

Tracing People

Background

Tracing old friends or relatives that you've lost touch with can seem a daunting task but this guide is designed to give you some starting points to help you search for living individuals.

With this type of research, it is important to respect people's right to privacy. Information that is deemed sensitive or damaging (such as hospital or asylum records) under the Human Rights Act 1998 will be closed for 100 years from the end date of the document, meaning that whilst it is closed, only individuals concerned within those records can perform a 'Subject Access Request' (SAR) to retrieve information contained within. More information on how to start a SAR can be found here: [How to submit a request | Gloucestershire County Council](#).

The General Data Protection Regulation (2018) also protects living individuals' data and has stronger legal protection for special category data. This requires us to ensure data that we hold here is handled correctly and requires us to protect against unlawful and or unauthorised access, loss, destruction or damage. For more information on GDPR, please visit the GOV.UK page on data protection: <https://www.gov.uk/data-protection>

Please note: This guide is not designed for those interested in conducting family history research. Instead, we would advise you to visit the Gloucestershire Family History Centre also based at Gloucestershire Heritage Hub.

What types of searching or information could I use?

There are many different avenues of research that can help you discover this information. Below are some examples which will give you an overview of the types of information they contain.

Social Media:

- This is one of the easiest ways to search for living people by looking at their presence online. There are several popular sites that you could use in your search, including Facebook, Instagram, X, LinkedIn, TikTok and others besides. Some sites will require you to create an account to search, and others will let you search without an account.
- Any information you already possess about the person you are tracing will help you to narrow down your results, such as their name, or job title etc.
- You may find that some accounts have privacy settings in place to minimise interactions with their accounts. It is also worth noting that you may occasionally come across accounts that are fake or have been created for malicious intent, so it is important to take care in your research. The National Cyber Security Centre has a useful page which gives you advice on how to spot these malicious accounts, and can be accessed at: <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/guidance/social-media-how-to-use-it-safely>
- You may also find it useful to use other search tools listed in this guide in tandem with social media.

Community Groups:

- Another way of searching for living individuals is through community-based groups or platforms, which can be either in person or online.
- These may include groups formed by individuals who have set up groups for current or former employees of companies that exist or existed in the area. Some notable examples include the [Fielding and Platt History](#) and [Dowty Heritage](#) pages. Most pages will have a 'contact us' section where you can get in touch with the group and ask questions.
- Some community groups may also meet regularly or have events you can attend in person to find out more, which may also help you in your search. **These groups will be required to abide by GDPR regulations as previously outlined.**

Electoral registers:

- These are produced every year and list those who are registered to vote in elections. Most often these are sorted by district, then by parish, and then finally by address. **They will only contain the name of the person registered to vote and their address.** To find out more, see our research guide '*Electoral Registers*'.
- It is worth noting that some earlier registers are sorted by name and that children under the age of 18, as well as temporary residents will not feature within these registers. **Gloucestershire Archives does not hold the current years' Electoral register.**

Telephone books:

- These are produced every year (although the last physical copies were produced in 2024) and usually cover a county or part of a county. **They will usually be sorted by surname and will give the name of the phone bill payer.**
- This won't include people who have opted out as "ex-directory".
- A small number of books are held at Gloucestershire Archives, with most of these within our local studies collection. Most modern 'phone books' however can be searched online.

Directories:

- Directories, (whilst similar to telephone books) simply list residents and tradesmen within an area. These are usually sorted by address and surname and will give you the name and address of the head of the household, sometimes alongside their trade and job title.
- A small number of historic trade directories are also available in the Searchroom on Microfiche – Please ask a member of staff if you wish to consult these.
- The latest county directories are from 1939, with the latest for Gloucester and Cheltenham from 1974 and 1975 respectively. Some Stroud directories are also held up to 1952. **After these dates you will need to use either Telephone books or Electoral registers.**

School records

- School records may be useful in establishing where children went to school and finding the parent/guardian of a child.
- School admission registers for instance will give the name and address of the parent/guardian of the child and may also tell you which school the child moved to, if the family moved away
- The majority of school records that are under 100 years old are closed or have restricted access. If you are unsure whether these records will include relevant information, please email us at archives@gloucestershire.gov.uk. For more information, you can also use our research guide *on 'School records'*.

Birth, marriage and death records

- Marriage certificates can also help you find out where people lived. Certificates will give you their place of marriage, their address at the time of marriage, as well as the name of their spouse.
- If the couple had any children, their birth certificates will give you the family's address.
- A death certificate will tell you the place of death or residence at the time of death.
- You will need to purchase a certificate either online or at the reception desk at the Heritage Hub. For more information, please see our research guide *'Civil Certificates'*.

How to Find the Records

All these records, except birth, marriage and death certificates, can be viewed at Gloucestershire Archives. Records can be searched for using our online catalogue, available at: <https://catalogue.gloucestershire.gov.uk/>. For more information, please see the relevant guide or email us at archives@gloucestershire.gov.uk.

Certificates for birth, marriage and death certificates which took place in Gloucestershire can be purchased from the Gloucestershire Registration Service. For more information see our research guide *'Civil Certificates'*.