



*I hope you enjoyed my talk on **Tracing Your Ancestors Through Death Records**. This handout aims to act as a reminder for some of the points in the talk as well as being a reference aid for various books and websites that will help you in your search for death records. There are further details in my book **Tracing Your Ancestors Through Death Records** published by Pen and Sword books and available [here](#)*

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Death Records - Why we need them!

These are usually the records that are left to last, if not totally overlooked, by most researchers. Yet it's very important that you don't overlook them because:

- They often shed more light on an ancestor's life than the records created in his lifetime.
- A lot can happen to an ancestor in between last census return and his death
- They often provide springboards for locating other records and yet further information

Death Certificates

Make sure you extract all information from each column! Follow up on unfamiliar places of death - may be a workhouse or other institution - use directories, census returns, maps and Google to do this. Large scale Ordnance Survey maps will be found

in local libraries, at TNA while various reproductions maps are available such as <http://www.alangodfrey.com/> and <http://oldtowns.co.uk/>
Some trade directories are online and a notable free website is <http://www.historicaldirectories.org/hd/>

Make sure you take note of who registered the death - often a relative but sometimes the coroner. In the latter case, from 1875 it will be state whether or not there was an inquest. If there was there should be further information for you! (see below)

To help understand causes of death on certificates look at:

- www.scotlandsfamily.com/medical-diseases.htm
- www.antiquusmorbis.com
- Booklet on definitions of causes of death:
<http://www.genealogyprinters.com/catalog/default.php?cPath=25&osCsid=cd2a590e31d6f2521d40c86bbazafc34>

Inquests records and obituaries

Whenever a death was sudden or unexpected there would have been an inquest and after July 1837 with the introduction of civil registration the death certificate would not have been issued until after the result of the inquest into the cause of death. From the mid nineteenth century you have a choice; you can look to see if the record of the inquest has survived or you can turn either turn to newspapers records. Before the 1850s there were few local newspapers around to report local news and you will have to rely on coroner's records but from 1850s, apart from in the most mundane cases, there would usually be a report of the inquest in the local newspapers if the event was deemed newsworthy or perhaps even a whole article devoted to the event if it were notorious horrendous enough. Many inquest records do not survive as there was no requirement to preserve them until 1921. From then on records dated before 1875 had to be preserved, although many had already been destroyed. Later documents are not similarly protected and once they are fifteen years old may legally be destroyed by the coroner although many will be deposited in local record offices. Inquest files under 75 years old are closed to the public. Between 1752-1860s coroners filed inquests with the Quarter Sessions records. Use the Gibson Guide to Coroners' Records and Local Newspapers to help locate records (see below).

Obituaries

Look for obituaries for both better off and poorer ancestors. Obituaries are excellent sources for not only finding out more about your relative but using as springboards for research in other records and now much easier to find once again because of the increasing number of online digitised newspapers. Use the Gibson Guide to Local Newspaper (see below) to see what is likely to be available and utilise latest digital technology such as the [British Newspaper Archive](#)

Inventories

Wills are an important part of research and not just the remit of the rich either but many people overlook the inventory and here it has to be said that the better off your ancestor was the more information there will be.

Inventories were required with wills up to 1782 and after this date where there was no will and someone applied for letters of administration to deal with the estate. They will either be filed with the will itself or in some record offices filed and catalogued separately. They don't always survive, but many do.

If you are lucky and if the items in the inventory are listed room by room you will also get to virtually walk round your ancestor's house and see how many rooms and what sort of rooms there were.

Important to use your death records in tandem

You should routinely use all your death records in tandem where possible. So don't just find a death certificate, look for the burial entry and the gravestone or memorial inscription too and look for a will! Each may give you information that is not on the other. Not only are you likely to get extra information from finding them all but if you are having trouble locating, for example, the death certificate, then check in the Principal Probate Registry index which is online at Ancestry up to 1966 <http://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=1904&enc=1> and at <https://probatesearch.service.gov.uk/#wills> to see if he left a will. If you find a relevant entry in the index it will give you a date of death and help you locate the certificate.

Similarly finding a gravestone or Memorial Inscription (MI) will give you an approximate date of birth and the date of death. MIs are transcriptions of the writing on gravestones. There is a rapidly increasing number of online data providing details of gravestones and MIs and some are free - some are free to search but you pay to view

an image - either way make full use of them. I list some of them on the handout where I look in greater detail at this in the book.

You may be surprised at the information you can find on gravestones which may not just be basic detail of name, age at death and date of death but may include numerous other family member you knew nothing about, details of occupations and even causes of death - the latter particularly useful before 1837.

Memorial Inscriptions, gravestones and burials records online

- www.worldburialindex.com Inscriptions and images from gravestones in the UK and overseas.
- www.gravestonephotos.com (The Gravestone Photographic Project) Free.
- www.deceasedonline.com Growing Central database of burial and cremation registers for the UK and Republic of Ireland.
- <http://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/Research/Libr/MIs/MIslist.htm> (Kent Archaeological Society) Excellent collection of nineteenth century Kent churchyard inscriptions.
- www.findagrave.com Details and images of gravestones in cemeteries from around the world

It's important too to think about those people who died childless or as children- they formed part of someone's family and although you may have found numerous siblings baptised for your ancestor research may show that most of them died as children giving you a completely different perspective on your ancestor's childhood.

Always think about your ancestor's death and how old they were and how it would have affected those left behind.

Military Records

www.thegenealogist.com has WW1 casualty lists (these were also published in *The Times*) and a growing list of military records many linked to a database of war memorials and also the CWGC site. It also has a growing gravestone collection.

The Imperial War Museum War Memorial website is at

<http://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/search>

Commonwealth War Graves Commission website: <http://www.cwgc.org/>

Websites and Books

- Jeremy Gibson and C Rogers, *Coroners' Records in England and Wales* (Genealogical Publishing Company, 2nd edition 2000).
- Jeremy Gibson, Brett Langston and Brenda W Smith *Local Newspapers 1750-1920 England and Wales A select location list 2nd ed 2002 pub FFFHS*
- Greater London Cemeteries and Crematoria Clifford Webb ad Pat Wolfston
- <http://www.bl.uk/collections/newspapers.html> British Library Newspapers. Colindale Avenue, London NW9 5HE, England Tel: 0208 412 7353
- <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/> British Newspaper Archive.
- British Library explore catalogue - explore.bl.uk Select -Advanced search and then Material Type - 'Newspapers' from drop down search menu
- Your local library may provide free access to newspaper archives - often at home, as well as in the library to collections such as The Times (1785-1985), the Guardian and Observer (1791-2003), and parts of the British Newspaper Archive or even still its predecessor the 19th Century British Library Collection.