



Find your family

by Richard Goss, President, Richmond-Tweed Family History Society



*Picture: Ballina Pioneers at a reunion in 1902.
Source: Richmond River Historical Society.*

In each family there is a storyteller, one who seems to have an urge to find the family ancestors. Maybe in your family you are that person, after all anyone can become a family historian. The first step is knowing that you are the most important person in your research as all exploration of your family history must begin with you.

Today, there are more people than ever before pursuing their interest in family history and genealogy, with two streams of technology transforming our capacity to research our forebears. Online databases give access to billions of digitised records and strings of DNA provide insights into circumstances we expected, or which we had no reason to imagine. As a result, research time and travel have been cut dramatically, while complexity and vulnerability have increased.

Getting started

Beginner researchers can find a 10-step introductory guide to family history on the Richmond-Tweed Family History Society's website: rtfhs.net.au. However, before you start, begin with the end in mind. A goal provides purpose, supports efficiency, and reduces distractions of which there are many because our families are so interesting.

The golden rule is to begin with what you know. Starting with yourself, write down everything you can – when and where you were born; names of your parents, siblings, spouse, children; where you live or have lived; your education, jobs, interests and hobbies. Then do the same for your parents and grandparents.

If you do this for each person in your immediate family, you will be surprised at how much information you have already accumulated.

Every home has loads of official documents, often in boxes in the back of a cupboard. Search through these documents and write down the details and dates of family members' life events. Note-taking is a most important aspect of family history. Information that can't be substantiated is only legend.

Where to from here?

Once you have reviewed the documents in your home it is time to widen the search.

- Birth certificates: find other generations and build up your family tree.
- Marriage certificates: a great resource for additional information to add to your tree. They record the names and ages of the bride and groom, the date and place of the marriage, their occupations, where they lived at the time of the marriage, their parent's names and their father's occupations.
- Death certificates: Much information can be obtained from a death certificate, which provides the date, name, and place a person died, the cause of death, the age of the deceased person and the name of the informant. It also records the deceased person's spouse, the age and place when married, and the parent's names. The certificate will also show if an ancestor died of an illness, an accident or any other unusual circumstance.
- Search the Census: These records give us valuable information about the members of the family, where they were living, their age and marital status, and their occupations – and most importantly, the relationships between the people living under the same roof. These Census records are also helpful in providing a picture of the development of family life and fortunes over a period of time.
- Shipping records: these can reveal a great deal of information about the assisted immigrants apart from the name of the ship, dates and locations of departure and arrival.

About the Richmond-Tweed Family History Society

Members of the Richmond-Tweed Family History Society have been adapting to and capitalising on changes for 39 years. Based at our Marie Hart Library, 6 Regatta Avenue, opposite the Ballina Memorial swimming pool, our research centre provides guidance and assistance in all family history matters for a \$5 contribution. The library is open Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday from 10am-4pm.

The Society meets from February to November at 2pm on the first Saturday of each month at the Ballina Players Theatre, 24 Swift Street.

Visitors are welcome. Attendance is free.