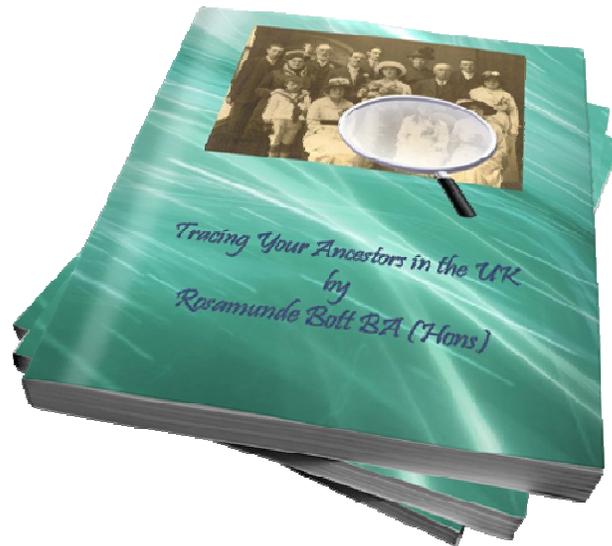


Tracing Your Ancestors in the UK Volume I

An Introduction to Genealogy.

By

Rosamunde Bott BA (Hons)



Volume II, a Step-by-Step Guide to Tracing Your Ancestry, provides detailed advice, step-by-step procedures and more information about resources and how to use them. You can buy Volume II [HERE](#) for the special offer price of \$15 (normally \$25)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Rosamunde Bott BA (Hons) FAETC is a professional genealogist and writer who has been tracing her own and other people's families for over fifteen years.

Previously Rosamunde has had various careers, including acting, secretarial work, lecturer and life coach.

She also writes fiction, and has completed four novels.

Rosamunde lives near Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire with her mother and a West Highland Terrier called Meg.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years interest in genealogy has boomed. This is partly due to television programs such as *Who Do You Think You Are?* and also the greater ease the internet has brought to finding and viewing some documents.

If you have been hit by the bug (and, be warned, it is a bug! Once you start you will quickly become addicted – but it's definitely a healthier addiction than most others I know of!), you may be feeling a little confused as to where and how to get started.

You may have done a little research on the internet, but are not sure which programs are the best to use or spend your money on.

If you live outside of the United Kingdom, you may be wondering how far you can go on the internet before you will need to a) visit the UK, or b) call in the help of a local genealogist.

I have written these two volumes entirely with the absolute beginner in mind. My intention is to make the process clear, easy and enjoyable, and by the time you have finished reading it, you will feel more confident about what you need to do.

Volume I is an introduction to genealogy, and gives you some of the history and reasons for tracing ancestors. It does not have to be read before Volume II, and in fact, I recommend that you use one alongside the other, especially if you want to get started straight away. While you are using Volume II to trace your ancestors, Volume I will give you more background information and a deeper understanding of how genealogy works.

You can order Volume II [HERE](#)

Here is what each volume contains:

Volume I – An Introduction to Genealogy

- History of Surnames
- How Genealogy started
- Why trace your ancestors?
- Using the Internet for Tracing Ancestry
- Where to find help

Volume II – A Step-by-Step Guide to Tracing Your Ancestors in the UK

- Family knowledge, documents, photographs etc.
- Civil Registration (Birth, marriage and death certificates)
- Recommended Reading
- Census Records
- Parish Registers (2 parts)
- Using Archives
- Wills
- Directories
- Land and Property
- Old Handwriting & Latin
- Other Resources
- List of Archives in the UK

Along the way, I will explain how some of my own family history has been researched at various steps – and some of the problems I have encountered. No-one has ever traced their family tree without hitting a few obstacles along the way – but that is all part of the fun! As we go along I will tell you what some of these problems might be and the best way to deal with them.

Of course, you don't have to be an absolute beginner to read this book. You may have already spent some time tracing your family history and you have decided that you need a little help; or perhaps you are completely stuck, or completely overwhelmed by the information you have and want a simple way to sort it all out. That's great – this book is for you too, but perhaps you may want to pick and choose your chapters and find the bits that are really going to help you.

Alternatively, you could use my professional services at <http://www.tracingancestors-uk.com/research-services>

So, let's get started on this exciting journey that you and I are going to take. You are going to meet some of the people whose blood runs in your veins, and who contributed to making you who you are today.

Happy hunting!



My great-grandfather, John Bott

A HISTORY OF SURNAMES

The study of genealogy mainly relies on the surname in order to follow a family line. However, in relation to the history of the United Kingdom, surnames are a relatively recent invention.

Before the Norman Conquest, surnames did not really exist. A person might be identified by where he came from, or what he looked like, so he might be known as Edmund of the red hair, or Godric from over the hill. So before 1066 names were not hereditary, making it impossible for the vast majority of people to trace a family history beyond this point.

The fashion for surnames began in the top ranks of society, and only gradually filtered down through all levels of society. It was not until the Middle Ages that surnames had become generally adopted by everyone.

Five Different Sources of Surnames

There are basically five different types of surname, and the source of your own surname will be from one of the following:

Place names

This is the most common surname root, and would have been developed from the place or area of residence of one of your distant ancestors. It could be the name of a place, such as Hill, Wood, Townsend, or descriptive, such as French.

Occupations

This is also very common but not always obvious, as many old occupations have vanished into obscurity. Examples of the more obscure names are Lavender (washerwoman) and Dexter (dyer). Some of the more obvious ones are Farmer, Baker or Carpenter.

Relationships

When a surname ends with the suffix, 'son', this indicates that an ancestor was named after the father. For example, Robertson means 'son of Robert'. Some surnames that end with an 's', such as Jones, also have the same origin. Occasionally, mother's are remembered, as in 'Annis' (from Agnes) or Mudd (from Maud).

Nicknames

These types of surnames have derived from physical characteristics such as Redhead or Armstrong, or peculiarities, such as Cruikshank (meaning lame of leg). Long or Short are obvious family traits, and some surnames come from moral attributes such as Good or Gay (meaning happy in its old sense!)

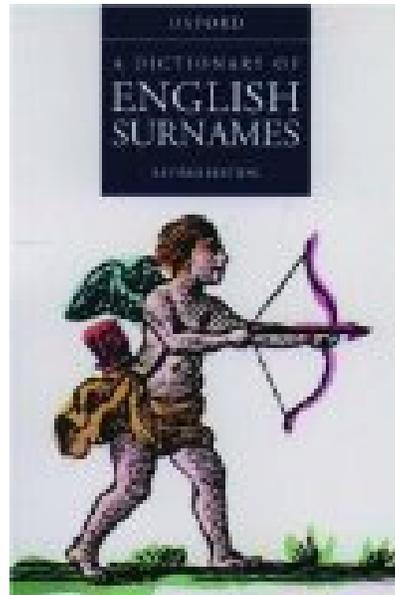
Nature

A few surnames have their origins in animals (such as Bull), plants or fruits (Quince).

It is not always easy to know in which of the above categories your surname originated. My own surname, Bott, is a very old name and its meaning is not obvious. However, it may originate from an old Frisian name of 'Botho', meaning messenger. I have read other possible meanings, though, so one cannot be sure.

There are a few surname databases on the internet where you can research the origin and meaning of your surname. Try <http://www.surnamedb.com> or <http://www.britishsurnames.co.uk>.

The authority on the origin of surnames is P. H. Reaney who has written several books on the subject. *A Dictionary of English Surnames* is a very good book to have at your side if you become fascinated by the surnames that you come across in your family history journey.



P. H. Reaney's *Dictionary of English Surnames*

HISTORY OF GENEALOGY

Ancestral research has only become popular for all members of society fairly recently. Up until the middle years of the 20th century it was generally seen as an elitist subject, of interest only for those in the wealthy sections of society who wished to prove their noble or royal heritage.

The earliest genealogies were handed down by oral tradition, rather than written, and were intended to prove descent from gods or heroes. These family trees were of course mostly fictional and created for the purposes of establishing power.

By the fifteenth century genealogies had begun to be written down, and often order to prove ownership in situations where an inheritance was challenged. Landowners who were threatened by plots to deprive them of their property would want to prove their legal right through their ancestry. These kind of genealogies were the first family trees below the level of the aristocracy.

By the sixteen century, family trees were still largely based on guesswork or a creative imagination! However, they had begun to be set down on paper – often as extremely elaborate and detailed works of art. Elizabeth I's own family tree purports to trace her ancestry back to Adam and Eve.



Family Tree of Herzog Ludwig I of Württemberg (ruled 1568-1593)

From this time, genealogy grew in popularity amongst the elite, along with the subject of heraldry and county histories. The family trees of the gentry – and some wealthy tradesmen - were often printed and many of these can be seen today in the County Histories held in county records offices.

Whilst this was mainly an activity for the very wealthy, there is evidence that shows that more ordinary families also had an interest in their

ancestry, but these would never have been written down. Mostly there was an 'oral tradition' amongst the farmers, craftsmen and labourers of a rural community about their family histories which would be told as they sat round the fire in the cold, winter evenings.

Throughout the nineteenth century, interest in family history grew more widespread, although it was still mainly the province of the wealthy.

In 1911, the Society of Genealogists was founded in Bloomsbury, London with the intentions of promoting and encouraging the study of genealogy. It also obtained a building in South Kensington in 1954, but by 1984 was no longer big enough to contain its rapidly growing library, and it moved to Clerkenwell.

As people began to have more leisure time in the twentieth century, the growth in interest in genealogy rapidly grew amongst all members of society, and records became more and more accessible. By the eighties it was no longer necessary to travel to the church where one's ancestors had lived to study parish registers as these now began to be held in the county record offices along with many other documents that were of use to the family historian.

Then came the internet. As more and more people gained access to the world wide web, more information became available online, including genealogical records, provided by companies such as Ancestry and Find My Past.

So great was the interest in seeing these kind of records online, that when the 1901 census was published for the first time, the website crashed because thousands more people than expected tried to access the site to find their ancestors!

With all the censuses now published and indexed online, and the civil registration indexes also available to search and order online, it is now possible to trace ancestors back to 1837 without moving away from your computer.

Programs such as *Who Do You Think You Are* in the UK and the USA have made family history even more popular, and this hobby continues to grow all over the world.

WHY TRACE YOUR ANCESTORS?

So why has genealogy become so popular for everybody in the last few decades? What is it about tracing your ancestors that is so fascinating? Why should you bother?

We all like to know our roots. Most of us feel a sense of pride about where we came from: the place we were born, or who our parents were. Even people who have been happily adopted often have a desire to find out who their birth parents were.

As human beings, we are naturally curious – not just about the world around us, but about ourselves. We like to know what it is that makes us the person that we are, why we are unique and why our likes, dislikes, passions, feelings or ideas can be so different from another person's.

Some of this is due to our upbringing, and our early experiences of the world. But some of it is also through our genes. We have not only inherited physical characteristics from our ancestors, but I also believe we have inherited some of their personalities. For example, I have a very acute desire to create organised systems for working. Neither my parents had this. Where did I get it from? Apparently, my paternal grandmother had a very similar personality trait. Did she inherit hers from further up that line?

We also have picked up a lot of learning from our parents. They, in turn, learned from their own parents, and they from theirs – and so on. Family traditions, beliefs and ideals can therefore get passed down through generations. There is quite a strong work ethic in my family. Having traced my ancestors, I can see this has come very strongly down the line, particularly on my father's side.

It is immensely satisfying to see where we have inherited our looks and personalities from. It gives us a sense of belonging, that we are part of a natural progression of time.

Another reason why many of us love genealogy, and this applies to me in particular, is a fascination with history. If you have any interest in history

at all, then tracing ancestors can make us feel more connected with that history than any text book can.

All of our ancestors were involved in some way or other in major historical events. When you realise this, those events become more fascinating than they ever were. In fact, an interest in family history can revive or even start a deep interest in history in general.

If you have Irish ancestors who emigrated from Ireland in the middle of the nineteenth century, then it is quite possible they were escaping from the terrible Irish famine caused by the failure of the potato crops.

If your English ancestors lived in a city in the nineteenth century it is very likely that they were affected by the industrial revolution in some way, which may have changed the way they worked or where and how they lived.



"Cromwell at Dunbar", by Andrew Carrick Gow

Your British ancestors from further back may have fought in the English Civil War – perhaps father against son, or brother against brother or cousin. How would your ancestors have reacted to the beheading of Charles I?

I don't know about you, but thinking like this makes me feel almost as if I could be there. In a way, it's like having your own time machine!

Some people like to trace their ancestors because they think they may be related to royalty or to someone famous. Well, I can understand this. But I do not find that having a factory worker, agricultural labourer or fisherman in the family is any less interesting. I admit, it would be fun and rather exciting to find out that I was related to Shakespeare, but I also love the fact that my Manx ancestors were probably out fishing in the cold, dangerous waters of the Irish Sea when Will Shakespeare was sitting at his desk, quill in hand. Were they any lesser human beings?

Family history is a hobby that never ends. There will always be lines that prove impossible to follow, which can be enormously frustrating and disappointing. But there is always the feeling that somewhere, somehow, you will come across a record that provides a breakthrough.

This is why it is so addictive. Finding a new relative to put on your tree is like winning a new level in a computer game – only far more satisfying and interesting! Every new person you find is like opening a door into a part of yourself. The more you find, the more you want to find. Luckily, there is always someone else to discover. You have thousands of ancestors – remember that each generation doubles as you go back. You have four grandparents, eight great-grandparents and so on.

For many, family history is a life's work, deeply satisfying, yet never ending. It's really no wonder it is so popular with so many people in the world today.



USING THE INTERNET FOR TRACING ANCESTRY

While the internet has made the tracing of your family tree so much easier than it ever used to be, it has also created a few problems and pitfalls that you should be aware of before you start.

As a professional genealogist I truly welcome the way that genealogy has become so accessible through the internet. It makes my job a lot easier, even though it means that more people are doing it themselves rather than hire a professional!

However, I have come across several difficulties with using the internet to trace ancestors and I have listed and explained them below, as well as showing how to overcome them. You should make yourself familiar with these before you start searching for ancestors online.

Speed

Before the internet, genealogists needed to painstaking work, often spending hours searching through documents for the name of their ancestor. Because it was so important not to miss the name and waste hours of work, this meant that people usually took great care over the work, noting down any clues and noting down the resources that have been looked at in order not to duplicate any work.

The same care and attention to detail is still just as necessary, but because the access to information is so fast on the internet, it is tempting to rush at it, neglecting to cover every possibility, and jumping to conclusions that the first possible name you come across is the right one.

Remember, to do a professional job and to be sure that you are following the right tree, every piece of evidence you find should really be backed up by further evidence. You should always, where possible, look at the original document rather than relying on index entries, and always take any information written with a pinch of salt.

Transcription Errors

The fact that you can do name searches to find people on the census, civil registration indexes and even some parish registers, is an incredible advance in the world of genealogy. When I started, there were very few indexes, even in paper form, so it took a lot longer to find an individual on a census, especially if it was a large area in a town or city.

Now you can put your ancestor's name into a search engine on one of the many genealogical websites, and, if you are lucky, the entry you need will pop up at the top of the list.

I say, "if you are lucky" because it is often not as simple as this. Difficulties in finding an ancestor in a particular document may be down to the fact that it's a common surname, or they were out of the country, or whatever – but very often ancestors remain elusive due to transcription errors.

Sometimes, particularly with the census, this is the fault of the enumerator writing down the name wrongly; but more often than not it is the errors made creating the online indexes.

When the indexes were created, it was a mammoth task, and there was so much pressure to get these details online as soon as possible that a huge amount of errors were made. This was mainly due to having to decipher often difficult to read Victorian writing. Guesses have often been made, with a surname ending up looking nothing like what it should have been.

Although the search engines will do a phonetic search, very often the errors have made the name look so different that they are still not picked up.

The answer to this is to keep trying, using different criteria for searching. For example, if you know for sure where your ancestor was born, and exactly how old they are, and you know their first name was George, you could try looking for a George, with the birthplace and year marked as exact, but leave the surname blank. This will give you all George's of the same age, born in the same place. As long as the area is not too big, you

may eventually find the right George by looking at the surnames seeing if any of them could look similar to the surname you're looking for.

The trick is to just keep trying – especially with the census. It is unusual for someone to be completely missing from the census records – although I have still come across a few who remain stubbornly elusive.

Online Family Trees

Many people now like to upload the family trees that they have traced onto public websites such as Ancestry.com, which can be looked at by other people who may be searching the same tree.

While these can be very helpful because they may have information on them that you do not have, you must never automatically take these as 100% accurate. Not everyone carries out their research in a professional manner, and many of these online trees can be full of inaccuracies, assumptions and, sometimes, pure fantasy.

Of course, I am sure that the majority of online trees have been created with a great deal of care, but it is always as well to check which resources have been used. If unsure, you can always contact the creator of the tree and ask them where they found their information. You can always then check the information out for yourself and decide whether it is real evidence or not.

Reliance on Indexes Rather than Original Documents

No professional genealogist would ever look at an index entry, or take information from an online resource such as the IGI (see Volume II for more details of this), without looking at the original document. However, because this can be difficult for some people who just want the ease of finding information online, they are tempted to take the reference as the information itself. Some of these types of entry can be very inaccurate, and if you do not cross reference with the original you will be in great danger of having information that is simply not true, or you could end up following the entirely wrong family tree!

If you find an entry on the IGI, you must check, or get someone else to check, the original parish register that it came from. If you find a marriage entry on the civil registration indexes, then you must go ahead and order the original document. This will give you far more useful and detailed information.

Not All Records are Complete

Resources such as the IGI are an invaluable tool to help you to establish a missing link. However, you must bear in mind that just because you cannot find an entry here, or on any other online resource, that it does not exist. The IGI is not complete, and neither are all indexes.

If you cannot find what you want on the online resources, my advice would be to visit the relevant local archives, or find someone to do that for you.

Not All Records Are Available Online

You could be forgiven for thinking that you could trace your whole family tree online, without having to go anywhere. This simply is not true – at least not at the moment, and probably not for a long time, if ever.

We are very lucky to have the full census records and civil registration indexes online, so you can actually trace families back as far as 1837 with some degree of accuracy without having to set foot in a record office or archive.

There are also an increasing number of parish registers being indexed and published online, including the London registers and a few others. However, this really is a gigantic task, and it is unlikely that all parish registers will be online in the near future.

Some wills can be downloaded from the National Archives site, but most archdeaconry wills are still held in local repositories, and you need to find out where these are.

So, once you get beyond 1837, it will almost certainly be necessary for you to travel to local archives yourself, or to hire someone else to do so.

There is a wealth of documents that can help you in your family history research: wills, land records, maps, school registers, tax records etc. While it is always worth checking to see if any of these have been published or indexed online, you will in all likelihood need to go to the relevant archive to look at the document itself.

Always approach any searches you do with a professional attitude, backing up your evidence, making notes of everything you do and all the resources you look at, and take it one step at a time without rushing. If you carry out your searches this way, you will find it far more satisfying and enjoyable, and each breakthrough will be more exciting, as you know that you are on the right track.



WHERE TO FIND HELP

When you start tracing your ancestors, you will probably want to carry out the research yourself, using online resources such as Ancestry.co.uk, Find My Past, the IGI etc. If you are outside of the UK, these are likely to be your main sources of information.

However, at some point you are bound to hit some difficulty. Either you just cannot find your ancestor on the online resources, or you want to go back further than the 19th century and trace your ancestors back as far as possible.

This is where, if you are not a UK resident, you will find it difficult to do further research yourself because many of the documents that you need are not available online.

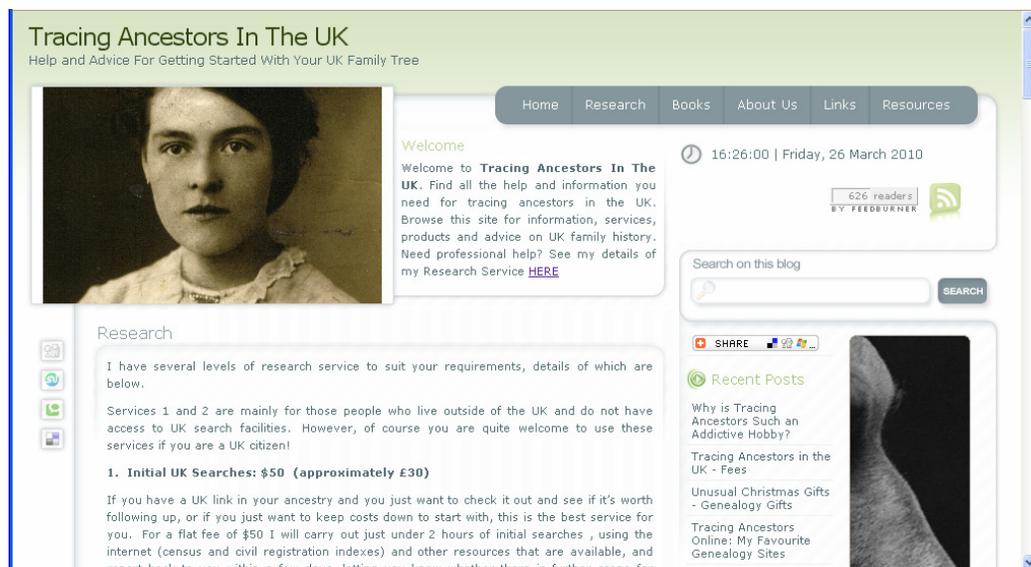
A professional researcher in the area in which you are searching will not only be able to see documents that are only available at local archives, but will also have the experience and expertise that is sometimes necessary to find an elusive ancestor. Tracing ancestors can often become extremely complicated and confusing, especially in cases where there are several possible options. For example, perhaps you have found that one of your ancestors is illegitimate and you do not know who the father is, except for a vague reference that has led you to three possible contenders in the same census. This kind of situation can sometimes seem hopeless, but occasionally a professional can be like a detective, looking for clues, eliminating impossibilities and using various sources to try and establish links between one person and another. Of course anyone can learn how to do this, but because of their experience, a professional may be quicker at fact finding and the elimination process.

A professional researcher may have access to specialist records, and also may have contacts in other areas where they need to look for further documentation. This saves time for the client because they do not have to spend time looking for another researcher for each area they need to search.

The best place for finding a qualified, certified genealogist in the United Kingdom is to go to the websites of either the Association of Genealogists & Record Agents (AGRA) or the Society of Genealogists.

You can use search engines here to look for a researcher in the area in which you have ancestors.

If you have ancestors in several counties in the United Kingdom, or you want someone who will trace your ancestors from scratch – searching several lines, which is very likely to take you into different counties, you can find a genealogist who will oversee the whole project, hiring other researchers as needed. My own service offers this kind of project work. I have various contacts all over the UK who I trust to do a good job.



The screenshot shows the homepage of the website "Tracing Ancestors In The UK". The title is "Tracing Ancestors In The UK" with the subtitle "Help and Advice For Getting Started With Your UK Family Tree". The navigation menu includes "Home", "Research", "Books", "About Us", "Links", and "Resources". A "Welcome" message states: "Welcome to **Tracing Ancestors In The UK**. Find all the help and information you need for tracing ancestors in the UK. Browse this site for information, services, products and advice on UK family history. Need professional help? See my details of my Research Service [HERE](#)". A clock shows the time as 16:26:00 on Friday, 26 March 2010, and a badge indicates "626 readers BY FEEDBURNER". A search bar is present with the text "Search on this blog" and a "SEARCH" button. The "Research" section is titled "Research" and contains the text: "I have several levels of research service to suit your requirements, details of which are below. Services 1 and 2 are mainly for those people who live outside of the UK and do not have access to UK search facilities. However, of course you are quite welcome to use these services if you are a UK citizen". A list item is shown: "1. **Initial UK Searches: \$50 (approximately £30)**". Below this, it says: "If you have a UK link in your ancestry and you just want to check it out and see if it's worth following up, or if you just want to keep costs down to start with, this is the best service for you. For a flat fee of \$50 I will carry out just under 2 hours of initial searches, using the internet (census and civil registration indexes) and other resources that are available, and report back to you within a few days, letting you know whether there is further scope for". The right sidebar features a "Recent Posts" section with titles: "Why is Tracing Ancestors Such an Addictive Hobby?", "Tracing Ancestors in the UK - Fees", "Unusual Christmas Gifts - Genealogy Gifts", and "Tracing Ancestors Online: My Favourite Genealogy Sites". There is also a "SHARE" button and a small image of a document.

My Website: <http://www.tracingancestors-uk.com/research-services>

ORDER VOLUME II NOW!

To trace your ancestors even further back and get valuable information about searching the records, you can now order Volume II of *Guide to Tracing Ancestors in the UK* and get the following information:

- Where to find the census indexes and how to search them
- Analysing the information contained in census records
- How to find and use relevant archives
- How to use the online International Genealogical Index
- Information about parish registers and how to use them
- How to solve problems with parish registers
- How to search for wills
- How to read wills

And much more!

You will be able to start tracing your ancestors IMMEDIATELY, using my step-by-step process.

You can order your copy of **Volume II [HERE](#)** for a special price of \$15 (normally \$25)