

How to get started with... **KEY** DOCUMENTS



Genealogist **Mary Evans** has researched celebrities' ancestors on much-loved TV show *Who Do You Think You Are?* – follow her steps below, and you too can benefit from her wealth of family history experience...

If you're just starting out on your family history, you'll soon gather that birth, marriage and death (BMD) certificates and the census records are your 'go-to' records to search. Read on to see what they can reveal about your ancestors.

Using certificates

Let's look at what can you learn from BMD certificates. Certificates give the year and place that a birth, marriage or death was registered and have columns with the vital information for constructing your family tree.

What can you learn from a birth certificate?

When & where

born: Rural areas might just name the village, but town/city addresses are more detailed. Even though you don't necessarily get a precise address, brief details can still lead you to a census record

Name, if any:

Just the first name(s). Not all babies were named before registration. These appear as 'male' or 'female' at the end of the surname list in the indexes

Name & surname of father:

Usually the source of the child's surname but for an illegitimate child this column might be blank. If so, remember that a middle name can be a clue the father's identify

DID YOU KNOW?

From 1875 an unmarried father had to be present to be named on a baby's birth certificate

Sex:

'Boy' or 'Girl'

Name of mother:

This has the mother's first name(s), her married surname and her maiden name as 'Jane Smith formerly Brown'. Sometimes a previous married surname will appear. An unmarried mother might record herself as married and include the father. This might be difficult in a village but could pass unnoticed in a town or city

No.	When and where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name and surname of father	Name, surname and maiden surname of mother	Occupation of father	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar	Name entered after registration
1	10th Dec 1907 161 St Paul's Street Cheston	Mary Ellen	Girl	John Kensby	Mary Kensby formerly Brown	Railway Stationer	M.E. Kensby 142, St Paul's Manchester	10th Dec 1907	R. H. Ballantyne	

Signature, description and residence of informant: Usually a parent but perhaps a neighbour

Name entered after registration: Name given to the child within 12 months of registration

Beware 'facts'

The parents are clearly shown as a married couple on Mary's grandmother's birth certificate, but they did not actually marry until 17 years after her grandmother's birth

Occupation of father: Usually straightforward but it can occasionally be exaggerated

When registered: From 1875, 42 days are allowed for this. Occasionally the parents might 'move' the birth date to avoid late registration and a fine

Study the many details on a marriage certificate

When married:
Always worth comparing this with the birth date of the first child

Condition: Bachelor/spinster/widow/widower or even divorced. Not everyone was truthful and some marriages were bigamous

Rank or profession:
This might be exaggerated slightly, perhaps to impress the new in-laws?

Father's name & surname:
One of my illegitimate great-grandfathers gave his grandfather as his father! If the father was deceased this might be recorded

Rank or profession of father: Again, be prepared for possible exaggeration

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF MARRIAGE
Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, LONDON

Registration District Birmingham Application Number...10138

1869 Marriage solemnized at St Philip's Church
in the Parish of Birmingham in the County of Warwick

No.	When married	Name and Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or profession	Residence at the time of marriage	Father's name and surname	Rank or profession of father
138	December 25 th 1869	Edward Cope	22	Bachelor	Gun Maker	Little Charles Street	Charles Cope	Cooper
		Esther Elizabeth Hazlewood	21	Spinster	—	Church Street	William Hazlewood	Carter

Married in the Parish church of St Philip's according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church after banns by me Edward Cope in the presence of us, Mary Ann Cope J. Hazlewood W. Earle Lecturer

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Marriages in the District above mentioned.
Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, LONDON, under the Seal of the said Office, the 6th day of June 1980

MR 227821

This certificate is issued in pursuance of section 65 of the Marriage Act 1949. Sub-section (3) of that section provides that any certified copy of an entry purporting to be sealed or stamped with the seal of the General Register Office shall be received as evidence of the marriage to which it relates without any further or other proof of the entry, and no certified copy purporting to have been given in the said Office shall be of any force or effect unless it is sealed or stamped as aforesaid.
CAUTION:—Any person who (1) falsifies any of the particulars on this certificate, or (2) uses a falsified certificate as true knowing it to be false, is liable to prosecution.



Name & surname:
The groom on the first line and the bride on the second. You might gain middle names and/or clues about spelling variations

Age: You might encounter 'full age', which is not helpful. Be wary of given ages too. If the bride was older than the groom she often shaved a few years off her age. My maternal great-grandparents are recorded as 22 and 21 but the bride was baptised before the groom was born. An under-age minor needed parental consent, in which case an age might be increased

Residence at time of marriage: Banns were read in the bride and groom's parishes so this could be a temporary address for convenience, often seen when the couple both give the same address

The box indicates whether the marriages was by banns or licence. It will give the signatures of the bridal pair – look for a signature or an X

Research insight

The 1869 marriage certificate (above) of Mary's maternal great-grandparents, shows that the groom was older than the bride rather than the other way round – contrary to Mary's research.

Mary found that this certificate was also interesting as it's a handwritten copy from the General Register Office (GRO) with the name Hazlewood spelt consistently throughout. However, when Mary subsequently looked at the original church register it was spelt in three different ways – the clergyman had spelt it one way, the bride had signed it with a different spelling and her brother had witnessed it with a third spelling!



BONUS CLUES
Check the names of the witnesses: they were often family members. Remember that a female witness might be under a married surname

Examine every last detail on a death certificate

When & where died:
If in a hospital you might also find 'usual residence'

Name & surname:
Was the informant aware of the deceased's middle names?

Cause of death: Usually a medical term. Google it to learn more or try www.archaicmedicalterms.com

When registered:
Usually within a matter of days

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH

GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number Y 007949

REGISTRATION DISTRICT *Kingsbridge*
 ...DEATH in the Sub-district of *Blackawton* ... in the County of *Dorset*

Columns--	1	2	3	4	5	7	8		
No.	When and where died	Name and surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
	<i>20th</i> <i>September</i> <i>1879</i> <i>Blackawton</i>	<i>Nicholas</i> <i>W. Kechum</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>76</i> <i>years</i>	<i>Retired</i> <i>in a</i> <i>House</i>	<i>Senile Decay</i> <i>of</i> <i>the</i> <i>Brain</i> <i>as</i> <i>certified</i> <i>by</i> <i>R. B. Cooper</i> <i>M. B. C. S.</i>	<i>S. M. Madhame</i> <i>Son</i> <i>of</i> <i>Present at</i> <i>Death</i> <i>Blackawton</i>	<i>20th</i> <i>September</i> <i>1879</i>	<i>Henry</i> <i>Howe</i> <i>Registrar</i>

...CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned.
 at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the *9th* day of *August* 19 *95*

KZ 285997

CAUTION: It is an offence to falsify a certificate or to make or knowingly use a false certificate or a copy of a false certificate intending it to be accepted as genuine to the prejudice of any person or to possess a certificate knowing it to be false without lawful authority.

DM 8395440 20783 50M 205 Mer(010375)

OLD JOBS EXPLAINED
Mystified by an old occupation? Try rmhh.co.uk/occup

TIP!
Remember that the information is given by the informant so is only as accurate as that person's knowledge

Sex: 'Male' or 'female'

Age: Again, be wary as the informant might be hazarding a guess, especially with older people

Occupation: Over a long working life there might be several occupations so this might not match an earlier certificate or census entry

Signature, description & residence of informant: Often a family member

Scottish certificates

Scottish registration began in 1855 and has more informative certificates with parents' date/place of marriage on birth certificates and both father's name and mother's name and maiden name on marriage and death certificates. In addition, many register entries can be viewed online, using pay-per-view credits. See www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk.

Did you know?

To this day, every three months the entries in the local register are sent to the respective General Register Offices (for England and Wales, Scotland, and Ireland). The quarters run Jan-Mar, Apr-Jun, Jul-Sep and Oct-Dec.

Irish certificates

Irish registration began in 1864. See: www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/government-citizens-and-rights/births-deaths-marriages-and-civil and www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/General-Register-Office.aspx/Pages/VariationRoot.aspx.



HOW TO ORDER A CERTIFICATE
Need advice on ordering a BMD certificate for England and Wales? Turn to page 53 for the cheapest options



Why the 1911 Census is especially useful

The 1911 Census is similar to 1901 but with some great additions...

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Number of Schedules 145
(To be filled up by the Enumerator)

Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the headings of the Columns. The entries should be written in Ink. The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, as in connection with Old Age Pensions, or for any other purpose than the preparation of Statistical Tables.

NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family	AGE (Last Birthday and SEX)	PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE					PROFESSION or OCCUPATION of Persons aged ten years and upwards.				BIRTHPLACE of every person.	NATIONALITY of every Person born in a Foreign Country.	INFIRMITY.	
			For Infants under one year state the age in months as "under one month," "one month," etc.	Write "Single," "Married," "Widower," or "Widow," opposite the names of all persons aged 15 years and upwards.	State, for each Married Woman entered on this Schedule, the number of— Children born alive to present Marriage. (If no children born alive write "None" in Column 7.) Total Children Born Alive. Children still Living. Children who have died.	Personal Occupation.	Industry or Service with which worker is connected.	Whether Employer, Worker, or Working on Own Account.	Whether Working at Home.						
1. <i>John Hensby</i>	2. <i>Head</i>	3. <i>64</i>	4. <i>Married 4</i>	5. <i>1</i>	6. <i>1</i>	7. <i>2</i>	8. <i>0</i>	9. <i>0</i>	10. <i>Carriage Driver</i>	11. <i>Great Central Railway</i>	12. <i>Worked</i>	13. <i>At Home</i>	14. <i>Stoke Newington, London</i>	15. <i>2 0 0</i>	16. <i>0 5 0</i>
2. <i>Jane Hensby</i>	3. <i>Wife</i>	57	Married 4												

(To be filled up by the Enumerator.)

I certify that—
(1) All the names on this Schedule are entered in the proper sex columns, and I have counted the males and females in Columns 3 and 4 separately, and have compared these counts with the number of persons on the Schedule which appeared in the district, and have corrected such as appeared to be erroneous.
Males 1 Females 1 Total 2

(To be filled up by, or on behalf of, the Head of Family or other person in occupation, or in charge, of this dwelling.)

Write below the Number of Rooms in this Dwelling (House, Tenement, or Apartment) counting the kitchen as a room but do not count scullery, landing, lobby, closet, bathroom, or warehouse, office, shop.

I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature *John Hensby*
Postal Address *12 Linsay Rd, St Albans*

With a married couple you get the number of years married and the number of children born alive/still living/died

Mary knew that her great-grandfather Hensby was a train driver but she also learned from 'Industry or Service with which the worker is connected' that he worked for the Great Central Railway. Look out for additional clues about your ancestor's employment in this census

Here you can see the signature of the ancestor who completed the form. This is because you are looking at the original paperwork (schedules) that our ancestors filled in.

This is unique to the 1911 Census for England and Wales among the surviving census records. The census records that we use for Scotland, 1841-1911 and England and Wales 1841-1901, are Enumerator's Summary Books (ESBs) – ie are the copies made by the enumerator

Paperwork problems

Some households struggled with recording the children of the marriage – one memorable one having the number living as only including those still at home while several were married and elsewhere. Thus the number of children born and the number living/died did not match! As with any historical record, however official it seems, you need to keep your detective hat firmly on!

