

WHAT RECORDS HAVE I LOOKED AT?

Research Log, Research Notes, Search Calendar, Research Findings, Index of Research, Documentation List

Whatever you call **IT**– DO **IT**!! For this article I shall call **IT** a Research Log.

WHAT

A Research Log is a documented list of everything you have searched, what you were searching for, where to find it again and what you plan to search. In short it is the major, **most important tool** in family history research.

WHY

It will prevent wasting time looking at the same records over and over again. The positive searches give you evidence to cite in your sources. The negative searches can be just as important in helping you identify your family and avoid searching in the wrong area in the future. It gives you clues for further research. You can formulate a timeline to see what you know about a person and what you need to look for. And many, many more uses.

Recently I had my family send me my research material on a family I had not looked at for several years. Oh dear! What a mess my notes were. I had recorded faithfully what I had searched – on many different pieces of paper. For example I had written – in the middle of a printed Research Log form - what looked like a burial record with death and burial dates and ages at death for Thurza and Walter Gough. No idea where I got that information, when I got it, how to find it again and what else I looked for at the time. My old records are really in bad shape.

WHO

Some people will write a log for each person, or each family. Others like to separate them by type of repository they are searching. Could be one for the internet – another one for microfilms another for books. You do it in a way that will be most useful to you.

WHEN

Every time you look for information on the internet. Whenever you go to a repository, such as a library, archive, and cemetery. When a bright idea pops into your head about what and where to search for a family.

HOW

You can download forms from the internet for the purpose.

www.familysearch.org – Get Started With Family History – Forms – Sorted by Document Type – Form – scroll down to Research Log.

<http://www.ancestry.com/charts/researchcal.aspx> - has a Research Calendar.

<http://www.familytreemagazine.com/forms/download.html> - there are several different forms you might like to try.

HOW DO I DO IT?

There are many ways of logging your research and each person has to find a way that suits them and fulfils their purpose. I am sharing with you my way – hopefully this will encourage you to keep a research log, whichever method you choose.

I love my computer. I believe it was created to make it easier for me to pursue my family history work. (Maybe it works for you as well?) I keep one research log for each family group sheet I have. Some information could appear on 2 sheets, where they appear as a child and as a parent. After attending several classes and conference seminars I have designed my Research Log as an Excel file. It could also be used almost the same as a Table in a Word Document. So here are the column headings I use.

DATE DONE

- This is the date you viewed the record.

CALL NUMBER

- To prevent looking at the same record multiple times.
- Record film, fiche, call number or site, eg ancestry.com.

PLACE

- For USA or England, record state or county first, town last.
- For other places the country might need to be first.

DATE/EVENT

- Put year first, then the event.
- Birth, death, marriage, Immigration etc.

PERSON

- Generally only the people you know belong to that family group.
- Add the birth year in brackets. This will distinguish between people with the same name.

SOURCE

- If found on the Internet – copy and paste.
- Make sure it shows where it could be found again.

RESULTS

- Record names, dates and places, which are relevant to your purpose.
- Record the years and names searched if applicable.
- Include contents – if there is too much information put it in a word document and save with a document number.

DOC #

- Any numbering system that makes sense to you will work.
- I use the first letter of the type of document, then the year, then the standard name of the person. It will be filed on my computer under that family's surname. Eg M1839 William Bittle. Also on a paper copy in my files.

NOTES

- Further research needed.
- Your analysis of the situation
- Message boards you have joined to try and gain more information

SEARCH PARAMETERS

- Helps you to know what time period or places you searched.
- When result is negative this is needed so that you will know in the future exactly what you searched for in that document.

These columns can now be sorted to give whatever results you want – a To Do list, Timeline, Records searched etc.

Here is an example of a few lines from a Research Log:

DATE DONE	CALL NUMBER	PLACE	DATE/ EVENT	PERSON	SOURCE	RESULTS	DOC #	NOTES	SEARCH PARAMETERS
2005 11 22	FHL1473693	KENT Sevenoaks	1811 Marriage	Giles, Sarah (1786)	Parish registers for Sevenoaks, 1559-1951 Church of England. Parish Church of Sevenoaks (Kent)	Robert JESSUP and Sarah GILES Married 30 November 1811	Parish / Marriage Robert Jessup	Copy original record	
2005 11 21	FHL992524	KENT, Ightham	1820 Christening	Jessup, Elizabeth (1820)	Parish registers for Ightham, 1559-1987 Church of England	Elizabeth 1820 , Robert and Sarah Jessope	Ch1820 Elizabeth Jessup		1813 - 1839 Christenings - Jessup
2005 11 22	1473692	KENT Sevenoaks			Parish registers for Sevenoaks, 1559-1951 Church of England. Parish Church of Sevenoaks (Kent)	JESSUP, William 1791, Mary 1791, John 1795, Stephen 1798, Mary 1800, Olive 1789	Parish / Christening Robert Jessup		1781 - 1805, Giles, Dennis, Jessup
2005 11 22	Ancestry.co.uk	KENT Maidstone	1861 Census	Jessup, Elizabeth (1820)	Ancestry.com. 1861 England Census [database online]. Data imaged from the National Archives, London, England.1861	Eliza WEST, George JESSUP, Kate CARR	C1861 Eliza West	Look for Eliza's husband. George could be a nephew	