

Preserving the Past for the Future

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Family History and Family Stories

Making Decisions

Think about:-

WHY you are doing this

WHO you are doing this for

WHICH aspect of your family's history, or which branch of the family, you will work on first

WHAT format you will choose (there are pros and cons of each)

Consider:- Cost, longevity, appeal to a particular audience, expertise required

Formats include:- Books or ebooks, Articles/short biographies, Websites or

Blogs, Videos, Power Point/Slide Shows, Displays, Various 'Outside the Box' methods

And WHAT you will include

Where you will start and stop?

Chronological or thematic?

Backwards or forwards?

Everything you know or the 'exciting bits'?

Overall theme?

Include research trail?

Faction?

Academic or popular?

WHEN you will do this

Set a realistic deadline and sub deadlines - Chapter 1 by x. Finish by y.

HOW you will organise your project

Collating Notes - Family Tree, List of characters, Biographies and

Chronologies, Context.

Time line for each ancestor - add local and national events to personal timeline.

From start keep record of:- Sources - documentary, books, websites, people

Acknowledgements

National and Local Context

National Context:- Royalty, Politics, War, Religion, Science, The Arts, Special Events

Timelines:- www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/ www.information-britain.co.uk/famousdates.php
www.britainexpress.com/History/index.htm

Bertram, Neil and Smith, Angela *Tracing Your Family History Using the UK Historical Timeline* Pen and Sword 2021

Grun, Bernard *The Timetables of History* Simon and Schuster 3rd edition 1991

History Year By Year Dorling Kindersley 2011

Wikipedia

Local Context:- Terrain, Neighbours, Schools, Shops, Businesses, Farms, Fairs and Markets, Transport, Church, Pub, Weather, Local Events.

Finding out about the Locality:- Vision of Britain www.visionofbritain.org.uk

Local history groups:- www.local-history.co.uk/index.html <http://one-place-studies.org>

<http://oneplacestudy.org> www.genuki.org.uk The British Association for Local History

www.balh.co.uk The Community Archives and Heritage Group www.communityarchives.org.uk

Robert and Elizabeth Blatchford's *Family and Local History Handbook* (Robert Blatchford

Publishing Ltd. issued periodically) www.genealogical.co.uk

General View of Agriculture

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_View_of_Agriculture_county_surveys

Occupations

Finding ancestors' occupations from:- certificates, censuses, parish registers, wills, leases, directories, newspapers, advertisements.

Books and Websites:- Shire publications www.shirebooks.co.uk

Milward, Rosemary *A Glossary of Household, Farming and Trade Terms from Probate Inventories* 3rd edition Derbyshire Record Society 1977

Raymond, Stuart *Trades and Professions: the family historians' guide* Family History Partnership 2011

Raymond, Stuart *Words from Wills* Raymond 2004

Waters, Colin *A Dictionary of Old Trades, Titles and Occupations* Countryside Books 2002

www.familyresearcher.co.uk/glossary/Dictionary-of-Old-Occupations-Index.html

www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk/glossary

www.taths.org.uk Tools and Trades History Society - also lists museums

Social Context

Few, Janet *Coffers, Clysters, Comfrey and Coifs: the lives of our seventeenth century ancestors* The Family History Partnership 2012

Houses:- <https://heritagecalling.com/2016/09/20/a-brief-introduction-to-vernacular-houses/>
www.buildinghistory.org/style/index.shtml includes all eras of domestic building for all parts of the country plus bibliography.

Furniture:- Fussell, G E *The English Rural Labourer; his home, furniture, clothing & food, from Tudor to Victorian times* Batchworth Press 1949

Gilbert, Christopher *English Vernacular Furniture 1750-1900* Yale University Press 1991

Clothing:- Wearing- Making - Laundering

Grafton, Carol Belanger *Victorian Fashions: A Pictorial Archive with Over 1000 Illustrations of Women's Fashions from 1855-1903* Dover Publications 2000

Styles, John *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* Yale University Press 2008

www.fashion-era.com/index.html

Food:- Utensils for cooking and eating - Cooking methods - Storage - Preserving

Hartley, Dorothy *Food in England* Piatkus 2009

Tannahill, Reay *Food in History* revised edition Penguin 1988

Prices and Wages:- www.measuringworth.com/calculators/ppoweruk

Illness and Medicine:- www.localhistories.org/medicine.html

Creighton, Charles *A History of Epidemics in Britain: Volume 1 From AD 664 to the extinction of the plague* 1894 reprinted Cambridge University Press 2013

Creighton, Charles *A History of Epidemics in Britain: Volume 2 From the extinction of the plague to the present time* 1894 reprinted Cambridge University Press 2013

Few, Janet *'Til Death Us Do Part: causes of death 1300-1948* Gould publishing 2015

Illustrating Your Family History

Photographs Old and New:- Of people - names, dates and locations if possible. Of places - homes, churches, gravestones, businesses. Of events. Of tools. Of clothes and uniforms. Of ships. Of mementoes.

Postcards:- Be aware of copyright

Maps:- Commercial or your own? Illustrate voyages and migrations - be aware of copyright

Documents:- Think about how many to include - be aware of copyright issues

Family Trees:- Large or small? Beware of including living people

Books and Websites

Barratt, Nick *Nick Barratt's Guide to your Ancestors' Lives* Pen and Sword 2010

Blanchard, Gill *Writing Your Family History* Pen and Sword 2014

Few, Janet 'Telling your Family's Story' in *Who do you Think you Are? Magazine* May 2023

Fitz-Hugh, Terrick V H *How to Write a Family History* Alpha Books 1988

Titford, John *Writing up your Family History: a do-it-yourself guide* Countryside Books 2003

Granny's Tales www.grannystales.co.uk

Publishing

Lynnmore, Michael *Publish your Genealogy* Kindle Publishing—available on Amazon as an ebook
www.lulu.com www.smashwords.com www.blurb.co.uk

Amazon self-publishing https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/1/print-on-demand

Ingram Spark print on demand www.ingramspark.com/plan-your-book/print/print-on-demand
www.selfpublishingbooks.co.uk/Self-Publishing-a-Book/Print-on-Demand

The speaker's 5 week online course *Are you Sitting Comfortably? Writing and Telling your Family History* run by Pharos Teaching and Tutoring www.pharostutors.com begins on 20 April 2026.

Heirlooms

Questions to ask of any object

Where was this found?

What was found with it?

Has that context been altered or disturbed in any way?

What does the object tell us about the way it was made and used and what can we learn about the people who owned it?

and of any source

Who created this?

What was its purpose?

Is this an original source or a derivation?

When was this created, how close in time to the event it is telling us about?

How accurate is this likely to be? Is it free from historical bias?

Hamlett, Jane and Few, Janet *Heirlooms : postcards, photos and papers* Really Useful Podcast
www.exploreyourgenealogy.co.uk/really-useful-podcast-series-5

Granny's Tales www.grannystales.co.uk

Few, Janet *Remember Then: women's memories of 1946-1969 and how to write your own* Family History Federation (2012)

Lillios, Katina L. 'Objects of Memory: the ethnography and archaeology of heirlooms' in *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* Vol. 6.3 (1999) pp. 235-262

Wilson, Bee, *Death, Divorce and the Magic of Kitchen Objects: how to find hope in loss* The Guardian 2025 www.theguardian.com/food/2025/apr/29/death-divorce-loss-kitchen-objects

Woodham, Anna; King, Laura; Gloyn, Liz; Crewe, Vicky and Blair, Fiona 'We are What we Keep: the family archive, identity and public/private heritage' in *Heritage and Society* Vol. 10.3 (2017) pp.203-220

Photographs

Things to think about

Do we prefer the studio portrait or the candid shot?

Does it make a difference to how we feel about the image and the person, if they are attractive?

Does a family resemblance make a difference?

Do we feel closer to ancestors whose images we possess?

Does our reaction to an image change if it is someone we knew in real life?

Are family photographs more important if we have very few living relatives?

Why were photographs taken?

What does an image tell us about family dynamics?

Do images of our family help us to create a sense of our own identity? Do they give us that feeling of belonging?

Think about how you store, display and most importantly share, family photographs.

When you label photographs, don't just put names, breathe life into the images by associating them with the stories.

The Story of a Photograph Album https://dc5e6185-3d78-4061-8b79-0cd365d8a7b0.filesusr.com/ugd/d63e92_ae9a81a817364dbfbf515c39f287014c.pdf

Photographers of Great Britain and Ireland – Dating Old Photographs
www.cartedevisite.co.uk/dating/

Photo Tree - Identifying Nineteenth Century Photo Types <http://phototree.com/identify.htm>

The Photo Managers – Be a Photo Curator <https://thephotomanagers.com/photo-curator/>

HeartWork Organizing – How to Curate your Photo Collection

<https://heartworkorg.com/2021/04/09/how-to-curate-your-photo-collection/>

Harvard Art Museums - Troubling Images: Curating Collections of Historical Photographs
www.youtube.com/watch?v=fod5sQjxLwY

Memories

Our family history does not begin with our grandparents; we should record details about our own lives as avidly as we do those of our ancestors. We find it all too easy to ignore writing our own life stories, we put it off because there are all those interesting ancestors to pursue instead and because we think we have plenty of time to get around to this one day. Imagine how thrilled we would be to find that grandma wrote her memories down. Our descendants might be equally excited if we preserved our own reminiscences for their benefit.

So how should we go about this? The important thing is to make a start. Be aware that memories will flash into your mind at odd moments. Make sure that you always have some method of jotting these down. This will probably mean that you need a notebook and pencil by your bed at night. If you are a hoarder, sort through your photographs, documents, diaries and souvenirs; perhaps assembling them in some kind of chronological order. You will need to create a rough timeline, recording personal milestones and perhaps any local, national or international events that impacted on your life.

When it comes time to actually put fingers to keyboard, there are two basic approaches. You either write a chronological account, 'first I was one, then I was two, then I grew up' and so on, or, alternatively, you write thematically. Which of these you opt for is obviously a matter of personal choice and I would not want to deter anyone by being prescriptive. What I will say is that, firstly, whichever approach you decide upon, you will need to create some form of chronology. I would however suggest that trying to write a chronological account is probably not going to be the easiest way for you to achieve the aim of recording your memories. Although what springs to mind, when people first decide that they should write their life story, is to produce a chronological account, a thematic approach is equally valid. This requires you to look at a range of topics. These might include, for example: schooldays, family, work, clothes, homes, leisure and hobbies, holidays and outings and many other options. It is much easier to dredge up those memories if you concentrate on a topic and it also helps to avoid repetition. The resulting account is also likely to be much more interesting for your potential readers.

The best advice with any major project such as this, which may appear daunting, is to 'divide and rule'. Staring at a blank sheet of paper, or an open document on a computer, headed 'My Life Story', is unlikely to inspire you. Even a subheading, 'My School Days', is not much better. If you consider a series of smaller-scale subjects, you will find the project much more manageable. You could, for example, spend ten minutes or so writing about school dinners, or school uniform. This makes the project achievable without the need to devote significant amounts of time to it at one sitting. You do, of course have to come up with these precise topics. In some ways, they may be similar to questions that you might ask your older relatives when interviewing them about their lives. Think what you would like to have known about great granny and remember that this may be exactly what your great grandchildren would want to know about you.

When you have come up with the sub-headings that you want to use and then the more detailed questions that relate to each topic, do set yourself a realistic deadline. Without that deadline, you are leaving yourself open to procrastination. When I helped eighty women write their memories of 1946-1969, we tackled one topic a month and most found this manageable but it will depend how much time you have to devote to this. You will also need to be prepared to return to 'finished' topics as you are bound to remember something else about food, whilst you are meant to be concentrating on clothes. Incidentally, all the questions that were sent as prompts to the women in my project are included at the end of the appropriate chapter of the book. Even if you do not want to write thematically, you may find it easier to concentrate on a small section of your life at a time.

Do immerse yourself in the era. Speak to friends and relatives to see what they recall, although be aware that siblings often have very different perceptions of the same event. Read books about the time and watch relevant television documentaries to jog your memory. It can be very helpful to undertake a project such as this as a small group, so you can share your memories of a particular topic.

If you have reservations about the actual writing process, try not to be overly concerned about spelling, grammar and writing style. Especially with an autobiography, allowing your own personality to shine through is an advantage. Computer software will prompt you when it thinks you have slipped up with your spelling. Write as you speak; once you have something on paper you can always tidy it up afterwards if necessary. However young you are, start recording your own memories today.

The topics covered by those who took part in the first 'Remember Then' project were:-

Clothes

Homes

Communities

School

Housework

Health and Personal Hygiene

Child Rearing

Toys and Children's Leisure Activities

Youth Culture

Leisure Activities for adults

Festivals and Celebrations

Work and Money

Food and Shopping

Relationships

Attitudes – to religion, politics, race, class, the role of women.

Transport and Communications

National and Local Events that had an impact

To give you an idea of how it is possible to divide a topic up into manageable sections, here are some questions that you could use for the School topic:-

Describe your school(s). What type of schools were these (public, fee paying, single sex or mixed)? For fee paying schools, what were the fees?

Describe the curriculum. Was this the same for boys and girls? Which subjects did you enjoy or dislike and why? What were you good at, or less good at? If there was a stage when you had a choice of subjects, were there expectations about which subjects you would study?

Think about memorable (for good or bad reasons) teachers and lessons. What were relationships with teachers like? What about parent/teacher relations?

How much homework was expected, if any?

What sanctions were there for those who misbehaved?

Mention class sizes and the times of the school day?

Write about school examinations. How were you prepared for these? How was revision handled?

What were the expectations?

Was there pressure to leave or stay on beyond statutory school leaving age? How did this vary with gender or class?

What about playtimes and break times? Did you stay at school for lunch? What were school dinners like? Can you remember playground games or activities?

Mention school trips or outings.

Each topic is broken down in this way in the book. One topic a month has worked well for past participants.

Few, Janet *Remember Then: women's memories of 1946-1969 and how to write your own* Family History Federation (2012)

Granny's Tales www.grannystales.co.uk