

Norfolk Record Office Information Leaflet 8

Tracing your Family Tree

1. How to Start

Begin by finding out as much as you can from family papers (e.g. birth and marriage certificates, letters and family bibles) and from older relatives. It is also helpful to read a book on the subject. Two concise guides are on sale at the Norfolk Record Office and many other books are available at bookshops and in your local library. If you have access to the internet, <www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/familyhistory/> <www.familyrecords.gov.uk> and <www.genuki.org.uk> have useful tips on getting started.

Once you have gathered all the information you can, you will be able to decide where to start your search. Most people begin with a set of known facts from which they work backwards into the past using marriage and birth or baptism records. For example, you may know the date and place of birth of your grandmother. Her baptism or birth certificate will tell you the names of her parents, so that searches can be made for their marriage and births or baptisms. Their birth or baptism certificates will give you the names of *their* parents, and you can continue tracing back, generation by generation.

2. Parish Registers

Parish registers have been kept since 1538, although often the very earliest registers have not survived. The registers record Church of England baptisms, marriages and burials. Dates of births and deaths are not usually given. For further details of the information found in parish registers, see our leaflet no. 45 *Parish Registers* available at the Record Office and on our website.

Most Norfolk parishes have deposited their registers with the Norfolk Record Office. We also hold registers of some nineteen Suffolk parishes in the deanery of Lothingland, an area stretching from Great Yarmouth to Lowestoft. To help preserve the registers for the future, many of them have been microfilmed. You can see the microfilms and fiche at the Norfolk Record Office and most are also at the Norfolk Heritage Centre. Some registers are still held by the churches themselves. Contact the Record Office or look at the Parish Registers and Transcripts summary on our website to check the whereabouts of the registers you wish to see.

There is no name index covering all Norfolk registers. Since there are about 700 ancient parishes in Norfolk (more than thirty in Norwich alone) you need to know where your family lived before beginning a search. If you are stuck, try checking these sources:

- The International Genealogical Index (I.G.I). This lists many baptism and marriage entries for the whole country. The index is arranged alphabetically by name within each county. The coverage for Norfolk is, however, very patchy. The Norfolk Record Office has the I.G.I. on microfiche for Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire; at the Norfolk Heritage Centre, you can see the I.G.I. for the whole of England

and Wales. You can also search a different version of the I.G.I. online at <www.familysearch.org>.

- **Boyd's marriage index, 1538-1837.** This covers about a third of Norfolk parishes. Both the Norfolk Record Office and Norfolk Heritage Centre have microfilm copies.
- **Pallot's marriage index, 1780-1837.** Contains over 1.5 million marriage entries, mainly from London and Middlesex, but there are also entries from 2500 parishes outside London, including some Norfolk marriages. The index is available online at <www.ancestry.co.uk> Initial searching is free of charge but you must subscribe to Ancestry to download the details. Alternatively, you can access the Ancestry website free of charge *via* computers at the Norfolk Record Office and at Norfolk libraries.
- **Norfolk Marriage Index, 1801-37.** Produced by Norfolk Family History Society, this is available at the Record Office on CDROM.
- **Civil registration records of births, marriages and deaths, 1837 to the present.** There are name indexes which cover the whole of England and Wales. For more details see section 3.
- **Census returns, 1841-1901.** You can search the censuses by name. The 1851-1901 censuses list each person's age and place of birth. For more details see section 4.
- **Free REG website.** You can search transcripts of many Church of England and nonconformist baptism, marriage and burial entries from across the country at <http://freereg.rootsweb.com/>. Coverage is by no means complete, but new entries are being added all the time.

3. Civil Registration Records

Civil registration of births, marriages and deaths began in July 1837.

Records for England and Wales are held by the General Register Office. Local Superintendent Registrars keep records for their own areas. Contact details are online at <http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/consumption/idcplg?IdcService=SS_GET_PAGE&nodeld=54> or see the telephone directory under 'Registration'. You can obtain certificates from the local Superintendent Registrar if you can give the name, date and place of birth, marriage or death. Fees are charged (around £7.00).

If you are unsure of precise details, try checking the General Register Office indexes to births, marriages and deaths. These indexes cover the whole of England and Wales. They are arranged alphabetically by name within the quarter of the year in which the event was registered. The indexes supply only limited details (name, the quarter of the year when the birth, marriage or death was registered, and the registration district, **not** parish). You can request a full certificate (quoting the information from the indexes) by writing to the General Register Office, or online at <www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates>.

You can see the indexes to births, marriages and deaths online at <www.ancestry.co.uk> and <www.findmypast.com>. Access to the Ancestry website is free of charge *via* computers in the Norfolk Record Office's searchroom and in Norfolk libraries (including the Norfolk Heritage Centre). You can also search the indexes free of charge at <www.freebmd.org.uk>. Although coverage is not yet fully comprehensive on this website, it is almost complete for events taking place between 1837 and 1910.

Microfiche copies of the indexes to births, marriages and deaths are held by some public libraries and branches of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons). The Norfolk Heritage Centre in Norwich has indexes, 1837-2003, and they are also available at The National Archives at Kew.

4. Census Records

Pre-1841 censuses survive for a few individual parishes, mainly amongst the records of parish churches. Most of the ones for Norfolk have been transcribed and are available online at <<http://www.origins.org.uk/genuki/NFK/norfolk/census/>>.

Census records are available for 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911. The census returns are arranged by street within each parish and registration district. The occupants of each house are listed together. In 1841, the name, age and occupation are given. Note, however, that the age of anyone over 15 is rounded down to the nearest five years, e.g. someone of 34 would appear as 30. From 1851 onwards, the records include name, relationship to the head of the household, marital status, exact age, occupation and place of birth.

The information given in the censuses can be invaluable. The ages and places of birth given may help you to locate baptism or birth entries more easily, whilst the listing of household members together may help you to identify other members of the family. However, you should bear in mind that the census only lists the people staying at the house on census night. Ages may be inaccurate and places of birth are sometimes incorrect or may have been misheard or misspelled by the census enumerator.

Census records for the whole of England and Wales are held at The National Archives at Kew. You can search the 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891 and 1901 censuses at <www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/census/> and <www.ancestry.co.uk>. Initial searching is free of charge and will give you a transcript of (usually) limited information from the original entry. You will need to pay a small fee to download images of original entries. Alternatively, you can access the Ancestry website free of charge *via* computers at the Norfolk Record Office and at Norfolk libraries (including the Norfolk Heritage Centre). You can also see microfilm copies of the Norfolk censuses, 1841-1901, at the Norfolk Record Office and the Norfolk Heritage Centre. There are name indexes for the 1851 and 1881 Norfolk censuses on microfiche at both the Record Office and the Heritage Centre. The Record Office also has indexes on CDROM to the 1891 Norfolk census and to the 1861 and 1871 Norwich censuses.

The 1911 census is currently accessible only through the Find My Past website at <www.1911census.co.uk>. Initial searching is free of charge and will give you a transcript of limited information from the original entry. To download images of original entries, you will need to pay a fee. Please note that you cannot access the Find My Past website *via* the NRO's computers.

5. Wills and Other Probate Records

Wills can supply valuable information about the person who made the will and his or her links with family and friends. An administration may have been granted if the deceased did not leave a valid will. Although less informative than wills, administrations name the person appointed to administer the estate (often the next-of-kin), whilst the date of the document indicates an approximate date of death.

Before 1858, wills were proved (made legally valid) by church courts. The Norfolk Record Office holds wills (mainly registered copies) proved in Norfolk, 1370-1858, and administrations granted in Norfolk, 1377-1858. You can see these records on microfilm in our searchroom. Digital images of wills proved in Norfolk, 1800-57, are also available online at <<http://www.norfolksources.norfolk.gov.uk>>. There are printed name indexes on the searchroom shelves to wills proved in Norfolk, 1370-1858, and to administrations granted in Norfolk, 1377-1858. These name indexes are also included in our online catalogue <<http://nrocat.norfolk.gov.uk>>. To search for a will or administration in our online catalogue, go to the 'set searches' menu and select 'wills and other probate records'.

Some pre-1858 wills (particularly those of wealthy people) were proved by the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (P.C.C.) These wills, together with administrations granted by this court, are held by The National Archives and can be seen on microfilm there. You can download P.C.C. wills, fourteenth century-1858, and search indexes to them at <www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline>. Checking the indexes is free, but a fee is charged to view digital images of the wills.

From 1858 onwards, wills were proved by civil courts. The Norfolk Record Office has Norwich District Probate Registry wills, 1858-1941. They are available on microfilm, 1858-1925. There are indexes on microfilm to both wills and administrations, 1858-1941, but we do not have the administrations themselves after 1858.

You can see original wills and administrations for the whole of England and Wales, 1858 to the present day, at the Principal Probate Registry in London. For Norfolk wills and administrations, 1858 to the present, you can also contact the Norwich Probate Sub-Registry. The Norfolk Heritage Centre has microfilm copies of the indexes to wills and administrations covering England and Wales, 1858-1966.

Copies of wills and administrations from 1858 onwards may be ordered from the Principal Probate Registry or Norwich Probate Sub-Registry, by quoting the information given in the indexes. To ask for a search to be made for a post 1857 will, write to The Postal Searches and Copies Department (post 1857 wills), York Probate Sub-Registry, First Floor, Castle Chambers, Clifford

Street, York YO1 9RG (Telephone: 01904 666777), giving the full name, last known address and date of death of the deceased.

6. Visiting the Norfolk Record Office

The Record Office holds many other sources of interest to family historians. These include:

- baptism/birth, marriage and burial registers for some nonconformist churches
- churchyard surveys
- cemetery registers
- marriage licence bonds
- electoral registers
- records of the poor

Please contact us for further details.

You can consult documents free of charge in our searchroom. Before visiting the Record Office, it is best to check that the records you want to see are available and to find out whether they are on microfilm or fiche. We produce a free leaflet on using the Record Office, which gives details of our opening hours and includes a map showing our location in Norwich. This information is also available on our website.

7. Useful Addresses

Norfolk Record Office

The Archive Centre
Martineau Lane
Norwich NR1 2DQ

Telephone: (01603) 222599

E-mail: norfrec@norfolk.gov.uk

Website: <http://archives.norfolk.gov.uk>

Online catalogue: <http://nrocat.norfolk.gov.uk>

Norfolk Heritage Centre

Norfolk & Norwich Millennium Library
The Forum
Millennium Plain
Norwich NR2 1AW

Telephone: (01603) 774740

E-mail: norfolk.studies.lib@norfolk.gov.uk

Website:

<http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/heritagecentre>

Norfolk Family History Society

Kirby Hall
70 St Giles Street
Norwich NR2 1LS

Telephone: (01603) 763718

E-mail: nfhs@paston.co.uk

Website: <http://www.norfolkfhs.org.uk/>

Norwich Register Office

Churchman House
71 Bethel Street
Norwich NR2 1NR
Telephone: (01603) 767600

Norwich Family History Centre

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
(Mormons)
19 Greenways
Eaton
Norwich NR4 6PA
Telephone: (01603) 452440

Norwich Probate Sub-Registry

(post 1857 Norfolk wills)
Combined Court Building
Bishopsgate
Norwich NR3 1UR
Telephone: (01603) 728267

Principal Probate Registry of the Family Division

(post 1857 wills)

First Avenue House

42-49 High Holborn

London WC1V 6NP

Telephone: (020) 7947 6939

Website:

<http://www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk/cms/1226.htm>

The Postal Searches and Copies Department

(post 1857 wills)

York Probate Sub-Registry

Castle Chambers

Clifford Street

York YO1 9RG

Telephone: (01904) 666777

The National Archives

Kew

Richmond

Surrey, TW9 4DU

Telephone (020) 8876 3444

Website: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>

General Register Office

(applications for birth, marriage and death certificates)

P O Box 2

Southport

Merseyside PR8 2JD

Telephone: 0845 603 7788

Website: <http://www.gro.gov.uk>

The Family Records Centre, formerly at Myddelton Street, London, closed in March 2008. Services provided there by The National Archives (e.g., access to census returns and PCC wills) are now available at The National Archives at Kew. See <<http://www.gro.gov.uk>> for information about services formerly offered by the General Register Office at the Family Records Centre (regarding records of births, marriages, deaths and adoptions).



If you need this leaflet in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language, please contact the County Archivist on 01603 222599 and we will do our best to help.

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