

Top 10 Tips

Genealogy - finding people

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You simply cannot do Scottish genealogy properly from the usual commercial genealogy websites.

Ancestry.com, Family Search, Find My Past, MyHeritage, Geni etc. just do not have the majority of the Scottish records, and the images to go with them.

Also, please be very sceptical of online family tree and all other unreferenced, undocumented sources.

All the records and documents you will need to start your Scottish genealogy are at:

- ScotlandsPeople - www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk
- ScotlandsPlaces - www.scotlandsplaces.gov.uk
- National Library of Scotland www.nls.uk

Here is how to start

1. Decide what you want to achieve.

Do you want to find every ancestor in all lines? Concentrate on one line only? Research one surname? Explore a family story or legend? Start with that, and stick to it without diversions until you decide to pursue something else.

2. Start with someone who was alive around 1911 or 1901.

Birth, marriage, death, census, wills & testaments, valuation rolls and more information are readily available back from that date, and it's close enough to be able to check details within living memory.

3. Start from a census.

This is a snapshot of a family at one place and time – work from that back to marriages, births and other details.

4. Work backwards.

It's a lot easier to track a line of ancestors than starting in the past and working all the lines forward. Someone born in 1700 will have perhaps 1,000 to 7,000 living descendants – which lines will you chase?

5. Talk to your oldest living relatives...

...but don't necessarily believe everything they tell you! Over the years, stories get spun, expanded, changed and in many cases suppressed. But it's a starting point, from which you can seek out actual evidence.

6. Never guess and trust nothing!

The ONLY worthwhile evidence is documentary evidence. Do not trust second-hand stories, published genealogies, websites or hearsay. Many family trees on the internet (Ancestry, Geni, MyHeritage etc.) are usually copies of each other – mistakes, inventions and all. Look for actual documents.

7. Names are not fixed.

Surname spellings can change from one generation to the next, and were not fixed until fairly recently. Don't fret over variants – a McKay is a MacKay is a M'Kay is a McCay is a Mackey is a Makee is a Makey, and all are derived from MacHugh (Gaelic, *MacAoidh*). Forget everything you have heard or read about "Mc is Scottish and Mac is Irish" – it's nonsense, and often both will be recorded as M'. There is no point researching McLaren and not MacLaren or M'Laren. Remember too that someone may be known by a second or third forename, or by a diminutive – so "Sandy Brown" may have been christened "John Harold Alexander Brown".

8. Think laterally.

There is usually birth and parents' information in Scottish marriage and death records, and don't forget wills and testaments, land transfers, court records and so on.

9. Never despair!

You are at the bottom of a very tall mountain, and sometimes it's hard going. If you hit a log-jam, shelve it and work on another aspect, such as cousins. You'll be amazed how often that one piece of vital information comes from an unexpected direction.

10. Join a local Family History Society and a Surname/Family Society.

Even if it isn't local to you, and even if you're overseas, having experts in a particular locality with access to resources at the end of the phone or email can help break down brick walls. They will also have details of resources you can use to get you started.

Other useful family history sites

National Records of Scotland – the official repository for many official records. Start at www.nrscotland.gov.uk/ or www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/catalogues-and-indexes

The National Archives – TNA, Kew, London, England holds many records relating to Scottish family history, especially military records. Much is free, some paid-for. www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Deceased Online – access to official records for UK burials and cremations. Free to search, then paid-for www.deceasedonline.com/

GENUKI – a non-commercial virtual reference library of genealogical information for the UK and Ireland. www.genuki.org.uk/

Places to start locally

Not every record is available online, and not all are held centrally. There are many excellent archives, museums, local history and family history centres and other resources all over the country – just waiting for you to visit.

Local Family History Societies – check out the Federation of Family History Societies for lists at www.ffhs.org.uk/

Local archives and Family Studies Centres – check the internet for local resources in your area of interest.

Take a course

There will be local courses all over the country. Ask the local Family History Society or local Library.

Visiting or researching remotely?

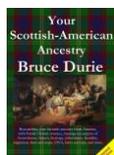
There is no question that the way to get the most out of a visit is to have done a great deal of research first – then you'll know where to go, what to look for and whether you have to combine a trip to an archive with a journey to your ancestral homeland. And once your appetite is whetted, there's no question you'll want to visit!

Please bear in mind that...

1. Transcriptions and indexes are not always accurate – use wildcards, Soundex etc.
2. Surnames can change in spelling.
3. A DNA test may help you break down that brick wall – FamilyTreeDNA is the best: www.ftdna.com.

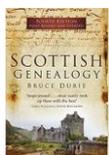
For more information visit www.ancestralscots.com/

You may also enjoy these books by Dr. Bruce Durie, available via www.brucedurie.co.uk/books.html



Your Scottish-American Ancestry

A good starting place for the beginner also interested in what it means to be Scottish abroad



Scottish Genealogy, 4th Ed (2017)

“A standard text by a master of the subject”
“Not only is it a great guide on the subject of Genealogy, it's also a fabulous Scottish history lesson.”