



A Brief Guide To Northumberland Family History

Family history can be fascinating and, with a little patience, very rewarding. It is important to remember always to start from yourself and work backwards, step by step. Family history research can be very time consuming and progress may sometimes be slow. Therefore, to make the best use of your time and money there are a number of things you can do before contacting the record office.

Firstly, look at one of the many genealogical books that can help you plan your research. For a comprehensive guide to records, M. D. Herber's *Ancestral Trails* (Society of Genealogists, 2005) is invaluable. The local family history societies may be able to tell you if someone has already begun research on your family and *The Northumberland and Durham Family History Society Journal* provide regular advice. You may also consider attending a family history course.

If you have any general family history queries, Northumberland Archives staff are happy to offer advice. They do, however, have a limited amount of time available and cannot give detailed advice about the techniques of research or guide you step by step through tracing your family tree. Their role is to advise on the sources available. Readers should also be aware that staff cannot spend extended periods of time providing assistance to new researchers.

Once you have done some background reading, next gather all the information, which you can from members of your own family. Get as many names, dates and places as possible for even if this is not always entirely accurate, it may provide useful clues and starting points. Having done this, some of the following sources may be of help.

CIVIL REGISTRATION. From 1837, all births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales had to be reported to a local registrar. Registrars still keep the certificates, so if you know the date and place of the event, you can apply to the local register office for a copy. If you do not know which registrar is likely to hold the certificate, there is a national index (the General Register Office, or GRO, Index), which is divided into births, marriages and deaths, is arranged alphabetically for each quarter of the year. This index, gives the name of the individual, the quarter of the year in which the event took place and the registration district it is recorded in. The index for the 20th century gives additional information such as mother's maiden name in the birth index, spouses surname in the marriage index and age at death. Each entry also has a reference number, but the local registrar does not need this reference in order to be able to find the certificate you require.

THE CENSUS. A survey of the population has been taken every 10 years since 1801, but 1841 is the first year that lists individuals. The census is closed to public inspection for 100 years so the most recent one available is for the year 1921. The census can be extremely useful since members of each household are listed with ages, occupations, relationship and parish of birth. It is arranged street by street. However, for the years 1851 and 1881 surname indexes are available. Census returns 1841-1921 for England and Wales are available to search online in our searchrooms on Find My Past.

ANGLICAN PARISH REGISTERS. These record baptisms, marriages and burials and were first kept in 1538, although very few survive from that date. The oldest registers for Northumberland

are Berwick Holy Trinity and Holy Island (1572 and 1578 respectively). Early registers are in Latin and give very brief information. Even if your ancestor did not regularly attend the parish church, the registers are worth checking. Between 1754 and 1837, the law required everyone (except Quakers and Jews) to be married in a parish church and buried there, in the absence of a civil cemetery. Many registers have been microfilmed and several have been transcribed and indexed.

THE INTERNATIONAL GENEALOGICAL INDEX (I.G.I.). This was compiled by the Church of the Latter Day Saints and is an index to the baptisms and marriages in parish registers, mainly those pre-1813. For each county, it gives an alphabetical list so it is especially useful for tracing families who may have moved between parishes. However, not all parish registers are indexed on the I. G. I. This information is now available on the FamilySearch website - www.familysearch.org.

NON-CONFORMIST REGISTERS. Due to the proximity of Scotland, Presbyterianism was strong in Northumberland and many mining communities were often Methodist. There are many surviving baptism registers from the late eighteenth-century onwards for Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodist chapels. It is worth remembering that, in some churches, baptisms could occur quite a long time after birth. There was also a strong tradition of Roman Catholicism in the county and Northumberland Archives also keeps the registers of several Catholic churches.

MONUMENTAL INSCRIPTIONS. Gravestones can supply useful information about your ancestors. Information from gravestones in many Northumberland churchyards have been transcribed and copies of these are available in our searchrooms. .

CIVIL CEMETERIES. By 1900 there were several civil cemeteries in Northumberland, administered by burial boards. Registers of burials and grave spaces often exist and occasionally cemetery plans.

WILLS AND PROBATE. Wills can often give information about next of kin, and also about social standing. In order to be made valid, a grant of probate must be carried out and the will proved. Prior to 1858, this was done through the Consistory Court of the Diocese covering that area. Most of Northumberland was in the Diocese of Durham, although Hexhamshire (Hexham, Allendale and St John Lee) and Thockrington wills were proved in the Prerogative Court of the Archbishop of York. An index to both of these series is available as well as copies of some of the wills themselves. After 1858, district probate registries were set up; the one at Newcastle covers Northumberland. A detailed leaflet is available which gives guidance on this complicated subject.

OTHER SOURCES. There are many other sources that can provide auxiliary information or help fill gaps. Local newspapers are often helpful; obituaries and announcements are of particular use. School Admissions Registers and School Log Books can provide information, and can be found for most areas from 1872 onwards. Trade Directories list private residents as well as tradesmen for each town and hamlet as well as providing a contemporary description of the area. Estate papers may give details of rentals and labour.

Detailed guides to many of the record series are available, but the following list gives a summary of records held.

Sources available

Newspapers.

Family and Estate Papers.

Business Records.

Trade Directories.

Maps, including the 1910 Land Tax and Tithe Maps (1840s), which give details of owners and occupiers of land.

Pedigrees.

Personal Name, Subject and Place index to records.

General Register Office Index to Civil Registration, 1837-1980.

Anglican Parish Registers.

International Genealogical Index, 1995 edition.

Non-Conformist Registers.

Civil Cemetery Records.

Monumental Inscriptions, transcripts for a number of parishes

Index to wills proved at Durham, 1540-1858.

Copies of wills proved at Durham, 1606-1858.

Hexhamshire Wills, 1676-1707, 1728-1838.

Index of Hexhamshire wills at the Borthwick Institute, 1688-1799.

Copies of Hexhamshire wills, 1676-1707.

Registered Copies of wills from the Newcastle District Probate Registry, 1858-1941.

Education Records.

Quarter Sessions Records.

County Council Records.

Borough Records, including records of Trade Guilds for Morpeth.

Poor Law Records.

Morpeth Barony and Borough Court Rolls.

Many of the sources are only available to consult on microfilm.

Please remember that original material will not be produced if it has been microfilmed even if all the microform readers are in use.

Sources Available at Berwick-upon-Tweed Record Office

A separate introduction to family history in North Northumberland is available.

Northumberland Archives is committed to providing a quality service to all its users and therefore this information is also available in Large Print and via the Internet. The Internet address is:

www.northumberlandarchives.com

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