

Recording Family History Research for Beginners



Recording your Family History Research
“Back to basics” presentation of how and where to record your family tree...and most importantly the source records that provide the evidence for your findings.

Recording your Family History Research - “Facts” - “Events” versus “Attributes”

- The things that you discover about your ancestors and other relatives are generally known as “Facts”
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- Facts may in turn be usefully sub-divided into “Events” and “Attributes”
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- Events have an associated date, e.g. Birth, Marriage, Death, Census entries, Military Service
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- Attributes do not have an associated date, (other than that of the record where you found the information)
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- Examples, Physical description, Residence, Occupation, Religion

Recording your Family History Research - the importance of “Sources”

- Facts are discovered from “Source Records” aka “Sources”
- Source Records may be paper records, online text records or images or physical photos or other memorabilia
- A source is the answer to the question “How do you know that a statement in your tree is true?” (e.g. “My grandfather was born on 7 Jan 1925”)
- Facts without sources are worse than useless - you cannot tell whether they are correct or not - or even why you think that they are correct
- Incorrect facts can be seriously misleading for further research
- Genuine sources may be labelled as primary where the original record was created at the time or the event e.g. Marriage Certificate
- Secondary sources are records that were created after the event you are researching
- Often where you only have a transcript of the original record (there may be errors in the transcription) e.g. GRO Index record for Birth Certificate
- An tree online or on paper does not count even as a secondary source - unless it has links to the underlying source records themselves

Recording your Family History Research - records of key life “Events” and individual’s “Attributes”

- Vital records: birth, marriage, and death dates and locations
- Census records: names, ages, relationships, occupations, and addresses
- Immigration and naturalization records: arrival dates, ports of entry, and countries of origin
- Military records: service dates, branches of service, and ranks
- Religious records: baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and burials
- Probate records: wills, inventories, and distributions of estates
- Property records: deeds, mortgages, and liens
- Court records: criminal and civil cases
- Newspaper articles: obituaries, birth announcements, and other news stories
- Photos and other artifacts: family heirlooms that can provide clues about your ancestors' lives

Recording your Family History Research - “Sources” versus “Citations”

- A citation provides the necessary information to identify and locate a source that was used to support a fact. It includes the following elements:
 - Author(s): The name(s) of the person(s) or organization(s) that created the source.
 - Title: The full title of the source, including any subtitles, volume numbers, and edition numbers.
 - Publication information: The place of publication, publisher, and year of publication for printed sources, or the website address and access date for online sources.
 - Specific information about the source: Volume and page numbers for books, the date and page number for newspapers, or the specific record number for archival documents.
 - Repository information: If the source is located in a repository, such as a library or archive, the name and location of the repository should be included.
- Also useful to record the date when you made the citation
- Cite your sources as you go, rather than waiting until the end of your research. This will make it easier to keep track of your sources and to avoid forgetting where you found information.

Recording your Family History Research - Example “Sources” and “Citations”

- Put more simply a “Citation” is the link between the “Fact” for that Individual and the “Source Record”
- An example fact may be that your grandfather was 6 ft 1 in tall at age 21
- The Source Record for this is the “Attestation” for his Military service - a paper document of which you have saved an image (or at least have saved a link to the image)
- Here is an example of an Evidence Style citation for a UK census record:
 - England and Wales Census, 1891, Class: RG12, Piece: 2412, Folio: 11, Page: 16, The National Archives, Kew, England, [accessed 28 Sept 2023].
- This citation tells us that the source is the 1891 England and Wales Census, and that the specific record is located in Class: RG12, Piece: 2412, Folio: 11, Page: 16 at The National Archives in Kew, England.
- We also know that the citation was accessed on 28 September 2023.
- It is important to note that citations should be as specific as possible. This allows other researchers to easily find the source that you used, even if they are using a different database or archive.

Recording your Family History Research - Multiple Facts from a single Source Record

- A single source record may reveal multiple facts about one individual
- A single Military Service record can contain many events, starting with the date of “sign up”, award of medals, injuries, residences or theatres of war, promotions and/or demotions in rank etc
- A single source records may also reveal facts about more than one individual.
- A Marriage Record will give facts about the Bride and the Groom, their parents etc including names, marital status, residence and their respective occupations
- A single Census record may contain many facts about potentially many individuals, typically names, ages, occupation and places of birth for a family grouping
- In all such cases it is possible to use the same citation for the Source Record for all facts for all individuals (unless the Source Record flows over onto to another sheet)

Starting Family History Research - Recording your findings and especially your sources

- Family tree software: There are many different family tree software programs available, both free and paid. They can help you organize your research, create a family tree, and store your documents and images.
- Genealogy notebooks are a great way to keep track of your research notes, sources, and ideas. You can use a dedicated genealogy notebook, or you can use an ordinary notebook or journal.
- Spreadsheets can be a helpful way to organize your data, such as dates, places, and names. You can use a spreadsheet to create a family tree, or you can use it to track your research progress.
- Word processing documents can be used to create detailed research notes, such as transcriptions of documents or interviews. You can also use such documents to write stories or biographies about your ancestors.
- There are many online tools available to help you record your family tree research, e.g. Ancestry, FindMyPast. These tools can help you find record your findings together with links to the underlying source records and share them with other researchers.

Starting Family History Research - choosing to store your family history data locally

- Storing data on your own device: (e.g. in spreadsheets, documents etc)
- Some advantages:
 - It is private and cannot be shared unless you physically give access to someone else - for example showing the results on screen to another family member
 - You can choose exactly how to record the information
 - You can choose exactly how to present the information (with the right tools)
- Some disadvantages:
 - It is private and cannot be shared unless you physically give access to someone else - for example showing the results on screen to another family member
 - You are solely responsible for backing up your data - so you need to know how and when to do this (a topic for another time if there is sufficient interest)!
 - Producing a tree or other charts can be very tricky and time consuming
 - Revising your tree with updates from your latest research can be tortuous
- There may be a one-off cost for some dedicated packages (but you can use the free LibreOffice in preference to Microsoft Office)

Starting Family History Research - choosing to store your family history data online

- Online - for example FindMyPast, Ancestry, FamilySearch etc
- Some advantages:
 - It can easily be shared with named individuals or publicly if set up correctly, e.g. to showing the results to another family member in a remote location
 - You have no responsibility for backing up your data - if you use a trustworthy organisation and obey their Terms of Service
 - Producing a tree or other charts should be easy to speedy
 - Revising your tree with updates from your latest research is instantaneous
- Some disadvantages:
 - Data may be shared by default unless you take steps to restrict access
 - Data may be preserved even after you leave the service (e.g. Ancestry)
 - You cannot necessarily choose exactly how to record the information
 - You cannot necessarily choose exactly how to present the information but may be some flexibility, e.g. multiple charts
- There will normally be a recurring cost - but this may provide access to a huge archive or source records

Starting Family History Research - choosing where to store your family history data

- No easy answers
- Choose what is right for you
- Try our various alternatives until you find one that suits you and then try to stick to it
- Be aware data can be moved between local storage solutions and between local and online services but some data may be lost in the process even when the so called GEDCOM common interchange standard is used.
- If you decide to use a spreadsheet program then this video on using an Excel template may be a useful starter...
- How to Create a Genealogy Research Notes Template in MS Word see URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSx8s8Ku2Qc>

Remember

**Start with what you
think you know, prove
it, then work
backwards and record
everything as you go!**



Happy hunting!

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