

SOCIAL SCIENCES COLLECTION GUIDES

TRACING LIVING PEOPLE

www.bl.uk/subjects/national-and-international-government-publications

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 links will not break. The URLs and information provided below were correct on 24th January 2023.

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 SOCIAL MEDIA

One method that can be used to trace living people is to research their online presence. Any information you already possess including their name, job, profession or location of residence can potentially be used as the basis for your search criteria or as a means of narrowing down your search results.

There are many techniques that can be used to assist with retrieving information about individuals online. Many social media sites allow internet users to view versions of their users' profiles without needing to create an account themselves. The images used in these profiles can also be checked against those provided in other websites. For further information on how to do this and for guidance on using social media as an investigative tool please refer to the works cited in the 'useful books' section of this document. The British Library is able to provide access to a wide range of resources on using investigative methods and if in doubt the reference services team will be happy to assist.

It must of course be noted that any information you obtain from a freely available online platform does not constitute absolute proof of identity. Furthermore different individuals have different privacy settings on their accounts indicating the amount of information they wish to communicate with the general public. As with any form of investigation, the more a piece of information can be cross-checked against multiple and different sources the more reliable it is likely to be. For tips on avoiding fake accounts and exercising critical thinking and argumentative reasoning when assessing the information you find online please refer to the resources listed at the end of this guide.

Facebook

<https://en-gb.facebook.com/>

Allows users to create profiles and share personal information including the area they live in, contact details, the organisation they work for and more.

LinkedIn

<https://www.linkedin.com/>

A professional networking site containing user profiles, often with details of individuals' career history and sometimes contact details.

Twitter

<https://twitter.com/>

A microblogging and networking site where users are able to communicate with other members and post content viewable by the general public.

Instagram

<https://www.instagram.com/>

A social media network also owned by Facebook where users can post images or videos and message groups and individuals.

Alongside the more well-known websites listed above, platforms dedicated to specific professions as well as personal interests and hobbies may also prove fruitful when searching for individuals. One example is the website Goodreads [<https://www.goodreads.com/>] which is dedicated to books and provides access to reviews and user profiles. When searching online you may wish to extend the parameters of your search beyond social media sites. If you happen to know the profession of the person you are looking for or the organisation they work for then it might be possible to find out more on organisational databases or websites. For example, if you know that the person you are looking for works as a chartered accountant then it might be worthwhile searching for them in the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales' website which allows users to search an online database of its members. Before beginning your journey you might find it useful to collect or make a note of all of the information you already possess about an individual and think about potential resources that can be consulted.

USING TELEPHONE DIRECTORIES

There are several Internet sites that 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

<https://www.thephonebook.bt.com/>

Search by surname + town or post code.

UKphonebook.com

<https://www.ukphonebook.com/> Search by surname + city, town or postcode. You must register before you can use the service. You get five free searches per day. The database now includes the edited electoral roll, consumer data and information from Companies House and the Land Registry as well as phone directories.

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

Cyndi's List

<https://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

<https://www.infobel.com/>

With a global digital platform, Kapitol-Infobel publishes and continually updates a

database of some 350 million telephone subscribers and 186 million businesses worldwide.. Established in 1995, Kapitol is the first business worldwide to have developed and published an online telephone directory.

This Number

<https://www.thisnumber.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 probate records to see if you can locate a will. This can be done online by following the instructions at <https://www.gov.uk/search-will-probate> and completing an on-screen form. .

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>.

A set of GRO indexes on microfiche is hosted at the British Library and is available for consultation in the Social Sciences Reading Room. Birth, marriage and death records are also available on subscription-based genealogical websites FindMyPast (<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/>) and Ancestry (<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/>). FindMyPast and its full records are accessible in the British Library reading rooms. Outside of the reading rooms searching is free but a fee is required in order to view the full records.

BMD Index

<https://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

<https://www.freebmd.org.uk/>

An ongoing project which aims to transcribe the Civil Registration Index of births, marriages and deaths, 1837-1997, and make the transcribed records available free via the Internet. Transcription is done by volunteers and is not complete for the whole period.

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 have been produced:

- Full Electoral Register
- Edited or Open 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. It is possible to find the electoral registration office using the following website: <https://www.gov.uk/contact-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 the electoral services team at your local council can be found on The Electoral Commission's website [<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk>].

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 electors.

Electoral data is now compiled by local authorities using electoral management systems. These internal databases are used to support the electoral process and are not available for public consultation. Data files of the edited or open version of the register are then 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

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

This Internet based service allows you to search the edited or open Electoral Register 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) and company and director reports. You can also use the database to see who is looking for you and to carry out identity checks.

FindMyPast

https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records-in-census-land-and-surveys/and_electoral-rolls

Covers the open electoral register 2002- (NB Please note that the holdings will change each year as the most current register is added). 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. FindMyPast and its full records are accessible on the British Library reading rooms. Outside of the reading rooms searching is free but a fee is required in order to view the full records found.

People Trace Online

<https://www.peopletraceonline.co.uk/>

Offers access to the open or edited electoral register and land registry, burials/cremations, company director and birth, marriages and deaths records.

The UK Electoral Roll

<http://www.theukelectoralroll.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

<https://www.ukroll.com/>

Offers data from the electoral registers 2004 onwards, company directors' lists and births, marriages and deaths indexes for England and Wales 1984-2005. Charges vary.

USING MESSAGE POSTING SERVICES

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

Missing People

<https://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, and a 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.

Ancestry

<https://www.ancestry.com/boards/topics.lostfamilyandfriends/mb.ashx>

Ancestry hosts a number of openly available international message boards where those looking for lost family or friends can leave posts.

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/default.htm>

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.

Family Action

<https://www.family-action.org.uk>

Family Action have management of the NORCAP Contact Register enabling them to check records for adopted individuals and their birth families who were registered before the register ceased operation in 2013. Meanwhile their support agency PAC-UK <https://www.pac-uk.org/> provides access to information from adoption files, searching and tracing services as well as advice, support and counselling for those affected by adoption.

Family Connect

<https://www.familyconnect.org.uk/>

In 2020 Family Action launched the Family Connect website which helps adults who have been adopted or in care find answers to questions about their origins.

Look 4 Them

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

This website is the joint initiative of six 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/main.html>

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,

births, marriages and deaths indexes and the UK Birth Adoption Contact Register. You can also search the messages posted on the site and leave your own.

Missing People see above

Missing-You.net

<https://missing-you.net/>

A website for people searching for lost relatives and friends, where you can also post messages

Salvation Army Family Tracing Service

<https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/family-tracing>

This unique, confidential service helps with tracing relatives where contact has been lost either recently or many years ago.

UK Friends Reunited

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

You can search for friends from primary, middle and secondary schools and college and university for free and send a message, Register to add yourself to the database.

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** [<https://www.theabi.org.uk/>], or the **Institute of Professional Investigators** [<https://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 tips on how to use social media the following texts are useful:

Cook, C.

Social media for Journalists: Principles and Practice

SAGE, 2013.

Golbeck, J.

Introduction to Social Media Investigation: A Hands-on Approach

Elsevier, 2015.

Hirst, M.

Navigating social journalism: a handbook for media literacy and citizen journalism

Routledge, 2018.

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

The National Archives

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/living-people/>

Part of the National Archives website is called **How to look for records of ...**

Living people. Apart from this brief guide to sources The National Archives is **not** the place to go for information to help you trace a living person.

For further information on building critical thinking and information literacy skills you can refer to the following text:

Anderson, A. and Johnston, B.

From information literacy to social epistemology: insights from psychology

Chandos Publishing, 2016

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