

Gatehouse-Folk : DIY Family History Research

- **Before looking at websites**

Speak to all family members and friends who may know of your relatives during the previous 2 generations or so.
Make notes about names, places and dates. Many official records have access limitations (some don't release information that is up to 100 years old) so you may need to rely on family recollections for more recent events.

Don't just record information about direct lineage, siblings can be very important.

Some siblings are born in different places where records may be easier to research, and siblings with unusual first names can help searches using a popular surname.

- **Gravestones**

Gravestone inscriptions are a very useful source of information about family relationships, particularly maiden names. Libraries and Family History Societies often have indexes and transcriptions.

Links to some local Kirkcudbrightshire graveyards can be found on www.gatehouse-folk.org.uk

- **Scottish Records**

These are kept at the General Registrars Office (GRO), New Register House, Edinburgh. You can book to go there in person, but many of their records are available through their on-line website www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk

To use the on-line system you can pay by credit card at the rate of £7.50 per 30 search units. Searching the index records is free. Indexes are lists of surnames, first names and years when the birth, marriage or death took place. Once you think you have found the index record for someone in which you have an interest, then you can look at or download a certificate at a cost of '6 units'. So you get access to 5 certificates for £7.50 (=£1.50 per certificate viewed / downloaded).

Apart from birth, marriage and death certificates, this website also has census returns, parish records, Scottish wills, including those of First World War soldiers, and Valuation Rolls.

- **England & Wales Records**

England and Wales birth, marriage & death (BMD) records are housed in The National Archives at Kew in London. They also hold all the Military Records for army, navy, air force and nursing organisations for the whole of the UK. Some of these records are available online at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

*Searching the indexes is usually free, but you **will not see** actual BMD certificates - only the indexes which include first & last names, place and year. This is sometimes not enough to know you have the right person. You have to order certificates separately - usually costing about £9-10 each and these are sent hardcopy by post. You have no way of checking you have the correct one until the certificate arrives.*

- **Irish Records**

Many originals were destroyed, but records are being recovered and made available on-line.

For Ireland (Eire) try www.rootsireland.ie and www.nationalarchives.ie

For Northern Ireland try www.proni.gov.uk

For 1901 & 1911 census try www.census.nationalarchives.ie

- **Free web sites**

It is useful to try some of the free web sites, although they may only have limited coverage of areas or years.

www.familysearch.org This site is owned by the Church of the Latter Day Saints, so it is American. Sometimes this can lead to strange transcriptions.

However it is free and covers most of the parish records (and sometimes later ones) for all the UK. They also have links to most of the rest of the world. The 1881 census transcription for the UK is also available free.

www.freebmd.org.uk This site is run by volunteers who enter the information. You will not see actual certificates just the indexes but might help you narrow down likely ones. Not all the UK is covered but most is. More useful for England.

www.freecen.org.uk Similar to above site and again covers most censuses and most of UK but not all yet.

- **Subscription-based Websites**

The 2 main web sites which require a subscription are www.ancestry.co.uk and www.findmypast.co.uk

Findmypast probably has a better, more accurate, searching ability because it is run by a British company and they sometimes are better at understanding British names.

Ancestry can have some quirks. It is an American site - for example they sometimes confuse Kirkcudbrightshire with Kincardineshire, although once you know this, there is not a problem. Ancestry probably has more information available for searching, but it depends what you want. Ancestry also covers most of the world if you take out a worldwide subscription. (Can be very expensive)

You can download actual English Census pages - but not Scottish ones, from both websites. Check both web sites for what they cover. They both have many other records such as military records, work and immigration records and newspapers. Prices vary but you can usually take out a subscription for a month at a time (and sometimes for less) although obviously a year's subscription is better value if you need it. Look out for special offers. Remember genealogy can become addictive!

- **Search Engines**

Search engines such as Google can throw up other less well known research projects. These days many people have their own websites that Google will search.

The following local web sites can be found this way.

www.gatehouse-folk.org.uk (photos and information about people who have lived in Gatehouse of Fleet)

www.kirkyards.co.uk (photos and transcriptions of 9 Kirkcudbrightshire graveyards)

www.kirkcudbright.co (place names around Galloway with links to maps and photos)

- **Other Sources**

There are many other websites with useful information to help your research.

www.cyndislist.com is a free site and useful for finding out which sources are available online for lots of different countries and topics.

- **Sharing**

Once you have some information you might want to share it.

Sites like www.genesreunited.co.uk and www.rootsweb.com can help you share information with others and find long lost cousins. They have a small annual subscription.

They also have some records available to search for a fee.

- **Local libraries and museums**

A source for local books, newspapers etc., they sometimes also have free information available on line.

For example the 1851 Kirkcudbrightshire census transcription is available from the Ewart Library, Dumfries or at <http://www.dumgal.gov.uk/historicalindexes/census.aspx>

For Wigtownshire information try <http://freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ainsty/>
Ewart Library, Dumfries: 01387 260285 Stewartry Museum, Kirkcudbright:01557 331643

The Mitchell Library in Glasgow has lots of information about the West of Scotland.

Tel: 0141 287 2988

<http://www.glasgowfamilyhistory.org.uk/ExploreRecords/Pages/Explore-Our-Records.aspx>

- **Family History Societies**

Most areas have a family history society which often has a library and some research facilities - and local knowledge.

The Dumfries & Galloway Family History Society is based at 9 Glasgow Road, Dumfries

Tel:01387 248093 www.dgfhs.org.uk

Members can buy discounted tokens for the www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk website. They publish several magazines a year and also organize lectures.

- **Maps**

Maps can be very useful for finding farms and other places where your family may have lived.

<http://maps.nls.uk>

www.old-maps.co.uk

www.oldmapsonline.org can be very useful.

The first Ordnance Survey Map c.1854 is very clear and is particularly useful.

www.geograph.org.uk is useful for modern photos and maps of many areas in the UK.

- **Military Records**

All UK official military records, including nurses, are in The National Archives in London and can be accessed through www.ancestry.co.uk and www.findmypast.co.uk and www.forces-war-records.co.uk

These resources include records up to and including the First World War (1914 - 1918). Bear in mind that many of the war records have not survived. There is little available yet about the Second World War.

Other useful web sites include:

Commonwealth War Graves (both World Wars): www.cwgc.org

Scottish National War Memorial: www.snmw.org

Scottish War Graves and War Memorials: www.scottishmilitaryresearch.co.uk

Military Records from the Commonwealth include:

Canada : www.canadiangreatwarproject.com

Australia : www.naa.gov.au

New Zealand : www.nzhistory.net.nz

- **Things to bear in mind**

Spelling of names varies, so don't just look for one version. Some search engines help with this.

e.g. Look for Mc, Mac, M' or no Mc at all!

Johnson/Johnstone, Ferguson/Fergusson, Lawrie/Laurie etc.

Sometimes officials made changes to names. Some Gaelic surnames were officially Anglicized in Lowland areas of Scotland e.g. McTavish was changed to Thomson.

Some first names now seem unusual: Nicholas and Graham can be female, Ivie and Hawthorn can be male.

Many Scottish families followed a naming pattern: 1st son after father's father, 2nd after mother's father, 3rd after father; 1st daughter after mother's mother, 2nd after father's mother, 3rd after mother etc. This pattern was not set in stone but can sometimes help to follow a family line but can sometimes cause confusion when cousins with the same name give their children similar names!

Secrets: People told lies or liked to keep some facts secret.

Not everyone knew or admitted to their correct age or birthplace. Sometimes they had 'secrets' to hide. Mistakes were often made in censuses by the enumerators or on certificates, especially if people involved could not read and write and could therefore not check the information. The counting methods used in the censuses can sometimes make information such as ages, difficult to read.

Family stories:

Often a family tale is passed down through the generations. There might be a grain of truth to these tales but hard facts can become distorted over time.