



GEN-FIND RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.

Notes on England & Wales Records and Searching Them

For general enquiries, it is a difficult task to institute an in-depth search without knowing a place-name for your ancestor when researching England or Wales. Most records are arranged by town, parish, county or Registrar Districts and the vast majority of these are housed in a multitude of regional archives and libraries, though an ever-increasing number are now being and National Library of England circumstances we have a few that, at minimum, will provide us and most of these constitute pre-ancestor might be located. This is family, and these index searches retainer we request. Your chances you know a town name or parish search better.

If you do know a place-name, additional research suggestions In this case, the minimum retainer a preliminary research plan, research strategies and results in the Report.



Figure 1 - Map of the United Kingdom

& Wales. In some minor limited county and state-wide indexes with a distribution of the family name 1900 information; at best, a pioneer always first priority, to locate the are covered by the minimum advance at success are much better, however, if or county by which to isolate the

you'll receive some research and based on information you've supplied. covers evaluation of your information, implementation of some basic evaluation of those research

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

“The history of **England** concerns the study of the human past in one of Europe's oldest and most influential national territories. What is now England, a country within the United Kingdom, was inhabited by early humans 800,000 years ago as the 2010 discovery of flint tools at Happisburgh in Norfolk revealed. The earliest evidence for modern humans in North West Europe is a jawbone discovered in Devon at Kents Cavern in 1927, which was re-dated in 2011 to between 41,000 and 44,000 years old. Continuous human habitation dates to around 12,000 years ago, at the end of the last glacial period. The region has numerous remains from the Mesolithic, Neolithic, and

Bronze Age, such as Stonehenge and Avebury. In the Iron Age, England, like all of Britain south of the Firth of Forth, was inhabited by the Celtic people known as the Britons, but also by some Belgae tribes (e.g. the Atrebates, the Catuvellauni, the Trinovantes, etc.) in the south east. In AD 43 the Roman conquest of Britain began; the Romans maintained control of their province of Britannia through to the 5th century.

The end of Roman rule in Britain enabled the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Britain, which is often regarded as the origin of England and the English people. The Anglo-Saxons, a collection of various Germanic peoples, established several kingdoms that became the primary powers in what is now England and parts of southern Scotland. They introduced the Old English language, which displaced the previous British language. The Anglo-Saxons warred with British successor states in Wales, Cornwall, and the Hen Ogledd (Old North; the Brythonic-speaking parts of northern England and southern Scotland), as well as with each other. Raids by the Vikings were frequent after about AD 800, and the Norsemen took control of large parts of what is now England. During this period several rulers attempted to unite the various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, an effort that led to the emergence of the Kingdom of England by the 10th century.

In 1066, the Normans invaded and conquered England. There was much civil war and battles with other nations throughout the Middle Ages. The Kingdom of England was a sovereign state until the reign of Richard I who made it a vassal of the Holy Roman Empire in 1194. In 1212 during the reign of his brother John Lackland the Kingdom instead became a tribute-paying vassal of the Holy See until the 16th century when Henry VIII broke from the Catholic Church. During the *Renaissance*, England was ruled by the Tudors. England had conquered Wales in the 12th century and was then united with Scotland in the early 18th century to form a new sovereign state called Great Britain. Following the *Industrial Revolution*, Great Britain ruled a worldwide Empire, the largest in the world. Following a process of decolonization in the 20th century the vast majority of the empire became independent; however, its cultural impact is widespread and deep in many countries of the present day.”¹

“The history of **Wales** begins with the arrival of human beings in the region thousands of years ago. Neanderthals lived in what is now Wales, or Cymru in Welsh, at least 230,000 years ago. Homo sapiens arrived by about 33,000 years ago. However, continuous habitation by modern humans’ dates from the period after the end of the last ice age around 9000 BC, and Wales has many remains from the Mesolithic, Neolithic, and Bronze Age. During the Iron Age the region, like all of Britain south of the Firth of Forth, was dominated by the Celtic Britons and the British language. The Romans, who began their conquest of Britain in AD 43, first campaigned in what is now northeast Wales in 48 against the Deceangli, and gained total control of the region with their defeat of the Ordovices in 79. The Romans departed from Britain in the 5th century, opening the door for the Anglo-Saxon invasion. Thereafter British language and culture began to splinter, and several distinct groups formed. The Welsh people were the largest of these groups, and are generally discussed independently of the other surviving Brythonic-speaking peoples after the 11th century.

A number of kingdoms formed in the area now called Wales in the post-Roman period. While the most powerful ruler was acknowledged as King of the Britons (later Tywysog Cymru: Leader or Prince of Wales), and some rulers extended their control over other Welsh territories and into western England, none were able to unite Wales for long. Internecine struggles and external pressure from the English and later, the Norman conquerors of England, led to the Welsh kingdoms coming gradually under the sway of the English crown. In 1282, the death of Llywelyn the Last led to the conquest of the Principality of Wales by King Edward I of England; afterwards, the heir apparent to the English monarch has borne the title "Prince of Wales". The Welsh launched several revolts against English rule, the last significant one being that led by Owain Glyndŵr in the early 15th century. In the 16th century Henry VIII, himself of Welsh extraction, passed the Laws in Wales Acts aiming to fully incorporate Wales into the Kingdom of

¹ 'History of England' in *Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_England extracted on 6 February 2012.

England. Under England's authority, Wales became part of the Kingdom of Great Britain in 1707 and then the United Kingdom in 1801. Yet, the Welsh retained their language and culture in spite of heavy English dominance. The publication of the extremely significant first Welsh translation of the Bible by William Morgan in 1588 greatly advanced the position of Welsh as a literary language.

The 18th century saw the beginnings of two changes that would greatly affect Wales, the Welsh Methodist revival, which led the country to turn increasingly nonconformist in religion, and the *Industrial Revolution*. During the 19th century southeast Wales in particular experienced rapid industrialization and a dramatic rise in population as a result of the explosion of the coal and iron industries. These industries declined in the 20th century, while nationalist sentiment and interest in self-determination rose. The Labour Party replaced the Liberal Party as the dominant political force in the 1940s, while the nationalist party Plaid Cymru gained momentum in the 1960s. In a 1997 referendum Welsh voters approved the devolution of governmental responsibility to a National Assembly for Wales, which first met in 1999.”²

MAJOR RESOURCE COLLECTIONS:

For England and Wales, the major resource collections focus around four major sources, though many more records exist which are not covered in this document. A good first step would be to consult one of the GENUKI online websites regarding the two districts, where a large part of the material included here was extracted from. Also, it will be good to consult this site for listings of archives and libraries in the regions for access to these sources.

Census records are excellent for both England & Wales and all available to 1911 are digitized and online, though most are accessible only on a pay-per-view basis. There has been a census every ten years since 1801, excluding 1941. However, only those that date from 1841 are of real value to the family historian. The administration of the early census returns 1801-1831 was the responsibility of the Overseers of the Poor and the clergy.

Most of these early returns were unfortunately destroyed, although in some isolated instances they have been preserved. The census returns for 1841 were the first to be kept and, as far as the general public is concerned, the information is released after a hundred years. For example, the public were given access to the 1891 census returns in January 1992.

The 1841 census was different from the previous censuses in two important respects. Firstly, the administration passed into the hands of the Registrar General and the Superintendent Registrars, who were responsible for the registration of births, marriages and deaths. Many recent reforms, including the 1836 General Registration Act, which had culminated in the introduction of civil registration had resulted in a new layer of central and local government.

When the 1841 census was being prepared, it was seen as a logical step that it should also supervise the census. Consequently, civil registration and census taking became inter-related; any change in local boundaries or districts affected them both.

Secondly, the emphasis changed from questions concerned with population size, and the numbers engaged in certain occupations and the condition of the housing stock, to a much more detailed analysis of individuals and families, and the communities in which they lived.

² 'History of Wales' in *Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Wales extracted on 6th February 2012.

Feb. 6,
2012

The information recorded on individuals has tended to increase with each census with the enumeration taken on the following dates:

10 Mar 1801	No longer exists, with a few exceptions
27 May 1811	No longer exists, with a few exceptions
28 May 1821	No longer exists, with a few exceptions
30 May 1831	No longer exists, with a few exceptions
6 Jun 1841	Now available to the public
30 Mar 1851	Now available to the public
7 Apr 1861	Now available to the public
2 Apr 1871	Now available to the public
3 Apr 1881	Now available to the public
5 Apr 1891	Now available to the public
31 Mar 1901	Now available to the public
2 Apr 1911	Now available to the public

Census returns are available at 10-yearly intervals from 1841 to the present with the exception of 1941 due to the War. However, only those from 1841-1911 inclusive are open for public access. All, with the exception of the 1841 census, give name, address, kinship, age, occupation, and place of birth. The 1851-1911 returns provide additional data elements such as: gender, relation to the head of the household and whether or not the subject was born in the county where the census was taken. The 1841 census lists only name, age (over 15 years rounded down to the nearest 5), gender, occupation, residence and whether or not the subject was born in the county where the census was taken. Remember as well that there were many small local census enumerations taken over the past several hundred years and many of these still survive and have been microfilmed. Unless the place of birth is known, it is necessary to find the subject in a census in order to know through which Old Parish Registers to search.

Only the census records over 100 years old are available to the public. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Library™ and the Family History Centers™ have access to all available census records (1841-1911) on microfilm, plus some street and surname indexes for large communities. The original records are housed in The National Archives at Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU England. All of the census enumerations for the noted period are now available online at a host of different sites, but particularly thru The National Archives and Ancestry.

Church records (or parish records) have been collected for many centuries here and are well maintained, that which has survived, but not all have and not all for the full period of coverage. The L.D.S. (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) has now provided online search facilities for the I.G.I. (International Genealogical Index), which is basically extracts of these records. As well as the general search facility, there is also a Custom Search page allowing refined searches. Hugh Wallis has provided a search facility which simplifies searching by batch number (<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~hughwallis/IGIBatchNumbers/CountryEngland.htm>). See also Finding L.D.S. Batch Numbers (<http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/FindingBatchNos.html>).

The FreeREG Project (<http://freereg.rootsweb.com/>) provides free Internet searches of baptism, marriage, and burial records, which have been transcribed from English and Welsh parish and non-conformist church registers. The largest single collection of Parish Register copies and transcripts is at the Society of Genealogists, and these are listed on Parish register copies in the library of the Society of Genealogists (<http://www.sog.org.uk/prc/intro.shtml>).

The contents of missing Parish Registers can often be obtained by finding the copies that since 1598 have had to be made annually and sent to the bishop (i.e., the Bishop's Transcripts). The standard source for locating such copies is: J.S.W. Gibson, *Bishops' Transcripts and Marriage Licences, Bonds and Allegations* published by the Federation of Family History Society.

As you consider parish records you should also educate yourself on Tithe payments, used to support the clergy, the importance of which we become clearer to you with your advanced studies. These are fully explained in the Public Record Office Domestic Information Leaflet 41 - Tithe Records (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/research-guides/tithe-records.htm>).

In addition, please consult G. Jaunay's *A Parish Finder for England*, published by Adelaide Proformat: South Plympton, Australia (2000) 468 p. Includes Ordnance Survey references for all English parishes, both ancient and modern, their diocese, deanery and county as at 1974, their date of creation and dedication, indicating for modern parishes the ancient parish(es) from which they were created, etc.

Of importance for searching ecclesiastics in the church, *The Clergy of the Church of England Database* is a collaborative project to create a relational database documenting the careers of all Church of England clergymen between 1540 and 1835 (<http://www.theclergydatabase.org.uk/index.html>).

Before 1837, Church Registers may be the only source for baptisms and marriages however little on deaths or burials will be found. Prior to 1837 all this information may be found in what are termed the Old Parish Registers. These were compiled & kept by the Minister of the Church or by the Session Clerk, and tend to vary in content and accuracy over the centuries since first initiated. Some records go back to the 16th century to as early as 1538. They seldom contain non-Anglican entries though non-Anglican subjects were often recorded in these records because of various forms of religious persecution since their inception. Though most Englishmen were members of the Established Church (Anglican) finding church registers in England is not always a straight-forward task: A) religious affiliation must be determined, B) then the name of the respective parish as well as possibly the name of the local parish church the family may have attended, C) next whether the church still exists, and D) where its registers are now located. Most likely the Registers will have been microfilmed, at least up to the turn of the 20th century. If not, the Registers may still remain at the original church, they may have been lost, or they may have been sent to another local church or to a church archives. Many of these records are now deposited in the respective county record offices and most of those have now been archived centrally in London as well. Some of the non-church of England records are housed in religious historical society archives throughout England & Wales. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Library™ and the Family History Centers™ have access to many of these records for the Established Church and to a much lesser extent for those compiled by non-church of England ecclesiastical bodies.

The contents of the Old Parish Registers will vary however normally you will find the following elements:

Christening or Baptism:	Name of child; date & place of event; father's full name; mother's given name.
Marriage or Proclamation:	Names of bride & groom; date & place of marriage and/or proclamation; residence of couple; marital status (added after 1754); by banns or license; witnesses to event; name of father (after 1812).
Burials:	Name of deceased; date & place of burial; sometimes, child's parents names or husband of a woman; residence (after 1812); age of deceased.

It takes some historical research to reach a likely objective. In some cases the records we want may only be at a distant archive. In other cases, it is our policy to encourage the client to correspond directly with a church if we can find an address. Whether we search the church records or supply the client with an address, we believe that a token bank draft or cheque should be given as a donation to the church as a goodwill gesture, the amount to be in proportion to the time spent or number of requests made.

Also of great importance are the **civil vital records registrations**. Civil Registration of births, marriages and deaths (known as "Vital Records" in some countries) started on 1 July 1837 for England and Wales. This was later expanded in 1927 to also include still births, and adoptions. The indexes to these records are available online by FreeBMD (<http://www.freebmd.org.uk/>) however most comprehensive indexes are only available on a pay-per-view basis.

On July 1, 1837 a civil registration system for births, marriages, and deaths was introduced in England and Wales. These events were officially recorded by local District registrars, who reported to the General Registrar Office (GRO) in London, now part of the Office of National Statistics (ONS). In 1927 this registration was expanded to include stillbirths and adoptions. The events were registered at the local office, which retained a copy, so each document should be available in both the local registry office as well as the central office. These records are vital to family historians because of the genealogical information that they include.

The General Register Office maintains a national index of all births, marriages and deaths registered in England and Wales. The index for each year is split into quarters (March, June, September & December), and is arranged alphabetically by surname. From 1984 to the present, the Civil Registration Indexes are ordered by surname for the whole year. For births and deaths, the Index is organized by the date when the event was registered, not the date that the birth or death actually occurred. Marriages are shown in the quarter in which they actually took place. After 1874, births were generally registered within six weeks, according to law, and deaths within eight days.

The GRO Indexes include the surname, first name, registration district and the volume and page of the General Register Office reference. Beginning with the September quarter of 1911, the mother's maiden name was added to the index for births. From 1912, the spouses name is included in the index for marriages. The age at death is included in the GRO Index beginning in 1866, and the date of birth for death registrations was added in 1969.

A central copy of all civil birth, marriage and death registrations is held by the General Register Office (GRO) in London. Local Offices hold records of and indexes to events registered in their area since 1837. Microfilmed copies of these registrations are also available through LDS Family History Centers around the world. The original registration records are not open to the public but you can get copies of the entries in the form of birth, marriage and death certificates. These register entries have been indexed, and the indexes are organized alphabetically for each year into quarterly volumes to 1983, and annually thereafter. There are also central indexes of all legal adoptions (since 1927) and some events which have been registered overseas. These indexes may be examined at the Family Records Centre without charge.

All of the Indexes to these records are open to public access. Indexes give the name of the subject, registration district for the birth, marriage or death, and after 1865, the age at death. Indexes and certificates are available through writing to the General Register Office, Certificates Section, P.O. Box #2, Southport, Merseyside, PR8 2JD England. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Library™ and Family History Centers™ have access to the indexes from 1 July 1837 through 1983. The actual civil registration records themselves, however, will need to be obtained through the General Register Office. Most of these may be ordered online at the following address: <https://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/default.asp>.

Contents of the civil registration records themselves are as follows:

Births:	Name of child; when & where born; gender of child; name & occupation of father; name and maiden name of mother; name and residence of informant.
Marriages:	When & where married; names of bride & groom; ages of couple; occupations & residence of couple; marital condition; fathers' names & occupation; signature of witnesses.
Deaths:	Name of the deceased; when & where died; gender & age of deceased; Occupation of deceased; cause of death; name & residence of informant.

The Home Office – Identity & Passport Service reference page will provide you with details on how and where to access the GRO Indexes (www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/.../dg_176534.pdf).

An alternative (and cheaper) method of obtaining information is via the local District Register Offices. It is possible to obtain copies of BIRTH or DEATH certificates by applying directly to the Superintendent Registrar of the centre where the birth or death was registered, without having to pay the extra search fee which St Catherine's House levies for a postal search. The saving is considerable, since at the time of writing, this latter fee is 15 pounds sterling, to be paid for ALL postal applications, regardless of whether you have an exact search reference or not. The Registration Districts appropriate to particular towns have been listed on a county basis at the following website (<http://www.ukbmd.org.uk/genuki/reg/>).

Mike Foster and helpers have transcribed part of the St Catherine's House (General Register Office) Marriage Index for 1849 and 1856 (<http://genuki.cs.ncl.ac.uk/StCathsTranscriptions/>). Also, FreeBMD is an ambitious project to make the G.R.O. (formerly St Catherine's) birth, marriage and death indexes available online. Thanks to an enthusiastic band of 11,000+ transcribers, the searchable database now (January 2012) has more than 268 million entries and is adding an amazing 46,000 new entries per day!

Probate records are available for England and Wales and are exceptionally comprehensive, existing from the 1380's to the present. Their contents will provide you with, generally: Name of the testator; names of executors; names of relatives & friends; residences; details of bequests, sometimes death date; and inventory of movable property.

Before 1858, the ecclesiastical courts had jurisdiction and are thus broken down in this manner. The records are usually now housed in the county record offices. After 1857, the government had jurisdiction. The original records and details for this latter period can be found at the Principal Registry of the Family Division, at First Avenue House, 42-49 High Holborn, London WC1V 6NP England. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Library™ and the Family History Centers™ have access to most of the indexes and probate material by microfilm. Postal applications for post-1858 wills for England and Wales should be sent to the Probate Office, Castle Chambers, Clifford Street, York. YO1 9RG. Indexes (or Calendars) to post-1858 wills for England and Wales can be found at a limited number of places around England & Wales though some of these offices may not have complete indexes back to 1858 - check before you visit! Please consult the following website produced by the National Archives of England regards Wills and Probates (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/research-guides/wills-and-probate-records.htm>).

Finding and obtaining copies of earlier wills are much more complicated tasks. A currently-available guide is Jeremy Gibson, *Probate Jurisdictions - Where to look for wills*, Birmingham, Federation of Family History Societies, (4th edn 1994).(FFHS Publications). More detailed guides (currently out of print) are: A.J. Camp. *Wills and Their Whereabouts*, 1974, and J.S.W. Gibson. *Wills and Where to Find Them*, Chichester, Phillimore, 1974, 210 pages.

Andrew Millard has a listing of indexes to English, Welsh and Scottish probate indexes (<http://www.dur.ac.uk/a.r.millard/genealogy/probate.php>) which have been produced since the publication of the fifth edition of *Probate Jurisdictions: where to look for wills* by Jeremy Gibson and Else Churchill. Pre-1858 probate records for much of the North of England are held by the Borthwick Institute of Historical Research (<http://www.york.ac.uk/library/borthwick/>).

Nick Hidden has provided a collection of about 1000 abstracts of probate documents relating to people residing in the neighbourhood of the towns of Hungerford and Wantage in Berkshire (<http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/BRKwills/>). Since Hungerford is on the County boundary there is some spread into Wiltshire and to a lesser extent into Hampshire and Oxfordshire. The historical period which is covered is from about 1500 up to the establishment of the Probate Registry for England & Wales in 1858.

Images of 1700-1858 wills proved at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury can be purchased from *DocumentsOnline* - The National Archives' online system for downloading digital images of public records (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/wills.asp>). Caryl Williams has a site titled *England Wills Database Exchange* which may prove helpful to you in your search (http://members.tripod.com/~Caryl_Williams/ewills.html). In addition, Leslie Mahler has provided will abstracts from:

Consistory Court of London 1621-1630 (<http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/Wills/Wills2.html>).

Commissary Court of London 1629-1634 (<http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/Wills/Wills1.html>)

Commissary Court of London 1644/5-1646 (<http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/Wills/Wills3.html>)

A place-name index is also provided here for each listing - there are references to places in all parts England as well as in other countries.

Lastly, Peter Ward runs a website that accepts transcripts of wills and make them available at no charge - *Will Transcriptions Online* (<http://www.willtranscriptions.co.uk/>).

Besides the above-noted source records, all other records, that are available to the public will be accessed by your researcher as best and as quickly as possible. The basic and most important of these, though certainly not all, are a myriad of other sources for English and Welsh research:

- 1). Deed Records
- 2). Landed Estate Records
- 3). Marriage License Registers (Bishops Transcripts)
- 4). Apprenticeship Records
- 5). Cemetery Records/Headstone Transcriptions
- 6). Local Directories, Atlases, & Histories

- 7). Military Records
- 8). Some Newspaper Collections & Manuscript Material

Information concerning England preferred known to start a search:

A). Approximate Date of Emigration

B). After 1837 —

- Name of Subject

- Name of Subject's Parents or Children (or both, if known)

- Approximate Date of Birth, Marriage or Death of either Subject, Parents or Children

C). Prior to 1837 —

- Information as above, but a place-name is necessary for the Old Parish Register - or at least a name of a county in England

SUMMATION:

Pre-1837 information in England remains, for the most part, a worthwhile exercise and generally provides great search results. England, because of its wealth of historical information and abundance of which is available to researchers, will provide great results to the average research plan. Pre-1750 research will, however, tend to lend less favorable results, at least in terms of definitive information on families. This does not mean however, that you will be unsuccessful. Only that the information for this early period is not as abundant, nor as reliable in its content. Much of your success in any genealogical research will depend upon how prolific your ancestors were in documenting their existence from locality to locality and England is no different.

GEN-FIND would be happy to work with you privately on your custom search needs of these and other records in simplifying your project objectives. Please contact us today to further discuss those interests!

GEN-FIND RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.

#101 – 5170 Dunster Road, Suite #521

Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada V9T 6M4

