INTRODUCTION

This brief 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 numerous new research tools are becoming available and expanding constantly and this guide lists just a small selection of those available. If in the course of your research you discover resource sources that you think should be added to this guide please contact us. Also due to the instability of URLs the British Library cannot guarantee that the URLs will remain stable. The URLs and information provided below were correct on 11th August 2014.

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 of the town where the person you are looking for might be living:

BT The Phone Book
http://www.thephonebook.bt.com
Search by surname + town or post code.
UKphonebook.com  
http://www.ukphonebook.com/  
Search by surname + town. You must register before you can use the service. A small number of free credits are available daily.

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

Cyndi's List  
http://www.cyndislist.com/  
The Finding Living People page of Cyndi’s List gives hotlinks to online national telephone directories of individual countries, and to directories of postal and email addresses as well as to numerous other sources that can be used in your research.

Telephone Directories on the Web  
http://www.infobel.com/teldir/default.asp  
“Infobel uses all media formats to manage, develop and offer a continuously updated database of some 140 million European telephone subscribers.

Numberway  
http://www.numberway.com/  
Free independent and up-to-date guide to telephone directories on the web, covering white and yellow pages, phone books and online directory enquiries.

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, Court 38, Royal Court of Justice, Strand, London WC2A 2LL.

A guide to how to use the GRO indexes, and where they are available for public consultation, is available on the Gov.UK website at https://www.gov.uk/research-family-history or on the UK Government Web Archive.

A set of GRO indexes on microfiche is hosted at the British Library and is available for consultation in the Social Sciences Reading Room.

BMD Index  
http://www.bmdindex.co.uk/  
Searchable online version of the index to the complete range of civil birth, marriage and death records for England and Wales from 1837 onwards. Access is fee-based.
**FreeBMD**

http://www.freebmd.org.uk

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. Free BMD is currently planning on moving the site to new servers and will update the database when that move is completed.

**Peopletracer**

http://www.peopletracer.co.uk

“A leading provider in low cost online people tracing, Peopletracer is a simple, user-friendly people and business searching website” reuniting businesses with customers, relatives and friends.” Access is provided to information from the Electoral Registers, Telephone Directories, Land Registry and Google Maps. Charges vary.

**Tracesmart**

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

Tracesmart Ltd is now a LexisNexis company and operates under the trading name of LexisNexis. It continues to offer a range of services for tracing people. “A powerful web-based tracing and investigation facility that calls upon a wealth of data from covering varying dates, to help trace people and conduct efficient, systematic investigations.” Charges vary.

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**USING ELECTORAL REGISTERS**

The Electoral Register (also known as the Electoral Roll) is the definitive list of persons registered to vote in the UK. The registers are compiled each year by local authorities.

The British Library’s collection of the electoral registers is currently available for personal consultation by members of the public in printed form only. The printed electoral 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.

Since 2003 two versions of the electoral register are being produced:

- Full Electoral Register
- Edited Electoral Register

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.
From 2003 the full version of the register contains names of all voters and is used primarily to support the electoral process. Individual registers can be seen at some local public libraries or at the council’s electoral registration office. Public access to it is strictly controlled. 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 copied only by means of handwritten notes. Information from them cannot be disclosed until ten years after publication. You should contact the appropriate office to check local access arrangements. Contact details for your local electoral registration office can be found on the About My Vote website [http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/]. You can search by postcode or local authority.

The British Library holds the full version of the printed registers for all constituencies. Again these may be consulted under supervision by personal visitors to the Reading Rooms, and 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 until 10 years have passed since its publication, so you will have to visit the Reading Rooms in person to use them. However although the British Library receives new registers from some 35,000 polling districts as they are issued, the sorting and binding of these registers for permanent preservation is a year-long process making them unavailable during this time.

Prior to 2003 it was possible for anyone to buy the full Electoral Register. Since 2003 only 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.

It is not possible to opt out of the full version as it holds details of all electorates.

Registers are now compiled in machine-readable form by local authorities. Data files of the edited version of the register 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. The British Library does not offer this service.

192
http://www.192.com/
This Internet based service allows you to search the edited Electoral Register registers from 2003 to the present, the UK telephone directories and births, marriages and deaths indexes for England and Wales from 1837 (Scotland and Northern Ireland are not included). You can also use the database to see who is looking for you.

Info Disk CD-ROM
This product is no longer available having been replaced by the 192 online system. You will find this product available on Amazon but the original discs were supplied with an activation code which is time limited.
FindMyPast
http://search.new.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/uk-electoral-registers-2002-2014 NB This URL will change each year as the most current register is added

Covers the electoral register 2002-2014. You can search by first name, last name, address and post code. It is worth checking beyond electoral registers as new records are regularly added. Although searching is free a fee is payable in order to view the full records found.

People Trace Online
http://www.peopletraceonline.co.uk/
Offers access to the edited electoral register backed up by their own databases containing an additional 25 million names.

Peopletracer see above

Tracesmart see above

The UK Electoral Roll
http://www.theuкеlectoralroll.co.uk/
Provides searches of the edited UK Electoral Register, births, deaths, and marriages indexes and UK Property Ownership data. The enhanced UK electoral register search claims to provide customers with the address of any UK individual, their phone number, their date of birth and the names of anyone else at the address. Charges vary.

UKroll.com
http://www.ukroll.com/

USING MESSAGE POSTING SERVICES

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

Missing People
http://www.missingpeople.org.uk/
Missing People, a UK charity provides support for missing children, vulnerable adults and families and can assist with searches for a missing person using a network of confidential contacts. These contacts will not disclose the address of the missing person, It provides a 24-hour service for recording sightings of missing persons, helpline and email address that enable those who have run away or gone missing to leave a message to be passed on to a relative, social worker or friend.

Missing You
http://www.missing-you.net
This site is under new ownership from 2015.
USING TRACING SERVICES

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

Adoption Contact Register
https://www.gov.uk/adoption-records/the-adoption-contact-register
The Adoption Contact Register puts adopted people and their birth relatives in touch with each other, if that is what they both wish.

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.

Friends Reunited
http://www.friendsreunited.co.uk/
This is a service for finding old friends from school, university, clubs, sporting activities, the armed forces, workplaces and even pubs. The database contains profiles which people associated with any school, university, club, pub, etc. have registered.

Look 4 Them
http://www.look4them.org.uk/
This website is the joint initiative of seven 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/
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 and email directories, the electoral registers, and births, marriages and deaths indexes. You can also search the 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.

Missing People see above

NORCAP - Supporting adults affected by adoption
http://www.baaf.org.uk/media/norcap-contact-register-moves-baaf
NORCAP went into administration and ceased trading in January 2013. The electronic data held on NORCAP’s contact register is temporarily in the guardianship of BAAF (British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering).
Salvation Army Family Tracing Service
http://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/uki/FamilyTracing
A unique, confidential service for tracing relatives where contact has been lost either recently or many years ago.

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.
BAAF Adoption and Fostering, 2001

Tracing Missing Persons (PDF format)
http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/looking-for-person/living-person.htm
Part of the National Archives website is called: Looking for records to help you trace a living person. Otherwise The National Archives is not the place to go for information to help you trace a living person.

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