



Strategies for Finding Your English Ancestors

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Beginning your English research is no different from any other genealogical research. You begin with yourself, and work back until you identify the immigrant. Once you identify the immigrant, there's more work to do in this country (or wherever they first settled) before you "jump the pond." Success in immigrant research is highly dependent on discovering the exact location in the homeland where your ancestors were born and typically clues to the location are in records here. In addition to knowing the location, you need some additional corroborating details to separate your ancestor from others of the same name...what makes him or her unique. Do you have the parents' names including the mother's maiden name or the names of siblings?

Learn about the locality

Once you identify a locality, learn about it. Maps and gazetteers are your best friend! Do you know where the county is located and the names of the surrounding counties? [FamilySearch](#) has a map of England where you can delve down to counties, parishes, registration districts and other jurisdictions. The [Topographical Dictionary of England](#) by Samuel Lewis (1848) provides information about the locality, including boundaries, location, towns, churches, schools, etc. This is also a good time to google the county or parish with the word genealogy. You will likely find local resources such as the local family history society, local cemetery transcriptions or histories of the area.

Religion in England

The Church of England (CofE) was the state church in England and there was no separation of church and state. The Church, therefore had responsibility for record keeping and social welfare for those within its boundaries. For this reason, even those who were not members of the Church of England might appear in the records. Parish records of births, marriages and baptisms have been kept since 1538 and in 1558 a law required that an annual copy had to be sent to the bishop of the diocese (called Bishop's Transcripts).

Since you began with researching the locality, you should know something about the history of the area, the parish and the chapels, and the surrounding area. *The Phillimore Atlas and Index of Parish Registers* which is available on [Ancestry](#), provides maps of the counties with the parishes and the starting dates for their records. Once you have identified the parish, check to see if there are online indexes/images. A large number of parishes have been indexed, many with images at [Ancestry](#), [Findmypast](#) and [FamilySearch](#).

Civil Registration

Civil Registration began in England on 1 July 1837 for all births, deaths and marriages. The indexes are done by year, then quarter. You will need to know the approximate date and the Registration District. There are multiple indexes to civil registration with different search capabilities.

[FreeBMD](#) allows you to search civil registration indexes from 1 July 1837 through in some cases 1983 (although they might not be complete for every year). You can check the coverage from their home page. [FamilySearch](#) provides individual indexes to births (to 2008), deaths (to 2007) and marriages (to 2005). Click on the map for England and select the appropriate index to search. [Findmypast](#) has indexes to births (to 2006), deaths (to 2007) and marriages (to 2008). And [Ancestry's](#) indexes cover births and marriages (to 2005) and deaths (to 2007).

To order a certificate of birth or death from the [General Register Office](#) you need to have the information from an index. You can also use the index at the GRO site, however it does limit you to searching ± 2 years. Orders for marriage certificates need to be placed with the local Registration Office. You should be prepared to provide the Name, Registration Year and Quarter, Registration District, Volume and Page number.

You can place your order online with the GRO, with the choice of a PDF emailed to you (usually is less than a week) for £7 or a Certificates mailed to you for £11. The information is the same, so unless you need a copy for legal purposes, just order the PDF. The marriage records from the local Registration Office will typically be mailed.

Census Records

Censuses were first taken in England in 1801, however from 1801 to 1831 they are numerical only. Beginning in 1841, the census records list the names of each individual. The census was taken on a specific evening. The enumerator left a household schedule in each home with instructions to have it filled out on the census evening. Only those people present in the household that evening were to be listed. The next day the enumerator collected the householder forms and verified that they had been properly completed, made copies and forwarded them to the appropriate offices. Because of this procedure, it is possible that a member of the family was not in the household where you expected to find them. They may have been enumerated in another household as a visitor, servant, border, etc.

In order to search effectively you will need to know the location where your ancestors lived. All of the censuses for England from 1841-1911 are indexed with images at [Ancestry](#), [Findmypast](#) and [MyHeritage](#). There is a 100 year privacy period in England. The 1921 census will be released in early 2022 initially at Findmypast. The 1931 census was destroyed by fire during World War II and there was no 1941 census taken because of the War.

The 1939 Register

The Register is a snapshot of the population of England and Wales just prior to World War II. It was used to create Identity cards and after rationing was introduced in 1940 to issue ration books. It is an important collection because the gap in census records due to the loss of the 1831 census. There was no 1941 census taken because of War II. It provides the most complete survey of England and Wales between 1921 and 1951 is available online at [Findmypast](#) and [Ancestry](#).

Newspapers

Don't neglect checking newspapers. With many newspapers now digitized and online you may be able to find notices of death or marriage; of legal actions or even advertisements for your ancestor's business. [Findmypast](#) has the largest collection of newspapers covering all of England and because of their relationship with The [British Newspaper Archive](#) (owned by the same company) adds new content every week. They have recently announced a joint venture to make 158 of these newspapers available for free (with more added in the future). To access you need to have an

account at Findmypast (but not a subscription). Go to the [Newspapers and Periodicals](#) page and click on "Free to View."

Strategy

- Understand the basics of good genealogical research.
- Cite sources for all information.
- Research the locality where your ancestor lived
- Use civil records and/or church records to fill in information (death, marriage, birth).
- Find each family member in all census records for which they were living.
- Utilize specific records for the locality and time when your ancestor lived.

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21. _____. *QuickSheet: Your Stripped-Bare Guide to Citing Sources*, Genealogical Publishing Company, Baltimore, 2017. <https://amzn.to/3suyOMN>

Web Sites

22. Ancestry *
England Resources <https://prf.hn/l/rvqv5Z7>
<http://tinyurl.com/howavx5>
23. A Vision of Britain through Time <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk>
24. British Newspaper Archive* <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>
25. Cyndi's List <http://www.cyndislist.com/uk/eng>
26. Ellis Island
Ellis Island in One Step <http://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/>
<http://stevemorse.org/ellis2/ellisgold.html>
27. FamilySearch
Learning Center - England <http://www.familysearch.org/>
Wiki England Genealogy <https://tinyurl.com/yxdbddck>
English Jurisdictions <http://tinyurl.com/j8bb2gk>
<https://tinyurl.com/ybrahk27>
28. Findmypast*
UK Collections* <http://tidd.ly/596c630b>
<http://tidd.ly/3d2b8ea7>
29. Free BMD <https://www.freebmd.org.uk/>
30. The Genealogist* <https://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/>
31. General Register Office England & Wales <http://tinyurl.com/38qhoq2>
32. GENUKI <http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng>
33. MyHeritage* <https://www.myheritage.com/>
34. The National Archives
Census Records (Explained) <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>
<https://tinyurl.com/469hs42m>
35. National Library of Scotland OS Maps <http://maps.nls.uk/os/>
36. WorldCat (library catalog) <http://www.worldcat.org>

*Databases require a subscription or Pay-Per-View. Some articles and general information are free.

Blogs & Podcasts

37. Evidence Explained <https://www.evidenceexplained.com>
38. FindMyPast UK Blog <https://www.findmypast.com/blog>
39. Lost Cousins Newsletter <https://www.lostcousins.com>

Information and links are correct as of August 2021.

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