

I've Lost My Ancestor Before 1837

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Research before 1837 brings its own particular problems. Many people rely heavily on parish registers but these are frequently incomplete or provide insufficient information. If ancestors moved from one part of the country to another it can prove difficult to trace where they came from or be certain we have found the correct family. It is therefore vital to have a sound research technique and to abide by the genealogy proof standard (GPS) during our work.

- Reasonably exhaustive research conducted
- Each fact has a complete & accurate source citation
- Evidence is reliable and skillfully correlated & interpreted
- Any contradictory evidence has been resolved.
- The conclusion is soundly reasoned & coherently written

Also attempt to prove each family tree to Verified Pedigree level (VPL), which in addition to the above, means we should seek 2 independent documentary sources to verify each generation of our pedigree.

We should not presume our English and Welsh families stayed within the neighbourhood of where they were born. Even before the advent of the railways in the 1830s many people of all ranks and status travelled far more extensively than we give them credit for. A significant number, travelled extensively within the UK in order to find work or improve their lot in life. Some people were permanent vagrants!

If you find a potential missing baptism for your ancestor many miles from where he baptized his own children, this entry must be considered, but your ensuing research must be sufficiently extensive to prove that it is the right one beyond all reasonable doubt. This is where the GPS and VPL come in and it is important that you:

- know all the sources and databases available to you
- work methodically

Also see what else you can learn about the wider family. This may provide further clues which will aid you in your search. If an ancestor married by licence this may reveal important new information which may help identify him in other records. Licences rarely survive but two accompanying documents usually will & can be very helpful:

- marriage allegation (affidavit) on oath: a formal statement giving ages, places of residence, marital status and confirming that there was no lawful impediment to marriage. If either party was under the age of 21 years he or she had to have the consent of the parent or guardian who will be named
- marriage bond (necessary up to 1823): the bond was sworn by two witnesses, usually the groom & his father or a friend. Each promised to forfeit a large sum of money (usually £40 - £200), if any impediment to the marriage was later found.

- Read more at about these records and how to locate them at [https://training.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Marriage Allegations, Bonds and Licences in England and Wales](https://training.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Marriage_Allegations,_Bonds_and_Licences_in_England_and_Wales)

Searching Parish Registers

Before searching for a 'missing' event in parish registers online ensure you are aware of which registers are and are not available online. Have an understanding of the geography of the area in which your ancestor settled so that, when you do find potential register entries for your ancestor, you can assess how far away they are. A working knowledge of the geography of the country as a whole will help as you try to determine which parish registers are not online. Parish register databases are spread across many different websites & this can be hard work. Even though a website advertised a 'county collection' of registers, there may be gaps within the coverage. Use the FamilySearch Wiki to help determine online parish register coverage. Sign up for newsletters which provide a roundup of genealogy web releases. My own is available from www.chfh.co.uk. Many parish registers are not yet online. If so, you can hire a local researcher to go to the record office to search for you.

The FamilySearch parish register databases should routinely be used in tandem with commercial websites such as Findmypast, TheGenealogist & Ancestry and other sites such as www.freereg.org.uk. Some county record offices, such as Essex & Medway (historically part of Kent) have put their parish registers online themselves. Use a search engine to find other local transcriptions of parish registers while Family History Societies often offer parish registers transcriptions. Many of our ancestors were nonconformists so search for nonconformist baptisms via www.BMDRegisters.co.uk, Ancestry or www.thegenealogist.co.uk

If you have found a potential missing baptism (or other vital event) you should:

1. try to locate corroboratory evidence to prove it's the right family
2. try to prove that it **cannot** be the right entry, e.g. if a baptism:
 - a. check to see if there is an infant burial
 - b. did the person in question marry elsewhere or was he baptising children elsewhere at the same time as your ancestor was in another parish?

Find out more about your potential candidate's earlier family – look for naming patterns or distinctive occupations in common with your own family. Could his occupation have been a reason for his migration to the new area? Background reading might show a link between the two places in this respect.

Make full use of online catalogues – e.g. TNA Discovery catalogue which includes many catalogues from ROs around country. You may turn up references to your ancestors in record office collections far distant from where they were actually living.

Other Sources to Consider for Finding Evidence to link two families

- Probate Records
- Settlement/Removal Records/Other Parish Chest Records
- Manorial Records

- Chancery Records
- Deeds
- Quarter Sessions
- Gravestones (Monumental Inscriptions)
- Visitations
- Tax records e.g. – hearth tax
- Guild/Apprentice Records

Wills

Wills are very important for our research as they record relationships & addresses.

- Don't presume it was just the wealthy who left wills
- Be wary of labelling your ancestor as poor just because he was described as, for example, a labourer

Your ancestor may not have left a will but you may find information about him in the wills of relatives! The wills of spinsters and bachelors can be of great use, naming many relatives across the country. Many will indexes & calendars are online. Before 1858, ensure you have checked all possible probate jurisdictions See *Probate Jurisdictions: Where to Look for Wills* by Jeremy Gibson and Stuart Raymond (6th edn) & then check to see whether these are online. If not hire a researcher to go to the Record Office for you.

Death Duty Registers are available from 1796. They may lead to details of other family members especially where there are letters of administration but no will. Read more at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/death-duties-1796-1903/>

Poor Law records

Our poorest ancestors often travelled the furthest – seeking work or sustenance. Some may have been permanent itinerants. You may pick them up in records relating to the poor law, although survival rates for these records vary greatly. Settlement examinations and registers, removal orders and registers survive for some parishes which will indicate the place of a person's settlement. For a man this is often the place where he was born and likely to have been baptised. Read more at <http://www.genguide.co.uk/source/settlement-certificatesexaminations-and-removal-orders-parish-poor-law/173/>

Guild and Apprenticeship Records

Guild & apprenticeship records can be useful for learning an ancestor's parentage. Use apprentice indentures, stamp duty records, registers of apprenticeships and admissions to Freedom of the City. Up to 1752 apprentice records often give detail of an apprentice's father & home address. An increasing number of records are online e.g. Ancestry, www.thegenealogist.co.uk. Otherwise they will be in local record offices

Manorial Records

The records of greatest use to the genealogist are often the Court Rolls for the Court Baron which record admissions to copyhold land tenancies. The court would admit a new tenant, who was usually the deceased's heir, after the payment of an entry fine. The record will state the relationship between the old and new tenant & may therefore provide evidence of

parentage. Successive runs of court rolls can provide a lengthy pedigree. Continued tenure of the same piece of land or property will also help prove the family lineage. Records may also provide the clarifying evidence if there are two individuals with the same name. Manorial records may also show where tenants have moved in from other places. Survival rates for these records are patchy and before the early 1700s the records will be in Latin. Locate manorial records using the manorial documents register. Read more at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/manorial-documents-lordships-how-to-use-manorial-document-register/>

There is increasingly a place for DNA in our searches too. Watch the videos below.

DNA for beginners: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9RyoEVDG7o>

The Future of Autosomal Testing <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQ3dNKo7tmI>

Further Reading

Cumbrian Manorial Records website: excellent introduction to the subject with document examples <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/projects/manorialrecords/>

Phillimore's *Atlas and Index of Parish Registers* (ed. Humphery-Smith). Maps online at Ancestry.com online at

www.archersoftware.co.uk/igi/index.htm for checking IGI coverage

British 19th Century Surname Atlas <http://www.archersoftware.co.uk/satlas01.htm>

<http://www.workhouses.org.uk/> Extensive site giving a wealth of poor law background

<http://www.agra.org.uk/> Approved UK genealogical researchers

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