Find apprentice ancestors

Discover your forebears who left home to learn their trade with our latest records

From bakers to blacksmiths, tailors to tanners, many of your ancestors with a trade will have begun their working lives with a childhood apprenticeship. You can now learn about the years in which they honed their skills with a brand new collection of records.

Starting an apprenticeship was one of the biggest, and no doubt most intimidating, events in our ancestors' lives. Parents who wanted their children to learn a trade and give them a brighter future had to send them away around the age of seven to live, learn and work with a stranger for the rest of their childhood years. You can now discover more about this important phase of their lives.

The Apprentices' Register, 1710-1811 is the third release in our series of new occupation collections, following our recent railway and postal worker records. The half a million records it contains cover a century of apprentices and their masters. They detail the money given to masters for taking the child into their care and teaching them a trade over a set number of years. These payments were taxed by the Government – the register was set up to keep track of what tax was due.

Within each record in the Apprentices' Register, 1710-1811 you'll be able to find the apprentice's name, the master and the trade they were teaching, the date the tax was paid, and often details of the apprentice's father. After you've discovered your ancestors, you could then track their later careers by finding them in local directories.

If you want to learn more about the history behind the records, check out our exclusive video, featuring insight from Tony Robinson. Watch it now.

The Apprentices' Register, 1710-1811 reveals the important beginnings of your ancestors' working lives. Search the records now.

Top tip

Runaway workers

Apprenticeships could be notoriously hard for young children. Instead of serving their full term, many would often resort to leaving the country to get out of it. See if you can find them in our emigration records.

Get started with… Searching

Find your family's stories quickly and efficiently by making the most of our various search options

Our site is a goldmine of family history information, from 6 billion historical records to 20 million family trees. The best way to pick out the gems about your family is to use our search options.

There are several different ways to search. If you use our main Search page you're looking across all the different records on our site. This is useful if you're not sure where to look, but you can end up with a lot of results to wade through.

Alternatively, choose a category from the Search menu, such as 'Census & Electoral Rolls'. You can then select a particular group of records such as the 1851 UK Census, or a single collection like the Census for England. This is great if you know where and when your ancestors are likely to appear – but you need to be sure of your facts.

Whichever level you search at, you can choose basic or advanced options. The basic options are ideal if you're just getting started, as you can have a guess at a place your ancestor might have lived, and when they may have been born. When you've built up your knowledge of your family, click 'Show advanced', and you can be more precise about places and dates.

Once you've clicked Search you'll see a list of results, with the most likely matches at the top. Look for any that you think are your ancestors, and click on the collection name to see a transcription. If you're still convinced, you can then select 'View original record' to see the historical document.

If you end up with too many results, you can further focus your search at this stage. On the left of the screen, you'll see that you can 'Narrow by category'. You can then go even further, and focus on a single record collection, a particular year or period, or even a specific part of the country.

Of course, if you're still not happy, you can try your search again. You don't need to return to the Search screen to do this – just click 'Edit Search' on the top-left, and you can revise the details there and then, and see the results update before your very eyes.

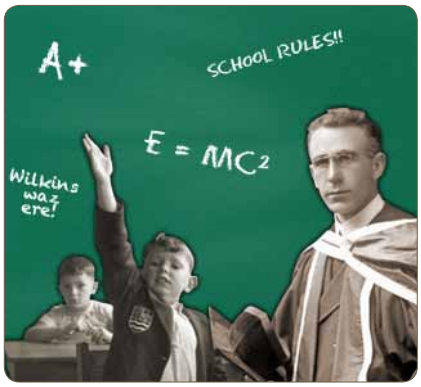
Top tip

Recent searches

If you're logged in as a member, our main Search page provides some handy extra features. Among these are your 'Recent searches' – just click on a name to return to that search, with the details filled in for you.

Back to school!

Sharpen your pencils, pack your lunchbox and get ready for a special week of family history lessons



It's time to get back in the classroom! Forget algebra and the Periodic Table though – we're going to teach you everything you need to discover more about your family's past.

We've put together a full week's timetable of 'lessons', to show you how to make more of our key records and most useful features. From building your family tree and searching censuses on Monday, to using occupation and worldwide records on Friday, there's something new to learn every day.

Each period includes 'new starter' and 'top set' tutorials, so you can learn new skills however much experience you already have. At the end of each lesson you'll find a short 'homework assignment' – these let you try out our tips and tricks while exploring our record collections.

Make sure you keep a note of your answers, because you'll need them at the end of the week. We'll be testing you on what you've learnt, to find out whether you're a family history boffin, or you need a bit of private tuition.

Once you've completed your lessons each day, check out our after-school club at our Facebook page. You can chat about the day's lessons with fellow students and even compare homework notes – but don't give away the answers, unless you want detention!

Plus, look out for 'free periods' every day. Rather than just lounging about in a common room, you can take advantage of some cracking competitions and great giveaways – we'll give you more details through the week.

Term starts on 12th September. Don't be late!

Top tip

Reading list
Get a jump on your fellow students by doing some preparation in our Help & Advice Centre. You'll find articles on all our main records, plus video tutorials to help you find your way around the site.

Have you tried… social networking

Share your hobby with us and your fellow members at our blog, Facebook and Twitter pages

Discovering your family's past is a personal hobby. But sharing it with others can make it even more fun – and give you new leads and ideas for your search. We've provided a few different places online to help you do exactly that.

The first of these places is our blog. We regularly post articles to let you know what's happening, both on our site and in the wider family history world. We also invite guest bloggers, from partners like The National Archives to experienced Ancestry.co.uk Advocates.

Any time you have something to share, you can comment on these articles. You might want to give us your opinion, tell us about a recent discovery or ask a related question. You'll usually find that you get a rapid response, from either us or another keen member.

For even more chances to chat, try our Facebook page. We have a growing community of Facebook friends – to join in just click the button to Like us.

You can then post comments and questions on anything that takes your fancy, or respond to other members' comments. We have interesting conversations about everything from our latest record releases to the day's news. Plus, we regularly arrange special Facebook events – we recently invited Tony Robinson to spend a morning answering members' questions on occupation records.

Our third hive of social activity is our Twitter page. Sign up to Twitter and follow us, and you'll be among the first to know about any new record collections, and any other news we may have. You can also see what other people around the world are saying about us – and join the debate.

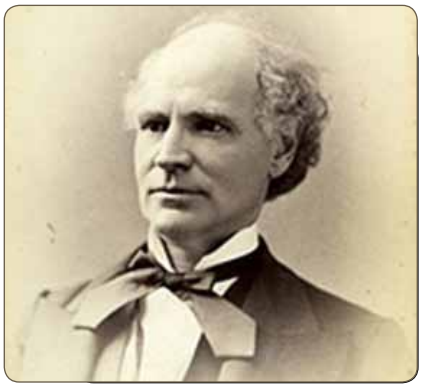
Top tip

Stay *Updated*

Don't forget that you can also make sure you hear about our news and record releases by signing up to our monthly newsletter, ***Updated***. Sign up now

Ask the experts

Our resident professionals answer your questions on all things genealogical. This month, fishing forebears and military medals



Welcome to our Ask the experts section. This is where we answer your questions on all things genealogical, so if you have any pressing queries, send us your questions now*.

If your question doesn't appear here, you can email our Member Services team at support@ancestry.co.uk or call 0800 404 9723, and they'll help you with your research.

This month's questions are answered by professional genealogist Doreen Hopwood and military historian Paul Reed.

Bios

Doreen Hopwood is a professional genealogist for the City of Birmingham. She regularly talks at family history events around the country, and lectures in social history at Birmingham University.

Paul Reed is one of the UK's leading military historians. He has written books on both World Wars, and contributes regularly to family history magazines. He also works as a historical consultant for the BBC, on programmes including Who Do You Think You Are? and My Family At War.

Question 1

Fishing for clues

We're trying to trace our ancestors who were born in the Plymouth area, but one married a girl in Great Yarmouth and their wedding certificate states that the groom and his father were both fishermen. Please can you tell me if the census was carried out on fishing boats (or for the Merchant Navy)? If so, how can I find them please?

Tim Whittaker

Answer

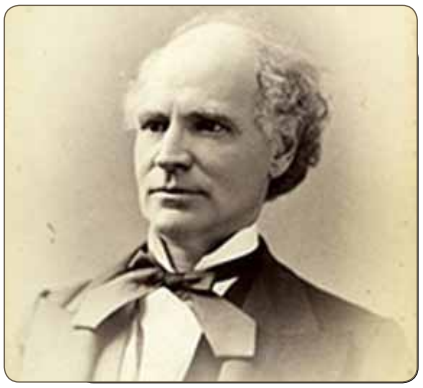
Recording the 'floating population' has always been a problem and there wasn't any consistent method of counting these individuals until the 1891 Census. However, throughout the period for which censuses are available, anyone who was on shore on census night should have been enumerated wherever they were.

The sea-faring population was split into three groups. For the first two, the customs officer was responsible for recording every person on their boat. These include vessels that were in a port on census night, and also those that were in UK coastal waters. The third group were those on board ships in foreign ports or at sea, for whom no full record was made.

Ask the experts (continued)

By 1891, everyone in the first two categories should have been fully recorded. Their entries should appear at the end of the records for the district covering either the relevant harbor, or the nearest coastal town. It would therefore be helpful to know the name of the vessel.

Doreen Hopwood



Question 2

Medal records

I've had a lot of success finding family I never knew I had. I found an uncle Conrad Lutge Gerken, but have hit a brick wall trying to find even a glimmer of his father or brother.

His father was Arthur Conrad Gerken, born 26th December 1884 in Newcastle-under-Lyme. I have a medal from World War I inscribed on the rim 'CH.3219-S- pte AC Gerken RMML'. I've tried really hard to find something to no avail.

The brother was William Gerken, born 10th Jaunary 1901 in Wavertree, Lancashire. I've seen photos of him in Army uniform and a note to his mother from Egypt. But a medal with his name on it says 'mercantile marine', and I doubt he was old enough to be in WWI. My mother gave me this number as his army number: 7891246.

Mavis Neuendorf

Answer

The first medal you have is for a man who served in the Royal Marines. I suspect it actually says 'RMLI' on the rim of the medal, which stands for Royal Marine Light Infantry, the infantry branch of the Royal Marines who served with the Royal Naval Division at Gallipoli and in the trenches of the Western Front in WW1.

The 'CH' prefix indicates he served with the Chatham Division of the Royal Marines – this being where he was originally trained after joining them – and the 'S' means he was a wartime enlistee; by the number it was sometime in 1914/15. Royal Marine medal records are available on Ancestry.co.uk.

RMLI service records are also available from The National Archives' Documents Online site, where you can download them for a small fee. His should give you a comprehensive picture of his Royal Marine service; the ships, postings and shore establishments he served in during the conflict.

The other medal you have sounds like a Mercantile Marine war medal which can also be traced at the Documents Online site. Men as young as twelve served in the Mercantile Marine in WW1, so it could be his.

Paul Reed