

Visiting the Archives

Following the last article, you will hopefully have identified baptisms, marriages and burials of some of your ancestors in the online indexes. The next step is to check the original records from which those indexes were created. If you have an online image of the record, then will already have done this but in many cases this will mean a visit to an archive.

Which archive to visit

For the North East there are 4 main archives:

- Durham Record Office (DRO), County Hall Durham, DH1 5UL
- Northumberland Archives (NA), Woodhorn, Ashington, NE63 9YF
- Tyne & Wear Archives (TWA), Discovery Museum, Newcastle, NE1 4JA
- Palace Green Library (PGL), University of Durham, Durham, DH1 3RM

A brief summary of which parish registers each archive holds is given below:

	Coverage	Website
DRO	Parish registers for the historical county of Durham	http://www.durhamrecordoffice.org.uk/
NA	Parish registers for the historical county of Northumberland	https://www.northumberlandarchives.com/
TWA	Copies of parish registers for parishes in the Tyne and Wear area	https://twarchives.org.uk/
PGL	Bishops transcripts for the ancient Diocese of Durham (includes Northumberland)	https://www.dur.ac.uk/library/asc/

On the website of each archive you will find an online catalogue and/or documents summarising the holdings of the archive.

	Link to information on holdings of Anglican parish registers
DRO	http://www.durhamrecordoffice.org.uk/media/16767/Parish-Registers/pdf/Handlist02ParishRegisters.pdf
NA	https://northumberlandarchives.com/docs/ANGLICAN%20PARISH%20REGISTERS%20-%20reviewed%20November%202017.pdf
TWA	https://twarchives.org.uk/collection/user-guides-and-information Option: Parish Registers on Microfilm
PGL	https://www.dur.ac.uk/library/asc/collection_information/family.records/transcripts/

The National Archives – Discovery Catalogue

The National Archives (TNA) are the archive for England. They are based in Kew, London, and so are not easily visited by someone based in the North East of England. However, this is not an issue as they do NOT hold parish registers. These are held at county record offices such as those described above. However, TNA does have an online catalogue which in addition to its own holdings, includes information on the holdings of archives across England. This catalogue is called “Discovery” and it can be found here:

<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/advanced-search>

Discovery is useful in several ways including:

- Identifying which archive holds the records of interest, particularly if you are looking for records in an unfamiliar area.
- Providing an alternative way to search the holdings of a known archive.
 - This is particularly useful at present as the catalogue of the Northumberland Archives is unavailable due to an upgrade.

Finding the right archive

From census records, some of my ancestors were from the Brampton area of Chesterfield, Derbyshire. A search in Discovery for “Brampton AND parish AND register” gives 334 records.

To the left of the screen is an option to filter for records held by TNA or by Other Archives. Choosing “Other Archives” reduces the number of hits to 170 and also gives a list of the 10 archives holding these records. Since Brampton is in Derbyshire, the Derbyshire Record Office seems likely. Choosing “Derbyshire Record Office” gives 4 records summarised in the table below.

From this, I can be reasonably certain that I need to start by looking at the records held by the Derbyshire record Office.

Description	Reference	Year
St. Peter's District Church, Holymoorside: marriage and service registers , minutes, accounts, corresp and plans	D6578	1949-2009
Old Brampton parish. Records incl registers , burials waste book, terriers, choir attendance registers, churchwardens' accounts, vestry and Parochial Church Council minutes and overseers' accounts	D947	1658-1996
St. Thomas Brampton Parish. records incl service registers, banns and marriages registers , PCC minutes and corresp, account ledgers and financial papers, other minutes and corresp, grave locations, choir attendance registers, faculties	D2443	1906-2014
Manuscript Volume: Derbyshire Collections: Manuscript notes on Derbyshire 1. Abstracts of early deeds relating to Brampton 2. Notes on the Hurt family, church monuments, pedigrees, etc 3. Notes on Revell family	D3287/47/12	Early 19 th century

4. Notes on Winfield family 5. Books and papers amongst the Cotton MSS, British Museum, relating to lead mining 6. Shore family pedigree 7. Notes on tenure of manors in the Honour of Tutbury 8. Notes on 18th cent deeds regarding Broadlow Ash, near Ashbourne 9. Printed notes on Derbyshire history and list of sheriffs of Derbyshire, 1660-1823 10. Notes on history of Matlock 11. Notes from Domesday Book 12. Extracts from parish registers relating to the Coke family Inside front cover: Bookplate of Charles Clarke		
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Note: Typically, a single reference such as “D947” will denote a collection within which there will be lots of items with individual references such as D3287/47/12. These references are hierarchical so item D3287/47/12 is a file in Box 47 (D3287/47) which is part of D3287 Papers of the Gell family of Hopton.

Preparing for your visit

Before visiting the archive, you must check their website for the practical details:

- Make sure they hold the registers for the parish(es) of interest using the catalogues and help documents above
- Opening times.
- Identification requirements.
- Whether you need to book.
 - In the North East you will need to do this at Durham, Tyne & Wear and The University of Durham Special Collections.
 - As parish registers are accessed on microfilm (or sometimes microfiche) you will need to reserve a reader at Durham and Tyne and Wear.
- Whether there is catering onsite or whether you should take a packed lunch
- Some archives limit the type of equipment and amount of paper which you can take in with you

If in doubt, telephone the archive to check.

There are some rules which are common to all archives:

- PENCILS ONLY.
- Coats and bags must be left in lockers and not taken into the archive.

Make a plan of which records you want to check:

- Type
- Parish(es)
- Time frame

On the day

The staff at archives are always very helpful. They will take you through any registration procedure, get you signed in and point you towards the lockers.

Once you are settled then they will show you how to find the correct microfilms and work the microfilm reader.

- Normally there is a ring binder with records listed by location and parish. Within each parish the records are listed by type and by date. Against each record set you will find a microfilm reference – something like “M123”.
- The microfilms are stored in numbered cabinets near to the readers.
- When you take out a microfilm replace it with your numbered seat block. This makes it easier for you to put the microfilm back in the correct place and also lets other people know that someone is already using that microfilm.

Remember to take lots of notes. Include the microfilm and record set references and also any page numbers. You might need to check the record again!

As you scan through the pages it can be useful to note all references to your surname(s) of interest. These people might also be your relatives.

Most archives have a facility to print pages from the microfilms but only on one special machine so you won't be able to print every page. Normally there is a small charge for this service.

HAVE FUN! A visit to an archive can seem intimidating at first with all the strange procedures and rules. However, staff and other users are always friendly and helpful. If you are not sure about something, just ask!!

[After your visit](#)

Try and review your notes and add the information to your tree as soon as you can after your visit and whilst it is still fresh in your mind.

Keep your notes safe in case you need to refer to them again.

Once you have integrated the results of your day, then you can repeat the process to extend your tree back in time.

Disclaimer: This document is intended as a guide to get you started with researching your family history. It is not intended to be comprehensive and Cameo Family History does not accept responsibility for errors and omissions.