

Resting Peacefully in Essex – While I became a better genealogist

Sherry Irvine, CG

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This handout material summarizes much of the research advice in the lecture and includes book details and web links.

Foundation Notes

All research begins with investigating details of **civil and ecclesiastical jurisdictions**. Be sure to look up places in *A Topographical Dictionary of England* (Lewis), checking both the place itself and the larger units within which it is located. For a hamlet or chapelry, look up the parish, and then follow through to the hundred and the county. Lewis's County essays are valuable for their summary of civil and ecclesiastical units and for the outlines of history that they contain. I find this information quickly in my own reprint edition of the *TD*, published in 1831. It and later editions are online at Google Books, or British History Online, or within the collections at Ancestry. By way of example, here are a few lines from the essay about the county of Essex taken from page 142, of volume 2 of the edition listed in the Bibliography:

The county is in the diocese of London, and province of Canterbury, and comprises the archdeaconries of Essex and Colchester, and part of that of Middlesex. The archdeaconry of Essex contains the deaneries of Barstaple, Barking, Chafford, Chelmsford, Dengie, Ongar, and Rochford; that of Colchester, the deaneries of Colchester, Lexden, Newport, Sampford, Tendring, and Witham; and that portion of the archdeaconry of Middlesex which is in this county, those of Dunmow, Harlow, and Hedingham. The number of parishes is four hundred, of which two hundred and fifty are rectories, one hundred and thirty-four vicarages, and the remainder perpetual curacies. For civil purposes it is divided into the fourteen hundreds of Barstable, Becontree, Chafford, Chelmsford, Clavering, Dengie, Dunmow, Freshwell, Harlow, Hinckford, Lexden, Ongar, Rochford, Tendring, Thurstable, Uttlesford, Waltham, Winstree and Witham, and the royal liberty of Havering-atte-Bower. [This goes on to list the market towns, and set out the number of representatives elected to Parliament.]

The FS website, 1851 Jurisdictions of England, is another essential foundation resource, although it does not match the range of jurisdictional and historical information within the *Topographical Dictionary*. The website includes jurisdictions and boundaries, names of adjacent and nearby parishes, and a summary of surviving church registers.

Also essential is an awareness of **terminology**, not only words associated with boundaries and jurisdictions, but with records, or everyday life. There are several genealogy or local history reference books, including those by Hey and Richardson, mentioned in the Bibliography.

Some **indispensable resources** which describe records and offer advice on research methods are available in print or digital formats. Those that I use regularly are listed in the Bibliography and Websites at the end, but is worthwhile to mention a few of particular value.

My Ancestor was a Migrant (Camp) – Never mind when this was published, it serves as a useful checklist of records that have any possibility of “catching” migrants, with descriptions of each.

Probate Jurisdictions (Gibson, Churchill) – the most valuable of all the Gibson Guides, and worth having in printed format; all Gibson Guides include excellent essays on the records covered and set out clearly where to find records and/or indexes. Again, pay no attention to dates of publication, as these finding aids serve as useful guides to surviving records and their whereabouts. This is important to any search, online or using microfilm, or on location.

The Local Historian's Encyclopedia (Richardson) – Yes, you can find definitions with your favourite search engine, but you learn far more when you can browse an amazing collection of definitions and explanations as are found in this book.

<i>Sources for English Local History</i> (Stephens)	} These 3 books are what I turn to for } detail and background about the records } I need once research must go beyond parish registers and probate.
<i>The Parish Chest</i> (Tate)	
<i>Village Records</i> (West)	

British History Online – seldom explored to the extent this website deserves, from the volumes of the Victoria County History series, to books of local history, to Ordnance Survey maps, to State Papers, and other early sources.

Essex Record Office – those of us with Essex ancestry are spoiled. The SEAX site is the access point to the catalogue and to a detailed list of surviving parish registers. The catalogue describes every item, many with sufficient detail to be useful to your research. There is also access to images, presently a free service but, according to a recent report, that will soon change.

Record Notes

Teaching and writing about family history led me to find out as much as I can about sources. You do not have to teach or write about records to be just as thorough. The history of a record can be fascinating, and will provide insights into why and how the information was gathered. Contemporary accounts about records, as well as long ago writings of antiquarians and early genealogists, also add to your knowledge and understanding.

How can you find the history of a record? Start with a good book, a reference volume or a discussion of family history research, rather than a sources / methods book. The two titles by David Hey in the bibliography are examples of what I mean. I have quite a collection of books of this sort, and of odd reference books too, such as a fat tome devoted to the topic of English parish

churches (see the Bibliography). Search for books of local history, too.

For my research in East Anglia, two books have been helpful, *The Common Stream*, and *Public Spirit: Dissent in Witham and Essex, 1500 – 1700*. The former tells the history of a Cambridgeshire village through its documents. You meet the people, experience their fortunes and misfortunes, and learn how the documents came to reveal the lives and times of the villagers. In *Public Spirit* there is a detailed account of all the records that tell the religious history of a community through a turbulent time, for which finding records may be challenging.

Advanced Research Notes

Record Selection

Can you ask the right questions, those that will help you search records which, potentially, will produce answers? Questions such as “when was he born?” or “where did she die?” may not be enough, or may not be what should be asked just yet. There are other questions, such as: Do church registers survive for the years of my search? Are there Bishops Transcripts or nonconformist registers? What are my index options, online, on film or fiche, in print? Do I know whether my ancestor died in the same place her youngest child was baptized?

Evidence Orientation

Have you got the right perspective? Always question the way you see a genealogical problem. What is your angle of vision: 21st century? Can you change that? Another aspect of perspective is the approach. It may be better to work indirectly, to investigate another member of the family. Also, consider asking someone else to view the problem, even view records you have looked at. Second opinions and second looks turn up new ideas or results missed the first time around.

Thought Processes

How confident are you in your ability to analyze and reason? Endless speculation is not analysis. Looking at everything you can think of or that others may suggest is not reasoning.

Analysis involves the review and consideration of your background knowledge (geography, history, records, known personal facts) in combination with the results of your most recent searches. There can be a great deal to absorb and synthesize. Maps will be useful. You may want to make time lines of local historical events and the ancestor's life. You will want to note what you know, what you want to learn, and what new facts may emerge from other sources.

You need to know which records provide “point-in-time” information and which give relationship facts or clues. The “point-in-time” details help you determine with some accuracy, the years an ancestor was in a particular location, valuable in the decades after the birth of the youngest child.

Trailblazing

Can you find alternate routes when the way is blocked? Genealogical brick walls often disappear when you add to your knowledge of records for the time and place: what survives, which ones are indexed, alternative finding aids etc etc. If you can find an alternative source, or another version of a source already searched, you may find the key to your problem. Blaze a trail around roadblocks.

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Websites

- Guildhall Library –
http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/Corporation/LGNL_Services/Leisure_and_culture/Libraries/City_of_London_libraries/guildhall_lib.htm
- The National Archives – www.nationalarchives.gov.uk
- Essex Record Office – <http://www.essex.gov.uk/Libraries-Archives/Record-Office/Pages/Record-Office.aspx>
- ERO Catalogue (SEAX) – <http://seax.essexcc.gov.uk/default.asp>
- London FamilySearch Centre – <http://londonfhc.org/>
- FamilySearch Wiki – <https://wiki.familysearch.org>
- FamilySearch 1851 Jurisdictions – <http://maps.familysearch.org/>
- London Metropolitan Archives –
http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/Corporation/LGNL_Services/Leisure_and_culture/Records_and_archives/
- British History Online – www.british-history.ac.uk
- Online Parish Clerks –
- Ancestry UK – www.ancestry.co.uk
- Find My Past – www.findmypast.com
- British Origins – www.origins.net