



Research information leaflet

Tracing Your Family Tree at Huntingdonshire Archives

Tracing your family tree is more than just sitting down for half an hour and working back through a few parish registers. Genealogy can be a difficult and time consuming task; but it can also be stimulating and rewarding. By consulting a wide variety of sources you may discover a great deal about your ancestors, and what began as a vague idea can become an expansive family tree.

This leaflet is designed to help you find your way through the rich variety of genealogical sources which are available when you visit the Huntingdonshire Archives. Our staff are always available to help, if something is unclear.

Church of England Parish Registers

These are the churches' own records of baptisms, marriages, burials and banns. They are a valuable and much-used source for family historians as it is likely that many of your ancestors will have been baptised, married or buried by the local parish church. The Archives holds parish registers for most of Huntingdonshire's parishes, from the sixteenth century onwards.

We also hold the "Bishop's Transcripts" for parishes in Huntingdonshire, which are contemporary copies of the registers. They survive for some years between 1604 and 1858, and are useful for checking missing or unlikely entries.

In many cases it is not necessary to look at the original registers, as most have been copied, typed and indexed. These transcripts make research easier; you can find names more speedily, instead of struggling through hand-written registers. Check the 'Summary Handlist of Parish Registers' in the searchroom for a full listing of parish register transcripts and any additional original registers available. These transcripts are the maroon coloured volumes on the searchroom shelves.

County Indexes

All the known marriages in Huntingdonshire between 1538 and 1837 have been indexed in volumes available in the searchroom. Huntingdonshire Burials, 1538-1837 have also been indexed and are available to use on CD-rom on our public access computers. We also have on CD-rom indexes of Cambridgeshire baptisms, marriages and burials.

Banns of Marriage and Marriage Allegations and Bonds

On many (after 1837, all) marriage entries the priest will say whether the marriage took place by licence or by banns. If it was by banns there may be a register of banns surviving from the local church. For a marriage by licence, the groom had to complete a form, called an 'allegation,' which was a sworn statement alleging there was no impediment to the marriage. Occasionally a bond was also submitted, stating the amount of money by which the parties were bound. These documents sometimes contain useful genealogical information. An index to these marriage allegations and bonds is available on the searchroom shelves.

Monumental Inscriptions Rolls of Honour and Burial Board Records

We have transcripts of many gravestone inscriptions in Huntingdonshire churchyards and cemeteries. Such inscriptions often include details about individuals which you will not find elsewhere. All our MIs are freely available on the searchroom shelves. We also have many Burial Board records and Rolls of Honour, lists of which are available in the searchroom.

Nonconformist Records

Not everyone was a member of the Church of England. The Archives holds some registers of various Protestant churches and chapels, especially Methodist and Baptist congregations. Please consult searchroom catalogue no. 8 *Nonconformist Records* for details about specific churches. We also have microfilm of nonconformist Huntingdonshire records held at the National Archives in London. Records of local Quakers are held at our sister office in Cambridge, but we have microfiche copies of Quaker births, marriages and burials 1631-1837.

Census Returns 1841 - 1911

A census has been taken in Britain every ten years since 1841 with the sole exception of 1941. The information contained in the returns is closed to public access for a hundred years, but the nineteenth century and early twentieth century census returns are open, and contain a great deal of useful genealogical information. We hold typed and indexed copies of the Huntingdonshire census returns for 1841, 1851 and 1891. We also have the 1861, 1871, 1881 and 1901 Huntingdonshire census returns on microfilm and microfiche. The 1911 census and other census returns and indexes for the whole of the country can be consulted free of charge on our public access computers at www.ancestry.com.

Records of the Poor

Poor relief used to be the responsibility of each individual parish. Every parish had an Overseer of the Poor, who raised money from the rates for benefits. He interrogated any new paupers arriving in the parish to see whether their claims were genuine. Overseers' records include settlement certificates, removal orders and bastardy papers. Unfortunately they do not survive for every parish. We have a card index in the searchroom of most of our poor law papers.

Following the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, three workhouses were built in Huntingdonshire, at St Ives, Eaton Socon [St Neots] and Huntingdon, run by Boards of Guardians. Anyone finding themselves in extreme poverty would move into the workhouse

for food and shelter. The records created by these Boards are detailed and informative: they include workhouse admission and discharge registers, punishment books, creed registers, and records of births and deaths within the workhouse. Indexes are available to births and deaths in the Huntingdon, St Ives and St Neots Union workhouses. Please consult searchroom catalogue no. 22 *Boards of Guardians* for more details.

Elections and Taxes

The Hearth Tax was introduced in 1662, and charged the occupiers of each building for every hearth or stove they had. The original tax records are at the National Archives in London, but we have transcripts of the 1664 and 1674 tax returns: they list the names of everyone paying the tax in each parish, as well as any exemptions. We also have land tax records for 1767, 1798 to 1800, and 1804 to 1832. These usually include names of land owners, occupiers, and the sums assessed. Other useful sources for names are poll books, which were drawn up after each election, and recorded how individuals had voted. Photocopies of all the Huntingdonshire county poll books which we hold are on the searchroom shelves.

The Archives hold electoral registers for Huntingdonshire 1832-1844, 1865, 1920, 1928-1939, and 1946 to date (with some gaps). We also have some registers covering the Soke of Peterborough for the years 1932 to 1984. For more details about taxation and election records, please consult searchroom catalogue no. 14 *General Handlists*.

Probate Records

Wills are excellent genealogical sources, as they give clues to the wealth and connections of testators, and sometimes mention children or heirs who may not appear in parish registers. Some wills are even accompanied by inventories of all the household goods of the deceased. However you must remember that only a very small percentage of the population actually made wills.

Before 1858 wills were proved in local ecclesiastical courts. We have surviving wills and inventories proved in the Archdeaconry Court of Huntingdon from 1479 to 1858, as well as those proved in the Peculiar Courts of Brampton, Buckden, Leighton Bromswold and Stow Longa (these were areas outside the jurisdiction of the Archdeacon). All these wills and inventories have been indexed. We also have indexes to records of some of the neighbouring probate courts, and indexes to wills proved at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury 1383 to 1800 (with gaps). After 1858 a national probate registry was established at Somerset House in London: our sister office in Cambridge has an index of wills proved there.

Probate was often complicated, and it is not always obvious which church court would have proved the will. Archives staff are available to help you.

Manorial Records

We hold records of many Huntingdonshire manors, going back to the middle ages. The most useful records to the genealogist are the Court Rolls, which give details of the conveyancing of land, and Terriers, which were surveys of the manorial estate and often included tenants' names. Please consult searchroom catalogue no. 31 *Manorial Records* for more information.

Crime

If one of your ancestors was tried for a crime it may be worth consulting the Quarter Sessions Order Books: they survive for 1782-92, 1795-1808, 1816-23, and 1827-1965. Many prisoners went to Huntingdon County Prison: records of the prison include the registers of habitual criminals 1870-1878, which contain photographs of each inmate. Copies of these registers and indexes are available on the searchroom shelves. There is also a name index to the General Register of the prison, 1856-1973. For more details please consult searchroom catalogue no. 21, *Crime*.

International Genealogical Index

The IGI is a microfiche index of births, baptisms and marriages from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Its coverage for Huntingdonshire is incomplete, and any information taken from it should be checked against the original registers, as the IGI can be unreliable. We have the IGI 1992 edition for Huntingdonshire and for all the neighbouring counties. You can also search it on the Mormons' own website, www.familysearch.org.

Directories

The Record Office has trade directories for Huntingdonshire and surrounding counties for various years from 1784 to 1940. These mention the more important individuals living in each town or village, and contain lists of all the business and tradespeople in the area. We also have some general biographical reference books, including various editions of *Burke's Landed Gentry and Peerage*, *Crockford's Clerical Directory*, *Kelly's Handbook*, *Who's Who* etc.

Genealogy on the Internet

Details about original documents held at the Huntingdonshire Archives can be found on our own website, www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/archives. This site includes an informative *A-Z Guide* about nearly everything held at the Archives in Huntingdon, and a searchable database to records held in this office, which is being continually updated.

Huntingdonshire Archives has three public access computers, which you are welcome to use to consult genealogical CDs or to browse the Web. There are hundreds of genealogical websites, but as well as those already mentioned, you might like to start with:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/?research-category=family-history>

The National Archives' collection of over 11 million historical government and public records is one of the largest in the world.

www.genuki.org.uk

details of UK genealogical societies, surname lists

www.ancestry.com

census returns, civil registration indexes and much more

www.freebmd.org.uk

civil registration indexes

<http://www.camdex.org.uk/>

index to Cambridgeshire births, marriages and deaths since 1837 (CAMDEX)

There are many other websites, of course, some of which are listed beside our public access computers.

Background Reading

Before you begin, you may find it helpful to do some background reading to familiarise yourself with the task ahead. Useful books include D. Iredale and J. Barrett, *Discovering Your Family Tree*, D.M.Field *Tracing Your Ancestors*, C. Morris *Tracing Your Ancestors* and Mark D Herber *Ancestral Trails*. All these books, and many others, will be available through your local library.