1 - write down what you already know

Start with yourself – your name and date and place of birth

Add your parents and their dates and places of birth, marriage and death (as appropriate)

Add what you know about your grandparents and any other relatives

Add additional information such as:

- Where they lived
 - Schools they went to
 - Occupations and places of work
 - Hobbies
- Information about their brothers and sisters

You may find it helpful to put it into a diagram.

STEP 2 - Decide how you want to record the information

Notebook

- Number the pages, one or two for each family
- Add in anything you know about them
- If you know information about the children give them their own page and added that page number to their name on their parent's page

Pre-printed Family History Books (Book stores, online, Family History Societies)

- Pages set up for entering your family history information.

Pre-printed Family History Sheets

- **Ancestry pre-printed sheets** for recording your family history with space allocated for specific information (free to download). Print out and file in a folder, or save on your computer.
 - [Ancestry® Charts and Forms](#) [Ancestry® Census Forms](#)
- **Source Summary sheet** - keep track of where you found specific information

TIP - I can guarantee that at some point you will wonder where you found something. Record where you found everything - it can save you a lot of time later.

- **Research Calendar** reminds what research you have done

TIP – At the end of a research session note down what to do next - saves time trying to work out where you are at when you come back to it.

TIP – You may find it useful to **have a long-term research plan**, with smaller targets to tick off as you complete them.

Computer Software (Family Tree Maker, Family Historian, Legacy etc.)

Once the information is in the database - a few clicks will produce a variety of charts and reports.

TIP - If you are storing information on your computer **keep at least one back up** in a separate place in case something happens to your computer. You don't want to lose all the research you have done.

Online Family Tree (Family Search, Ancestry, Find My Past, My Heritage)

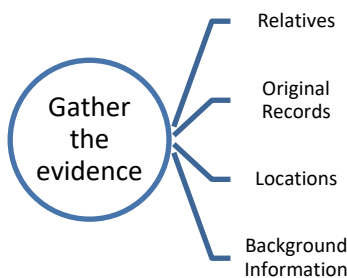
Many family tree websites offer the opportunity to create your family tree online - allows you to view it, add to it, and share it with other family members. Saved in the cloud so protected from accidents to your computer.

STEP 3 - Think - What would you like to find out?

Think about what you would like to find out – at least to get started - gives a focus to your initial research, but can be changed or expanded on later.

- Do any questions come to mind?
- Is there a particular person, or family line that you are interested in?
- If you want to research all ancestors going back a few generations – decide which parent or grandparent you want to start with

STEP 4 - Become A Detective



Speak to Relatives (older family members, siblings, cousins or family friends)

- Find out where your ancestors were born, married, died, were buried - you may want to visit a gravestone later so if you can find out where in the graveyard it is, all the better
- What house did your ancestor lived in, what special events or holidays did they have
- Let an older relative ramble on– you never know what you might find out
- Looking at old family photos can prompt memories of things they have forgotten
- Record the discussion (if you can) - allows you to concentrate on listening to what they're saying instead of taking notes, and you can listen to the recording later.

Find the original Birth, Marriage and Death records (confirm information about key events)

Scotland's People – only access to the key Scottish records – main starting point for research

Where?

- General Register House in Edinburgh
- Hubs around Scotland – Glasgow, Kilmarnock, Hawick, Alloa, Inverness
- Online: <https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk>

What?

- All Statutory Records of Birth, Marriage and Death (1855 onwards)
- Many pre 1855 Church Registers - Baptisms, Marriages, Deaths / Burials
- Most Census Records - taken every 10 years, available from 1841 - 1921
- Other Records – Wills, Tax Records, Church Records etc.

TIP – Other Genealogy websites – don't have the original Scottish Birth, Marriage, Death and Census records. However, they may have indexes and transcriptions of these records. These are generally good for basic information, and they can help you find the original records, but the original records often have more information, and you can read them for yourself. They may also have other records such as military records and school records.

- *Family Search* (free) <https://www.familysearch.org>
 - Browsable 'Historical Images' which include some church and cemetery records
- *Ancestry* (subscription) <https://www.ancestry.co.uk>
- *Find My Past* (subscription) <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/>
- *My Heritage* (subscription) <https://www.myheritage.com>

Using Scotland's People (same online or in a Centre)

- Login / Create Account & Register
- Useful to purchase some credits before you start as it saves having to go back and buy credits when you find a record you want. Most records cost 6 credits (£1.50) to view and download
- Click on 'Search the Records' to begin your search
- There are links to Guides for each record on the Search pages
- Statutory Registers – Births, Marriages, Deaths (from 1855 onwards)
 - Restrictions on what records can be viewed online - cannot see:
 - Birth records less than 100 years old
 - Marriage records less than 75 years old
 - Death records less than 50 years old
 - More recent records – up to 2024 can be viewed in the Scotland's People Centre and in the local hubs around Scotland, and limited information can be seen in the online index
 - If not accessible online you can order records (£12 each) - posted out to you within 15 days.
- Start with looking for a record that you will know for sure is your family (from the information you expect to find on it)
- Complete the search form (which includes helpful information about how to complete it)

TIPS for completing Search Forms:

- In earlier records spelling was not consistent or accurate
- 'Search Tools' allows you to choose how precisely you want to search for a name
- If you are unsure of spelling replace one or more letters with '*' or choose 'wildcard' or 'fuzzy matching' to include multiple spelling variations
- An event in December may not have been registered until January of the following year

TIPS for Results pages:

- Searches can be refined if too many results are shown
- Results can be put in order by clicking on the column title

Know what to expect on the records - Information has varied slightly over the years:

Birth Records –

- District, Year, Register Number
- Name
- Date & Place of Birth
- Parent's Names, Father's Occupation, Mother's Maiden Name, Date of Parent's Marriage (not always correct)
- Informant – usually father or mother, and whether present in the house when the birth took place
- Date and District of Registration

Marriage Records –

- District, Year, Register Number
- Date & Place of Marriage, Form of Marriage – Church / Civil
- Names, Occupations, Marital status
- Ages
- Residences before marriage (Marriage in the bride's home was common over 100 years ago)
- Father's Name & Occupation, Mother's Name & Maiden Surname, and if either was deceased
- Minister's name and church, Names and Addresses of two Witnesses (often relatives)
- Date and District of Registration

Death Records –

- District, Year, Register Number
- Name, Sex, Occupation
- Marital Status, Age
- Name(s) of Spouse(s)
- When & Where died
- Father's Name and Occupation
- Mother's Name and Maiden Name
- Cause of Death & Doctor's Name
- Informant's Signature and Relationship
- Date and District of Registration

TIP - The information on any record can be wrong - Who provided the information? How well did they know the person? It is not uncommon to find the wrong parents' names on an early Death Record. If the informant is a son-in-law or grandchild they may not have known the deceased's parents and can get mixed up with family names.

Use the information on the records found to work your way back through the generations:

Information Found	Search for
Birth Record- Parents names & date and place of marriage	Parent's Marriage record
Birth & Death Record- Date of birth / Age	Census Records
Marriage Record- Were parents recorded as 'deceased'?	Parent's Death Record between - If deceased - the last year recorded as alive and the year of marriage If not recorded as deceased - after the date of marriage
Marriage and Death Record- Recorded as a widow / widower on Death Record	Spouse's Death Record

TIPS on Names:

- **Scottish Traditional Naming Patterns** (not always followed and sometimes reversed)
This can be helpful in identifying if a record is the correct one – if no children have been given their grandparents names you may have the wrong family.
 - Eldest son – named after his father's father
 - Second son - named after his mother's father
 - Third son named after his father
 - Eldest daughter - named after her mother's mother
 - Second daughter named after her father's mother
 - Third daughter named after her mother
 - Later children may be named after an uncle / aunt, minister, midwife, employer, neighbour
 - If a child (or close family member) died - next child born of the same sex often given that name
- **Shortened Names and interchangeable names** –An official record would probably have their proper names. But when searching be aware that variations on names could have been used e.g.: Elizabeth – Liz, Eliza, Betty, Betsy; Marion – Main, Maisie, Myra; Jane / Jean; Jessie / Janet etc.
- **Names and Sex** – names we think of as belonging to males may have been given to females in the past
- **Women's Surnames** - In Scotland women keep their maiden names for life and can be found under either their married or their maiden surname – it doesn't mean they weren't married e.g.: Gravestones – 'Marion Robb wife of John Smart' or 'John Smart ... his wife Marion Robb'.
Census – 'Marion Smart' when husband alive but after he died – reverts to 'Marion Robb'

Register of Corrected Entries

Above record – *"There is one correction associated with this entry"* Click on *"View 1st correction"* - provides further information e.g.:

- Birth Record – possibly a paternity case in court naming the father
- Death Record – more information if a sudden or unexpected death

Census Records

Information gathered every 10 years, available after 100 years – currently 1841-1921 available

Records a family through time and identifies changing circumstances e.g.: move to a larger house

TIPS on Census Records:

- **The form was completed with information about each person actually in the house on the census night**, may have included visitors or people only there for the one night. Someone normally living in the household may have been away from home on census night and not be recorded with the family, but elsewhere.
- **If searching several census years** remember to increase the age range
- **Adding the forename of another person** on that census page – useful if there is a number of possible records in the search results and you know the name of another family member, but could also exclude the correct record if the other family member is listed on a different page
- **Ages not always recorded accurately and could vary quite a bit between censuses** – a few years younger in one, a few years older in the next, children's ages were more likely to be correct
- **1841 Census - adult ages** rounded down to the nearest 5 years
- **A big age gap in the family** could indicate that a child had died or was living elsewhere
- **Number of rooms with windows** (from 1861) indicates the size of the house they lived in
- **Guide to Census Records** gives information on missing records and surviving pre-1841 Census Records
- **Check other names** on the page - sometimes find other family members on the same page but in a different household – it might be siblings / parents with their own households, a young person in a neighbour's house – just visiting, or living more permanently with a relative who had more room in their house, or as a servant (servants were common it doesn't mean that the family was wealthy - they would probably not be paid but would get board in return for helping with the household chores and looking after children).

Old Church Registers

For births, marriages and deaths before 1855 you will need to search the Church Registers of Births and Baptisms, Banns and Marriages, and Deaths and Burials. Baptisms and Marriages usually took place in the home. Death Registers are usually of Burials.

Prior to 1855 there was no requirement to register a birth, marriage or death, and many Church Registers are not available on *Scotland's People*. **The Guide to Church Registers** includes a list of Old Parish Registers and how complete they are. Some Church Registers are held by local archives

(especially the Episcopal Church Registers) so if you don't find the Church Register you are looking for try contacting the local archive for the area.

Search Form - Choose from the options of Church of Scotland (old parish registers), Roman Catholic Church Registers, or Other Churches. If unsure start with the Church of Scotland registers, but if you don't find the record you are looking for try the other options.

TIP: If you find two or more records for the same event download both - they may have different information.

Visit locations

Visit the places your ancestors lived. See the church they went to, walk in their footsteps to school.

Google Streetmap <https://www.google.co.uk/maps/> is useful if you can't visit - you can move the yellow man along the streets and look from side to side to see what they would see (if not changed!)

Gather background information

- **Statistical Accounts of Scotland** (<https://stataccscot.ed.ac.uk>) detailed accounts of each parish written by local ministers around 1795 and 1840 give a good description of life in the parish at that time
- Search **historical Newspapers** for the local area – find out what was going on in the area when your ancestors lived there - you might find them winning a competition or in an accident
 - British Newspaper Archive (subscription) <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/> (also available on *Find My Past* <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/>)
 - National Library of Scotland <https://www.nls.uk/> – newspapers available online
 - Local Libraries

STEP 5 - Write up what you find as you go along

- Family Tree Charts
- Booklets
- Blogs
- Website

Don't wait till your family tree is complete – it never will be!

Once you've got started -

- **Put flesh on the bones** – find other records
 - Monumental Inscriptions
 - Maps
 - Church Minutes
 - Estate Rentals
 - School Admission Registers
 - Court Records
 - Military Records
 - Tax Records
 - Wills
 - Prison Registers
 - Employment Records

- **Choose the people you're interested in and want to find out more about**

A reminder – we are who we are because of who our ancestors were:

**I am bound to them,
though I cannot look into their eyes or hear their voices.
I honour their history.
I cherish their lives.
I will tell their story.
I will remember them,
for I am the result of the very love, struggle, sacrifice
and journey of thousands who have gone before me.
[Author Unknown]**