

The wonderful thing about family history research is that anyone can do it... all you need is curiosity about where you come from. In the last five years, thanks to the rise of the internet and TV shows like *Who Do You Think You Are?* it's a hobby that's within everyone's reach.

Maybe you'd like to have a go but don't know where to start? Just follow our handy step-by-step guide and you'll have an impressive family tree in no time at all.

1. Begin with yourself

First write down your name, date and place of birth, and date and place of marriage (if applicable) on a piece of paper. Repeat this formula for your siblings, parents, grandparents and other relatives (include death dates where relevant), working backwards through the generations. If your dates are a bit vague, don't worry – you can check these later.

2. Draw your tree

Draw a first draft of your family tree. You can use the free poster (overleaf) for this – feel free to photocopy it to complete the different versions. It doesn't have to be a work of art, just a chance to capture all the important information. Start with your birth family first, without trying to involve that of your husband or wife. Include the



names and birth dates of your children and grandchildren as well as older generations. To keep things simple, produce a separate tree for your father's family and your mother's.

3. Rummage in the attic

Look in any boxes of family papers. Brush off the inevitable dust and see if you can find birth, marriage, death (or adoption) certificates, war service or employment records, or anything else that might be a clue: family history is like a detective story. Make a note of the dates, names and any other information included.

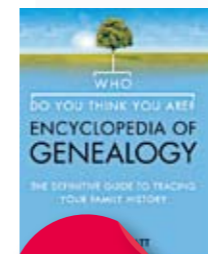
4. Study heirlooms

Family heirlooms may also be clues to how your ancestors lived: a great-uncle's war medals, for example, are invaluable for working out when and where he served and his service number.

5. Ask the family

You don't want to cover the same ground as another family member so contact the rest of the clan to see if anyone has done any research. Ask for help – distant cousins may be able to help with dates and names, even if only for one small branch of your tree. Borrow and scan (or photograph) memorabilia, heirlooms and photos for clues and to help you keep a record of objects passed down through the family.

BOOKS FOR BEGINNERS



Who Do You Think You Are? Encyclopedia of Genealogy by Nick Barratt (Harper, 2008) is the definitive, must-have guide to researching your family's roots. From the makers of the award-winning BBC series, this book contains all you need to know whether you're a beginner or more experienced researcher.



EXTRA FOR YOU Yours readers can order a copy of *Who Do You Think You Are? Encyclopedia of Genealogy* by Nick Barratt at the special price of £20 (£5 off the RRP). Simply call the HarperCollins Hotline on 0870 787 1724 and quote Dept 858J. Or write to Mail Order Dept 858J, HarperCollins Publishers, Westerhill Road, Bishopbriggs, Glasgow G64 2QT, enclosing a cheque made payable to HarperCollins Publishers. Free p&p for all UK orders. Please allow 21 days for delivery.

6. Order certificates

Your family's birth, marriage and death certificates are available from the General Register Office (see Where to get help, below). If you want to be thorough, order them for everyone in your tree. The certificates cost £7 each, so be sure you have the right person! You will need the relevant reference number from the BMD Index which can be searched by name and date.

7. Online research

Most people nowadays do their research online as it is easier, cheaper and quicker. Simply go to either www.ancestry.co.uk or www.findmypast.com (www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk for Scottish research). Initial searches are

free but you will have to pay to view BMD Index references. To save money, type the names and dates into www.freeBMD.org.uk first. This site is free to search but isn't yet complete.

8. No computer?

If you don't have access to a computer there are other options. Most local libraries and archives now have a subscription to www.ancestry.co.uk, which you can use for free.

It is still possible to access the BMD Index in person by visiting The National Archives (the modern incarnation of the old Public Record Office), the National Archives of Scotland or your local County Record

Office. These places also have BMD Indexes but they are on microfilm and must be browsed by hand so finding the references will take longer.

9. Work backwards

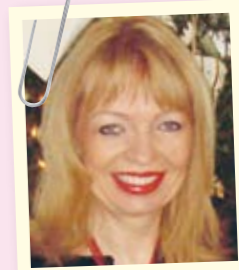
Make sure you always work backwards through the generations from the known to the unknown, verify all dates and names with documentation, and check, check and check again that your work is accurate.

'I just wish I'd done it earlier'

// Head teacher Pauline Wood from Wynyard village, in Teesside, began researching her family history because she was at a loose end in the summer holidays. Now she is so enthusiastic about genealogy that she's included it on the timetable at school and the kids love it.

"When my mum died it struck me that I knew very little about my family's past," says Pauline. "I never knew my grandparents so I began by asking my older brothers and sisters what they could remember. It was fascinating and definitely the best place to start, even people's nicknames are helpful as you delve deeper into the research."

Pauline has been using Ancestry.co.uk to research and build her tree over the past two years and now it's grown to include more than 1200 names. "It's so easy to use," she says. "My only regret is that I wish I'd done it earlier. My husband and I have met so many interesting people and we've found family connections all over the world."



WHERE TO GET HELP

The National Archives (England and Wales)
Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU
Tel: 020 8876 3444
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

The National Archives of Scotland
HM General Register House, 2 Princes Street, Edinburgh EH1 3YY
Tel: 0131 535 1314
www.nas.gov.uk

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)
66 Balmoral Avenue, Belfast BT9 6NY
Tel: 028 90255905
www.proni.gov.uk

General Register Office Certificate Services Section
General Register Office, PO Box 2, Southport PR8 2JD
Tel: 0845 603 7788
www.direct.gov.uk

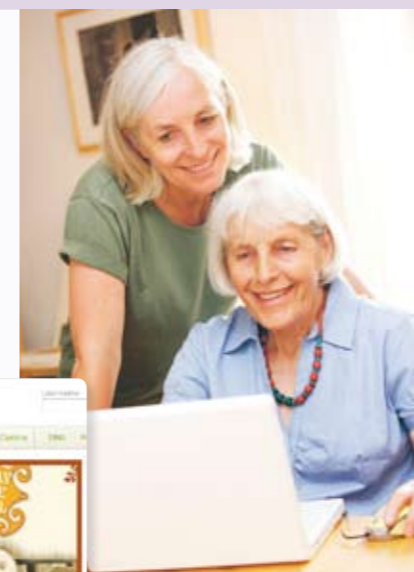
Society of Genealogists
14 Goswell Road, London EC1M 7BA
Tel: 020 7251 8799
www.sog.org.uk

Federation of Family History Societies
PO Box 8857, Lutterworth LE17 9BJ
Tel: 01455 203133
www.ffhs.org.uk

LOOKING ONLINE

// www.ancestry.co.uk offers endless opportunities to research your family story. Its easy-to-use family-tree building software allows members to record family history and share it with others.

We have five Premium Memberships to Ancestry.co.uk to give away, worth £107.40 each, which will give the winners online access to UK Censuses, Birth, Marriage & Death and Military records along with pre-1837 Parish & Probate records and incoming passenger lists and much more. Simply send your name and address to: Ancestry Giveaway issue 68, Yours Magazine, Media House, Peterborough Business Park, Peterborough PE2 6EA. The first five entries drawn after the closing date, August 14, will be the winners. If you do not wish to be contacted in the future by Yours Magazine please write 'No Further Contact' clearly on the postcard'. (Please note winners must have access to the internet to take advantage of this prize.)



OTHER USEFUL WEBSITES

www.findmypast.co.uk
Full of useful documents – this site also gives access to emigration records

www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk
A one-stop-shop for research north of the border

www.genesreunited.co.uk
A tree-hosting website where you can find living relatives

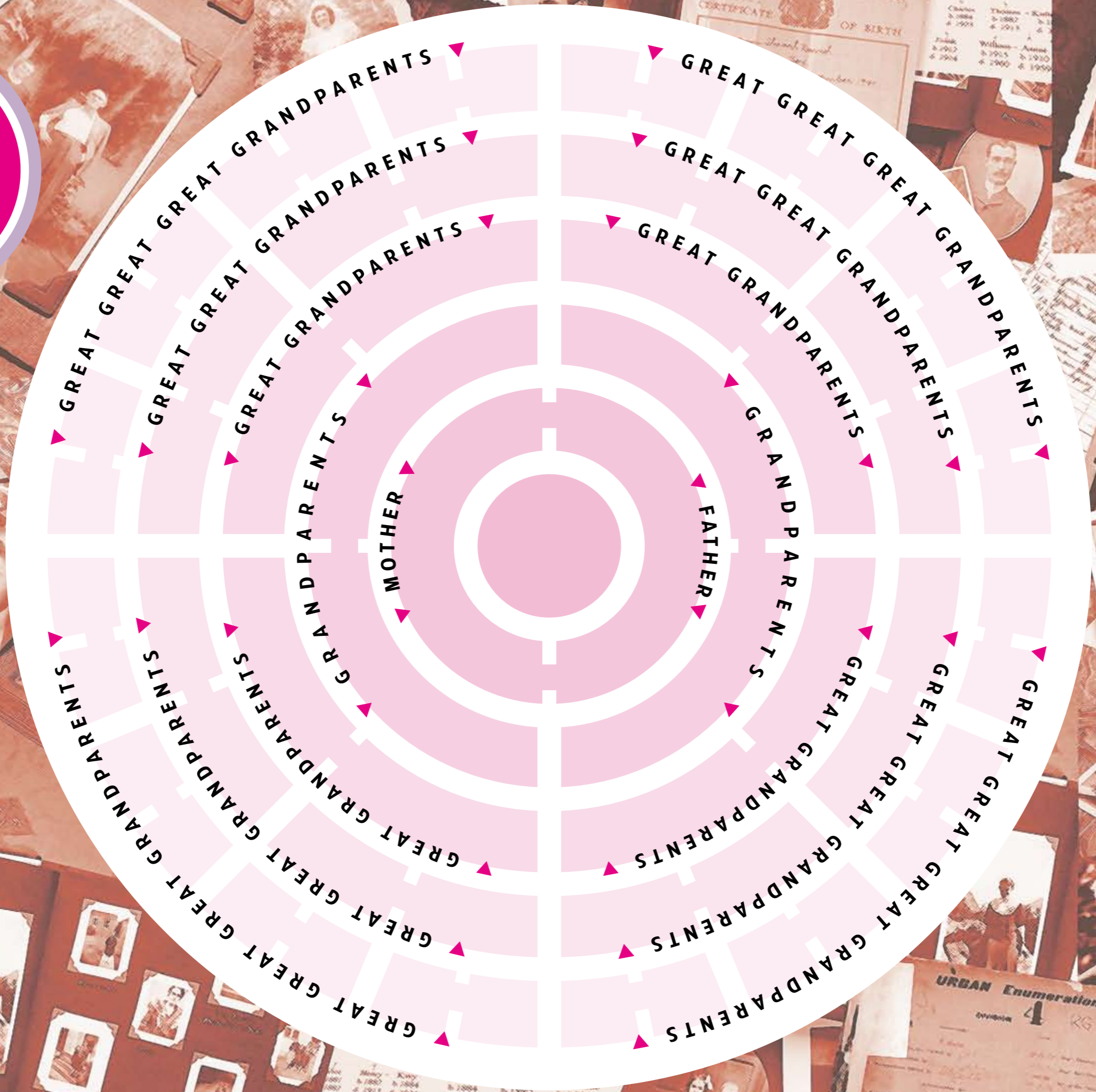
www.familia.org.uk
Directory of family history resources held in public libraries in the UK.

USING YOUR FREE POSTER

Turn over the page to create your very own family tree with our easy-to-use poster. Start with yourself in the centre and work your way outwards adding parents, grandparents etc in turn through the generations. Write in pencil to begin with so you can go back and correct any mistakes. Before you start you may like to take a photocopy so you can complete several versions that include all branches of your tree. Or why not complete one for each of the grandchildren with them taking centre stage?



MY FAMILY CIRCLE



PICS: MASTERFILE; IREX FEATURES; JUPITER GETTY IMAGES

URBAN Enumeration Volume. 4 RG 3-82 219-2B

Now you've got the basics it's time to find out more. Family history really comes to life when you start to look more at the way your ancestors lived, rather than just when they were 'hatched, matched and dispatched'. A study of social history can make you aware of the conditions that your ancestors had to cope with and how they survived to raise a family.

1. Use the census

Censuses are surveys taken every 10 years in the UK. They list every person who was in each house on the night the census was taken, plus their relationship to the head of the household, their age, occupation and place of birth. The censuses remain closed for about 100 years after they are taken but you can now search the ones from 1841 to 1911 on various websites or on microfilm at The National Archives. Local archives will generally have copies of returns for their area.

2. Be a family history detective

From the census returns you should be able to work out a family's movements,

religion and occupation. Did they move across the country for work or stay in one place all their lives? What was their status? Did they have lots of children? Were they rich or quite poor?

3. Narrow your focus

The volume of information you can discover about your family can quickly become overwhelming so choose a particular branch, family, theme or era to focus your energies on. Some people become more interested in local history through their research and will want to find out more about where their ancestors lived; others are more interested in military history, or perhaps the Victorian era.

4. Join a family history society

Joining your local family history society can give you a real advantage. These research groups share resources, give monthly talks and publish lists of members' interests so you can pool information. Contact the Federation of Family History Societies on 01455 203133 for your nearest group or visit www.ffhs.org.uk for a complete list.

5. Be organised

You've got more of a chance of keeping on top of things if everything is clearly ordered and organised. Keep a folder for each family unit that you research, and colour-code them – your maternal family and its off-shoots could be different shades of red, your paternal side blue.

6. Start a one-name study

Family historians who wish to follow the origins and meaning of one particular surname often begin what is known as a one-name study. The Guild of One-Name Studies publishes a list of the surnames that are currently being researched (Call

0800 011 2182 or visit www.one-name.org). If one of your surnames is covered then the organiser may be able to help you. If it's not, why not apply to start one yourself?

7. Get some help

However well we start out in our family history research, sooner or later there will inevitably be a person you can't track down. Don't panic! Rescue is at hand in the form of countless online help groups, family history societies and frequent workshops and talks (like those held by the Society of Genealogists). Contact someone at your local family history society or the problem page of a family history magazine for advice.

'You just need perseverance & common sense'

// Alison Rabin (51) from Wokingham, has used her family history research to prove that Victoria Cross recipient William Leefe Robinson was a distant uncle. William was the first pilot to shoot down a Zeppelin over British soil.

"My family always suspected he was an ancestor," says Alison. "But until recently, I hadn't known if this was a bogus link or not. There were countless dead ends; all I can say is it took a lot of perseverance and common sense."

Other family members had tried and failed to find a link but Alison puts her success down to using the internet. "It provided the gateway," she says. "Through Ancestry.co.uk I found cousins in New Zealand also looking for relatives of William Leefe Robinson. We provided the missing links in each other's search. Now it's opened up a whole new part of my family that I would have never met if it hadn't been for my hunt for William."



Alison's search had unexpected results

'I needed to get to the bottom of a mystery'

// Brenda Buckley (60) from Plymouth was prompted to begin her research by a family mystery. "My father, Arthur, had an older brother Ronald, but my gran, Lottie, refused to talk about him, saying only that he was born in Redhill workhouse in London and was fostered because she couldn't look after him," explains Brenda. "Ronald had died in an accident aged seven. I felt compelled to get to the bottom of this mystery."

The search took Brenda six years, but her 'eureka' moment was discovering that when he was fostered Ronald went by his second name, Joseph. "After that there was no stopping me," says Brenda. "I found out he was killed when he fell under the wheels of a steamroller."

"At the same time I also started investigating my mother's side of the family. Her father was an alcoholic who vanished when she was a young girl. I found out that he had married again, without getting divorced and he'd had further children with his new wife!"

"Now I've made contact with my step-auntie, Patricia. We're good friends and have even been on holiday together. My next task is to find out more about Lottie and her days in the workhouse. Once you start a search it almost becomes something of an addiction!"



FAMILY HISTORY FOR CHILDREN

With family history on the curriculum for children in schools now, it's a great idea to get the grandchildren involved.

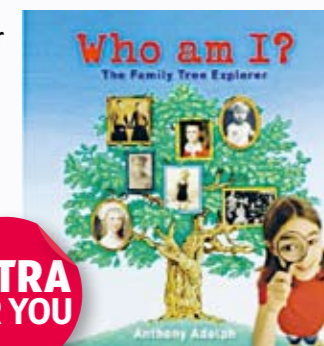
Not only can they help you with the technology side of things but you can help them with their schoolwork and enjoy some quality time together.

If you're not confident using a computer why not ask one of the grandchildren to help? They're generally really adept at finding their way around the internet and it can be really enjoyable having someone to share your discoveries with. They will marvel when their great-great-grandmother pops up as a young scullery maid; great-granddad as a bootblack. Family history can offer kids an insight into the advantages of the modern world in medicine, technology and even education. By learning about the work lives of their ancestors, which in Victorian times often started at the age of eight, they might even feel better about going to school!

With younger children, why not spend an afternoon drawing a basic family tree and talking them through it? It's a good opportunity to show them photos to point out who the people are – can they see any family resemblances?



// Who Am I? The Family Tree Explorer by Anthony Adolph (Quercus, 2009), is an ideal book for inspiring children aged six to nine to start researching their ancestors. Teeming with facts and step-by-step activities this book will turn your grandkids into budding genealogists.



We have five copies of Who Am I? The Family Tree Explorer to give away, worth £14.99 each. Simply send your name and address to: Who Am I? Giveaway Issue 68, Yours Magazine, Media House, Peterborough Business Park, Peterborough PE2 6EA before August 14. The first five entries drawn after the closing date will be the winners. If you do not wish to be contacted in the future by Yours Magazine, please write No Further Contact clearly on the postcard.

EXTRA FOR YOU

PICS: GETTY IMAGES; MASTERFILE

A family tree (see pages 66-67)

is a wonderful heirloom to pass down to future generations. Or, when your tree is a reasonable size, you could get a professional to frame and mount it as a present for a relative or as a legacy for your family. There are many other things you can do to pass on your story to others...

SHARING WHAT YOU'VE FOUND

1. Make a scrapbook

Scrapbooking – making decorative pages by sticking together images and text – has become a real art form. Many craft shops and websites have specialist papers for this purpose.

2. Fill photo albums

These can be as ornate as you like, and organised by generation, theme or branch of the family. Include snaps of as many generations as you can, and make sure you caption the photos and mount them on acid-free paper so they won't get damaged.

3. Organise heirlooms

To help family historians of the future, sort treasured letters into bundles and tie them with string. Sort papers into folders and label

heirlooms, like medals, jewellery or watches, with the name of the first owner, age of the object and any valuation information.

4. Make a memory tape

Borrow a video camera (a cassette recorder will do). You can talk freely about the important moments in your life: your first day at school, wedding day, jobs and memories of your parents. Label the tapes with who is speaking and about what – then keep them safe.

5. Publish a book

Why not get your own life story – or that of your family – bound into a real book? Your life doesn't have to be dramatic or exciting, everyday stories and anecdotes of the way you lived will be fascinating to future generations. Online company

Create your own book, like this one, on blurb.com



www.blurb.com have free software (Booksmart) that you can download to help you create your book. Prices start at just £3.50 per book for up to 120 pages of text.

6. Share your tree online

Put your family tree on a tree-sharing website, like Ancestry or Genes Reunited, and share your password with family members so they can browse your research and add names, dates and photos.

7. Make a digital project

If you are good on computers you might want to invest in family history software, like Family Tree Maker (RRP £39.14), which allows you to print your own charts, trees and reports, even print your own family history book.

8. Be creative

There are so many ways to pass on your family's story; you can even get mugs, t-shirts or mouse mats made with part of your tree on. Your ancestry is unique and your presentation of your family history research should reflect this. Good luck!



PICTURE PERFECT

Sorting out family photos is a job that many of us fail to get round to. Most of us have a box of black-and-white snaps of unknown faces or a tatty old album of faded photos in the attic.

For those you can't identify, use books and websites to try to date the period of the costumes and match with the dates, gender and status to people in your tree.

To avoid discolouration and damage, always store your photos and papers in acid-free albums and boxes. Damaged photos can be easily restored now by companies using digital photography. For a cheaper alternative scan the photo into your computer and use a photo manipulation programme (free with most digital cameras) to remove dust, scratches and to bring back contrast.

NEXT ISSUE

Lose weight, gain energy with the next part of **Yours** Reclaim Your Waist – nutrition and exercise advice for a happier you!