

This guide is designed to help people who have lost contact with a friend, a former work colleague or a relative in the recent past and wish to try and trace them. It is not intended for those compiling their family tree or tracing distant ancestors. The suggestions offered here will give some indication of the information sources available and some ideas about how to approach the problem.

Please note that the British Library neither endorses, nor can be held responsible for, any information provided by external websites or publications listed herein.

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USING TELEPHONE DIRECTORIES

If you are looking for someone in the UK, but do not know the town they are living in, visit your local library and systematically check their set of printed telephone directories. There are several Internet sites which offer access to UK telephone directories, but to use them you need to enter the name town where the person you are looking for might be living:

British Telecom Directory Enquiries

<http://www.bt.com/>

Offers 200 free searches per month, by surname + town or post code. Follow the Directory Enquiries link from the BT home page.

UKphonebook.com

<http://www.ukphonebook.com/>

Search by surname + town.

There are several Internet sites which you can use to access web versions of telephone directories for foreign countries:

Cyndi's List

<http://www.cyndislist.com/>

The Finding People page of Cyndi's List gives hotlinks to online national directories of

individual countries and to one stop gateway sites

Telephone Directories on the Web

<http://www.infobel.com/teldir/default.asp>

Offers over 400 links to white pages, yellow pages, email addresses and fax listings for 184 countries worldwide

Infospace

<http://www.infospace.com/uk/>

Enables you to look for phone numbers and email addresses for residents of the UK, US and Canada

USING MARRIAGE AND DEATH INDEXES

If you are looking for a young person, try searching the **General Register Office's** (GRO) marriage indexes for a possible marriage. The marriage certificate should include the address at which each of the parties married were living when the ceremony took place. You can then check that address in the electoral registers to confirm the names of the residents, who may know the subsequent whereabouts of the couple.

If you suspect that the person you are looking for may have died, try checking the GRO death indexes. Not finding a death entry in the GRO indexes is not conclusive as the person may have died abroad on holiday or on business. It is therefore also worth checking the index of wills kept at the Principal Probate Registry Search Room, First Avenue House, 42-49 High Holborn, London WC1V 6NP.

A guide to how to use the GRO indexes, and where they are available for public consultation, is available on their web site

[<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/research/groindexes/index.asp>].

FreeBMB

<http://freebmd.rootsweb.com/>

An ongoing project which aims to transcribe the Civil Registration Index of births, marriages and deaths, 1837-1983, and make the transcribed records available free via the Internet.

Tracesmart

<http://www.tracesmart.co.uk/>

Computerised birth, marriage and death records, 1984-2002, can be searched via the web site for a charge of £14.95 per ad hoc search.

USING ELECTORAL REGISTERS

The electoral registers are currently available for personal consultation by members of the public in printed form only. The printed registers for each constituency are arranged

by polling district. The arrangement within polling districts is normally by street in alphabetical order, within which properties are in street number order. There are no alphabetical indexes of voters.

Because of this arrangement, the printed electoral registers are of very little use for tracing named individuals. All they can do is help you to establish how long a known individual lived at a given address. The disappearance of a name from the electoral registers usually means that the person has moved home, married or died. The registers will not tell you which.

From 2003, two versions of the electoral register are being produced:

The full version of the register contains names of all voters and is used primarily to support the electoral process. Public access to it is strictly controlled. Individual registers can be seen at local public libraries or at the Office of the local Electoral Registration Officer (ERO), but they must be consulted under supervision and copied solely by means of handwritten notes. You should contact the appropriate ERO to check local access arrangements. Contact details for electoral registration officers in England and Wales can at present only be found under 'Electoral Administration' [<http://www.dca.gov.uk/elections/admin.htm>] on the archived version of the **Department for Constitutional Affairs** web site. These have not been updated since January 2004. Up to date lists are available for **Scotland** [<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/>] and **Northern Ireland** [<http://www.eoni.org.uk/index/contact-us.htm>].

The British Library holds the full version of the printed registers for all constituencies. These may be consulted under supervision by personal visitors to the Reading Rooms, and again copied only by means of handwritten notes. The law also prevents the Library from disclosing any information from the full version over the phone or in writing, so you will have to visit the Reading Rooms in person to use them.

The edited version of the register is available for sale for commercial use for direct marketing, advertising, etc. It leaves out the names of electors who have exercised their right to opt out to protect their privacy. The edited version of the register is not held in printed form by the British Library.

Earlier registers up to 2002 contain the names of all voters. The British Library holds a complete set for the whole country (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) from 1947. Registers for individual constituencies can also be found in local public libraries and record offices, but as a consequence of the **Representation of the People (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2006** (SI 752) and **Representation of the People (Scotland) (Amendment) Regulations 2006** (SI 834), registers that are less than ten years old can only be consulted under supervision by personal visitors and again copied only by means of handwritten notes..

Registers are now compiled in machine-readable form by local authorities. These files are purchased by certain commercial firms who compile databases comprising the contents of all the registers for the country. These databases can be searched by personal name, but are normally priced services. The ones listed here charge comparatively nominal fees.

192

<http://www.192.com/>

This Internet based service allows you to search the edited registers from 2002 to the present and/or the UK telephone directories by personal name.

Info Disk CD-ROM

<http://www.192.com/products/>

Gives access to information on residents of the UK and Ireland based on data from non-current electoral registers and the telephone directories.

Tracesmart

<http://www.tracesmart.co.uk/>

Searches entire electoral register (edited version), computerised birth, marriage and death records, 1984-2002, and Tracesmart's own register of 22 million people. Charge of £14.95 per search.

Locate First

<http://www.locatefirst.com/>

Offers access to the current edited electoral register. You can search by first name, surname, door number, street, village, town, county and/or post code. Fees charged are, again, nominal at around £5.00.

USING MESSAGE POSTING SERVICES

A number of web sites offer facilities for finding people by leaving or viewing messages on 'virtual noticeboards':

Missing You

<http://www.missing-you.net/>

Free service allows you to place a message on their web pages with details of the person you wish to contact. In exchange, you are invited to read messages already posted in case you have information that may help to find someone currently being sought.

Saga Circles

<http://www.saga.co.uk/circles/>

This website for retired people in the UK includes a free service to help 'find friendships past and future'.

Message Home Helpline

<http://www.missingpersons.org/>

A freephone helpline that enables those who have run away to leave a message to be passed on to a relative, social worker or friend.

USING TRACING SERVICES

If all else fails, you may wish to use a fee-based service or charity which specialises in tracing people:

[Adopted Children Register](#)

The Adopted Children Register contains a record of everyone who has been adopted through a court in England and Wales. Web site gives information on applying for adoption certificates, receiving information on original birth details and making contact with adopted people and their relatives.

Adoption Search Reunion

<http://www.adoptionsearchreunion.org.uk/>

This site has been developed by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering to be the first port of call for anyone thinking about researching an adoption that took place in the UK. It contains a searchable database to help people locate adoption records in the UK as well as some in Ireland. Users can search for homes, organisations, staff members and local authorities, and links are provided to where adoption records may now be located.

Finders Keepers

This is an organisation set up to help re-unite those who grew up 'In Care'. It's for old girls and boys, and members of staff, from National Childrens Homes, Barnardo's, C of E Homes, Catholic Homes, etc. They can be contacted *by post only* at:

PO Box 229,

Gt. Missenden.

HP16 0YD

Friends Reunited

<http://www.friendsreunited.co.uk/>

This is a service for finding old school friends. The database lists 28,000 secondary and primary schools and colleges, including many that are now closed, and personal details which former pupils have registered.

Look 4 Them

<http://www.look4them.org.uk/>

This website is the joint initiative of nine reputable organisations which specialise in helping to find missing people, or those who have lost touch with their families.

LookupUK.com

<http://www.lookupuk.com/>

Site offers advice to people looking for lost friends and relatives, and to adoptees and birth parents hoping to contact each other. It offers access to several databases, including telephone directories, e-mail and newsgroups. You can also search the 45,000+ messages posted on the site and leave your own.

My Old Mate

<http://www.myoldmate.net/>

If you are looking for an old friend, enter a name and see if there are any matching records. If you want to be found, enter your details and wait for a response.

National Missing Persons Helpline

<http://www.missingpersons.org/>

NMPH is a UK charity which helps find missing people and supports family and friends

as they wait for news. They run two national helplines, the Missing Persons Helpline and the Message Home Helpline, provide publicity to help find missing people, and attempt to trace them through their network of contacts.

NORCAP - Supporting adults affected by adoption

<http://www.norcap.org.uk/>

NORCAP offers searching assistance, counselling for adoptees and parents and also has a list of approved researchers.

Salvation Army Family Tracing Service

http://www1.salvationarmy.org.uk/uki/www_uki.nsf/vw-dynamic-arrays/79FF668A8768F77480256F19005BE0C0?openDocument

A unique, confidential service for tracing relatives where contact has been lost either recently or many years ago.

Searchline

<http://www.search-line.co.uk/>

Specialises in searching for, finding and reuniting lost relatives, especially those separated by adoption. They also offer an intermediary and counselling service when contact is made.

There are also a large number of commercial tracing agencies and private detective agencies who will search on your behalf for a fee. The **Association of British Investigators** [<http://www.theabi.org.uk/>], or the **Institute of Professional Investigators** [<http://www.ipi.org.uk/>] will supply names and addresses of members in your area who offer a complete tracing service. Tracing services also promote themselves on the web and can be found through any of the major search engines.

USEFUL BOOKS

For general guidance on searching, directories of useful organisations, etc. we suggest you consult:

Rogers, C. D.

Tracing missing persons: an introduction to agencies, methods and sources in England and Wales

Manchester University Press, 1986

Stafford, G.

Where to find adoption records: a guide for counsellors, adopted people and birth parents 3rd ed.

BAAF Adoption and Fostering, 2001

Tracing Missing Persons (PDF format)

http://www.familyrecords.gov.uk/frc/pdfs/missing_persons.pdf

Family Records Centre Factsheet, 2003