Researching your family history

A beginner’s guide

Dundee University Archive Service
**Researching your family history**

**Introduction**
This guide is designed to provide basic assistance to researchers wishing to use our collections to find out more about their ancestors and be of general help to anyone wanting to explore the histories of their families in Tayside and Fife.

**Handy hints for getting started**
Before you start your research we suggest that you do the following:

Write down the facts you already know about your family history. Start with yourself and work back, noting dates and places of birth, marriage and death of as many of your family as you can.

Talk to family members, especially elderly relatives, to find out as much as possible. However, be mindful that memory on its own is often fallible.

Collect documents and certificates, look out old photographs and search your own and relative’s attics for letters, diaries and mementoes that might contain clues.

**Where to look next**
Basic information about births, marriages and deaths can be found online, as well as information about where people lived

*Scotland’s People (pay per view)*
The official online source of parish register, civil registration and census records for Scotland. Includes Scottish births from 1855-1906, marriages from 1855 to 1931 and deaths from 1855 to 1956; access to Old Parish Registers (OPRs); the censuses of 1841-1901, the valuation roll for 1905 and wills and testaments from 1500 to 1900

www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk

*Ancestry (pay per view)*
This site also hold life event records as well as newspapers, the census, some school registers, directories and gazetteers. Apart from the census, not all areas of Scotland are consistently covered by all types of records. Most local authority libraries offer free access to the site

www.ancestry.co.uk

Websites which allow free access to search databases of genealogical information include Familysearch (www.familysearch.org) and Scots Origins (www.origins.net). Please note that these are not always 100% accurate so a degree of caution is advised when using them.

A number of other groups and individuals have compiled lists of information useful to genealogists and put it on the internet. While some of these websites are excellently researched others are not so well compiled and users need to carefully consider whether the website is reliable. Ideally it is always best to consult original records if it is possible to do so.
Registrars’ offices
Local registrars often provide a chargeable service to help family historians trace their ancestors’ birth, marriage and death certificates.

Local authority archives and libraries
The archives and central libraries of many local authorities are usually happy to offer assistance to members of the public engaged in genealogical research. Some have specific units set up to help family historians.

Most hold on microfilm the Old Parish Records (OPRs) for their local area. These are the records of the Established (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland and contain details of baptisms, marriages and burials prior to 1855. Please be aware that for earlier periods especially, there can be many gaps in these, particularly in regard to the recording of burials. Microfilm copies of the census books for 1841–1901 for local parishes are also held. (Note that copies of some of these microfilm records are also held by University of Dundee Archive Services.)

Libraries often have copies of local newspapers going back many years, which are particularly useful for obituaries as well as birth, marriage and death announcements. They also may have copies of old electoral registers which can be useful for confirming where people lived.

Other useful records that archives often hold include:

- Copies of wills, testaments and personal estate inventories
- Records of Kirk sessions and trade guilds, business and organisations which frequently list members and employees
- Property sasines and land rentals

If you are planning to visit an archive or a library it is always a good idea to phone in advance to confirm opening hours, availability of documents and any special requirements the archive has. Note also that access to some records held by archives and libraries may be restricted.

Angus Archives
Hunter Library, Restenneth Priory, Forfar DD8 2SZ
01307 468644
angus.archives@angus.gov.uk
www.angus.gov.uk/history/archives/default.htm

Dundee City Archives
Archive & Record Centre, 21 City Square, Dundee DD1 3BY
01382 434494
archives@dundeecity.gov.uk
www.dundeecity.gov.uk/archives

Dundee Local History Centre
Central Library, Wellgate Centre, Dundee DD1 1DB
Fife Archives
Carleton House, Haig Business Park, Balgonie Road, Markinch
KY7 6AQ
01592 413256/41
andrew.dowsey@fife.gov.uk
www.fifedirect.org.uk

Perth and Kinross Council Archive
AK Bell Library, 2-8 York Place, Perth, PH2 8EP
01738 477012
archives@pkc.gov.uk
www.pkc.gov.uk/archives

Perth and Kinross Local Studies
AK Bell Library, 2-8 York Place, Perth, PH2 8EP
01738 477062
localstudies@pkc.gov.uk
www.pkc.gov.uk/familyhistory

Tay Valley Family History Society
The Research Centre, 179-181 Princes Street, Dundee DD4 6DQ
www.tayvalleyfhs.org.uk

The Tay Valley Family History Society is a member of the Scottish Association of Family History Societies (SAFHS) and is a centre for family history research in the Tay Valley area (the former counties of Angus, Fife, Kinross and Perthshire). They hold a large library of genealogical and local history material and offer guidance and assistance to members and visitors.
Useful tips and points to remember

People may use more than one name during their life-time and women can often be referred to by the maiden name as well as their married name.

The spelling of names can change over time; the further back you go the more likely there is to be inconsistent spelling. This is equally true of ‘official’ records and applies to both forenames and surnames.

Census records often have inaccurate ages. This can be deliberate, but was often accidental: people celebrated birthdays less in the past.

If a child died in infancy it was not uncommon for the same name to be given to a later sibling.

The further back you go, the more likely that families followed traditional naming patterns. Forenames and middle names can often give a clue to the person’s mother’s or grandmothers’ maiden names, as well as be a compliment to godparents or individuals who may have helped the family in some way.

People were often inconsistent as to whether or not they used middle names on documents.

Until the mid-twentieth century children were usually born at home, not in a hospital.

The address a person was listed at on a census is the place they were staying the night the census was taken. This address was not necessarily their usual place of residence.

Spellings of place names change. Also current spellings of these names may not reflect local pronunciation (eg Anstruther is often called ‘Ain-ster’ by locals). Equally, names of villages and streets can change over time, as can building numbers.

Parish names do not always reflect the largest place in the parish or the modern area that goes by that name. Parish boundaries also underwent major reorganisation in the 1890s.

Boundaries of counties and cities change over time. For instance Coupar Angus parish was in Forfarshire until the mid-nineteenth century when it became a part of Perthshire. Similarly Broughty Ferry was originally part of the Parish of Monifieth and only became part of Dundee in 1913.

If using electoral roles you should be aware that before 1918 not all men had the vote in local or national elections. Also, while no women had the right to vote in parliamentary elections, some women did appear on the register from the late nineteenth century as they could vote in local polls. All men over the age of 21 could vote after 1918, as could women over the age of 30. Women did not win the vote on equal terms with men until 1928.
University of Dundee Archive useful collections

Many of the records in our collections offer information about individuals and provide context to the lives of your ancestors.

General

We hold microfilms of OPRs and census records for Dundee and parts of Forfarshire (Angus), 1645-1891. Please contact us for more specific details.

We also have some valuation rolls for the counties of Angus and Fife. These show the owners of properties.

Calendars of Confirmation 1876-1936, give the name and address of the deceased, date and place of death, testate or intestate, date and place of confirmation or granting of probate, names of executors or next of kin, value of estate.

Family papers

The Archive holds the papers of a number of families and individuals who have lived in the Tayside and Fife. Particularly interesting records we hold include:

- Papers of the Cox family (who owned Camperdown Works in Lochee) including family trees back to the seventeenth century and photographs of family members, 1798-1989
- Papers of the Baxter family (who owned Dens Works) including family trees of John Baxter of Tealing and his descendants and photographs, 1795-1992
- The lineage of Guthrie of Craigie and Torosay and Guthrie of Guthrie, 20th century
- Papers relating to the Berry family of Tayfield, 1769-1991
- Photographs and papers relating to the Torrance family, 1880-1974
- Professor John Anderson's family tree, c1908-1935

Solicitors' records

These collections contain various legal papers relating to companies and individuals. They include some useful genealogical records such as family trees, trusts and deeds. Please see our online catalogue for more details. Major collections are

- The Thornton Collection of manuscripts and plans, 1518-1962
- Ogilvie, Cowan & Co, Solicitors, Dundee, 1632-2012
- Shiel and Small, Solicitors, 1743-1982

Religion

The University Archive holds two major collections that family historians may find useful.
The Glasite collection, 1728-20th century
The Glasites were a small protestant group founded in the early eighteenth century by the Reverend John Glas, formerly minister at Tealing (near Dundee). Eventually there were Glasite congregations scattered across Britain. Robert Sandeman, the son-in-law of John Glas, exported the faith to America. We have some details of membership for Glasite congregations both in the local area and in other parts of Britain, as well as for the Sandemanian Church in North America.

Brechin Diocese of Scottish Episcopal Church, c1600-1990s
The Brechin Diocese covers the Dundee, Forfarshire and Kincardineshire areas. In the records we hold there a number of baptismal registers including:

- The baptism register of Rev. David Rose containing note of baptisms in Birse, Careston [Caraldston], Dunlappie, Edzell, Fettercairn, Glenmuich, Lethnott, Lochlee, Menmure, Navar, Strathcathro, 1723-1735.
- Baptism records for St Mary’s Church, Broughty Ferry 1888-1946

Health Records
We hold the records of the former Tayside Health Board (THB) including the majority of the surviving records of several major hospitals. Records of particular use to family historians include:

- Patient and staff records for hospitals including Dundee Royal Infirmary 1819-1998, Perth Royal Infirmary 1807-1998, King’s Cross Hospital 1889-1979 and Arbroath Infirmary 1843-1950
- Patient and administrative records for mental health hospitals including Dundee Royal and District Asylums (Liff) 1805-1998, Perth District Asylum (Murthly) 1829-1960, Murray Royal Hospital 1802-1993 and Sunnyside Hospital 1781-1995

Note that researchers are not normally permitted to access patient records less than 100 years. Access to other medical records of living persons is restricted in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998. Please contact the Archive for further information.

University Records
We have a large collection of records relating to staff and students of the University of Dundee and its predecessors (University College, Dundee and Queens College, Dundee) from 1883 to the present. This includes some material relating to the University of St. Andrews. We also have records relating to other institutions that have merged with the University over the years including Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and the Dundee College of Education. Please be aware however that access to some of these records is restricted in accordance with our data protection policy. Items that are particularly helpful to family historians include:

- Nineteenth century matriculation registers
- Graduation programmes
- University calendars
• Student newspapers
• Photographs

**Business**

We hold the records of a number of major businesses that operated in Dundee and Tayside in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Unfortunately many of these records give little information about the names and details of workers other than senior staff. Some records which do feature some employees’ names include:

• James Allison & Sons (Sailmakers), wages books, 1890-1957
• J. & A.D. Grimond Ltd, register of accidents, 1896-1935
• Cox Brothers’ monthly wages books, 1893-1921
• Memoranda of agreements between companies in ‘The Titaghur Group’, and their European employees in India, 1913-1965

**Books**

The Archive holds several Dundee Directories from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These can be useful in so far as they provide lists of streets with the names of residents plus an alphabetical list of inhabitants, with details of their occupation and residence. However, the drawback of the directories is that they were not very thorough in who they included and as result a large number of people seldom or never were listed. They also sometimes failed to remove people after their deaths or update their addresses.

We also hold an extensive collection of local history books, including many designed for family historians.

**Online resources**

Our searchable catalogue is an ongoing project which provides descriptions for many of the items in our collections.

Our website also contains source lists which identify a variety of items that may be of interest to genealogists.
Visiting Dundee University Archive

Anyone is welcome to use of the Archive, but researchers are asked to bring some identification with them on their first visit.

It can occasionally be necessary to close at short notice and this, combined with limited space in our searchroom, means that it is always advisable to make an appointment.

Readers are required to follow the searchroom rules and document handling guidelines, which will be issued to them on their first visit. These help all users to work in a quiet environment and preserves the records for all researchers.

Opening hours
Monday – Wednesday 9am-1pm  2pm-5pm
Thursday  Closed to researchers
Friday  9am-1pm  2pm-5pm

Location

Tower Basement

Contact details
Dundee University Archive Services
Basement
Tower Building
University of Dundee
Dundee
DD1 4HN

Tel: 01382 384095

archives@dundee.ac.uk

www.dundee.ac.uk/archives