The County Record Office Huntingdon Guide to

Tracing Your Family Tree

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 Record Office. Record Office 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 Record Office holds parish registers for most of Huntingdonshire's parishes, from the sixteenth century onwards. Please consult the *Access to Archives* website, www.a2a.org.uk, or our searchroom catalogue no. 1 *Parish Registers* to find out more details on what we have.

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 a number have been copied, typed and indexed. These transcripts make research easier, as you can find names more speedily, instead of struggling through hand-written registers. These transcripts are the maroon coloured volumes on the searchroom shelves.

County Indexes

All the known marriages in Huntingdonshire between 1601 and 1837 have been indexed in volumes available in the searchroom. Many (but not all) Huntingdonshire burials are included on the *National Burial Index* CD-rom, which can be consulted on our public access computer. We also have an index of Cambridgeshire marriages 1538-1837 (with some gaps) and an index of Cambridgeshire baptisms and burials 1801-1837.

Marriage Allegations

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 parties involved had to complete a form, called an 'allegation,' which confirmed their intention to marry. These allegations sometimes contain useful genealogical information. We have a card index of all the surviving Huntingdonshire marriage allegations 1662-1883 in the searchroom.

Monumental Inscriptions

We have transcripts of many 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.

Nonconformist Records

Not everyone was a member of the Church of England. The Record Office holds some registers of various Protestant churches and chapels, especially Methodist and Baptist congregations. Please consult searchroom catalogue no. 4 *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.

Census Returns 1841 - 1901

A census has been taken in Britain every ten years, 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 census is open, and it contains a great deal of useful genealogical information. We hold typed and indexed copies of the Huntingdonshire census returns for 1841, 1851 and 1891: we have 1861 and 1871 on microfilm; and we have the whole census for England and Wales for 1881 on CD-rom.

The 1901 census is available on the National Archives' website, www.census.pro.gov.uk, and you will be able to consult this from our public access computer. We have a microfiche copy of the Huntingdonshire 1901 census, too.

Records of the Poor

Poor relief used to be the responsibility of each individual parish, rather than the Government. Every parish had an Overseer of the Poor, who had to find money from the rates for benefits, and who 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, St Neots and Huntingdon. Anyone finding themselves in extreme poverty would move into the workhouse for food and shelter. Workhouses were run by Boards of Guardians, and 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. Please consult searchroom catalogue no. 18 *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 the poll books, which used to be drawn up after each election, and recorded how individuals had voted. There are photocopies of all the Huntingdonshire county poll books which we hold, on the searchroom shelves.

The Record Office holds electoral registers for Huntingdonshire 1832-1844, 1865, 1920, 1928-1939, and 1946 to date (with some gaps). We also have some covering the Soke of Peterborough for the years 1932 to 1984. For more details about taxation and election records, please consult searchroom catalogue no. 10 *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 which are not mentioned in parish registers. Some wills are even accompanied by inventories of all the household goods of the deceased. But 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 proved in the Archdeaconry Court of Huntingdon for 1479 to 1858, as well as wills 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 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. Record Office 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. 30 *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. For more details please consult searchroom catalogue no. 17, *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: the index for the whole world (on CD-rom) is available at the Cambridge Family History Centre,

Latter Day Saints' Church, 670 Cherry Hinton Road, Cambridge (01223 247010). 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 from about 1824 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* and so on.

Genealogy on the Internet

Many of the Record Office's catalogues are now available for you to search online. They can be found at www.a2a.org.uk, which is the website of the **Access to Archives** (A2A) project. Catalogues of Church of England parish records, bishops transcripts, nonconformist chapels and many other Huntingdonshire records can be found there. Other details about original documents at the Record Office can be found on our own website, www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/archives. This site includes an informative *A-Z Guide* which gives information about nearly everything held at the Record Office in Huntingdon.

The Record Office has a public access computer, which you are welcome to use, to consult genealogical CDs or to browse the Web. There are hundreds of genealogical websites, but a few you might like to start with are:

www.familyrecords.go.uk information about the Family Records Centre and its services
www.genuki.org.uk details of UK genealogical societies, surname lists
www.rootsweb.com hosts the *FreeBMD* project, aiming to provide free access to the civil registration indexes of births, marriages and deaths since 1837
www.camcnty.gov.uk/sub/register/cambsindex.htm: index to Cambridgeshire births, marriages and deaths since 1837

There are many other websites, of course, some of which are saved as Favourites on the public access computer. Copies of the Cambridgeshire Libraries' leaflet *Internet Sites for Family History Research* are also available.

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* and C. Morris *Tracing Your Ancestors*. All these books, and many others, will be available through your local library.

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