

# Family history research

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## Genealogy databases

We're much luckier than even our parents, for who family history research meant trips to libraries and writing to distant archives and researchers for help. Now much of what we need is at our fingertips.

There's a lot of priceless information about your ancestors and other relatives, just waiting to be found at the click of a mouse. But how to locate it? As fantastic as Google is, you are going to need some specialist help. This is where family history websites or databases come in.

We're talking here about databases for family history research, not about programs you can use to store the information that you discover. Those will be the subject of a future article.

Genealogy databases are mostly subscription sites, so either you have to pay to use them (annual, monthly or pay per view) or trot down to your local library. Many libraries have on-site access to one or more databases. You might subscribe to one for use at home, which is very handy, but do remember to check out other sites as they each have different collections available.

The leading sites allow you to:

- search their collection of on-line records
- build a family tree and publish it on their website (privacy settings can be varied)
- take part in forums or discussion groups, which is handy for seeking help and finding people with similar interests
- get a DNA test and find relatives through matching.

There are several main subscription sites.

- [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com). Probably the leader in the field. Worldwide coverage. Many members' family trees.
- [Findmypast](https://www.findmypast.com). Very strong for UK research. A pro subscription gives access to the British newspaper archive (which is not free to use, unlike PapersPast in New Zealand). Not many family trees on the site.
- [TheGenealogist](https://www.thegenealogist.com). Another UK site, but with a less comprehensive collection than its competitors. Less of Scottish interest.
- [MyHeritage](https://www.myheritage.com). Formerly concentrated on the US market, and has only recently started building up its UK collection.

With Christmas not far away, it might be time to start casting hints about getting a subscription as a present. It's worth trying the sites out first by using a free trial period or by visiting your library, as each has different coverage and different strengths and weaknesses.

Feel free to share your experiences of different sites in our [family history forum](https://www.familyhistoryforum.co.uk) or [Facebook group](https://www.facebook.com/familyhistoryforum).

You don't have to pay a subscription to find out everything. In the next issue we'll look at the many valuable free sites for people researching their family origins.

