

Family History

How to begin

There are many books on family history. Anyone considering research on their family tree should consult a general book to give guidance on how to set about research and the type of records that can be searched. The North Devon Local Studies Centre has collections of individual family histories, biographies, biographical dictionaries and pedigrees. The periodicals Devon Family Historian and Family History News and Digest are also available. The following books are recommended:

- *Discovering your Family History*, D J Steel (1987)
- *The Family Tree Detective*, C D Rogers (1988)
- *Tracing your Family Tree*, J A Cole and M Amstrong (1988)
- *Beginning your Family History*, G Pelling (1987)
- *Basic Sources for Family History 1: back to the early 1800s*, A Todd (1987)
- *How to Record your Family Tree*, P Palgrave Moore (1979)
- *Family History from Newspapers*, E McLaughlin (1987)
- *Oral Evidence and Family Historians*, L Taylor (1984)
- *Tracing your Ancestors in the Public Record Office*, A Bevan (1999)
- *Family History on your PC*, A Bradley (1996)
- *Genealogy Online*, E P Crowe (1999)

It is also worthwhile talking to existing members of whichever family is being researched or to those who lived close to them. A local society, such as the Devon Family History Society, will be of great assistance. As for the interpretation of original documents likely to be encountered, the following books may be of some help:

- *How to Read Local Archives 1550-1700*, F G Emmison (1967)
- *The Handwriting of English documents*, L C Hector (1980)
- *Latin for Local History*, E A Gooder (1970)

The International Genealogical Index, an index mainly of baptisms and marriages before 1837, lists entries from parish registers and other sources in alphabetical order by surname and is a useful starting point for family history research, though it does not cover every register for every parish. Microfiche of the IGI for England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands is available in the Local Studies Centre. It is also available on the Internet at www.familysearch.org.

Anglican parish registers

Most registers of baptisms, marriages and burials for the county of Devon are available on microfiche. The exceptions are registers which are too fragile or too large to be microfilmed or those which have only recently arrived in the Office and have not yet been filmed.

The North Devon Record Office also holds the original registers for most of the parishes in the north Devon area covered by the Archdeaconry of Barnstaple. Indexes and transcripts of a number of parish registers are held in the Local Studies Centre. Marriage bonds and allegations used for licence applications are held in the Devon Heritage Centre, Great Moor House, Bittern Road, Sowton, Exeter 01392 384253.

Parish overseers' and churchwardens' accounts often contain details which may provide additional useful family information.

Bishops transcripts

These are contemporary copies of parish register entries which can be useful in covering gaps in the registers or may help in reading an illegible register entry. Microfilm of the Devon transcripts from c.1597 to 1812 is held by the North Devon Record Office. The transcripts are most complete for the second half of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century. Transcripts for the period after 1812 are held at the Devon Heritage Centre, Great Moor House, Bittern Road, Exeter. Cornish parishes are included in the series of bishops transcripts, as Cornwall was part of the Diocese of Exeter up to 1876.

Records of nonconformist churches

The North Devon Record Office holds registers and other records for local Methodist churches and circuits and also for a number of other nonconformist congregations. Also available is microfilm of pre-1837 non-parochial registers for the whole of the county which are held at The National Archives in London. Useful books on nonconformist records include:

- *Sources for Nonconformist Genealogy and Family History*, D J Steel (1973)
- *Sources for Roman Catholic and Jewish Genealogy*, D J Steel (1974)

Census returns (Non-Record Office material)

Census returns for the north Devon area for 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891 and 1901 are held at the North Devon Local Studies Centre. The returns list each person in a household, relationships within the household, ages, occupations and, from 1851, place of birth. The Westcountry Studies Library, Devon Heritage Centre, Great Moor House, Bittern Road, Sowton, Exeter, 01392 384253 holds the returns 1841-1901 for the whole of Devon. The Local Studies Centre holds surname indexes for the census returns of 1851, 1881 (Devon) and 1841, 1861, 1871, 1891 (north Devon only). Surname indexes and transcripts of the returns for a number of other counties are also available (1881 only). Census returns from 1841 to 1911 are also available online from Find My Past and Ancestry.com. Useful books on using census returns are:

- *The Censuses 1841-1881: use and interpretation*, E McLaughlin (1985)
- *Making Sense of the Census*, E Higgs (1989)

Trade directories (Non-Record Office material)

Devon trade directories 1830-1939 are held at the Local Studies Centre, listing gentry and wealthier residents in each parish as well as farmers and tradespeople. They also contain information about local institutions such as schools and the names of local officials.

Electoral registers (lists of voters)

Microfilm of electoral registers for Devon 1832-1900 is held by the North Devon Record Office, as are some original poll books showing how votes were cast. Owing to property qualification, relatively few men could vote before the late nineteenth century and women were not completely enfranchised until 1928. Later electoral registers are held at the Devon Heritage Centre, Great Moor House, Bittern Road, Sowton, Exeter (01392) 384253.

Wills

Most Devon wills were destroyed during the Second World War. For the period 1796-1812, abstracts of some Devon wills are available at The National Archives in the series of Death Duty registers (IR 26). Microfilm of the Estate Duty Office copy wills for Devon, 1812-1858, is held in the Local Studies Centre. Records of the Archdeaconry of Barnstaple, held by the North Devon Record Office (ref. 1127), include court books largely concerned with testamentary matters, 1682-1855. There is also an index of lost wills proved at the Archdeaconry court, 1563-1858.

A number of family and solicitors' records contain wills and copies of wills. Lists of the documents in these collections are available in the North Devon Record Office searchroom and references to wills may also be found in the North Devon Record Office name and subject indexes. Since 1858, wills for England and Wales have been registered centrally at the Principal Registry of the Family Division, First Avenue House, High Holborn, London, WC1V 6NP and at local probate offices. Calendars of wills are available at the Devon Heritage Centre and the Exeter Probate Sub-Registry, 2nd Floor, Exeter Crown & County Courts, Southernhay Gardens, Exeter, EX1 1UH 01392 415370. Useful books on wills include:

- *Wills and Where to Find Them*, J S W Gibson (1974)
- *Wills and their Whereabouts*, A J Camp (1963)

Civil registers of births, marriages and deaths

Records of civil registration began in July 1837. Copy certificates may be obtained from the Family Records Centre, 1 Myddelton Street, London, EC1R 1UW (in person) or from the General Register Office, Smedley Hydro, Southport, Merseyside, PR8 2HH (by post), or from the local Superintendent Registrar for the district in which the event took place. They can also be purchased online from The General Register Office: www.gro.gov.uk/gro.

The North Devon Athenaeum holds microfiche of the indexes to the civil registers for England and Wales, 1837-1983 Please note that copy certificates cannot be supplied by the Local Studies Centre itself.

Tombstone inscriptions (Partly non-Record Office material)

Indexes of tombstone or memorial inscriptions compiled by the North Devon Burials Group for a number of north Devon churchyards and other collections of inscriptions (selective), such as those compiled by Benjamin Incedon in the late eighteenth century, are available at the Local Studies Centre. Some public cemetery records are held by the North Devon Record Office.

Other sources (Partly non-Record Office material)

Further information of use to the family historian may be found in the large variety of documents held by the North Devon Record Office and other material available in the Local Studies Centre. These include parish records, particularly poor law papers; school records; rate books and tax assessments; court records; estate and business collections; local newspapers; tithe records, and, of course, family archives. Advice on these and other sources is available from North Devon Record Office staff. Searchable catalogues of a large selection of holdings are available at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a.

Family history research service

This service is available through the North Devon Athenaeum. Current charges are: £15.00 per half hour and £30.00 per hour. www.northdevonathenaeum.org.uk/research.

North Devon Record Office
Library and Record Office
Tuly Street
Barnstaple
EX31 1EL

Tel: 01271 318792

Email: northdevon@swheritage.org.uk

Website: www.swheritage.org.uk/devon-archives

South West Heritage Trust is a charity and a company limited by guarantee registered in England.

Registered office: Somerset Heritage Centre, Brunel Way, Norton Fitzwarren, Taunton, Somerset TA2 6SF

Company number: 09053532 Charity Number: 1158791 VAT Registration Number: 197221592