



Archifau
Gwent
Archives

**FAMILY HISTORY
RESEARCH**

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INTRODUCTION

Tracing family history has become one of the most popular pastimes in the UK. Whether you are a complete novice exploring a family myth or a seasoned researcher trying to find an elusive piece of information, family history can be a fascinating and rewarding experience.

If you have ancestors who were born or lived in the Gwent area and are interested in finding out more about them, then this step by step guide will give you some guidance on how to find out more.

BEFORE YOU START

There is a wealth of published guides and advice leaflets available to family historians. Many of these are available here at Gwent Archives. Local libraries, as well as specialist organisations such as the Society of Genealogists (www.sog.org.uk/index.shtml) and the Gwent Family History Society (www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wlsghfs/) may also provide copies.

The Gwent Family History Society has branches covering all parts of the county, and contains many long-term family historians who can provide help and advice.

STEP 1: MAKING A START

The best place to start is to see what you can find amongst your own family records. You or members of your family may have documents such as certificates, copies of wills or even an old bible giving names and dates, which can be used as a starting point.

Many record sources have now been put online. Before using Gwent Archives, it may be worth seeing what additional information can be gleaned from visiting websites such as *Ancestry* and *FindMyPast* – available free of charge in Wales at all County Archives and local libraries. These websites provide access to Census returns and the General Register Office Index.

STEP 8: WHAT ELSE CAN I TRY?

School records are used by many family historians. Admissions and Discharge registers can give the full name of a child, a parent's name, date of birth, address where living, a previous school, and why the child has left the school. Log Books provide a picture of what life was like at the school: the syllabus, local events and daily management at the school.

Other sources at Gwent Archives which may record your ancestor include: **Electoral Registers, Land Tax records, Estate records, Manorial records, Trade Directories** and **Newspapers**. Finally remember that Gwent Archives also hold a [Personal Names Index](#) which runs up to 1870.

REMEMBER

To note down the sources and their references you have consulted, in case you need to refer back to them. It may be that once you find out more information, you need to revisit a source which was initially unsuccessful.

Put time aside to carry out your research. It is rare just to turn up and obtain instant results, sometimes hours can be spent for little or no gain; however, when that nugget is found it can feel completely worth it. The real fun is in searching original records and seeing what sort of information they contain.

Gwent Archives offers a paid research service. If you are unable to visit us in person, but would like to carry out research, then this can be done for a fee. Details of our service can be given on request.

If you choose to visit us, contact Gwent Archives in advance to reserve a space in our Research Room. Certain records are only available on a Microform machine or a computer, of which we only have a limited number.

Enjoy carrying out your research and remember our friendly Research Room team are available to provide help and advice.

Tithe records are another potentially useful source for tracing ancestors who owned property. Tithe records usually date from around the 1840s and 1850s. Tithe Maps display every individual plot within a given parish. Accompanying **Tithe Apportionments** give details of ownership and occupation for each plot.

STEP 7: WAS YOUR ANCESTOR LOCKED UP?

It may be the case that your ancestor's personal circumstances resulted in them being imprisoned or committed to an asylum.

If your ancestor was a criminal, it may be worth looking through the **Quarter Sessions Record** at Gwent Archives. This series includes Minute Books (1769-1929) and Record Books (1830-1942), Indictments and Presentments (1780-1949) and Calendars of Prisoners (1808-1936). From these records you would be able to find out the names of prisoners, the crimes they had committed and what their punishment was. For less serious crimes Gwent Archives also holds **Petty Sessional Courts Records** (1890s onwards).

If your ancestor was diagnosed with Mental Health issues, then they may have ended up in the Three Counties Asylum in Abergavenny or St Cadoc's Hospital, Caerleon. Gwent Archives hold **Asylum records** including Admissions and Discharge Registers for both, as well as Case Files. These are still being catalogued and are subject to Data Protection legislation. Please speak with a member of staff, who can advise to their availability.



STEP 2: CENSUS

Since 1801 a decennial **Census** has been produced. Since 1841 this has given names, ages and occupations of all the members of a household, as well as their relationships to each other. From 1851 onwards it has also provided places of birth. The Census is available on the *FindMyPast* and *Ancestry* websites. There is a 100-year closure period with the Census, so at the time of going to press the latest Census to be available is the 1911 Census.

Gwent Archives also hold copies of the 1841-1901 Censuses for the county on Microfiche with associated indexes.

STEP 3: BIRTHS, MARRIAGES AND DEATHS

Since 1 July 1837 births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales have been registered centrally. The Indexes for these, known as the General Register Office Index (or St Catherine's House Index), are available on *Find My Past* 1837-2005, arranged alphabetically by quarter for each year. The information given in an index entry will enable you to apply for the full Birth, Marriage or Death certificate of an ancestor. Depending on the nature of the certificate, they can provide information such as full names, exact dates, parents' names, occupations, addresses, cause of death.

Certificates can be obtained from the local registrar of the district named on the GRO Index or the General Register Office itself. They can be contacted at General Register Office, PO Box 2, Southport, Merseyside PR8 2JD. Certificates can also be purchased online at www.direct.gov.uk/gro

STEP 4: WHAT IF YOUR ANCESTOR WASN'T REGISTERED?

If an ancestor does not appear to be registered or they were born, married or died before the 1 July 1837, then there are alternative sources to try.

One of the most frequently consulted sources at Gwent Archives is our collection of **Parish Registers**. We hold registers of baptisms, marriages and burials for most of the parishes in the area, as well as a few parishes just over the border in Brecknockshire, Glamorgan and Herefordshire. Like certificates, parish registers can provide a lot of information. Parish registers are not usually indexed, but Gwent Archives do hold transcripts for some parishes, and in the near future fully indexed Monmouthshire parish registers will be appearing on *FindMyPast*.

Allied to parish registers, we also hold photocopy **Bishop's Transcripts** for some parishes. These were contemporary copies of parish registers filed annually by the parish clerk to the diocesan registrar. These can be especially useful if there is gap in the parish registers or an entry is illegible.

If your ancestor was not an Anglican, then Gwent Archives also holds **Non-Conformist Registers**. We hold registers for denominations including Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists and Catholics. Many pre-1837 registers are available on Microfilm, as the originals are at The National Archives, London.

To help locate the date and place of an event e.g. Baptism, Gwent Archives has access to the **International Genealogical Index**, compiled by the Church of Latter Day Saints. This can be searched free of charge at www.familysearch.org or by using the Microfiche copies in our Research Room.

STEP 5: WAS YOUR ANCESTOR POOR?

Ancestors who were dependent on assistance are often recorded. The authorities involved often left detailed records. Up until the mid-1830s the local parish provided relief or shelter to the needy. Surviving records may be found amongst the **Parish Records** we hold at Gwent Archives, and may include settlement and removal papers giving details of an ancestor's transfer from one parish to another. Early poor law records may also be found amongst **Quarter Sessions Records** such as Bastardy returns for illegitimate children who were feared to be a potential burden on the parish. Our [Subject Index](#) picks up many of these records under the terms *Charities, Poor, and Overseers of the Poor*.

The Poor Law Act of 1834 enabled parishes to group together into unions. Poor Relief was gradually taken over by Boards of Guardians. Gwent Archives holds **Board of Guardians Records** for all the Unions in the county up until 1930, when powers were transferred to County and County Borough Councils.

STEP 6: WAS YOUR ANCESTOR RICH?

If your ancestor held property, then there is a good chance that it was devised to others in a will. Gwent Archives holds a collection of draft and copy **Wills**. We also have an index of pre-1858 Wills held at the *National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth*.

Gwent Archives also holds other **Title Deeds**, showing evidence of the transfer of property. Your ancestors may have been one of the parties involved. As well as giving details of ownership, Title Deeds can also provide useful information about family relationships.