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Family History Guide

Ignite your imagination

Prepared by Kate Davis, Local History Librarian. Connected Libraries.

First Steps.

Family History is all about births, deaths, marriages, and you!

This guide will help you research your family history, whether you are a beginner or an experienced family historian. So, let's begin!

Always start with yourself.

Start from yourself and work backwards to your parents, grandparents and so on, one generation at a time. Although it can be tempting to skip a generation or two, it can make mistakes more likely.

Record what you already know.

Make a note of any relevant facts, dates, and information you have collected so far. You might like to start a journal to document what you find on your family history journey. Gather any important documents in

Cranbourne, circa 1900. SLV 1756157.

your possession and store them in one location, for safety. These records could include birth, death and marriage certificates, military records, wills, photographs, diaries, and letters.

Talk to your relatives.

A useful next step is to reach out to relatives, to gather copies of records they have and find out if there are any family stories they know. A warning: there might be family stories, passed down for generations, that are incorrect. Be aware of this whilst researching.

Organise what you know on an Ancestral/Pedigree Chart.

These charts are sometimes known as a family tree. They often record the names, date of birth, marriage, and death of an individual, and are an excellent way to help you visualise your family history. Fill in your chart with everything you've found out so far.

Identify what you want to know.

It's important to think about what you want to get out of your family history research. Whether you want to learn about an extended family member or you or your family's immigration record, this will help you focus on what's important whilst researching.

Establish research questions.

Consider breaking your research into smaller tasks. Start with one person and consider what you'd like to know about them. There is so much information out there, so this will make your research less daunting.

Getting Started.

Record-Keeping On Paper.

It is important that you consider how you will keep track of your family history research when you begin. The following tools are easy and helpful to use.

Ancestral/Pedigree chart.

Narre Warren, site of Fountain Gate Shopping Centre, circa 1900. Connected Libraries Local History Archive.

Known also as a family tree, these record your family lineage in a visual manner.

A few things to note when filling it out:

- Female names go on odd numbered lines.
- Surnames are always in capital letters.
- Dates are usually written in DD MM YYYY
- If you are unsure of exact dates, use circa.

Life timelines.

This tool chronologically records events in an individual's life. Starting with birth, ending with death, they contain key events, such as marriage, children, work, and social or sporting activities. Keeping a life timeline for everyone you research can be a great way of keeping track of their lives, separately.

Research log/calendar.

Keeping a log or calendar of the search terms, records, and databases that you have previously searched is important, especially the further into research you get. It will help you avoid searching for information in the same places.

Research extract.

An extract can be useful for records which cannot be copied (for copyright or other reasons) or for summarising a lengthy record, so you don't need to read the whole thing again.

Correspondence record.

As part of your family history research, you may speak to distant relatives about your ancestry. Use this tool to keep a record of all correspondence.

Family group sheet.

This resource gives you a place to record more information about one family in your tree. It can be very useful to have a sheet for each family group.

Source summary.

This tool allows you to keep track of the information you have found, where it was located, and which of your ancestors it is related to.

Record-Keeping Digitally.

There are various digital platforms available to record family history research. Some of these are free, others require subscriptions:

- FamilySearch: free, http://www.familysearch.org
- Legacy Family Tree: paid or free, https://legacyfamilytree.com/
- Family Tree Maker: paid, https://www.mackiev.com/ftm/
- Family Historian: paid, https://www.family-historian.co.uk/
- Ancestry: paid, https://www.ancestry.com.au/
- Find My Past: paid, https://www.findmypast.com.au/

For many people, using paper records works fine. If you choose to use digital record-keeping, make sure to choose wisely.

Tips for Record-Keeping.

Some tips to keep in mind when you begin to record your family history are:

High St Berwick, circa 1920-1954. SLV H32492/8029.

- Generally, women were listed under their maiden names on records. Sometimes maiden names were kept as middle names when women got married.
- Always use the same version of names e.g., Joseph not Joe.
- Consider writing dates in full, e.g., 5 April 1976. The European and American modes of writing dates can make recording dates confusing.
- Never assume anything. Try to find multiple sources with the same information, to verify it is true.

- Remember, it's your family history. If you or your relatives had stepchildren, several marriages, or any other unusual relations, it is up to you whether you record them on your family tree.

## Research: What to Know.

Assess Sources.

It's important to remember that every record was created for a specific purpose. Keep this in mind as you research your family history.

It is also important to consider where you get your information from. Websites with a .gov.au or .org.au are the most trustworthy. Libraries and museums often provide reliable information too. Sources like Wikipedia or self-published books need to be evaluated by double checking the information they present.

Primary resources.

These are records made close to the event, which are more likely to be accurate. For example, a birth certificate or court document.

E.g., a court record for a criminal trial exists to document the crimes of the individual. These records don't often allow the individual to explain their side.
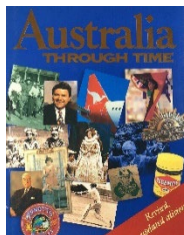
Secondary resources.

These documents are created further away from the actual event, often in books, and offer an analysis of primary sources. These can be useful but are often made to convince the reader of the author's views, so can sometimes misrepresent information.

Derivative resources.

These are records which have been reproduced, via transcription or digitisation. They have the same information as primary sources but cannot replace the original documents – description of digitised documents and transcripts can be incorrect.

Tips for Research.

When undertaking family history research, you need to look beyond the obvious; not every record will exist, but you may be able to find related records. Educated guesses are a huge part of family history research.

Spelling and transcription errors.

Many records recorded details quickly, and sometimes messily. Often details may have been recorded by illiterate people. Messy handwriting and misspelt names are recorded as is in transcripts. This means the individual who you are searching for may not come up in results.

To get around this, try:

- Using phonetic spelling of names: e.g., Thewlis or Thoulis.
- Try different variations of names e.g., Eleanor, Helen, Ellen or Nell.

Name changes.

Individuals change their names throughout their life for various reasons: marriage, immigration, family dynamics or for nicknames.

To get around this:

- When combing through immigration records, look for your ancestors' first name, and a similar last name. Immigrants often Anglicised their names when arriving in Australia, so it might be useful to search for family members who might have immigrated at the same time.
- For ancestor's using different surnames, try to search for their relatives. You may find another family member with the same surname and be able to trace it back.
- For ancestors who went by nicknames, browse the Family Search Traditional Nicknames Wiki, to find a list of nicknames they might've used: https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Traditional_Nicknames_in_Old_Documents_-_A_Wiki_List
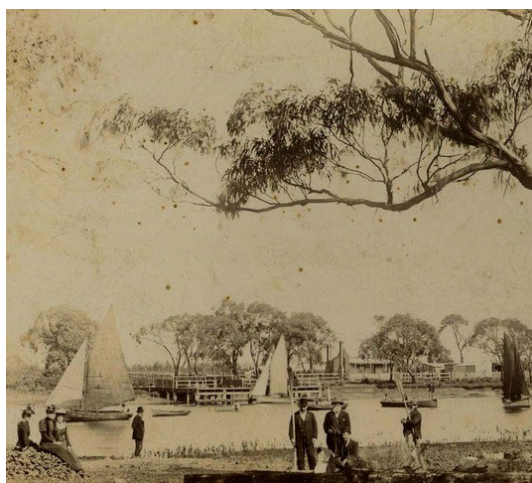
Tooradin Foreshore, Sawtell's Inlet, circa 1900. Connected Libraries Local History Archive.

No results.

Generally, you should always have some information returned on your search; it may not relate to your ancestors though. In these cases, less is more:

- Put less information in the search bar. Remove year, place of birth or death, use parents given names, not surnames, use different combinations of information.
- Use wildcard symbols. The asterisk '*' replaces one or more characters: John* will bring up Johnson, Johnstone, Johnsen. A question mark '?' will replace one letter: Eli?abeth will search for Elizabeth and Elisabeth.

- Keep in mind, some family stories may be incorrect. It is possible that relatives might have been unaware or covered up personal details, like marital status or whether they had children.

Library Resources.

As a member of Connected Libraries, you have free access to Ancestry and Find My Past, in our libraries. Both can only be accessed in the library, on our public computers or your own device (connected to the Library Wifi). To use these in branch, visit the Online Resources section of the Connected Libraries website.

Ancestry.
https://www.connectedlibraries.org.au/online-resources-ancestry/

- All Ancestry records can be searched. However, you cannot make a family tree, message people, or respond to message boards.

Find My Past.
https://www.connectedlibraries.org.au/online-resources-find-my-past/

- You can create an account with Find My Past, which allows you to save records, whilst in the library, to look at later. This only works for records you've already saved, not for new searches.

Events.
Connected Libraries run regular family and local history sessions for beginners, intermediate and advanced family historians. Keep an eye on our events page to book in: https://events.ccl.vic.gov.au/

Resources.
The library also has a range of family and local history resources available online. Browse our blogs and webpages via:
https://www.connectedlibraries.org.au/browse/local-history/

If you'd like any assistance with your family history research, fill out an enquiry form via our website: https://www.connectedlibraries.org.au/local-history-at-cl/

Australian Records.
Births, Deaths, and Marriages.
Birth certificates.

These certificates can be incredibly helpful with researching earlier generations, as they include information about an individual's parents.

Marriage certificates.

These certificates are a rich source of information, often providing information about the individuals occupations, location, and family.

Richardson's butcher shop on Clyde Road, circa 1880s. Connected Libraries Local History Archive.

Death certificates.

A death certificate not only documents the death of an individual, but also provides information on their parents and children.

Accessing birth, death and marriage records.

In Australia, the registration of births, deaths and marriages is a state-based activity. In Victoria, these are held by the Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths, and Marriages.

An index to Victorian births from 1853 to 1922 can be searched for free on their website. The index also includes early baptism records from 1836 to June 1853. Records less than 100 years old are restricted, for privacy reasons.

The index for Victorian marriages is available, with records from 1853 to September 1962. The index also includes early church records of marriages from 1836 to June 1853. Records less than 60 years old are restricted.

An index of deaths can also be searched for the period from 1853 to September 1992. The index includes early church records of deaths from 1836 to June 1853. Records less than 30 years old are restricted for privacy reasons.

For restricted certificates, if you're the next of kin you can make an application to gain access. Full copies of all certificates are available for download, at cost.

Purchasing the full certificate will give you more information about the individual's, their occupation, location, family, and more.

Visit each state's registry below:

Births Deaths and Marriages, Victoria: http://www.bdm.vic.gov.au

NSW Registry of Births Deaths & Marriages: http://www.bdm.nsw.gov.au

Queensland Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Divorces:
https://www.qld.gov.au/law/births-deaths-marriages-and-divorces

South Australia Births, Deaths and Marriages:
https://www.sa.gov.au/topics/family-and-community/births-deaths-and-marriages

Tasmania Births, Deaths, and Marriages: http://www.justice.tas.gov.au/bdm

Western Australia, Registry of Births, Deaths, and Marriages:
http://www.bdm.dotag.wa.gov.au

Princes Highway at Hallam/Eumemmering, 1970. Doveton and Kays Avenue and the General Motors Holden factory are marked. Connected Libraries Local History Archive.

Other birth, death, or marriage records.

Newspaper notices.

Notices were often placed in local newspapers to announce life events. You can search these notices via Trove:
https://trove.nla.gov.au/

Search using key words like 'birth, marriage, death notice' and your ancestor's name or the name of their parents' or children. For marriage notices, include both individuals' surnames. You can also refine search results to a specific date range, which is helpful if you have a rough idea of the decade in which the individual was born, married, or died.

Ryerson index.

If you cannot find death notices via Trove, try searching the Ryerson Index, an online database of Australian death notices: https://www.ryersonindex.org/

Will and probate records.

These records can be a great source of information on an individual and their relationships. They often include the date of death, the occupation of the deceased, their assets, and the beneficiaries of their estate.

The Index to Victorian Will and Probate records for 1841 to 2020 is available to search via the Public Record Office Victoria website: https://prov.vic.gov.au/ Records between 1841 and 1925 have been digitised, records after 1925 need to be ordered.

Coroner's inquests.

These documents can provide more information about the circumstances of your ancestor's death, if it was sudden or accidental. Inquests from 1840 to 1985 can be searched via the Public Record Office Victoria website: https://prov.vic.gov.au/

Tooradin, circa 1925-1940. SLV H91.1601619.

Burials.

Burial records and headstones can provide details of a person's death. Burial records can help you determine when a person died and where they were buried or cremated. Headstones can contain useful information about the deceased and their family.

Australian Cemeteries.

Most cemeteries are administered by a trust; many of which have online burial indexes. The Australian Cemeteries website lists known cemeteries, contact details for their cemetery trust and online records (where available): http://www.australiancemeteries.com.au/

Billion Graves and Find A Grave.

Both sites are crowd-sourced and hold records of headstones worldwide. Some records also have photographs of headstones associated.

https://billiongraves.com/

https://www.findagrave.com/

State Library of Victoria.

The State Library holds indexes for various Australian cemeteries on CD-ROM, microfiche or in book form. Search the name of the cemetery via their catalogue: https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/

Immigration.

For many of us, migrating to Australia is a key event in our family history. If your ancestor arrived by sea, their journey would likely have been documented on the ship's passenger list. If they arrived by air, it would have been captured on an arrival card.

Berwick Quarry, 1907. Berwick Mechanic's Institute & Free Library.

Pre-1923.

Until 1923, passenger arrivals were the responsibility of the colonial/state governments. As such, records prior to 1923 are held by state record offices. Immigrants travelling to Victoria from overseas at this time could be unassisted (paid their own fares) or assisted (sponsored or subsidised by the government). The information recorded about unassisted passengers is often brief, with some only listed by surname. There is often more information about assisted passengers, including their age, occupation, religion, employers, and wages. The Assisted passenger lists (1839 to 1871) and the Unassisted passenger lists (1852 to 1923) can be searched via the Public Record Office Victoria: https://prov.vic.gov.au/ or via Ancestry (where most have been reproduced).

Post-1923.

From 1924, the Australian Government took responsibility for immigration. Records from 1924 onwards are held by the National Archives of Australia. These have been indexed and are searchable via their Record Search, or via the Ancestry record: Fremantle, Western Australia, Passenger Lists, 1897-1963.

Electoral Rolls.

Electoral rolls hold valuable details about an individual's address, family members and, up until 1984, their occupations. A very limited number of 19th-century Victorian electoral rolls exist. Digital copies of Victorian electoral rolls between 1903 to 1980 are available via Ancestry. Microfiche copies from 1903 to 2008 are available in the Newspapers and Family History Reading Rooms at State Library Victoria.

Endeavour Hills Shopping Centre, 1987. Connected Libraries Local History Archive.

Directories.

Post office, telephone and trade directories are great for confirming an individual's address and occupation. Trade directories contain commercial listings, including details of government officials and those working in banking, law, and education.

The largest collection of Victorian directories are the Sands and McDougall directories. Every fifth year of these directories, from 1860 to 1974, can be accessed online via the State Library Victoria. The State Library also has microfiche copies of each directory on site.

Digital versions of the 1857-1880 directories are also available via the University of Melbourne website: https://omeka.cloud.unimelb.edu.au/melbourne-history/exhibits/show/melbournedirectories/browsemelbournedirectories

You can also access a large selection of the Sands & McDougall directories via Ancestry: Australia, City Directories, 1845–1948.

Rate Books.

Rate books usually contain the names of the owner and occupants, their occupation, address, and often a description of the property.

Several Victorian rate books are held at the State Library Victoria, with a larger collection held at the Public Record Office Victoria. A selection of Victorian rate books are also available via Ancestry: Victoria, Australia, Rate Books, 1855–1963.

The Connected Libraries Local History Archive has the rate books from Berwick Shire, 1875 to 1965, and Cranbourne Shire, 1863 to 1950. To access these, fill out our online form: https://www.connectedlibraries.org.au/local-history-at-cl/

Occupation Records.

These can be used to trace your ancestor's working life and can provide a wealth of personal information including key dates, salary, and qualifications.

An individual's occupation can be found on several records: electoral rolls, marriage, or death certificates. Once you know this, The Victorian Government Gazette is a good record to search. Records listed in the Gazette only encompass regulated professions (medical and legal) and public service employees. The Public Record Office of Victoria has a large range of employment records, including:

- Teacher records (1863-1959)
- Victoria Police employment (1853–1973)
- Railway employment records (1855–2014)
- Ships' crews (1852–1922)

In other cases, though, there may not be any records available. In many industries, there is no obligation to keep employment records.
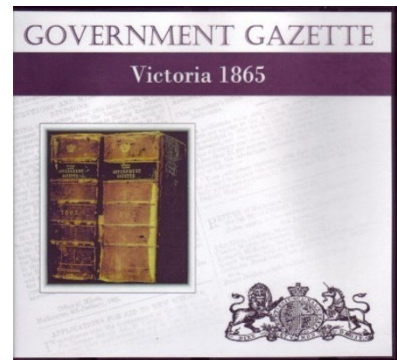
Military Records.

WWI Australian Imperial Force service records, WWII army, navy, air force and other conflict service records have been kept from 1901 onwards. These records often include personal details, next of kin, the unit they served in and other medical and military information, and are available online, via the National Archives of Australia:
https://www.naa.gov.au/

Berwick War Memorial. Connected Libraries Local History Archive.

The Australian War Memorial has a collection of official histories, embarkation and nominal rolls, honours, awards and war diaries available to search online: https://www.awm.gov.au/. Access to these may only be in person for some records.

Criminal Records.

Many family historians discover an ancestor with a criminal history. These records often contain great details about those arrested or held prisoner, created by the authorities at the time.

Prison registers.

These records can be incredibly detailed and often include a prisoner's name, aliases, personal description, where they were tried, their offences, sentences, and behaviour. From around 1870, prisoners who were given a sentence of more than 6 months had their photograph included in their record.

A Register of male and female prisoners (1855-1947) is available for search via the Public Record Office Victoria. The online registers include male and female prisoners held in Melbourne prisons and female prisoners held in regional prisons.

Victorian Police Gazettes.

These gazettes were first published in 1853, originally for police eyes only. They contain details about wanted prisoners, missing persons, inquests, crimes, appointments, and discharged prisoners. Even if your ancestor was a law-

abiding citizen, you may still find their name listed if a crime was committed against them or if they were a witness.

These gazettes can be viewed via Ancestry. The State Library also holds the Victorian Police Gazettes from 1853-1971.

Court records.

These contain information about the accused person, offence, names of witnesses, the verdict and sentence. These are available via:

- Find My Past: Victorian Petty Session Registers 1854 – 1985.
- Ancestry: Selected Trial Brief and Correspondence Registers and Other Images, 1837-1993.

The Public Record Office Victoria also holds an extensive collection of court records, available to search online.

Victorian Sheriff's Office warrants.

The State Library has a collection of Victorian Sherriff's Office warrants from 1842 to 1933, including a small range of earlier and later years. These records contain individuals' names,

R. & J. Grant, Wheelwright and Coachbuilder, High Street, Berwick. Berwick Mechanics Institute & Free Library.

occupation, origin, date of the warrant and further comments. An index can be viewed online.

Other records.

Police correspondence files are available, which include information on crimes, criminals, missing persons and wife and child deserters. These and the Register of Juvenile Offenders 1893-1925 are indexed and available via the Public Record Office Victoria.

School Records.

Doveton North Technical School, 1970. Connected Libraries Local History Archive.

The years spent at school make up a significant period of an individual's life. Unfortunately, these records can be hard to find. If you know the name of the school your ancestor attended, that will make things much easier.

If they attended a government school, try searching the Public Record Office's Government school and pupil records Index to non-government schools 1906–1996. If the school is private, you may need to contact them, if they still operate.

The Archival Access website has also indexed a selection of primary school pupil registers in their Victorian Pupil Register database: https://www.archivalaccessvictoria.com/indexes-tools-1

Health and Welfare Records.

It is highly likely that the individual you are researching might have received medical, financial, or institutional care or assistance during their lifetime. These records give colour to your ancestors' life and can help to place them in a specific location.

Wards of the state.

If your ancestors' parents could not care for them, they might've been taken into the care of the state. These children are known as state wards. The Public Record Office holds the Victorian records of state wards: records from 1864 and 1894 are digitised, whilst all other records are on site.

Records under 100 years old are closed, for privacy reasons. Closed records require an application be made to the Care Leavers Record Service, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (formerly Department of Health and Human Services) for access.

Find and Connect is another great resource to find children who were state wards. They provide access to information about orphanages, children's homes, and other care institutions: https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/

Hospital records.

Whilst it's unlikely that complete medical records have survived, hospital admission and discharge forms for your ancestors may still exist. These can be difficult to access, as records are closed for the approximate lifetime of an individual and applications to view these need to be made to the holding agencies.

Try contacting the hospital directly, if you know which one your ancestor may have attended, to see what archives they hold. If the hospital no longer exists, records may have been transferred to another hospital, or to the Public Record Office, if it was a government hospital. The State Library of Victoria also has several published indexes to Victorian hospital records.

Hallam Hall, circa late 1970s, early 1980s. Connected Libraries Local History Archive.

Mental health records.

The Public Record Office Victoria holds a large collection of mental health records from government asylums. They have a digitised index of patients for each asylum in Victoria, from 1849-1885. The full records can be viewed in person. More recent mental health records are restricted for privacy reasons.

Some mental health records are also available to view via Ancestry: Victoria, Australia, Asylum Records, 1853-1940.

Welfare records.

State Library Victoria holds records of institutions that provided shelter for adults and children. Access to these records varies and restrictions are also in place due to privacy legislation. Try searching the Public Record Office for these sorts of records.

Maps as Records.

Using maps to find out more about where your ancestors lived can be very useful, especially if they owned large farming properties or historic houses.

The National Library of Australia has great guides for using Australian maps for family history: https://www.nla.gov.au/research-guides/australian-maps-for-family-historians/maps-other-family-history-sources

When using maps for family history research, keep in mind:

- Place names often change or were duplicated in many areas.
- Until the 19th century, place names were often spelt phonetically.
- Parish boundaries changed often.
- Maps won't always have a north orientation.
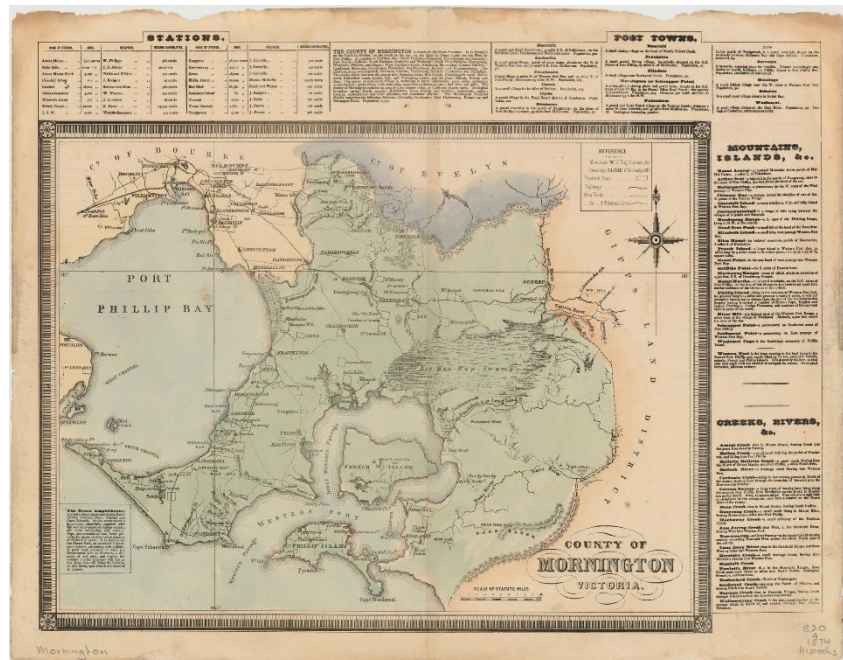
County of Mornington in 1874. SLV: 785983.

Tracing First Nations Ancestors.

Tracing your First Nations ancestry can be quite difficult, considering the devastating treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia, including the Stolen Generations. The oral storytelling nature of First Nations culture also means that written records have not historically been kept, and that any written records were created by Europeans and are likely unrepresentative.

As such, keep in mind that:

- Many births, deaths and marriages of First Nations individuals went unrecorded, due to remoteness.
- Change of name or adoption of different names was commonly forced upon First Nations people living in missions or stations.

The ethics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collections and accessibility is rapidly changing. Many places which hold First Nations records include a cultural sensitivity warning when entering their websites. If you are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and find language or any records to be insensitive or culturally inappropriate, reach out to the holding institution. Most have take-down policies for culturally insensitive materials.

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Resources.

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) has fantastic family history resources and a research unit (available on free call line 1800 3520553) for those with First Nations ancestors, especially those who are or have relatives who are members of the Stolen Generation.

AIATSIS's Mura catalogue, of manuscripts, books, serials, photographic and audiovisual materials, is available to search online. They also have searchable Aust Lang, art and object, and photographic collections.

AIATSIS has a range of guides, including a step-by-step guide to family research, and a comprehensive Family History Kit for those researching their First Nations

ancestors: https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-08/aiatsis-family-history-kit.pdf

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family History Resources.

Link-Up.

Link-Up are an Australian-wide organisation (excluding Tasmania) which reunites family and country, for all First Nations people who have been fostered, adopted, or raised in institutions: https://www.vacca.org/page/services/community-support/link-up-victoria

Koorie Heritage Trust.

The Trust is a First Nations owned arts and cultural organisation, which provides a family history service for members of the Stolen Generations and their families: https://koorieheritagetrust.com.au/

Bringing Them Home Name Index.

This index is a searchable list of names and places regarding First Nations records held at the National Archives of Australia: https://www.naa.gov.au/explore-collection/first-australians/bringing-them-home-name-index

Public Record Office of Victoria resources.

-Koorie Records Unit: assists First Nations people in accessing their records, and other records at the National Archives of Australia.
-Finding Your Story: a downloadable manual for records of the Stolen Generations in Victoria
-Walata Tyamateeti: a research guide to Indigenous records in Victoria

Maps.

If you are trying to identify a local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander location or nation, AIATSIS has a map of Indigenous Australia available online: https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia

International Records.

Some international family history records are available via Ancestry, but for a lot of countries outside of Europe, you may need to research records held within the country itself.

When looking for international records, a good first step is to research the country that your ancestors are from. You should look for information about:

- Political system and history.
- Religions in the nation.
- Wars.
- Economic hardships.
- Natural disasters.

Knowledge of these issues will provide context into the lives and decisions of your ancestors. Depending on what you find out, the event could have caused some records to be destroyed.

It's also a good idea to do some research into the naming systems of the country. Many countries use different naming systems which make individuals who are not related look like they might be. In the Scottish patronymic naming system, MacDonald means 'son of Donald' and Clerkson means 'son of a clerk (the father's occupation). Russia uses a patronymic system to differentiate gender: -ovich for sons, -ovna for daughters. Knowing the naming system that the country uses can help you avoid making mistakes in your research.

As a first step for finding related records, it can be useful to use historical maps and geographical directories (sometimes called gazetteers) to identify the name and locations of areas where your ancestors lived. Once you've found these, consider comparing them to a current map to see if these places are still under the same name, or are even still in the same country. Knowing what the area was and is now called can be very helpful when looking for records.

Old Maps Online is a global resource with over 400,000 searchable maps: https://www.oldmapsonline.org/
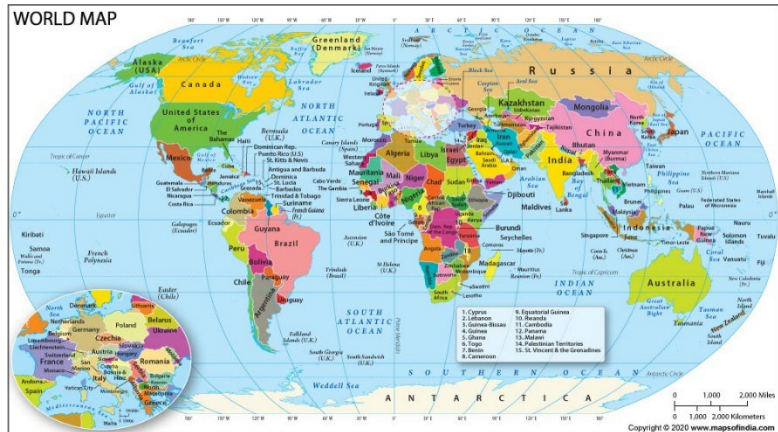
You could also browse maps via the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection: https://www.davidrumsey.com/

Locating International Resources.

When locating overseas resources, remember that each country has a different method of storing and collecting records. A good tool for finding these records is the Family Search Research Wiki, which can be searched by country and region: https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Main_Page

When trying to access overseas records, you are likely to come across records that are not only handwritten, but in another language. If you, or someone you know, can speak this language it will be an advantage. If not, there are a lot of resources available to help, like Google translate: https://translate.google.com/

Contact relevant agencies.

Once you find the recording institution, try searching for their website. If they don't have any digital records, you will need to contact them directly. It is recommended to keep correspondence short and in the language of that country if possible. Try writing out an email, putting it into Google translate and changing it to the language of the region you are contacting.

Other international resources.

- WorldGenWeb Project: https://www.worldgenweb.org/
- GenealogyLinks: https://www.genealogylinks.net/
- Cyndi's List: https://www.cyndislist.com/

Family History via DNA.

Ancestry, 23andMe and several other organisations offer DNA test kits for family history and heritage. These tests compare data from reference samples with your results. Each company uses different reference samples, so the results are slightly different depending on which company you use.

These results can be valuable when compared with the results of others. If 2 people share DNA, then the test will indicate a cousin relationship, either as 1st, 2nd, removed or half cousins. The DNA test can't tell you which ancestor you share, so having a family tree to be able to trace it back is very useful.

Conducting family history DNA testing has the potential to bring up some family secrets. There have been cases where people have discovered affairs, second families and that their biological family is not who they thought they were. Before deciding to do a test, it is a good idea to consider mentioning the possibility to some family members, to gauge their response. Take their concerns seriously.
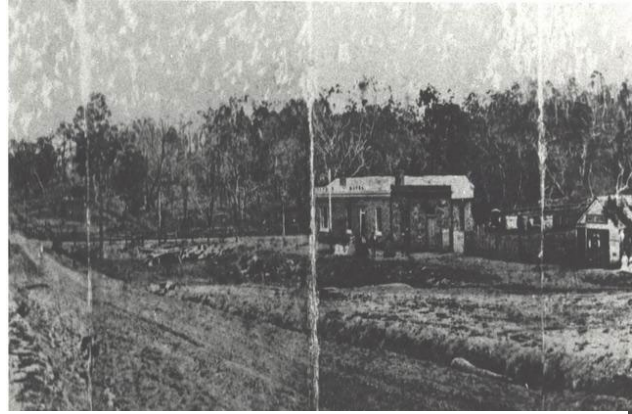

Endeavour Hills Community Centre, 1982. Connected Libraries Local History Archive.

If you decide to complete a test, make sure you are ready for what you might find. If you discover family secrets, be sure to act ethically with the information you have found – there is likely a reason that your ancestors hid their secrets.

Bringing the Past to Life.

As you get further into your family history research, you might like to learn more about what your ancestor's daily lives were like. You may have questions like:

Bain's Border Inn (now Berwick Inn) circa 1850s. Connected Libraries Local History Archive.

- What did their town look like?
- What would the community have been like?
- Why did they settle there?
- What was their work like?
- What was going on around them that may have impacted their lives?

This research will require you to branch out beyond the typical family history resources.

Historical Societies.

Many historical and family history societies have unique collections of material local to their area. Most are staffed by volunteers who often have an in-depth knowledge of the area and can offer expert advice.

Berwick Mechanics Institute and Free Library.

-This Institute operates as a lending library and has a collection of local history publications and materials.
-https://berwickmilibrary.org.au/
-15 High Street, Berwick, 3806

Berwick-Pakenham Historical Society.

-The Society operates a Museum in the Old Shire Offices in Pakenham, containing objects, photographs and documents about the Berwick and Pakenham districts. It is open from 2.30pm-4pm on Sundays.
-https://bphs.com.au/
-85 Princes Highway, Pakenham, 3810. Enter via service lane off James St.

Cranbourne Shire Historical Society.

- The Society manages the Fishermans Cottage Museum at Tooradin and has a collection of photographs, documents and maps relating to Cranbourne and Tooradin. The Museum is open Sundays 12pm-4pm.
- Telephone: 03 5998 3454.
- 13 Mickle Street, Tooradin, 3980.

Narre Warren and District Family History Group.

- The Group operates the Lorraine Taylor Research Room at Cranbourne Library and have an extensive collection of local and international family history research materials. They are open 11am-2pm Tuesdays and Saturdays.
  - https://nwfhg.org.au/
  - 110 High St, Berwick.

To see a full list of local historical groups operating within City of Casey, visit our website: https://www.connectedlibraries.org.au/heritage-groups/

To find more local historical societies, search the Federation of Historical Societies website: https://www.history.org.au/historical-societies/

Community Museums and Organisations.

Places like Indigenous keeping places, RSL branches, mechanics institutes, museums, archives, botanic gardens, and genealogical societies can also be incredibly helpful for finding out more about your ancestors' life. Depending on their collection focus, you might find such resources as publications, records, newspapers, uniforms, photographs, and artefacts at these organisations.

Former Berwick Pakenham Historical Society rooms, circa 1980s. Connected Libraries Local History Archive.

To find organisations in your area that may relate, think about your ancestors and where they worked, lived, and played:

- Is there a local history museum in the area where they lived?

- If they played a sport or had a hobby, is there a museum dedicated to that?
- Is there a museum dedicated to the industry in which they worked?

Online Groups.

Sharing your family history can be an incredibly rewarding experience. There are lots of family history and local history groups online, especially via Facebook. These can be very useful if your ancestor was an active member in their area, as there might be other family historians with related information. Try searching for family history or the location and keyword 'history' to find groups to join.

Websites like Victorian Genealogy, FamilySearch and Cyndi's List can provide a range of resources that you might find useful when researching more widely.

However, it's important to remember that the information you find online may not always be correct – make sure you verify that the information is correct by doing further research.

Enjoy Researching!

Family history is addictive and fun! You can make connections you never knew about and learn more about the past through your own family.

Family history research is something that is never done. There are few family historians who have finished researching: every piece of information you find will likely make you want to know even more. Enjoy the process of finding out about your ancestors. Researching slowly is fine and can even prevent you from making mistakes in your family tree.

If you make a mistake, just go back to the nearest relative whose information you know is true. Lots of family historians have made mistakes at some point: you can always get back on track.

Remember, whilst there are a select few who have traced their family history back to 700/800 BCE, if you can trace back to 1800 with accurate sources, you have done impressively!

Hallam Hotel, pre 1930s renovations. Connected Libraries Local History Archive.