

TRACING WARWICKSHIRE ANCESTORS

Start by collecting as much information from members of the family and work back from the earliest event for which you have definite evidence. Although much is now available online, visiting a record office is still important for expert knowledge and access to a wealth of primary and secondary sources. This leaflet deals with the types of record most often used by family historians, although there are many others which may be worth consulting, and about which the staff of the Record Office will be happy to advise you.

Church of England Parish Registers: These are one of the most important sources of information for anyone tracing the history of their family, especially prior to the introduction of civil registration in July 1837. They contain entries for baptisms, marriages, and burials back to 1538, however some early registers do not survive, and in many parishes they do not start until after 1600 and even 1700. These registers provide information about many Warwickshire people in the past, and the Record Office hold the registers, (which are not in current use) for parishes in the historic County, including Coventry but excluding Birmingham. A further exception to this is Stratford-upon-Avon where the original registers are held by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Record Office; however, we do hold microfilm copies of the majority of these.

The IGI (International Genealogical Index): Compiled by The Church of the Latter Day Saints (The Mormons), the IGI contains nearly 2 million entries for Warwickshire people, and although it is by no means complete and deliberately excludes burials, it does cover a high proportion of baptisms and marriages between the 17th century and the 1870s. The current IGI indexes for the whole of the United Kingdom and Ireland are available on microfiche, and also on the internet at www.familysearch.org, which is accessible free at Warwickshire County Record Office.

Warwickshire Burial Index: A complete index of Warwickshire burials from 1701-1837, (excluding Birmingham) is administered by the Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry. Enquiries should be made to burials@bmsgb.org

The National Burial Index: The third edition of this index on CD contains over 18 million entries from the 16th to 21st centuries for 50 counties in England and Wales and is available on request in the searchroom. (Not comprehensive)

www.ancestry.co.uk and www.findmypast.co.uk: These websites have become one of the most useful sources for access to Warwickshire parish registers since they were made available to view online. Researchers can search and view entries from parish registers of baptisms, marriages and burials up to 1911. This can be done either through subscription, pay per view or free at the County Record Office and local libraries.

Bishops Transcripts of Parish Registers: Where the registers contain gaps, or are missing altogether, it is worth checking the Bishops' Transcripts. These are held at Worcester for parishes in the south west of the County and at Lichfield for those in the north and east.

Marriage Bonds and Allegations: Many people chose to marry away from their home parish, especially in the 17th and 18th centuries, and records of these, (where they survive), contain more information than is often found in parish registers. These are held at Worcester and Lichfield Record Offices.

Nonconformist and Roman Catholic Registers: Nonconformists were those who worshipped outside the Established Church. The availability and time period covered by the nonconformist registers will vary and in many cases will post date the Act of Toleration of 1689. A list of registers held at the County Record Office including Roman Catholic registers can be found on our website: <http://heritage.warwickshire.gov.uk/warwickshire-county-record-office/county-record-office-collections/>. Following the Non Parochial Registers Act of 1840 all nonconformist registers were required to be surrendered to the Registrar General and can now be searched online at www.bmdregisters.co.uk (£). For further information about Catholic registers and their whereabouts contact the Catholic Archivist at Cathedral House, St Chads, Queensway, Birmingham B4 6EU Tel: 0121 236 2251. For information about Nonconformist registers see 'Tracing Nonconformist Ancestry' by D J Steele @ D.312.Ste (reference shelves).

Poor Law Records. Prior to 1834 the Poor Law was administered by the parish and its officers, and the records can be found amongst the parish collections. Following the New Poor Law Act of 1834 the responsibility passed to the newly formed Poor Law Unions, each one run by a Board of Guardians. Many of the records for this period are in collection CR 51.

Warwickshire Poor Law Index in collaboration with Coventry FHS: This is a comprehensive index of parish Poor Law records for Warwickshire, containing around 35,000 names, and is available pay per view or free at the County Record Office at www.midlandshistoricaldata.org (FHS indexes)

Civil Registration: From 1st July 1837 every birth, marriage and death in England and Wales was required to be registered with the local Registrar. Name indexes were compiled quarterly, and microfiche copies of these from 1837 to 1950 can be searched at Warwickshire County Record Office. These indexes are also available for free at the Record Office through www.ancestry.co.uk, www.findmypast.co.uk and www.freebmd.org.uk. Copy certificates can only be obtained from the relevant local Register Office or Certificate Services Section, General Register Office, PO Box 2, SOUTHPORT, PR8 2JD, Tel: +44 (0)300 123 1837. Further details can be found at www.gro.gov.uk

Monumental Inscriptions: Warwickshire County Record Office has an index of most of the surviving monumental inscriptions for the churches and churchyards across the county. These indexes are available in the local studies area.

Municipal Cemeteries: By the mid nineteenth century churchyards in the towns and cities were becoming very full and as a result public or municipal cemeteries were introduced. Initially these were generally established and run as commercial ventures, but after the passing of legislation in the 1850s and 1860s enforcing the closure of urban churchyards, municipal cemeteries became the rule. Records of some Warwickshire municipal cemeteries have been deposited at the record office, others are held elsewhere. Please see the guide, 'Warwickshire Cemetery Records'. This can be found in the local studies area.

Warwick Cemetery Burial Slips: These burial slips date from 1859 when the cemetery opened, to 1968; they are records of internment and in some cases have supporting documentation. They are available to search and view free at the record office through www.ancestry.co.uk and www.midlandshistoricaldata.org (FHS indexes)

Census Returns: The census returns for 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891 and 1901 for the historic County, excluding Birmingham and a small number of fringe parishes, are available at Warwickshire County Record Office on microfilm and microfiche. Access to all available censuses from 1841-1911 covering all of England and Wales is available to search and view for free through www.ancestry.co.uk and www.findmypast.co.uk. We also hold a small number of earlier censuses for some parishes, which vary in their content.

Wills: The National Probate Index to wills made since 1858 can be searched at www.ancestry.co.uk (1858-1966) and online at <https://probatesearch.service.gov.uk/#wills> (1858-present day). The index is also available on microfiche in the searchroom (1858-1943)

Before 1858, wills were dealt with by the ecclesiastical courts. Most wills made by Warwickshire people were proved at the Dioceses of Worcester or Lichfield and will be found either at Worcester Record Office or Lichfield Joint Record. Indexes are available at the record office along with published indexes to the Prerogative Court of Canterbury wills. The record office does hold a small number of original wills for a few parishes that had their own jurisdiction as well as copies of wills that have come to us through private collections. Maps and other sources are available at the record office to show the division of the county into the probate jurisdictions. See 'Finding Aids and Indexes' in the local studies area.

British Newspaper Archive: The British Newspaper Archive website provides access to searchable digitized archives of British and Irish newspapers, and access is free via any of the public computers at the county record office www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk

Other useful Sources:

Hearth Tax Returns, 1663-1674
Land Tax Returns, 1770s-1832
Electoral Registers, from 1832
Rate Books
Trade Directories and Street Indexes
School Records

Research can be undertaken by our Professional Research Service. Please visit our website for details at <http://heritage.warwickshire.gov.uk/warwickshire-county-record-office/>