

# Genealogy Glossary:

## A guide for family ancestor searches



### A

**Ag lab** – Short for "agricultural labourer", a common occupation listed in UK census records.

**Ancestor** – A person you are descended from, such as a grandparent or great-grandparent.

**Archive** – A place that holds historical documents, often open to the public or researchers.

### B

**Baptism** – A Christian religious ceremony marking entry into the church, often used as a proxy for birth.

**BMD** – Births, marriages, and deaths; core records for building your family tree.

**Brick wall** – A research dead-end where you can't find the next piece of the puzzle.

**Burial** – A record of interment, commonly found in parish registers.

### C

**Census** – A population count taken at intervals (typically every 10 years) to record who lived where and with whom.

**Census substitute** – A record used in place of a missing census, such as tax rolls or directories.

**Civil registration** – Governmental recording of births, marriages, and deaths (began 1837 in England/Wales, 1855 in Scotland).

**Collateral line** – A relative not in your direct line, like an aunt, uncle, or cousin.

### D

**Deed** – A legal document showing property ownership or transfer, sometimes revealing relationships.

**Descendant** – A person who comes from a specific ancestor. For example, your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren are all your descendants.

**Descendant chart** – A diagram showing all descendants of a specific individual.

### E

**Emigration** – The act of leaving one's country to settle elsewhere.

**Enumeration** – The process of listing individuals in the census.

**Enumeration district** – A small geographic area used for census organisation.

### G

**GEDCOM** – A standard file format for sharing family trees between genealogy software programs.

**Genealogy** – The study of family lineages and history.

**GRO (General Register Office)** – The agency responsible for civil registration in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

**Guardian** – A person legally responsible for a child, often appointed after the death of a parent.

### H

**Head of household** – The first person listed on a census return; often the main occupant or family lead.

**Heir** – A person legally entitled to inherit property or assets.



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I

**Illegitimate** – A term historically used to describe a child born to unmarried parents.

**Immigration** – The act of entering and settling in a new country.

**Index** – A searchable summary of records, used to locate originals.

**Indexing** – The process of creating searchable versions of handwritten documents.

**Intestate** – Dying without leaving a valid will.

L

**Land records** – Documents that record land ownership or transfer.

**Lineage** – A direct line of descent from an ancestor.

**Maiden name** – A woman's surname at birth, before marriage.

M

**Manuscript** – A handwritten document like a diary, letter, or family Bible.

**Microfilm** – A photographic method used to store and preserve historical documents.

**Monumental inscription (MI)** – The text on a gravestone or memorial.

N

**Naturalisation** – The legal process of becoming a citizen of a country.

**Non-conformist** – A person whose religious beliefs differed from the state church; often kept separate records.

O

**OPR (Old Parish Registers)** – Scottish church records of baptisms, marriages, and burials before 1855.

**Original record** – The document created at the time of the event, e.g., a birth certificate.

P

**Parish records** – Church registers of baptisms, marriages, and burials, especially before civil registration.

**Patronymic** – A surname derived from a father's first name (e.g. MacDonald = son of Donald).

**Pedigree chart** – A chart that shows your direct line of ancestors.

**Place of origin** – The specific town, village, or parish your ancestor came from.

**Primary source** – A document created at the time of an event (e.g. marriage certificate).

**Probate** – The legal process of dealing with a deceased person's estate, including wills.

R

**Register** – A record book or database of vital events like births or marriages.

**Repository** – A place where historical documents are kept, such as an archive or library.

S

**Secondary source** – Information created after an event, such as published family trees or research notes.

**Sasine (Register of Sasines)** – A Scottish legal record documenting the transfer of heritable property (land, buildings) from 1617 onwards.

T

**Transcript** – A typed or digital copy of a record, often easier to read than the original.



[www.findmyancestors.uk](http://www.findmyancestors.uk)

