

Your Family Tree: 1

HOW TO TRACE YOUR FAMILY TREE

Getting Started - Do your homework!

- **Start with what you know** and work backwards. Note basic facts such as when and where you, your parents and grandparents were born.
- **Talk to family and friends** as they may remember useful snippets of information. Make a note of what each person tells you as accounts may differ. You can refer to your notes to verify your research and fill in gaps.
- **Look for other sources at home:** Family Bibles may contain details of births, marriages and deaths. Look on the back of old photographs for names, dates and places. Many people keep certificates, news-cuttings and other mementoes to remind them of significant events. Think where you keep these things and check attics, wardrobes, old shoeboxes, etc.
- **Check family gravestone inscriptions** for names and vital dates.
- **Gather paperwork**, e.g. birth, death and marriage certificates.
- **Find out if anyone else is researching your ancestors** – check online forums, websites or social media and ask if any distant relatives have been in touch with family members.
- **Contact or join a family or local history society** who may be able to provide advice on research and direct you to local sources.

Key information:

- **Names** – often repeated within families: check the given names of grandparents, uncles, etc. for a common family name. Remember, spelling was not standard in the past and variations in the spelling of surnames are common.
- **Dates**: dates of significant events, e.g. birth, marriage, death. Date of emigration, if relevant, is helpful.
- **Places** – the area your family came from is very important, a place name is vital to locate records such as church registers. Note references to townland names, parishes and counties.

Remember, it is not vital to have all of this detail to begin with, but the more information you can gather, the better you will be able to target your research. These few basic facts will help you to be more selective when you are ready to begin your research.

Get online!

Visit PRONI's website at www.proni.gov.uk to help you get started. You will find leaflets (including the full [Your Family Tree leaflet series](#)), [YouTube talks](#) on research and key sources, a range of free searchable archives and indexes, [the PRONI eCatalogue](#) which references over 1.5 million records.