

# Master Your Family Tree Research

A course by Dr. Sophie Kay, [www.khronicle.co.uk](http://www.khronicle.co.uk) ♦ Autumn 2025 ♦ **Week 3: Research Plans**



**Welcome to Week 3 of your course!** Over the past three weeks, we've looked at research logs, research questions and research plans - and this is the point where we can finally bring them all together to support your genealogy workflow. Refer back to your Roadmap from the Week 1 Worksheet and see how your research sessions might look if each of these three elements were bringing support, structure & direction to your family history. *Image left c/o Getty Images, licensed via Unsplash+*

## Your Week 3 Challenges...

Whether you're an experienced hand or are relatively new to family history, here are the three challenges from the close of today's session. Delve into as much family history as you can over the coming days, and try these tasks alongside your Worksheet exercises to develop your skills further:

**ONE** EITHER find a historical map for your place of interest OR identify some good contextual reading

**TWO:** Develop a full research plan – context, knowns, unknowns, stumbling blocks, running theories, and a priority list. Dive in with the research!

**THREE:** Finalise your roadmap to include the role of your research plan.

## Building Your Genealogical Larder

For many researchers, it's easiest to begin by exploring what's been digitised and made available online. The following sites may be of particular help with this. It's intended as a non-exhaustive list, so if you're using a commercial genealogy site other than *Ancestry* or *FindMyPast*, be curious and see whether there's an equivalent to the Card Catalogue, listing all the record sets you might possibly delve into on that site.

- The site **GENUKI** covers England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, as well as some Crown Dependencies such as the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands: <https://www.genuki.org.uk/>
- Place-based records search at **FamilySearch**: <https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/location/list>  
Remember that you can also search by name for a country or region by clicking on the *Search* tab on the FamilySearch homepage, and then selecting *Records* from the drop-down menu.
- The Card Catalogue at **Ancestry**: <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/catalog>
- All Record Sets at **FindMyPast**: <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/search/historical-records>

Only a tiny fraction of the world's historical records have actually been made available online: so you should *always* survey physical archival collections when making your *Genealogical Larder* list. That's often where the real seams of genealogical gold can be found!

If you're mostly focused on British Isles research, then use the **Find An Archive** tool at The National Archives to identify relevant archives and museums. There are some international entries in this directory too, so it's always worth a quick look! <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/find-an-archive>

## Context

Explore surname frequency to help you in interpreting onward searches:

- **GB Names** (England, Scotland, Wales): <https://apps.cdrc.ac.uk/gbnames/>
- **Barry Griffin Surname Maps** (Scotland, Ireland): <https://www.barrygriffin.com/surname-maps/>
- Explore the list of surname distribution maps on **FamilySearch**, for many different countries around the world: [https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Surname\\_Distribution\\_Maps](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Surname_Distribution_Maps)

These are great resources, but don't ever use them in isolation. Come to your searches with a critical mind and explore the records to see how often your surname of interest pops up...

## Historical Organisations & Resources

- ★ *Institute for Historical Research* – Open and Free Access Materials for Research: <https://www.history.ac.uk/research/research-resources-support-historians/open-free-access-materials-research>
- ★ Federation of Family History Societies: <https://www.familyhistoryfederation.com/>
- ★ Scottish Association of Family History Societies: <https://www.safhs.org.uk/>
- ★ Australasian Federation of Family History Organisations: <https://www.affho.org/>
- ★ Society for One-Place Studies: <https://www.one-place-studies.org/>
- ★ Guild of One-Name Studies: <https://one-name.org/>

## Maps, Newspapers and Trade Directories

Historical **maps** are an essential part of every genealogist's store cupboard, if you're to have a proper sense of the location and context of your research. Here are just some useful sites to get you started in acquiring historical maps:

- **Ordnance Survey maps** (and many others too!) at the National Library of Scotland: <https://maps.nls.uk/>
- Those of you researching Welsh ancestors may find the **People's Collection Wales** (*Casgliad y Werin Cymru*) a handy resource: <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/locate>
- **David Rumsey Historical Maps Collection**: <https://www.davidrumsey.com/>
- The US **Library of Congress** has a superb collection of historical maps, including US examples as well as many from other locations around the world: <https://www.loc.gov/>
- **ARCHI** (mostly archaeological focused, including LiDAR and old maps; some are free, others require a subscription): <https://www.archiuk.com/>

And if you're interested in the **jurisdictional boundaries** of England, Scotland or Wales, then you may find the following sites of use:

- **Scotland boundaries viewer** at the National Library of Scotland: <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/boundaries/>
- **England Jurisdictions 1851** at FamilySearch (includes Wales): <https://www.familysearch.org/en/mapp/>

Historical **directories** – if they're available for your chosen time and place – can be mighty handy for building up a profile of an area, its main institutions, transport links and commercial companies.

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- ★ **Trade directories for England and Wales**—nearly 700 of them, covering the period c.1760—1910, can be accessed for free via the [University of Leicester’s directories collection page](#);
- ★ **The National Library of Scotland** has a dedicated page for Scottish Post Office Directories: <https://digital.nls.uk/directories/about-directories/trade.html>
- ★ **New Zealand directories** include Wise’s Post Office Directories, Stone’s Directory, and Stevens & Bartholomew’s. Read more about these and how to access them on the webpage of **Christchurch City Libraries** here: <https://my.christchurchcitylibraries.com/family-history/directories/>

And don’t forget to survey the available **newspapers**, if you’re researching an era and place where print media are available:

- ★ **British Newspaper Archive** <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>
- ★ **FindMyPast Newspapers & Periodicals Collection** (from the British Newspaper Archive) <https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search/british-newspapers>
- ★ **Newspapers.com** <http://www.Newspapers.com> (great for North American titles),
- ★ **Papers Past** (NZ) <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/>
- ★ **Trove** (Australia) <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/>

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## Miscellaneous Resources

Hopefully the approach described in Week 3 of this course will provide lots of ideas to get you started with building a research plan – but you should remember that there’s more than one way to go about this. The two articles below provide some alternative structures and ideas to give you inspiration:

- ★ My Family History Files, *A Research Plan for Johannes Zittel*: <https://myfamilyhistoryfiles.com/research-plan-for-johannes-zittel/>
- ★ Phil Isherwood, *How to Build a Research Plan*: <https://familyhistory.car.blog/2020/07/05/how-to-build-a-research-plan/>

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## My Session Notes

Your Week 3 Worksheet (provided separately) includes space for responding to the various exercises during and after the session. The space below provides an additional area to add your notes and thoughts.