

Family history sources in the Westcountry Studies Library

Factsheet 13

Where to start?

Everyone begins their family history in a different way. To decide where to start, think about what you already know, and what you need to find out next to move on. We hold many guides to family research which will help you find a place to start. Ask in your local library about books you can borrow. Alternatively, follow the link www.nationalarchives.org/catalogue and select the Research Guide to Family History.



Census returns

From 1801, information about the population of England, Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man was collected by means of a ten-yearly census. The censuses of 1801 - 1831 were merely headcounts, but from 1841 every household was listed with the name of each person present, including children, visitors and servants, approximate age, occupation, and whether born in the county. From 1851, marital state, relationship to the head of household, exact age and place of birth were also listed.

We hold the Devon census returns from 1841 to 1901 on microfiche and microfilm, and the indices for Devon 1851 and 1881, North Devon 1841 and 1861, and Cornwall, Dorset and Somerset for 1881. Internet searching is also possible using the free library subscription to www.ancestrylibrary.com, and to www.1911census.co.uk (online payment required).

Devon Parish Register transcripts

We hold transcripts of many parish registers of christenings, marriages and burials. The Devon Record Office Service Point is a part of the library and contains original parish registers on microfiche. The Devon and Cornwall Record Society's collection of Devon and Cornwall parish register transcripts and micro-filmed non-conformist (chapels) registers are also available to members: full or temporary membership can be arranged at the desk.

International Genealogical Index

This index was compiled by the Mormon Church of the Latter Day Saints, based on transcriptions of church registers of christenings, marriages and burials. Where the Mormons were given access, registers from the sixteenth to the early/mid-nineteenth

century were copied. The indices for England, Wales and Scotland are available in the library on microfiche.

Trade directories

We hold a selection of directories for Devon, Cornwall, and the Westcountry, as well as some for the major towns. From 1850, the county directories give a description of each parish, its principle establishments (church, school, charities etc) and a list of residents. These vary in detail, the later directories including alphabetical lists of residents and trades. Exeter directories start in the eighteenth century and continue until the 1970s when telephone directories took over. Telephone directories from the 1940s onwards are held here.

Electoral registers

Voters' lists for Devon are kept from 1951 and for Exeter from 1932, although the runs are not complete. Under new distribution and availability rules, only those registers **over ten years old** may be seen and we are not being supplied with any new ones.

Newspapers

The microfilmed newspaper holdings range from the eighteenth century to the present day. Family historians use these to study obituaries, coroners' reports and trade advertisements as well as following up individual family stories which might have made the news. Of particular use is the Exeter Flying Post which runs from 1763 to 1917 and is indexed under subject, place and property up to 1885 and under name up to 1835. Devon Library members can also access 19th Century British Library Newspapers online, which include Trewman's Exeter Flying Post at www.devon.gov.uk/nineteenthcenturynews. The Sherborne Mercury is available from 1737 - 1867. The Express & Echo holdings start in 1904 and there are several shorter runs of local papers.

Wills

When the probate office at Exeter was bombed in 1942, all of the registered copies and original wills proved in Exeter, Totnes, Barnstaple, Taunton and Wells were destroyed. Various indexes and calendars of these wills survive and are available in this Library. We also hold the abstracts of a selection of early wills compiled by Oswyn Murray and Olive Moger before the war. See our separate information sheet *Westcountry Wills and the Westcountry Studies Library*.

Family files

Files are held for many local families, containing items placed there by family historians. These might include newspaper features and obituaries, pedigrees and correspondence. The files vary from a single item to whole boxes. Each file allows for all the variations of spelling the name might have undergone over time. There are also Biography cuttings: extracts from newspapers about local individuals who might not otherwise have been recorded, as well as famous characters with local connections.

Published works and typescripts

We have collected many biographies of notable local people and families. The collection also includes works about lesser known families, where research has been carried out, and the findings placed with us in a published or typed/hand-written form.

Other useful sources in the Westcountry Studies Library

The family historian can make use of the Library's collection of maps, illustrations, portraits and books on local history and a wide range of local topics to gain a broader understanding of the environment inhabited by our ancestors. Internet access is available and is free for a range of family history websites, including www.ancestrylibrary.com, the National Archives website at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk which lists, among other things, the Devon Record Office holdings, and www.familysearch.org, the Mormon IGI website. The Burnet Morris Index of Devon names and places was completed in 1940 and provides the family historian with references to many sources, some of which are held in Westcountry Studies or Exeter Reference Library.

Before visiting, please ring to check availability of stock and book microfilm readers.

For a full list of our holdings, and to view many of our illustrations, see our online catalogue at www.devon.gov.uk/localstudies

Contact details

Westcountry Studies Library

Castle Street
Exeter
EX4 3PQ

Phone: 01392 384216

Email: westcountry.library@devon.gov.uk

Opening hours:

Monday:	9.30 - 6.00
Tuesday:	9.30 - 7.00
Wednesday:	10.00 - 5.00
Thursday:	9.30 - 7.00
Friday:	9.30 - 6.00
Saturday:	9.30 - 4.00

Different formats

If you would like a summary of this in a different format such as large print, Braille or tape, or in a different language, please contact our Customer Service Centre on 0845 155 1015 or email customer@devon.gov.uk

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