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## HC Research Guide Family History How do I start?

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### Start with who you know

Start with yourself and work backwards – parents, grandparents, great grandparents, as far back as you can.

### Begin your search at home

There may be many sources of information already in your possession such as diaries, letters, photographs, the family bible, business papers, scrapbooks, baby books, birth, marriage, and death certificates, legal documents, wills and many other items.

### Talk to your family

Contact members of your family and find out what they might know, particularly older relatives who very often have memories, photographs, heirlooms or documents helpful for family history research.

### Decide the scope of your research

Will you research your direct ancestral lines only? One parent or both? Will you research all descendants of a particular ancestor? You may choose to broaden the scope of your research as you get into it. It's your history.

### Use charts to help visualise your family story

Generation/pedigree charts and family group sheets are useful to record what is known and to see what is unknown. Fill in all the dates, places and other details that you know. Add information as more is found.

### Organise your information

As you start gathering information about your ancestors from family members you might be surprised by how much material you quickly accumulate. It is useful to set up a filing system, both to safely store your collection and to allow you to easily retrieve an individual item or items as required.

### Methods of organising

- **Computer word documents/spreadsheets** – Create your own filing system using last names as folder names. Write up all the information you know in word documents and file in individual folders. Scan documents found into folders. Make sure you back up your work.
- **Using pen and paper** - Use folders, files, or exercise books. Have one book or folder for each person or branch of the tree. Use a pedigree chart to index and number your ancestors.
- **Family tree information sheets** – Ancestry and FamilySearch have different types of documents and charts you can download and print can be used to record family details. We have copies available.
- **Family tree software** - There are many options, some paid and some free. Choice have completed an article on family tree resources and software. See the article below:  
<https://www.choice.com.au/electronics-and-technology/internet/using-online-services/articles/online-family-history-services>

### Collecting and preserving the information you find

Make copies of certificates and important documents while keeping the originals safe. Share your information with family members and other researchers.

## Verifying information

There is a lot of information available online, in publications and family stories that may or may not be accurate. Use original records like birth, death, or marriage certificates to verify if this information is correct before you go any further.

## How do I find out more?

Read books and journals to find out what sources are available, and how to use them effectively.

National, state and local libraries and heritage centres, including Geelong Heritage Centre, have extensive collections of local histories, guidebooks, indexes and records. For further information:

- **Kim barne thaliyu / Geelong Heritage Centre** <https://www.grlc.vic.gov.au/glhc/heritage-centre>
- **State Library Victoria:** <https://guides.slv.vic.gov.au/>
- **Public Record Office Victoria:** <https://prov.vic.gov.au/explore-collection/explore-topic/family-history>
- **National Library of Australia:** <https://www.nla.gov.au/research-guides/family-history>

## Birth, Death & Marriage (BDM) Certificates

These are important as they contain information that was given by your ancestor (or someone who likely knew your ancestor) to the officer who recorded it.

- You can get BDM certificates from Australian State Registry Offices. The cost varies for each state.
- Victorian births, deaths and marriages: <https://www.bdm.vic.gov.au>

## Things to remember when researching your family

- Never believe everything on a certificate – eg. People may give an incorrect age.
- Never completely trust the spelling of surnames, place names, etc.
- Always check first and last name variants.
- Remember that everything is only speculation until verified.

## Some further tips

- Label all photographs with names, places, dates and original sources (soft pencil only on the back). If you obtained a photo from a family member, include the details to keep provenance intact.
- Keep documents like certificates, wills, titles, in a safe place away from light, excessive temperature changes and humidity. Use acid-free paper/tissue/photo albums for storage. Tell someone where your treasures are stored.
- Write or audio record your life story. Ask older family members to record their lives.
- Remember someone, sometime is going to want to know who their ancestors were, what they did, where they came from, and YOU can help keep your family history alive.

## We can help

Access indexes for births, deaths and marriages, burial registers, immigration records and our significant heritage collection (including images, rate books, directories and much more) in our research room:

Wadawurrung Country, Level 3 of Geelong Library & Heritage Centre, 51 Little Malop Street, Geelong VIC 3220  
Drop ins are welcome, we're open 10am – 4pm, Tuesday to Friday. You can also [book an appointment](#) online.

Website: <https://www.grlc.vic.gov.au/glhc/heritage-centre>

Email: [heritagecentre@grlc.vic.gov.au](mailto:heritagecentre@grlc.vic.gov.au)

Phone: (03) 4201 0630

