

England: Getting Started

Census: Find your families in every census they are alive for. In England the first census listing people by name was taken in 1841 with the census traditionally being taken every ten years since then. The exceptions are 1941 (due to WW II) along with the fact that the 1931 census was destroyed during WW II. Census records are generally released 100 years after they are taken.

The 1841 census has great value but it has some limitations. Relationships are not given and individuals older than 15 years – their ages were rounded down.

The census can also provide a good approximation of date and place of deaths and marriages. Census records are used in combination with church records and civil registration records in locating ancestors.

- All original images 1841-1911 are found on: Ancestry, Find My Past & The Genealogist

Civil Registration: England and Wales civil registration began on 1 July 1837. Civil registration is the government recording of births, marriages, and deaths. Civil registration records are excellent sources of names, dates, and places of births, marriages, and deaths. Because they are indexed and cover most of the population, English civil registration records are important sources for genealogical research.

- Indexes can be found on: FreeBMD, Find My Past, FamilySearch & Ancestry

Church Records: Church records are the main source for identifying people prior to 1837. It is also a main source after 1837 – you should use church records in conjunction with civil registration. The registers kept by the parish record christenings, marriages, and burials performed in that parish.

The amount of information recorded varies from parish to parish. Later records are usually more complete than earlier ones. Content often changed when a new minister began keeping the records.

- FamilySearch.org - Church records may be online or use the Library Catalog to order microfilm.
- OPC (Online Parish Clerks) for 13 counties. Google 'OPC' and (name of) parish – to find.

- Find My Past – Has 160+ million baptisms, marriages and burials.
- BMDRegisters.co.uk – largest non-conformist web site – 68 million entries
- Society of Genealogists – over 10,000 parish transcripts
- The Genealogist – Over 50 million church registers & transcriptions
- FreeReg.org.uk – About 40 million transcriptions of church indexes.

Probate: First question – is probate before or after 1858

Prior to 1858 the Church of England probates the estates of the deceased. There were over 300 church probate courts in a hierarchy of jurisdiction and importance.

- Wiki.familysearch.org – Do a parish search, find probate topic and look for links to online help and/or online records.

Starting January 1858 the civil government took over the settlement of estates through the Principal Probate Registry. There are county wide indexes to the records – they are arranged by year and then by surname.

- Ancestry.com – All England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills & Admins) 1858-1966. FindMyPast has the same but through 1959.
- www.gov.uk – England & Wales Wills probate 1858-present. Order a copy for 10 pounds – receive document online within 10 days. Includes soldiers wills 1850-1986.

Estate Duty Death Indexes 1796-1903 cover all courts in England and Wales, 1796-1805 cover 25% of probate records, 1805-1815 cover 75% of probate records, 1815-1858 almost 100% of probate records.

- FindmyPast.com has 1796-1903 indexes online.

Helpful Links:

- Maps.familysearch.org
- Surname distribution 1881 & 1998 - gbnames.publicprofler.org/

To access the very best information for 10 important England research topics (all British too):
Wiki.familysearch.org – type ‘Family History Library Classes and Webinars’ into the search box – click onto the first result ‘Family History Library Classes and Webinars’. Scroll down to ‘Past Webinars’ and find ‘British Isles’. Now you can select a one-hour webinar to watch and/or a handout to read and print.