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FAMILY HISTORY

# AWAKEN YOUR ANCESTORS

TRY A TASTER MODULE OF OUR  
POPULAR FAMILY HISTORY COURSE –  
**COMPLETELY FREE!**

# AWAKEN YOUR ANCESTORS

## ELEMENTARY FAMILY HISTORY COURSE



## MODULE ONE GETTING STARTED

LMentary Family History  
Education & Research



The Institute of Heraldic & Genealogical Studies

## GETTING STARTED

### INTRODUCTION

You have completed your course paperwork, and you are now ready to begin a journey tracing your ancestors. Ahead of you lie wonderful and exciting records with the potential to offer up all manner of information about your family: their relationships, where they lived, the good luck stories and the hardships they experienced. These records might help you solve a family mystery or present you with a new one to untangle. In short, there is so much to discover.

In this module you will cover the following:

- The value of family records
- Some simple rules that govern family history research
- An introduction to the fascinating subject of surnames
- Family relationships: how to differentiate, for instance, between a first cousin and a first cousin-once-removed, or a second cousin from a third cousin.

The module will also:

- Offer tips on how to organise yourself
- Show how and where to access the records

The records introduced in the AWAKEN course can extend a pedigree all the way back to the reign of Henry VIII in the sixteenth century. But first we begin by looking a little closer to home.

### BEFORE YOU START

What do you have in your possession, or already know? Ask yourself, has it already been done by someone else?

You can spend hours researching your ancestors, spending a small fortune purchasing certificates, paying for internet searches and spending time travelling to various archives. As you proudly display your work at a family reunion, an aunt you haven't seen since childhood rummages in her bag and produces a neatly folded sheet of A3 paper displaying a family tree almost identical to yours. Indeed, she may even have extended her pedigree further back than you have.

Your journey begins at home. Take a long hard look around you and you will find **Family Records**.

## FAMILY RECORDS

So, what are family records? Quite simply anything you find in the house: address books, a family bible, certificates, diaries, invoices, inscribed books, letters, medals, newspaper cuttings, photographs, postcards, and receipts; in fact, anything that was considered worth saving; keepsakes often stashed away in a shoebox and placed on top of the wardrobe.



A postcard dated January 1916 offers Polly's address and a clue that her admirer had just returned to his army unit.



It is almost tempting to go straight to the military records module of the ***Broadening Your Family Tree*** Course to see if the author survived the war.

## TALK TO YOUR RELATIVES

Assemble all the information you can from your relatives. Obtain or copy civil registration certificates and photographs they may have. Talk to your elders; ask your grandparents what life was like as a child and what they can remember about their own grandparents. It is this information that you cannot easily obtain from a record.

If you plan to visit an elderly relative remember to be sensitive and considerate, too pushy and the information will dry up. If your interviewee is not forthcoming consider an alternative approach. On your next visit take a photograph with you, or a street map of the place your relative lived as a child, indeed anything that you think might stimulate conversation. Use your props wisely and the information will be forthcoming.

The table below lists the main categories of family records and their uses.

<b>A TABLE OF FAMILY RECORDS</b>	
<b>Family Bibles</b>	Began in the mid-17 <sup>th</sup> century and were presented to a newly-married couple. In the 18/19 <sup>th</sup> century bibles were often handed-down the generations from mother to the eldest female.
<b>Address Books</b>	A directory of names and addresses.
<b>Commemoration Books</b>	Birthday books, scrapbooks, memorial books, baby books.
<b>Inscribed Books</b>	Presents, school prizes – offer names, dates, locations.
<b>Accounts</b>	Legal – household – written on scraps of paper or entered into a journal. May offer a clue to an address.
<b>Certificates</b>	Birth, marriage, death - membership of a particular society.
<b>School, church and public records</b>	Reports and workbooks – passports – driving licence – apprenticeship indentures.
<b>Military Records</b>	Almost every house will have some form of record associated with the military. You may find medals, service records, photographs, certificates, regimental magazines, diaries, even articles of military uniform.
<b>Printed announcements</b>	Visiting cards, birth and baptism announcements, change of address, wedding invitations.
<b>Greeting cards</b>	A card for every occasion! Names – addresses – notes.
<b>Personal diaries and journals</b>	Offer a frank picture of everyday life [often through the eyes of a child].
<b>Visitors' Books</b>	Names, addresses, relatives, friends.
<b>Letters</b>	Letters of a personal nature will convey feelings and emotions. They will offer first-hand accounts of events; descriptions, names and addresses.
<b>Family heirlooms</b>	Handed down from past generations – the 'crown jewels.'
<b>Portraits and photographs</b>	Family groupings – social standing – location.
<b>Muniments</b>	Grander homes kept their title-deeds, business records, charters and private papers in a special muniment chest, room or house.

**Table 1: Family Records**

## **BASIC RESEARCH GUIDELINES**

When you have exhausted all avenues of questioning, and assembled your collection of family records, it is time to make a start on your own research. Here are some simple rules to guide your research methods.

### **Work Backwards**

Whatever path you choose to take with your research, start with yourself and work backwards, generation by generation, ensuring that you have verified your sources at each stage.

Start by drawing a simple diagram of what you know or what your relatives have told you. Your diagram might look something like this:

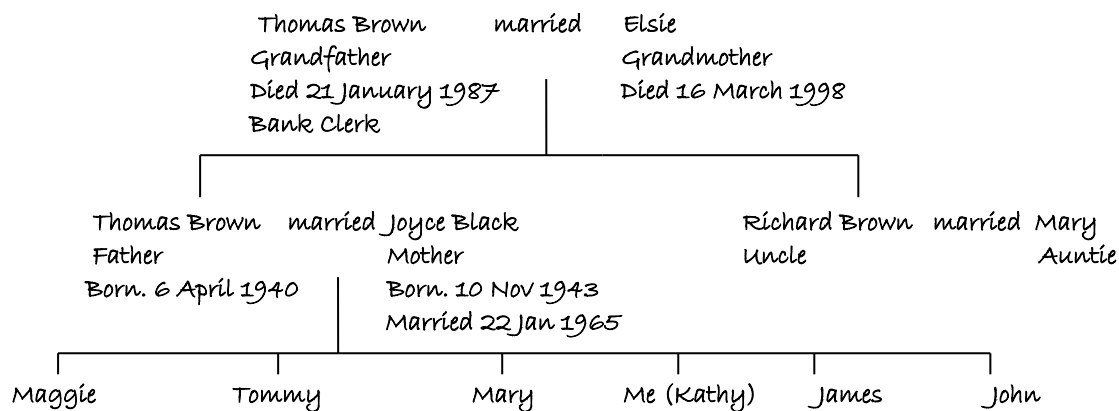


Fig. 1: A Simple Pedigree

Everyone begins their family history where the knowledge ends and the questions begin, and each diagram will be unique to the individual. Having drawn your family tree, you should have an idea of what you already know and be able to identify where to begin your research.

At Figure 1, Kathy the author probably knows the birth dates of her siblings, may have the date of her parents' marriage and their dates of birth and has some knowledge regarding her grandparents, aunts and uncles. Modules 2 and 3 will explain how Kathy would conduct a search to discover accurate details about her family members.

## Set Your Sights

This is a good a time to decide what you want to achieve. You might favour following a single surname, your father's or mother's maybe, as far back as possible. You might wish to look for an illustrious member of the family; a famous sea captain for example. Or you might be keen to find out more about a story involving a "black-sheep": a highwayman or a convict. You may decide to follow the four lines of your grandparents. There are no hard and fast rules, the decision is all yours.

Whatever route you decide to take you must always keep your research "tight". Keeping it tight means staying focused. It is you directing your research, not your ancestors. You will sit down at your computer with a specific aim, only to find yourself being dragged off in the opposite direction following something exciting that has just popped up on your screen; it happens to everyone. If you are not careful you will find yourself being taken along different research paths, often running down blind alleys, chasing something unplanned. So, start with a plan, and stick to it. If you make a discovery that grips your curiosity, make a note of it and place it in the pending tray for another day.



## Get Organised

Be systematic. You will soon be awash with facts, figures, books, maps, records and slips of paper – almost anything of use. File it, don't lose it and most important of all, remember where you have put it.

Record everything you do, yes everything. Make a note of what you have looked at, where you saw it and include the date range of your search and what you found. It is equally important that you also make a note of the records you have searched that yielded nothing. Recording your negative searches will save you revisiting those very same records at a later stage, resulting in the same negative results, and valuable time being wasted. Throughout this course you will be reminded to record everything that you have looked at. Getting yourself organised starts here, right now.



Getting organised also means using the correct storage products. You should start by purchasing acid free plastic document wallets. Very soon you will be purchasing A4 GRO Certificates and you will need somewhere safe to protect them. There are many genealogical suppliers placing adverts in family history magazines and they, and others, also attend family history fairs. Look out for them.

## Be Honest With Yourself

Be honest in your approach. Resist temptation to claim a possible ancestor if you have any doubt whatsoever in your mind. Throughout this, and subsequent IHGS courses, you will be told about obtaining the required level of proof. Proof is essential if you are to create an accurate pedigree. There are perils attached to accepting the flimsiest of evidence so you must be patient and look for further evidence to confirm your theory before you can rightfully claim your discovery and be ready to move on to the next generation.

## Understand Surnames

The subject of Surnames is covered in ***Broadening Your Family Tree***, the second course in this series of correspondence courses. However, at this early stage, take some time to discover a little about the surnames in your family tree.

A surname is usually derived from one of four basic roots which originally differentiated between people sharing the same Christian (or given) name: location, occupation, a patronymic (and less commonly, matronymic) relationship, or a nickname. For example, LANE and YORK are locational names, SMITH and FLETCHER, occupational, JOHNSON and WILLIAMSON, patronymic and STRONG and SHORT fall into the nickname category

It is not uncommon for a surname to have changed over the years and do not be surprised to find your surname recorded under different forms. For example a search for the surname HOWARD in the parish of Kilmeston, Hampshire, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, produced a number of variants: HOWRD, HORROD AND HEWRD – sometimes different spellings on the same register page. Also on the same page was the surname HAWARD. This could represent another variation of the surname HOWARD or possibly the surname HAYWARD.

It would be calamitous if the researcher accepted the surname as HOWARD when all along it was HAYWARD. The honesty rule certainly applies here.

A local library will often stock at least one surname dictionary and there are a number of free-to-use websites that will offer a brief description of the origins of a surname and list the likely variants to it.



Use at least one of the following websites to trace the origins of your surname:

[www.surnamedb.com](http://www.surnamedb.com)

[www.britishsurnames.co.uk](http://www.britishsurnames.co.uk)

And look for a dictionary of surnames in your local library.



When researching a surname you should aim to consult at least two reference sources as experts do not always agree.

## Classes and Societies

Consider joining a family history society; you will meet people with the same interests. You can join a society that covers the area where your ancestors lived or you can join one closer to home. For a modest annual subscription you will receive a quarterly newsletter and access to any family history databases and research facilities the society may offer.

Choosing a society based in an ancestral area, but far from your own home will mean that joining in activities will be difficult. However, the advantage is that you will receive information relevant to your research such as details of transcriptions, indexes and graveyard surveys. You may also receive help from fellow members “on the ground” or connect with a distant relative who is also researching one of your ancestral lines.

[www.familyhistoryfederation.com](http://www.familyhistoryfederation.com) - the website has a directory of Family History Societies. You should consider joining a Family History Society; choose one in your locality or one where your ancestors lived.



Join a family history society.

## Embrace Technology

You can survive without the Internet but life is so much easier if you can turn on your computer and access records from home. Records are becoming available online at an encouraging rate with so many websites vying for your custom.



There are a number of commercial websites that offer various subscription packages; [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk) and [www.thegenealogist.co.uk](http://www.thegenealogist.co.uk) are three of the largest. Before you commit to a yearly subscription you should consider the merits of each. You should also consider that most libraries and local record offices now offer free access to [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) and [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk). So, initially, you might be able to survive with regular trips to your local library. This course will include many ways to conduct internet searches and provide information regarding free website alternatives, where available.

A computer is an excellent place to store much of your work and if you use a laptop you are free to take it into the archives. Add a scanner and a digital camera to your inventory and you have the resources to produce, store and move documents in the digital world. If you do plan to store your family history on a computer, ensure you have ways to back-up your work to guard against catastrophic failure, loss, theft and everyday mishaps. It would not quite be the end of the world if you lost all of your hard-earned data but it would certainly come close.

## WHERE TO LOOK

Your local library is a great place to start. A good library will have a well-stocked family history reference section. Borrow the book before considering buying your own copy.

The library may also offer access to [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) and [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk). It will probably have a collection of local Ordnance Survey maps, a local newspaper archive and copies of local parish registers too. Well worth a visit.

When you reach Module 6, Parish Registers, you will be encouraged to visit a local archive. This could be one that holds the records of a county or a major city. People are often surprised how much a local archive has to offer. The common mistake is to assume that everything is available on the internet.

A typical local archive will offer parish records dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, wills, maps, newspapers, property deeds, court records, the local militia records, guild records, business records and so much more. Many will also have local indexes that provide a quick and easy way to locate what you are looking for, a finding aid. Details of local archives can be found using the following link: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/find-an-archive>.



Use the, find-an-archive link, to locate Hampshire Archives and Local Studies. Then locate archives that are of interest to you.

The National Archives (TNA) at Kew is the main repository for the United Kingdom and houses a wealth of national records. For the military enthusiasts you will find information at the various service and regimental museums and also at the Imperial War Museum. Other specialist repositories include: the National Maritime Museum, the British Library, the Society of Genealogists (SoG) and the Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies (IHGS). These major repositories will be covered in the **BROADENING** and **COMPLETING** courses.

## FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

In no time at all you will be discovering ancestors across a broad family tree. All will be related to you somehow; “distant cousin” is one term used today. You will have second and third cousins and cousins who are removed. This section introduces you to family relationships.

Most of us do not think about specific cousin relationships in exact terms – ‘cousin’ seems good enough. However, it's important to understand the various types of cousins:

- **First cousins** share two of the same grandparents.
- **Second cousins** share the same great-grandparents but not the same grandparents.
- **Third cousins** have in common two great great grandparents and their ancestors.

When cousins descend from common ancestors by a different number of generations they are called ‘removed’:

- **Once removed** means there is a difference of one generation. Your father’s first cousin would be your first cousin once removed, as he is one generation below your grandparents and you are two generations below your grandparents.
- **Twice removed** means that there is a two-generation difference. Your grandmother’s first cousin would be your first cousin, twice removed because you are separated by two generations.

The following diagram is a quick way to identify family relationships;

Common Ancestor	Parent	Grandparent	Great Grandparent	Great Great Grandparent
Parent	Sibling	Nephew/Niece	Great Nephew/Niece	Great Great Nephew/Niece
Grandparent	Nephew/Niece	First Cousin	First Cousin Once Removed	First Cousin Twice Removed
Great Grandparent	Great Nephew/Niece	First Cousin Once Removed	Second Cousin	Second Cousin Once Removed
Great Great Grandparent	Great Great Nephew/Niece	First Cousin Twice Removed	Second Cousin Once Removed	Third Cousin

Table 2: Family Relationships



Extend the table above to include your seventh cousin

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## INTRODUCING THE TESTER FAMILY

Throughout the **AWAKEN** course you will have the opportunity to practice your search techniques on the TESTER family. At regular intervals you will be given information, or asked to find a particular piece of information, that will help you build up evidence of the family. During the final module, *Pulling it all Together* you will have gathered enough information to create a family tree that stretches back into the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Here is the first TESTER instalment.

### Task

### PRACTICAL TASK - The TESTER Story (T1) - FAMILY RECORDS

Having recently taken an interest in family history, the researcher was invited to the home of a first cousin. The cousin was also a keen family historian and had some information he wanted to share.

The researcher was given copies of two photographs and offered further information on the TESTER family:



Photograph 1 shows the mother, Ragna, who was a Norwegian national, with the baby, Louisa, on her lap. Stood beside Ragna are her sons, Thomas Henry TESTER and Alfred TESTER. The cousin thinks there was a middle brother who died, aged about 2, and he believes the young girl was called Ingeborg. The photograph was taken about 1900.

The second photograph on the right was taken some time later and shows Thomas TESTER, his wife Ragna, and their son Spencer. It appears to be a day of celebration – possibly May the 16<sup>th</sup>, Norwegian National Day, as Spencer looks quite Nordic in his appearance. It looks as if Thomas TESTER is wearing his Sunday best, complete with a military medal. It is believed the photograph was taken about 1912.

The family home was in Thornton, Lancashire, a small village close to the fishing port of Fleetwood in the district of Fylde.



This illustrates the benefits of talking to relatives. The above information will offer strong leads that can be put to good use when searching the GRO Indexes. Module 2 will carry the TESTER story forward.

## SUMMARY

The basis for starting your research is organising yourself, establishing what has been already researched and deciding in which direction you want to take your own investigations.

### Things to Do

#### *Talk to your relatives:*

Find out what your relatives know and what family records they possess.

#### *Rummage around your house:*

You are looking for family records: photographs, certificates, postcards, medals etc. What clues do they offer? List your collection and consider scanning suitable items. Then put your records somewhere safe, appropriately stored.

#### *Surnames:*

What are the origins of the TESTER surname? Is it a nickname, or could it be an occupational surname? Could it be both a nickname and an occupational surname? Use a surname dictionary at your local library, or use the website [www.surnamedb.com](http://www.surnamedb.com) to find out. Does the TESTER surname have any known variants?

Then do the same for the surnames in your family tree.

#### *Archives:*

Use the link <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/find-an-archive> to locate Hampshire Archives and Local Studies. Then locate archives that are of interest to you.

#### *Family Relationships:*

Extend the table to include your seventh cousin  
Answer the set of ten short questions.

#### *Useful Websites:*

Take a look at the following websites and you will see that they have plenty to offer.

[www.genuki.org.uk](http://www.genuki.org.uk) - A website with hundreds of links to various family history sites.

[www.cyndislist.com](http://www.cyndislist.com) – Another directory of useful websites.

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) – The website of the National Archives. Has a good selection of research guides.

[www.ihgs.ac.uk](http://www.ihgs.ac.uk) – The comprehensive website of the Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies includes details of courses, graded assessments, information and a catalogue of the extensive library holdings

[www.familyhistoryfederation.com](http://www.familyhistoryfederation.com) - the website has a directory of Family History Societies. You should consider joining a Family History Society; choose one in your locality or one where your ancestors lived.

## TEN SHORT QUESTIONS



Use the Family Relationship table to answer the following ten questions:

1. If our most recent common ancestor is your grandfather and my great grandfather, what relation am I to you?
2. If our most recent common ancestor is our great great grandfather, what relation are we to each other?
3. If our most recent common ancestor is your grandfather and my great great grandfather what relation am I to you?
4. What ancestor would second cousins share?
5. What relation to you is your uncle's son?
6. If our most recent common ancestor is my grandfather and your great great grandfather, what relation are you to me?
7. If our most recent common ancestor is our great great great grandfather, what relation are we to each other?
8. What ancestor would third cousins share?
9. What relation to you is your uncle's grandchild?
10. What relation to you is your first cousin's grandchild?

The answers will be provided with Module 2.

## BACKGROUND READING

K. Bali, *Tracing Your 20<sup>th</sup> Century Ancestors*, Pen & Sword 2016,

N. Betram & A. Smith *Tracing your Ancestors using the UK Historical Timeline*, Pen & Sword 2022

J. Oakes, *Tracing Your Ancestors 1066-1837*, Pen & Sword 2012

J. Shrimpton, *Tracing Your Ancestors Through Family Photographs*, Pen and Sword 2016

R.A. Symes, *Family First. Tracing Relationships in the Past*, Pen and Sword 2015

R.A. Symes, *Tracing Your Ancestors Through Letters and Personal Writings*, Pen and Sword 2016

## Surname Directories

D. Kennett, *The Surnames Handbook*, The History Press, 2012

P.H. Reaney & R.M. Wilson, *A Dictionary of English Surnames*, Oxford University Press, 2005

G. Redmonds, *Christian Names in Local and Family History*, National Archives, 2004

J. S. Titford, *The Penguin Dictionary of British Surnames*, Penguin Books, 2009

## AND FINALLY

Do not rush through the course; take your time in order to gain the maximum benefit from it. Organise yourself, set your sights and follow the direction given in the module notes. You should gather up your family records, talk to relatives to establish what has already been done, and learn about the origins of your surname.

Finally, when all the above has been completed and you have investigated the merits of the various websites that are listed, it will be time for you to begin your own research. You will start by searching the records of the General Register Office (GRO), and Modules 2 and 3 will explain exactly how to do it.

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