



The National Archives

Records Guidance

January 2012

Records guidance project

Objective:

Improve the access to the guidance on our website

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Records guidance project

Looking for a person?

The research signposts listed below can help you uncover a person's history. Each guide tells you where you can find the relevant records, and how they can be accessed.

The National Archives holds many records which can help you find out about people's lives and careers. The signposts also point to useful records in other archives and organisations, and reveal which records are available online.



Births, marriages and deaths

Births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales

Births, marriages and deaths in Scotland and Ireland

Births, marriages and deaths in the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man

Births, marriages and deaths of British nationals at sea or abroad

Births, marriages and deaths in the armed forces

Deaths in the First and Second World War

Adoption

Adoptions

Census

Census

Change of name

Change of name

Army

British Army officers up to 1913

British Army officers after 1913

British Army soldiers up to 1913

British Army soldiers after 1913

British Army nurses

Women in the British Army

Women's Land Army

Home Guard

Occupations

Apprentices and masters

Civil or Crown Servants

Clergy

Coastguard

Customs officers

Excise officers

Famous people

Lawyers

Admiralty charts (maps)

1. What is an Admiralty chart?

Hydrographic charts are maps designed as aids to navigation at sea. The National Archives holds many such charts, including hand-drawn (manuscript) charts as well as printed ones, and foreign charts as well as charts produced in Britain. Section 6 of this research guide describes our holdings of foreign, manuscript and early printed charts.

Admiralty charts are hydrographic charts produced by the British Admiralty. The Hydrographic Office was established as a sub-department of the Admiralty in 1795 and issued its first officially published Admiralty chart in November 1800. Admiralty charts are the most common type of chart among the records held at The National Archives and our holdings of them cover seas and coastal areas in all parts of the world.

Most Admiralty charts delineate the coastline and high and low water marks, and record the depth of water as established from soundings. They record navigational hazards such as reefs and wrecks, and navigational aids, such as lights, buoys and beacons. Most charts have a compass indicator, often an elaborate compass rose. Most also have some indication of scale, either a scale bar or representative fraction, or a border showing degrees of latitude and longitude. Where direct indication of scale is absent, as on older charts, the scale is usually noted in the appropriate published Catalogue of Admiralty Charts, Plans, and Sailing Instructions (available on microfiche in the Map and Large Document Reading Room at The National Archives).

One of the characteristics of an Admiralty chart is that it is continually updated and corrected. Obsolete charts were regarded as dangerous and were to be destroyed because they presented a potential navigational hazard. Dates of survey and completion are usually recorded, as are those of the corrections continually made to maintain the accuracy and utility of the chart. These corrections were often made by amending the existing copper plates on which the chart was engraved and re-publishing it as a new edition; in other instances the chart was completely re-drawn. Note, however, that, particularly in the early years of the Hydrographic Office, published Admiralty charts drew on earlier surveys. In extreme cases this means that some charts may be based on surveys made more than a century earlier. For example, Admiralty chart 731, the chart of Macaula Bay which was listed in the first published catalogue of 1823, bears a survey date of 1703.

Some Admiralty charts contain little information on areas inland of the foreshore other than that required to assist in making a landfall. Others include extensive representations of land features, and may also have coastal elevations and topographic views as insets. Nineteenth-century charts in particular may include ground plans of sites of archaeological interest, or details of coastal forts and other defences, as well as pictures of natural features. Some insets contain detailed charts of harbours. Admiralty charts record names given to coastal features and include many names no longer in use today. In many instances they also provide the best and most easily accessible maps of small oceanic islands. Some charts record surveys of navigable rivers.

Contents

1. What is an Admiralty chart?
2. Where to find Admiralty charts
3. Admiralty charts in The National Archives
4. Finding a particular chart at The National Archives
5. Copperplate Admiralty charts
6. Manuscript charts, early printed charts and foreign charts
7. Further reading

Related guides

Admiralty Index and Digest: ADM 12

Maps and plans: overseas relations

Maps for research

Maps: military maps of the First World War

Maps: military maps of the Second World War

The Catalogue

Search descriptions of 11 million documents from the UK central government, law courts and other national bodies.

Download as a PDF
Download the guide as a PDF

Looking for records of a birth, marriage or death in England and Wales



This is a brief guide to help you with your research. Records of births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales are kept in various places, but not usually at The National Archives. This guide will help you to find out where else you can look.

Related guides

Births, marriages and deaths of British nationals at sea or abroad

Census

Divorce

Did you know?

Birth, marriage and death certificates cannot be viewed or ordered at The National Archives.

The General Register Office (GRO) keeps all certificates of births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales since 1837.

Civil registration began on 1 July 1837 and no central records of births, marriages or deaths exist before that date.

What do I need to know before I start?

Try to find out:

- the person's name (and name of their parents, spouse or next of kin, where applicable)
- the approximate date of the birth, marriage or death
- the district where the event is likely to have taken place

What records can I see online?

Birth, marriage and death certificates (1837 to present)

There are no birth, marriage or death certificates available to view online.

Indexes to birth, marriage and death registrations (1837 to pre Search [birth, marriage and death indexes](#) on [freemdb.org.uk](#). Some content (C) also have the indexes - for a full list, see the [General Register Office direct.gov.uk](#) (you will need to scroll halfway down the page to see the

Non-conformist registers (primarily before 1837)

Search [Birth registers](#) for non-conformist and other non-parochial par births and baptisms, and deaths and burials up to 1865, as well as rect (irregular) marriages up to 1754 and Quaker marriages up to 1837 (RO

What records can I find at The National Archives at

The National Archives does not hold birth, marriage or death certificates baptism, marriage or burial records.

Quick animated guides

The life of a document



Discover more about the journeys our documents have made.

Resources

[Research evidence - further aids to research](#)
[Understand the Archives - further topics in the series](#)

Transcript

The National Archives is home to 1,000 years of government records and information. When carrying out research, it's helpful to remember that when these records were created they were working documents created for specific purposes.

More videos

- Preparing to research** - Find out where to look when you first start your research.
- Starting your research** - Where to go to find the information you need.
- Research routes** - How to map out your research trail.
- Preparing for your visit** - Forward planning to help you get the most out of your visit.
- Recording research results** - Discover how to record all your results effectively.
- Sharing research** - Discover how to share results with other researchers.
- The records we hold** - Find out about the records we hold, and what you can access.
- The life of a document** - Discover more about the journeys our documents have made.
- How the records are arranged** - Understand how records are arranged.

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What we did:

1. Audit across all guidance

Scope and prioritise work

What should be kept, deleted, rewritten or merged?

What titles are unclear/vague?

What content can be moved?

2. Created a new content structure

Incorporate all guidance

Grouped into meaningful categories

Improved titles and headings

Comprehensive A-Z listing

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What we did:

3. Tested our new structure

Online testing

Users given tasks to find guidance

75 people completed all tasks

Detailed analysis: *completion rates, journeys*

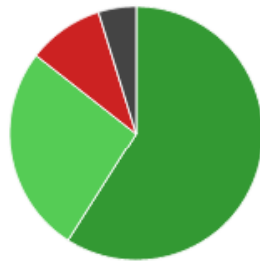
Specific recommendations: *headings and content placement*

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Test Results:

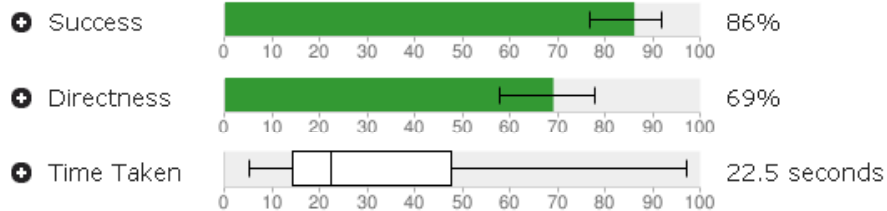
Task 1

You want to find guidance on divorce records at The National Archives. Where would you look?

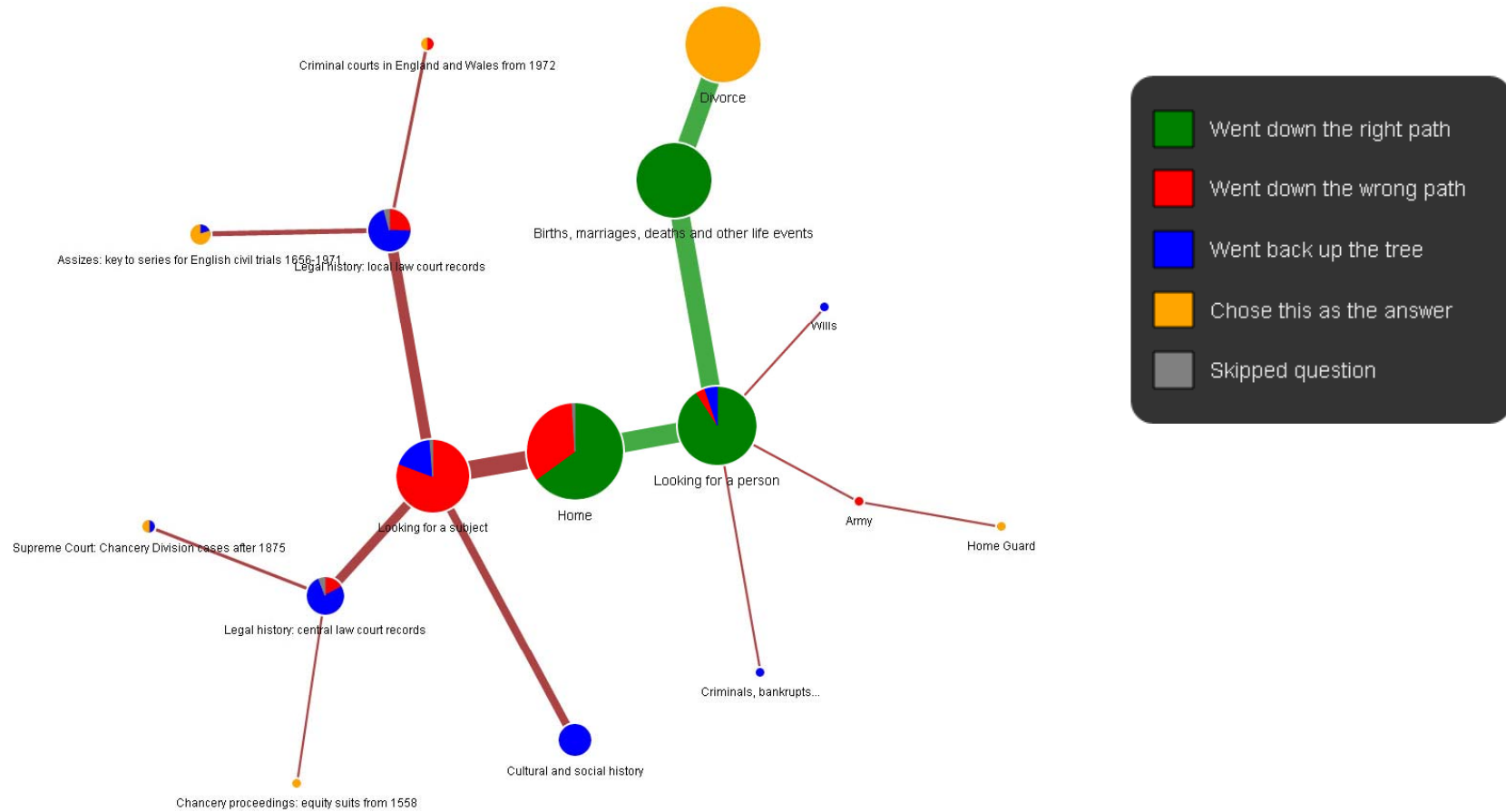


Direct Success	49	59%
Indirect Success	22	27%
Failure	8	9%
Skip	4	5%

[Detailed task results](#)



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What we did:

4. Improved the new content structure

Prioritise and incorporate recommendations from user testing

Create roadmap for continual improvement

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Changes:

All guidance (quick, in-depth & animated) held under people, places & subjects + A-Z.

Improved headings and titles

Allow duplication of links

Links to related guides prioritised in right hand column and more flexible