

Free UK Gen is a group of three websites created to make available free of charge birth, marriage and death indexes, census returns and parish register entries. The data is input by volunteers and none of the sites are complete yet. <https://www.freeukgenealogy.org.uk/>

Free BMD is the longest running of these sites and has the most data available. The aim is to have all birth, marriage and death entries from 1837 to the present day available to search in one big index. Currently the database is fairly complete from 1837 to about 1977 (births), 1979 (marriages) and 1979 (deaths), although some subsequent years are nearly complete with more being added regularly. <https://www.freebmd.org.uk/>

At the moment full indexes of census returns are only available on the pay to view websites and **Free Cen** hopes to change this in due course. The database is still a long way from completion and only the census returns for 1841-1891 are included. Coverage is patchy, but Cornwall and Scotland are very well covered. It is worth looking at the site from time to time to see what has been added. <https://www.freecen.org.uk/>

Free Reg, like its sister sites is also free to view and the aim here is to make available parish register entries of baptisms, marriages and burials in one large index. This site is also in its early days, but will expand in time. There do not seem to be any coverage charts available on this site nowadays. <https://www.freereg.org.uk/>

To obtain birth, marriage or death certificates online, the site to use is **The General Register Office** certificate ordering website. It is helpful to have the reference number for the event required and this can be obtained using either Free BMD or one of the pay to view family history sites. Beware of ordering certificates through a pay to view site or one of the websites pretending to be official, they will always put a surcharge on the price. The cost of one certificate on the GRO site is £9-25. Certificates ordered from district register offices currently cost £10-00. <http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/>

Family Search is the website of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints otherwise known as the LDS Church or Mormon Church. Although you have to register to use this site, it is free to use and is particularly good for finding baptisms and marriages which took place in the UK. Burials are not generally featured as these do not form part of the LDS religion. However, there are many pedigrees submitted by members of the church and these can be useful but need to be treated with caution as they are only as good as the research carried out by the individual who submitted it. It must also be noted that the information in the index is not complete and not all parishes are covered. On the plus side it does cover the whole world which is useful for tracing ancestors with foreign origins. The 1881 census index is also available here as it was created by the LDS Church and is also available on many other family history websites free of charge. <https://www.familysearch.org/>

Another good free resource is the **Online Parish Clerk** or OPC project, although the coverage is very patchy. The counties of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Essex, Hampshire, Kent, Lancashire, Somerset, Sussex, Warwickshire and Wiltshire have variable amounts of information available. The idea of this project is for one person to take on the role of the online parish clerk for a parish or group of parishes of their choice and with the help of other volunteers make available as many records relating to those parishes as possible. Some

parishes are covered very extensively and others have little or no information currently online. Information found here can include parish registers for baptisms, marriages and burials, memorial inscriptions, census returns, wills and trade directories to name but a few. The project was first started in Cornwall so the coverage of that county is particularly good.

For an overview of the online parish clerks available visit:

https://www.ukbmd.org.uk/online_parish_clerk

This link is for the Dorset OPC webpage which is particularly good:

<http://www.opcdorset.org/>

The National Archives is exactly that. It is a huge repository of documents based at Kew on the west side of London. The website gives an idea of the types of records available to visitors to the archives and also has downloadable research guides on a variety of subjects. To access the documents themselves you either have to visit Kew or use their online pay to view site called Discovery. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

Discovery (formerly called Documents Online) is the pay to view site belonging to the National Archives. It is particularly good for wills made before 1858 and for military records. Searching is free and some information can be obtained from the index but full details of a document would require a download. The current cost of a download is £3-50. This site has also incorporated the old Access to Archives website and this is a backward step. The search criteria on the old site was very good, but here is particularly poor making it very difficult to find documents not held at the National Archives without searching over a time span of one hundred years! <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

A fairly new website is the **Probate Registry**. Until recently the only way to get copies of wills made from 1858 onwards would be to visit the Probate Registry in London. Now it is possible to search free of charge on their website. It will cost £10-00 to get a download of any will found and it will take up to ten days for the download to be ready. They have wills available up to the present day and a section on soldiers wills, useful to anyone doing military research. <https://probatesearch.service.gov.uk#wills>

The British Library has its own pay to view website to promote its newspaper collections titled appropriately **The British Newspaper Archive**. This is a huge archive of newspapers, many of which are small regional publications that can be of great use to family historians. At this time only some of the collection is available online, but the amount is growing regularly. The subscription periods for this site are for one month or twelve months, both giving unlimited access to the collection. This archive can also be found as part of the subscription on the pay site Find My Past. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>

Unlike The British Newspaper Archive, **Welsh Newspapers Online** is a completely free site with a wide range of Welsh publications to search. It is part of the National Library of Wales and it can be accessed via the Library home page and click on collections. In addition to

newspapers, other collections are available to search, including wills. Well worth a visit for those with Welsh ancestors. <https://www.llyfrgell.cymru/>

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission was set up in 1917 and exists to commemorate the dead of the two world wars. It maintains war graves in this country and war cemeteries all over the world. Searches can be made on this website for information on the location of burials and/or memorials to the fallen. This site is free to use. <https://www.cwgc.org/>

The Roll of Honour website seeks to record all war memorials in the UK and give a brief history of every person named on them. It sometimes gives more information than can be found on the CWGC website and where possible gives a photo of the actual grave of the person commemorated. Another free site. <http://www.roll-of-honour.com/>

For help in finding a particular war memorial, **War Memorials Online** is a volunteer run free site which welcomes input from the public to help complete the comprehensive coverage the site already has. <https://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/>

The **Imperial War Museum** also has a free website for recording photos of any type of war memorial, for any war, in any part of the UK. This site also relies on members of the public submitting photos for inclusion on the website. <https://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials>

A slightly different website well worth a look is **A Street Near You** which is an interactive map of the world that you can zoom in on and then place a memorial pin on the street where your ancestor lived. It is also possible to add a photo of that ancestor tagged to the map. <https://astreetnearyou.org>

To obtain a photograph of a war grave, the website to look at is **The War Graves Photographic Project**. The aim of this site is to collect pictures of all known war graves throughout the world. The site is free to search, but if you find a photo it will cost £4-00 for an email copy or £6-00 for a hard copy to be sent by post. Still cheaper than a trip to a foreign cemetery! <https://www.twgpp.org/>

One website that is good for both military and civilian ancestors is **The London Gazette** which is still today the government paper for official announcements. Most military officer promotions and bravery awards were listed in the Gazette. For civilians receiving any sort of award (for example an MBE) it would be announced here. If your ancestor got into financial trouble, there are numerous lists of bankruptcies! <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/>

There are a number of pay to view websites and they all have access to the birth, marriage and death indexes and the census returns for 1841-1911. Most have parish register collections but these and other records available vary from site to site.

Ancestry is probably the most well known of the pay to view sites and is particularly strong when it comes to military records relating to World War 1 and they have a good selection of electoral registers. They also have a partnership deal with London Metropolitan Archives to put online searchable indexes of the registers of many London parishes. <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/>

Find My Past, another pay to view site, has a good selection of ships' passenger lists and since the centenary of the start and end of World War 1 now have a vast collection of military records. They have a partnership deal with the City of Westminster Archives and the British Newspaper Archive is also available here. <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/>

The Genealogist also has a good selection of records on pay to view.
<https://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/>

Scotland's People is the place to look for any sort of research into Scottish ancestors. This is a pay site, but searching is free. Although small amounts of Scottish information can be found on some of the free sites, this site holds a large amount of data that is not available anywhere else online. <http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>

County Record Offices are the places to visit for research in a particular area and they all generally have a website which gives details of the collections that they hold, research guides and opening times of the office. It is unusual to find actual documents available online on these websites. Many county record offices have partnership deals with one of the pay sites. The example given here is the Dorset History Centre in Dorchester.
<http://www.dorsetforyou.com/dorsethistorycentre>

There are a large number of **Family History Societies** which usually cover a county or other geographical area. Some deal with entire foreign countries and others just a particular surname. Most societies have websites which give a variable amount of information and often publications for sale. It is unlikely that much free information would be available on these sites as societies need to raise revenue to survive but many societies have indexes etc for sale or will do small amounts of research for members at sensible prices. Some examples are:
Somerset & Dorset Family History Society: <http://www.sdfhs.org/>
Dorset Family History Society: <https://www.dorsetfhs.org.uk/>
Families In British India Society: <https://www.fibis.org/>

There are many thousands of websites giving varying amounts of free data and here are some examples:

<https://cdm16445.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16445coll4> This site is supplied by the University of Leicester and is of particular use for ancestors who were in any sort of trade or profession and covers most of the UK at various dates. To buy old trade directories on CD can be expensive, this site is free!

<http://digital.nls.uk/directories/> The National Library of Scotland maintains this site which is free to view and concentrates on historical directories for Scotland.

<https://maps.nls.uk/index.html> Another website from The National Library of Scotland and this one has a vast collection of old Ordnance Survey maps for the whole of the UK at varying dates. It is free to search and view, but if you want a copy of the map they are available to purchase.

<http://www.proni.gov.uk/> For research into ancestors in Northern Ireland this is the site to start with. Although a lot of Irish records were destroyed in the 1920s there are still a lot available to the family historian and much of it is free.

<http://www.workhouses.org.uk/> Although there is little information on specific ancestors on this site, for anyone with ancestors who found themselves in the workhouse, and many did, it is a treasure trove. There are maps, plans and photographs of most of the UK workhouses and descriptions of what life was like in them.

<http://www.naval-history.net/> If background information about life in the Royal Navy is required, or information on particular ships, then this is the site to look at. It has a huge amount of information available free of charge. Not so many individual names though.

<http://www.theshipslist.com/> Many of our ancestors thought fit to travel and this free site has a large number of passenger lists for ships leaving the UK and travelling to a variety of destinations. The pay-to-view websites also have a good selection of passenger lists.

<http://www.familydeeds.org/> This website is part free and part pay to view. It lists thousands of old deeds and for all of them a summary is available free of charge. A Small fee is payable to download the entire transcription and in some cases the original document is for sale at a reasonable price. Finding an ancestor on this site is probably like the proverbial needle in a haystack, but success would be pure gold!

Cyndi's List is a website with links to other sites all over the world dealing with all aspects of genealogy and family history. If it can't be found here it probably doesn't exist, although patience is needed to navigate through the thousands of links. <https://www.cyndislist.com/>

Genuki is a website that provides links to other sites on all aspects of genealogy in the UK and Ireland. <https://www.genuki.org.uk/>

There are a number of family history retailers online who sell software packages for recording family history data. They also have available a variety of data CDs which may be of use if the information on them is not available elsewhere. Two examples of the retailers are given here:

GENfair

<https://www.genfair.co.uk/>

S & N Genealogy:

<http://www.genealogysupplies.com>

To keep up with the latest developments regarding family history websites and to help develop research skills it can be useful to subscribe to a family history magazine. Probably the best available is **Family Tree Magazine** which is also an entertaining read.

<http://family-tree.co.uk/>