

BRITISH GENEALOGY TIMELINE

Medieval Records

1085/6 The Domesday Book

William the Conqueror's great land survey of England; in effect, the earliest English census (of sorts, as only tenants-in-chief and their sub-tenants, i.e. the great landowners, before and after the Conquest, were recorded by name).

1130+ Pipe Rolls

Accounts of Crown revenues rendered by the King's sheriffs to the Exchequer. Tenants-in-chief can be traced in them.

1182+ Feet of Fines

Judgements of title to land, written three times on a single scroll, cut in wavy lines to avoid forgery and filed at the Court of Common Pleas. Early source of surnames.

1199+ Court of Chancery: Charter Rolls, Close Rolls and Patent Rolls

Records of royal grants of land and rights, to individuals and corporations, from the reign of King John.

1232 Earliest evidence of position of Parish Clerk.

13th Century+ Manorial records

The estate manor was the unit of local administration for centuries after the Norman Conquest. Records cover the affairs of the manorial courts, which dealt with rights and duties, disputes and changes of tenancy, etc.

1290-1344 (1524- 1546) Lay Subsidy Rolls (Revived by Henry VIII)

Lists of those paying taxes on goods, levied for a specific purpose like a foreign war. Important source for those interested in the origins of surnames.

1377-1381 (1641 & 1660-1697) Poll Tax Returns (Revived under Charles I and Charles II)

A tax per head, first levied under Richard II. Important for calculating the population at that time; and providing early evidence of many surnames.

1483/4 College of Arms founded by Richard III

College has registers of armorial bearings granted to English and Welsh families from the 15th century to the present day, with pedigrees of thousands of families.

Tudor and Stuart records

c.16th Century+ Ecclesiastical Courts

Dealt with disputes over attendance and behaviour in church, conduct of parsons, state of the church, immorality, wills, slander, etc. Nicknamed the Bawdy Courts due to large number of cases involving fornication and adultery.

c.16th Century+ Quarter Sessions and Assize Courts

Though these were in place in the 14th C., few records survive from before the late 16th C. Assize courts tried the most serious crimes - murder, rape, robbery, larceny, arson, etc.

1524-1546 Lay Subsidy Rolls

Medieval tax on moveable goods revived by Henry VIII. Lists used to calculate population.

1530-1688 Heralds' Visitations

County surveys of claims to arms by Heralds of the College of Arms. Many have been published.

1538 Parish Registers

Introduced by Thomas Cromwell, chief minister to Henry VIII Single most important date in English genealogy (along with civil registration in 1837) when Cromwell ordered each parish in England and Wales to keep a register of baptisms, marriages and burials.

1547 Apprenticeships allowed to be cancelled if apprentice was abused by Master.

1558 Earliest date from which many registers exist

From 1598 it was ordered that every parish should keep a bound register and older registers (usually on single sheets) should be copied into it. But many parishes only made their copies from Elizabeth I's first regnal year.

1563 Statute of Artificers and Apprentices

Requires anyone who wanted to enter a trade to first be apprenticed by a Master.

1567 Upper age limit of apprenticeship reduced from 24 to 21 (originally just in London, extended to rest of country in 1778).

1592 If Master died, the indenture would be canceled. Parents would get money back. Apprenticeships could continue through Master's spouse or son.

1597 Overseers of the Poor required to assign poor children and orphans to apprenticeships. People obligated to take the children on.

1598 Bishops Transcripts introduced

Copies of the registers that had to be sent annually to the bishop. Movement to keep parish chest records on parchment.

1597 Position of Overseers of the Poor created for parishes.

1597/1601 Earliest Poor Laws acts

Care of the poor became the responsibility of the parish, a system that remained in place until 1834. Parish given rates to help poor.

1641/2 Collection for distressed Protestants in Ireland

In March 1641/2 Charles I ordered a collection from every parish for the relief of English Protestant settlers in Ireland ousted by the Catholic Irish. Lists include many women and supplement the Protestation Returns.

1642 Protestation Oath Returns

In 1642 Parliament ordered all males over 18 to take an oath to defend the "true religion".

1649-1660 Commonwealth Interregnum Period from the execution of Charles I to the restoration of Charles II. Many pedigrees enter a "black hole". Civil registration from 1653 to 1660.

1662 Settlement rights created, defining who and who couldn't live in the parish.

1662-1688 Hearth Tax Returns (survive only to 1674)

Major source. A tax on number of hearths in a household, it was a principal source of revenue for Charles II and James II. Returns valuable in calculating population.

1622+ First English newspaper A vital source for "putting flesh on the bones" of family history.

1665/6+ London Gazette Carries many official notices of appointments, honours, promotions, business affairs, bankruptcies, etc. Extant today.

1695-1706 Marriage Duty Act

A tax on marriages, births and burials and on bachelors and widowers.

1696+ Poll Books

Another valuable source. Lists of electors and how they voted.

1697 Settlement certificate required to settle in a different parish.

Late Stuart and Hanoverian Periods

1693-20thC. Land Tax

Ran for 270 years and was only abolished in 1963. Few early returns, but from 1780-1832 fairly uniform survival for many counties.

1696-1851 Window Tax

Replaced the Hearth Tax, but was equally unpopular and led to people bricking up unwanted windows

Late 17th C+ Social, trade and commercial directories

First London directory in 1677. Increasingly published in the 18th and 19th centuries. A major source in later Victorian times.

1710 Stamp Act, required duty to be payable on indentures

These duties cover 1710-1811. They're located in National Archives IN1 series.

1723 First poorhouses set up.

1723/3 Act prevented pregnant women being removed from a parish.

1733 Public records anglicized

Until this date, legal documents were in Latin.

1743/4 Child settlement was changed to mother's parish (instead of parish child was born in).

1752 Calendar Changes

Britain switched from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar, used in Catholic countries since 1582. Eleven days lost in September to bring the country into line with Europe. Start of the year changed from March 25th to January 1st.

1753 Clandestine Marriage Act

Most significant event since parish registers were introduced in 1538. A law to prevent clandestine marriages, it required all marriages to be performed in the Church of England, the only exceptions allowed being those of Jews and Quakers.

1757+ Militia lists and musters

An extensive variety of military records list from this date.

1767 Age for release of male apprenticeships turned from 24 to 21, maximum 7 years apprenticeship.

1767 Males in parishes ages 15-60 put in ballot to serve in Parish Militia.

1780 Probate Duty first introduced.

1784+ Assessed taxes

A curious assortment of taxes were levied on such things as shops, servants, horses, carts and wagons - and even hair powder. Some records survive in county record offices.

1793 Enforcement of Estate Duty,

Probates for estates over the value of 10 pounds were taxed.

1794/5 Paupers could only be removed by if relief was needed (forbidden to remove sick people).

1796 Legacy duties first introduced.

1801 First census taken.

For statistical reasons only, but a few returns that give names have survived from 1801-1831.

1802 Overseers of Poor required to keep register of parish apprentices. Survival of these records are RARE.

1804 Duties abolished on apprenticeships.

1814 Repeal Act.

Made apprenticeships not a requirement. Apprenticeships didn't occur in factories.

1815 Offspring taxed if they were bequeathed upon in a will. Spouse exempt.

1830s Position of Surveyor of Highways in parish dissolved and given to paupers.

1831 Swing Riots in South and Midlands against low levels of poor relief, low wages, etc.

This led to creation of Poor Law Union and workhouses.

1832 Reform Act

Gave the franchise to many more people and introduced electoral registers.

1834 Poor Law Amendment Act

Poor Law Unions and workhouses introduced. Heralded the second period of poor relief in England and Wales. Scrapped the old parish system and introduced Boards of Guardians.

Victorian and 20th-Century Records

1837 Civil Registration

Introduced into England and Wales on July 1st 1837, under which the state took over responsibility for registration of all births, marriages and deaths.

1841+ Census Returns

Census returns from 1841-1901 are the principal sources, along with BMDs, of the Victorian era.

1857 Estate Tax

Every estate worth more than 20 pounds was taxed.

1858 Wills

The state took over responsibility from the church for proving wills. Records at the Principal Registry of the Family Division. Pre-1858 wills dating from the 14th century are widespread.

1872 Parliamentary elections became secret

Until this date, poll books could reveal how a person had voted.

1875 Births registration compulsory

Though people were supposed to register births from the inception of the system, fines weren't imposed for failure until this date.

1875 Chancery court and King's bench merged into one High Court of Justice.

1881 Army regiments change names.

1896 Estate Duty introduced.

1910 Lloyd George's "Domesday"

An Act that imposed a duty on increase in value of land when sold; it created millions of records.

1914-18 World Wars I & II

CD of soldiers who died in the Great War and records of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

1922 Law of Property Act

Abolished the form of 'copyhold' land tenure and brought an end to last meaningful function of manorial courts.

1924 Property Amendment Act

Placed manorial documents under the charge and superintendence of the Master of the Rolls.

1971 Courts Act

Abolished Assize Court and Quarter Session Courts to form a single permanent Crown Court.