



How to Use This Book

The *Who Do You Think You Are? Encyclopedia of Genealogy* is the definitive, comprehensive guide to tracing your roots, and putting them into the correct historical context so that you fully understand not just who your ancestors were, but also the way they used to live. This book is split into five sections.

SECTION ONE

Section One concerns the preparatory stages you need to do before you even start logging on or heading to the nearest library, record office or archive – the sort of work you can do at home and with your family to hand. It includes gathering initial information from your family; organizing it into a family tree; setting your research goals; and working out which archives you'll need to visit first. These are crucial steps to take, and are often skipped over by enthusiasts straining at the leash – often with disastrous consequences later on. Remember, perfect planning prevents poor performance!

SECTION TWO

Section Two introduces you to the key resources you'll need to build and expand your family tree, in particular civil registration certificates of births, marriages and deaths; census returns; wills and probate documents; and parish registers. These will provide sufficient clues to bring your relatives back to life as real people who lived interesting lives. Many of these are now available online, and should be used as building blocks to construct a secure foundation for your research.

SECTION THREE

Section Three is where it all gets personal. By this stage you will have built your family tree, and this section provides more detailed information about the ways you can investigate the historical context surrounding the names you have uncovered. There are several subsections, each reflecting a major theme of British social history over the last few centuries, many of which are likely to have directly affected your ancestors. The main topics covered include military history, as it would be a great surprise if at least one ancestor wasn't involved in the forces at some point; occupations over the ages; migration into and out of Britain; family secrets, since we all have a skeleton or two lurking undiscovered in the closet; and wider aspects of social history, such as working further back in time and looking for blue-blooded ancestors. What makes the book unique is that there is a history of each theme as well as a description of the records you'll need to consult, where to find them and how to use them.

SECTIONS FOUR & FIVE

Sections Four and Five provide supplementary practical advice and support to help structure your work as it progresses. Section Four contains troubleshooting guides which take you along some of the most common lines of research step by step, such as searching for military ancestors, or those who entered or left Britain over the last few centuries; whilst Section Five provides profiles and meanings of some of the most frequently occurring surnames and occupations that you are likely to encounter during your research; information on genetic genealogy, where you trace distant relatives through your DNA; and information about the key archives, institutions and websites that you will visit or use during your work.

So, if you are a novice family historian and you want to get the best out of this book, don't skip over Sections One or Two. More experienced researchers might want to focus on Section Three. And if you get stuck, head for Sections Four and Five to kick-start your research in another direction.