

Family History

How to trace your family tree

What is Family History?

“The term applies specifically to biographical research into one’s forebears with the object of compiling a narrative history of the family. A family history should place the members of the family in their historical, geographical, social and occupational contexts and describe their activities and the lives they lived.” Fitzhugh, Terrick (1998)

Dictionary of Genealogy (5th ed). London: A & C Black.

Where do I start?

The first stage in doing a family history is to do a family tree. The information resulting from this search will prompt the further exploration of the records necessary to tell the family story.

1. Use a pedigree chart to organise the search record of your direct line.

- This can be purchased from the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (LDS), your local family history society or downloaded free from the internet at several places such as Cyndi’s List <https://www.cyndislist.com/charts/> or the LDS site: https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Genealogy_Research_Forms
- Record information in the detail and spelling provided. Birth, death and marriage certificates provide a lot of helpful detail. Each certificate in the search sequence can provide information to help you find the next one.
- Information on certificates in each State may be found under the headings 'Free help' < 'AUS info' < BDM Records < BDM Certificates from Graham Jaunay's Adelaide Proformat website <https://www.jaunay.com/bdm.html>
- The costs of certificates, the necessary forms and conditions as well as the addresses for each State are on each Registry’s site. Each Registry site provides links to the others.
- Crosscheck names, ages, birthplaces provided for individuals in one certificate with another.

2. Trace backwards and record from yourself starting with your full birth certificate.

This provides you with information about your parents:

- your father's full name and place of birth and occupation at the time
- your mother's maiden name, age and place of birth
- when and where your parents married.

3. Record the information from your parents' marriage certificate.

Your own birth certificate will provide you with the marriage place and date. You will need these details to obtain a copy of the marriage certificate. Information includes:

- parents' full names, ages and birthplaces
- grandfathers' names and occupations
- grandmothers' maiden names.

4. Record the information from your parents' birth certificates.

The birth certificate of either parent includes:

- father's full name, age, birthplace and occupation at the time
- mother's maiden name, age and birthplace
- when and where your grandparents married

5. Continue following back using certificates to get more information.

Death certificates may provide invaluable information:

- father's name and occupation
- mother's maiden name and occupation
- deceased person's birthplace
- and, when the person has arrived in Australia from overseas,
- number of years in the colony and in which Australian colonies.

6. Exhaust all Australian sources before attempting overseas research.

- You need the next set of parents' names and their town or parish of origin to commence an overseas search.
- If these are not supplied on the death certificate they may be supplied on the shipping records.
- Shipping records are found in Australia, not overseas.
- These records are organised on a state basis and are usually indexed according to whether passengers received financial support or not when coming to Australia.

7. Maintain records of your sources.

- Use a research log. This is useful for crosschecking information and picking up errors. Samples may be purchased from societies, found in handbooks, or downloaded free from Internet sites such as Ancestry <https://support.ancestry.com.au/s/article/Free-Charts-and-Forms>

8. Prepare family group sheets/descendant charts to record relationships other than the direct line.

Again, there are plenty of sources from societies, in handbooks and online.

9. Find out more about the lives of your family.

- From countries of origin to Australia there is an increasing amount of material being collated and indexed on ordinary people.
- This information is available in a variety of formats.
- The Internet makes the sources more accessible.

Need further information?

(07) 3840 7810 | slq.qld.gov.au/ask

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