

FINDING 17TH CENTURY ENGLISH ANCESTORS

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Manage your expectations

You are SO lucky to know anything about your 17th century English ancestor. Remember the 17th Century is one of the greatest periods of upheavals in English history including religious and political schism; the English Civil Wars (1642-9); the execution of a King resulting in the period of the Commonwealth and Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell; the first steps to creating an empire and tremendous developments in transport, technology and science.

Establish if any research been done before. As well as trawling through online published pedigrees be aware of major bibliographies that will lead to published research in monographs, journals etc. such as *The Genealogists Guide* by G Marshall and *A Genealogical Guide* by J B Whitmore.

PARISH REGISTERS record christenings, marriages and burials from 1538 in England & Wales but note there are only about 800 parishes with registers that survive to 1538 and there is significant disruption to parish registers for the period leading up to and during the civil wars and the subsequent Commonwealth Interregnum. i.e. the generation from 1640-1660 known as the “Commonwealth Gap”. This session expressly looks at sources that might help to fill the gap.

WILLS

Most church courts which proved wills were in abeyance during the Commonwealth period. Wills that would usually be recorded in the local church courts were proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury and hence the records are at TNA and readily online. Before and after this period, the probate records of local courts are found in local diocesan or county record offices. Family Search and Society of Genealogist’s libraries have all published and many unpublished will indexes and finding aids along with copies of all church court wills. However, there is no one website that has all English wills and there are other probate records such as contested wills, probates exhibited as evidence in civil courts, administrations, accounts and bonds that are seldom examined.

STATE PAPERS see [The National Archives research guides](#)

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/state-papers-domestic-1547-1649/>

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/state-papers-domestic-1642-1660/>

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/state-papers-domestic-1660-1714/>

State Papers Domestic, Charles 1 1625-1649

Mostly the papers of the Secretaries of State. See *Calendar of State Papers Domestic*, J Bruce, WD Hamilton & C Lomas, eds. 23 Volumes 1858-1893. Each volume is indexed

Committee of Both Kingdoms (Derby House Committee): Books 1644-1650

The same calendar also includes, for 1644-1649, the papers of the Parliamentary Committee of Both Kingdoms, the principal executive committees of Parliament.

Committee for Compounding with Delinquents: Books & Papers 1643-1660

Papers of the Committee for Compounding with Delinquents 1643-59 responsible for negotiating the conditions upon which the delinquents regained their estates. From 1644, after sequestration of their estates, most royalists and non-combatant catholic delinquents who were prepared to sacrifice part of their estate to safeguard the rest and protect themselves could/were permitted to pay compensation and were allowed to “compound or appeal to have their lands restored in return for a fine expressed as a fraction of the capital value of the property”. Can contain “vast amounts of information about marriage contracts, dower rights, annuities to younger sons, etc. which were deductible from the pre-composition assessment in certain circumstances Contains most of the papers of the Committee for

Sequestration. 266 volumes. See *Calendar for the Committee for Compounding etc 1643-1660* MAE Green ed. 5 vols, Index in vol 5 available on microfiche at Family History Library and SoG.

Sequestration Committee: Books & Papers 1643-1653

Papers of the committee for Sequestration 1643-9 which administered the estates of those accused of having voluntarily helped the royalist cause or of being Catholics and whose lands were thereby confiscated to the service of the state. Moveable goods were to be inventoried and sold, the landed property leased for the profit of the state. Based on an informant's information rather than detection, if delinquency was proven the owner was permanently deprived of his estates and property but allowed back a fifth for the maintenance of his children while another fifth went to the informant. In cases of recusancy the offender was allowed one third of his estate back. When it was merged with the Committee for Compounding its working papers were absorbed by the new committee (SP23). The 13 volumes are largely the order books and are an important and neglected source.

America and the West Indies in the Calendar of State Papers Colonial 1573-1739 see *Calendar of State Papers Colonial 1573-1739* on British History Online and Colonial State Papers ProQuest or <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/america-west-indies-calendar-state-papers-colonial-1573-1739/>

Many of the published calendars of State Papers can be found on the British History Online website <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/catalogue/guides-and-calendars>

There are few passenger lists showing emigration from England in the 17th Century and all known are published. The most important survival survivals are from 1634-5 from London Port Books 1635 and Licences to Pass Overseas 1635 see *The Complete Book of Emigrants 1607-1660 etc* Peter Wilson Coldham and *The Original Lists of Persons of Quality* John Camden Hotten, *Planters of the Commonwealth etc*.

Any breakthrough towards new discoveries will come from greater access to previously uncatalogued and/or unindexed sources such Chancery and other Equity Courts, Tax records, Manorial and Ecclesiastical Courts as they become more readily available. Make regular visits to TNA Discovery catalogue and websites/catalogue of the appropriate local English County Record Office

Who governed the lives of our ancestors in the 17th century?

- The Parish, Vestry and Parish Officials – Parish Registers and other parish records generated by the incumbent, overseers of the poor, churchwardens, constable
- The Diocese and Archdeacon – Prerogative (Archbishops), Consistory (Bishops) & Archdeaconry Church Courts with records created by proctors, summoners, apparators relating to probate, marriage licences and matters of morality
- Quarter Sessions and Assize Courts – the criminal and administrative courts with records of Judges, Justices of the Peace & Magistrates
- Manorial Courts – customary lores and laws of the manor - lord of the manor, steward or reeve, jury, constable
- Equity Courts – courts of chancery, exchequer, requests, star chamber, wards & liveries
- The Crown and Officers of State – State Papers Colonial, State Papers of the Commonwealth period Parliamentary Committees etc.

HERALDIC VISITATIONS

The visitations of the Heralds of the College of Arms took place every 30 years or so throughout the 16th and 17th centuries and provide a snapshot of the pedigrees of middle and upper class families that bore coats of arms. Most of these pedigrees, published by the Harleian Society are drawn from records at the College of Arms and the Harleian Manuscripts at the British Library. Links to online copies of Heralds Visitations can be found on the Medieval Genealogy website

<http://www.medievalgenealogy.org.uk/sources/visitations.shtml>

PROTESTATION RETURNS

Parish by parish lists of the names of those adult males who in 1642 swore an oath to support the Protestant Church of England (and many who did not) are held at the Parliamentary Archives. They provide the nearest thing to a census for this period <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/parliamentary-archives/explore-guides-to-documentary-archive-/familyhistory/sources/protestations/>

PETITIONS TO PARLIAMENT

Opportunity to show loyalty to Parliament & the protestant church. 1) Vow & Covenant June 1643 & 2) Solemn League & Covenant September 1643. All men above the age of 18 as well as lodgers & inhabitants to subscribe their names in a book or roll with their neighbours. No national collection was made & was probably only taken in strongly parliamentary areas. Occasionally found in parish records. Listed where found in Gibson & Dell.

TAXING TIMES 17TH CENTURY

Many 17th Century Tax records at The National Archives, Kew provide name rich resources associated with local tax records. The E179 Catalogue lists taxes by place in an online database on TNA website <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/e179/>

SUBSIDIES, LEVIES & GRANTS

1640/1 (TNA E179). Various acts passed for the relief of his majesty's army. In general only the wealthier were taxed. Collection at the discretion of the county Commissioners but based on goods worth £3 and upwards, offices or annuities providing income of 20 shillings and aliens and popish recusants paying double or if not liable to subsidy paying a poll tax of 2s. 8d. a head along with non-communicants aged 21 or more. Listed in Gibson & Dell.

POLL TAXES

1641-1660 some records survive in the lists of Exchequer, Kings Remembrancer & Lay Subsidy Rolls (TNA E179) described in Lists & Index Society Vols. 44, 54, 63, 75, 87. Laid down prescribed sums from every one over the age of sixteen and not in receipt of alms according to status in life. Lowest contribution six pence, the highest £100. Catholics paid double, widows a third. For printed returns see Texts & Calendars I & II (Mullins). Listed in Gibson & Dell.

FREE & VOLUNTARY PRESENT TO KING CHARLES II

1660 (TNA E179). One of first attempts to raise money for King on Restoration. Listed in Gibson.

HEARTH TAX

1662-89 (E179 & Quarter Sessions). Occupiers of houses taxed 2s. on each hearth. Collected Michaelmas & Lady Day. Poor exempt but often listed. See Hearth Tax, Other Later Stuart Tax Lists and Association Oath Rolls – Jeremy Gibson.

ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL REBUILDING FUND

1677/8 (LMA former Guildhall Library MS 25565) lists of original returns from parishes throughout England and Wales recording the contributions made towards the rebuilding of the Cathedral after the Great Fire

E179 DATABASE. Lists all various taxes for the period and can be searched by place via the catalogue on TNA's website

ROYALIST CLERGY

An attempt towards recovering an account of the number and sufferings of the clergy of the Church of England, Heads of Colleges, Fellows, Scholars who were sequestered harassed etc. in the late times of the Grand Rebellion occasioned by the Ninth Chapter (now the second volume) of Dr. Calamy's Abridgement of the Life of Mr. Baxter together with an examination of the chapter by John Walker, 1714. (Known colloquially as Walker's Sufferings of the Clergy.) see also *Walker Revised: being revision of John Walker's Sufferings of the Clergy during the Grand Rebellion 1642-1660*, Oxford University Press, 1948

PARLIAMENTARIAN CLERGY

Calamy Revised. Being a revision of John Calamy's Account of the ministers and others ejected and silenced, 1660-2 by A G Mathews Oxford University Press 1934.

QUAKERS

Extracts from the State Papers relating to Friends. First series 1654-58, Second series 1659-64. *Journal of the Friends Historical Society supplements 8 & 9, 1910 & 1911*

SOLDIERS

Officers & Regiments in the Royalist Army. A revised edition of the List of Indigent Officers 1863 - S. Reid (ed.) (Commonly known as Indigent Officers or "IO" this was a list of officers claiming the sixty thousand pounds granted to his sacred majesty for the relief of his true, loyal & indigent party. Lists only those who survived the wars and this therefore a companion to Royal Martyrs below.)

Army lists of the Roundheads & Cavaliers containing the names of the officers in the royal & parliamentary armies of 1642, Edward Peacock (1874).

See Cromwell Association Online Directory of Parliamentary Officers , Originally published by British history Online <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/cromwell-army-officers/intro>

Civil War Petitions for Civil War Petitions is a fully-searchable digital edition of over 4,000 petitions for relief from maimed soldiers and war widows. It includes the accompanying certificates from military commanders, medical practitioners and local communities in support of their cases. There are additional details of tens of thousands of names of those who received military welfare for injuries and bereavement sustained during the Civil Wars. The material is organised by county with ten counties currently online. Four more will be added every quarter until completion in June 2021. www.civilwarpetitions.ac.uk

GENERAL SOURCES FOR THE CIVIL WAR & COMMONWEALTH -

See "*All embarked in one bottom*". *An introduction to sources for soldiers, administrators, and civilians in civil war Britain and Ireland.* Martin Bennet in the *Genealogists Magazine*. vol. 25 no. 8, Dec. 1996 (contains an overview of useful sources including constables accounts [as collectors and compilers of local tax lists], parish rating lists, accounts of the parish overseers and church wardens.)

GENERAL FINDING AIDS

Protestation returns 1641-2 and other Contemporary Listings; Collections in Aid of Distressed Protestants in Ireland; Subsidies; Poll Tax; Assessments of Grant; Vow of Covenant; Solemn League and Covenant - J. Gibson & A. Dell, 1995.

Quarter Session records for Family Historians. A select list - J., Gibson, 1995 (new ed in progress)

Hearth Tax, Other Later Stuart Tax Lists and Association Oath Rolls – Jeremy Gibson, 1996