

First Steps in Family History for Young People

Understanding and recording your own family history is a valuable exercise for your own interest and for local history knowledge. It helps to tell you where you came from, what trades and jobs people had in the past, can highlight how they lived and provide useful information on how an area has changed over time. This activity provides basic, introductory information on how to begin researching your own family tree, just as we have researched the families that lived in the Weavers Cottages as part of our project.

Aims

This session will teach the students how to start researching their own family history. It will encourage them to think and question the types of information available in the home to help them do this.

Objectives

At the end of this session, the students will:

1. Be able to fill in a birth chart
2. Know some of the memorabilia around the home which are useful for family history (e.g.: birth certificates, photographs, marriage certificates etc)
3. Be able to read some of the more common sources for family history

Materials - You will need:

- a copy of the 3 or 5 generation birth chart from this website
- a selection of census returns, birth, marriage and death certificates – or images of some from our website.

Plan

- **Introduction** - What is genealogy? The difference between genealogy and Family History – 10 minutes
- **Starting a birth chart** - talking through the chart – 15 minutes
- **Exercise in Oral history** - students will interview each other in pairs or threes – 15 minutes
- **Feedback** on Exercise among the whole class – 10 minutes
- **Whole Class exercise** – discussion on memorabilia around the home (using either black board or white board) - 15 minutes
- **Investigating evidence** - looking at certificates, census returns etc in groups – 15 minutes
- **Feedback** from class on whole session – 10 minutes
- **Plenary** – revision of new vocabulary and where to go from here

Suggested Questions for your parents, grandparents or even great grandparents

1. What is your (birth) name?
2. Where and when were you born?
3. Do you have any brothers or sisters?
4. What are their names and when and where were they born?
5. If you are married, where and when did you marry?
6. What are the (birth) names of your parents? [If possible, it is best to ask your grand-parents Questions 6-8 directly]
7. Where and when did they marry?
8. Where and when were they born?
9. [Going back to your parents] What is or was your occupation?
10. Where and when did you go to school?
11. What can you remember about your schooldays?
12. What can you remember about your teenage years?
13. Can you remember where you have lived, and when?

Questions 9-13 can also be asked of your grandparents and great-grandparents, if possible.

Other suggested topics for questions are:

- Childhood years including games;
- Holidays including family holidays;
- Family occasions such as weddings, funerals and baptisms or naming ceremonies;
- Other cherished memories and even any family recipes handed down.

If possible, try to get some dates, or approximate dates,
and places for these memories.

First Steps in Family History for Young People – More Tips!

1. Begin with yourself! Write down where and when you were born, the names of both your mother and father, if known. Keep it very basic at first, you can always add extra details such as where did you go to school, what were your first memories, later on.
2. Ask your parents, grand-parents and even your great-grand-parents, if you know them, the following questions. What are their names and birth names, where and when were they born. What are the names of their parents and what do they know about them? Once again, keep to the basic questions first, you can always ask questions later on about where they went to school, what was or is their occupation, where and when did they get married, if at all and what are their first memories.
3. Write these basic details for your direct ancestors on a Birth Brief or Generation Chart. Keep a blank copy for future use. Write in pencil at first so that you can erase or correct any mistakes easily.
4. Ask if your parents or grand-parents have any birth, marriage or death certificates, or other documents or memorabilia which might be useful for family history. These could all be collected together into a Memory Box for the future.
5. By using these steps it should be possible to get back as far as 1939 or even 1911. In 1939 the National identity Register was compiled immediately before World War II. This is available to search at www.findmypast.co.uk. The last census to be available for family history research was compiled in 1911 and is available at www.ancestry.co.uk, www.findmypast.co.uk and www.thegenealogist.co.uk Watch out for the 1921 census, which will become available in 2022!
6. When your parents delve further back, it is always best to check the original records rather than rely on later transcriptions or indexes, which sometimes contain mistakes. As well as the subscription websites mentioned above, there are a number of good free websites for family history, including www.familysearch.org, www.freebmd.org.uk which covers an index to births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales and www.freecen.org.uk which covers the census but is not complete.