British Research Methodology: How, What & Where to Search

Best practices

- Work from what is known/proven.

- Quality records – are they original records, derivative records, or authored works?

- Quality information from high-quality sources – primary, secondary, or undetermined source?

North American records:

Minimum identification needed for a successful search.

- Name, including what they went by within the family if possible.

- A date, preferably a birth date, but others will do.

- A place, the more specific, the better the results

- A relative, anyone will do.

These records can provide clues to your British ancestor's records in the British Isles. You may need to expand your search to friends, associates, and neighbors (Elizabeth Shown Mills FAN Club)[1].

- Census records, including children.

- Birth, marriage, or death records of the family, including collateral family.

- Citizenship records (could be federal, state, or local)

- Church, military, county, and local histories

Methodology:

Plan

- What do you need to **verify**?

- What do you want to **discover**? Writing a research question will help you focus.
  For example, "When did Elizabeth Grizzell, spouse of Daniel Coleman (date-date), die?" Who, what, where, when, but not why generally.

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[1] https://www.evidenceexplained.com/content/quicklesson-11-identity-problems-fan-principle

- Where might you find the information you need? Manifest, emigration, immigration, naturalization, church, etc.

Execute your plan!

- Start at the end – start with their death and life before searching for a birth.

- Look at ALL possibilities and rule them out one by one – don't take the first result.

- Pay attention to spelling variations. Names were recorded as they were **heard**.

- Search by variations of names, using wildcards[2], or tracking all variations on a spreadsheet.

- Don't … look at family trees as evidence, but they can provide clues!

Surname mapping method – You may need to approach the location of origin in a different way when other methods do not work. Searching for your target surname AND the surname of a spouse or close associate may help you narrow down where they all came from. https://britishsurnames.co.uk/ shows distribution in 1881 and in the 21st century. If your ancestors came earlier, you can search for the surname only (no first name) and an approximate year and record where the name is found. Do the same with the 2nd name. Where they overlap, you should search for your ancestors. The International Society of Genetic Genealogy (ISOGG) wiki has a listing of surname mapping sites for various countries at https://isogg.org/wiki/Surname_mapping

Types of records and where to find them.

Emigration[3] / Immigration[4] records (British and American)

- Ellis Island – Federal facility beginning about 1890- - https://heritage.statueofliberty.org/passenger

- Castle Garden (1855-1892) – New York state facility
  https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1849782?collectionNameFilter=false&cid=bl-fsup-8014

- Many other ports, including border crossings
  https://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/ports

- Other travel records

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[2] Wildcards commonly used are "?"=any single character and "*"=zero to several characters depending on the database
[3] Emigration – related to leaving a country.
[4] Immigration – related to entering a country.

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British records and where to find them (including Colonial America)
Parish, Civil, Census, and others

- Ancestry.com

- FamilySearch.org (free)
    - FamilySearch Research Wiki https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page

- FindMyPast.com (free to search – subscription needed to access most records)

- FreeBMD https://www.freebmd.org.uk/

- Genuki – Genealogy UK & Ireland https://www.genuki.org.uk/

- IrishAncestors.com Irish Ancestors (johngrenham.com)

- MyHeritage.com https://www.myheritage.com/

- National Library of Scotland https://www.nls.uk/

- Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) – How-to-guides can be found at
    https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/proni-how-guides#toc-3
    General Register Office of Northern Ireland (GRONI) – Introduction to GRONI can be found at
    https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/introduction-groni-and-its-records

- TheGenealogist.co.uk The Genealogist: Search Census, Births, Marriages, Deaths, Parish Records, Non-Conformist Records, Directories, Military Records, Wills & more!

- The National Archives (TNA) – Contains records related to the branches of the British and Colonial governments. Research Guides are available free through the website
    www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

- UKBMD https://www.ukbmd.org.uk/

- Ulster Historical Foundation

- Miscellaneous sites

- British Surnames https://britishsurnames.co.uk/

- Newspapers

- Facebook – British County Family History groups

- Federation of Family History Societies for locations of interest
    https://www.familyhistoryfederation.com/

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Terminology to be aware of

- Boroughs – similar to our towns

- Exchequer – the royal treasury broadly

- Hundreds and Districts – similar to an American metropolitan area

- Interregnum – 1649-1660, when all courts except the Prerogative Court of the Archbishop of Canterbury were abolished (The Cromwellian Era).

- Non-Conformists – Congregations that did not conform to the practices of the Church of England
  [Religious non-conformity in England • FamilySearch](#)

- Parish – similar to an American neighborhood

- Regnal – Refers to the years of a king or queen's reign.

- Shire – similar to an American county Transportation – Persons transported as a result of being imprisoned.

Additional information on terminology https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/img_auth.php/1/16/Poff_-_Say_What_Understanding_Abbreviations+_in_England_Records.pdf

Language variations to be aware of

Spelling is a relatively new creation when speaking about British records. Names were written as they sounded, and variations in dialects affected how a word was spoken. Think broadly about how our ancestor's names were spoken and recorded. Think of the movie *My Fair Lady*, and the way Eliza Doolittle first pronounced Professor Henry Higgin's name when they met. This will help you understand how to approach names in the British Isles and why the research can be complex.

- 'I'/'Y' used interchangeably.

- 'SS' and terminal (final) 'S' were written differently than other 'S'.

- 'U'/'V' used interchangeably.

- Terminal (final) "e" dropped in American English, affecting the spelling of many British names.

Britain had, and has, as many regional dialects as the U.S. Ireland, Scotland, and Wales had distinct languages of their own and were not affected by the French influence in the same way as England.

**For both terminology help and language help, the book *British English A to Zed*
by Norman W. Schur is a great resource.**

Important Dates in British History for Genealogy

DATE	SIGNIFICANCE
1535	England and Wales united
1538	Parishes ordered to keep records of christenings, marriages, and burials (parish registers)
1598	Parish registers were copied onto parchment, and copies were required to be sent to their Bishop. These became known as the Bishop's Transcripts.
1620	Congregationalists (Pilgrims) sail on the Mayflower.
1630	Puritans leave for New England with John Winthrop
1656	Quaker (Society of Friends) records begin.
1660	Charles II re-established the monarchy - the Bishop's Courts were restored.
1685	Huguenot refugees flee to England from France.
1695-1706	Tax on parish register entries resulting in a decrease in entries
1707	Scotland unites with England & Wales to become the United Kingdom.
1752	The Gregorian calendar was adopted, and the year then begins on January 1st instead of March 25th
1754	Marriage outside the Church of England was outlawed (except Quakers and Jews). The age of consent becomes 21 (was 16). Irregular marriages were recorded separately.
1778	Catholic persecution diminishes. Catholic church records return.
1783-1794	The Stamp Duty Act taxes parish registers except on paupers. Decreased entries again, and more are listed as paupers (even if they weren't)
1800	Ireland joins the United Kingdom
1834	Poor Law Unions took poor relief over from the parishes. Workhouses established.
1837	Civil registration begins
1841	The first census with significant genealogical interest taken
1844	Counties Act
1857	Divorce restrictions eased
1858	Principal Probate Registry established
1974	County boundaries changed

For more information, see History of England at: https://www.historyofengland.net/

Resources

A Rose by any Other Name: A Guide to Irish Christian Names. Judith Eccles Wight.

Ancestral Trails. Mark Herber, in association with the Society of Genealogists

British English A to Zed, Norman W. Schur

Chronicle of Britain and Ireland. Henrietta Heald.

Cromwellian Gazetteer, The: An Illustrated Guide to Britain in the Civil War and Commonwealth. Peter
    Gaunt

Genealogical Research in England and Wales, Volumes I, II, & III. David E. Gardner and Frank Smith.

Genealogical Research in England and Wales: Language. David E. Gardner.

Isles, The: A History. Norman Davies

Phillimore Atlas & Index of Parish Registers, The. Cecil R. Humphery-Smith.

Tracing Immigrants Search Strategies

   https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Tracing_Immigrants_Search_Strategies

Tracing Your Ancestors in the National Archives: The website and beyond. Amanda Bevan.

Orthography resources

Discovering old handwriting. John. Barrett & David Iredale

Reading Early American Handwriting. Kip Sperry

Reading old handwriting. Eve McLaughlin

Simple Latin for family historians. Eve McLaughlin