

# TRACING CARIBBEAN ANCESTRY

## SOURCES IN BRITAIN

### SOURCES IN THE HOME

Certificates, official letters, photographs, objects like anniversary presents can all give information on names, ages, occupations, places.

### RELATIVES

Relatives can give a lot of information, but you need to check accuracy from documents. Once you have got as much as you can, draw up a family tree and see what gaps there are. At this point you need to start getting birth, marriage and death (BMD) certificates.

### BIRTH, MARRIAGE & DEATH CERTIFICATES

Birth, marriage and death certificates for events in England and Wales can be obtained from the General Register Office or from the local Register Office where the event was registered or took place.

Birth certificates give parents' names, occupations and place of birth.

Marriage certificates give date, place, both parties' names, occupations and their fathers with their occupations, plus witnesses.

Death certificates might not be very helpful: the informant might be a hospital doctor, not a relative, so consider carefully if you need one.

[www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/](http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/)

[www.freebmd.com](http://www.freebmd.com) is a volunteer programme to index certificates in local register offices. It is more accurate than the GRO indexes, but the record you need may not yet be online.

**General Register Office for Scotland** (part of the National Records of Scotland)

[www.gro-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk)

**General Register Office Northern Ireland**

<https://geni.nidirect.gov.uk/>

### WILLS

From 1857 wills have been proved by the state. They usually include family members. If a person dies intestate (without making a will) someone needs to apply for a grant of administration to sort out their assets.

[www.gov.uk/search-will-probate](http://www.gov.uk/search-will-probate)

### THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

The National Archives (TNA) in Kew is the major repository of government records.

**Naturalisation** Until 1962 people from the colonies were automatically British citizens so did not need to be naturalised. From 1948 people could register as citizens of the UK and from 1962 needed to obtain labour vouchers from the Ministry of Labour to be granted entry. These records (and other related sources) are in TNA: how to obtain them is explained in Guy Grannum's book (see Reading List)

There are also reports from colonies, copies of local documents (like the slave lists), muster lists for soldiers and ships' crews, etc but most of the records there relate to the better-off, usually white, inhabitants. Many of the wills of Caribbean estate owners, up to 1858, are held here. You can either download a will or go there and print it out for the cost of each sheet.

TNA has a number of online research guides on aspects of Caribbean history: the most useful is *Black British social and political history in the 20th century*. There's a guide to tracing family history on the *Moving Here* website, but that is not being updated any more.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

### **SERVICE IN THE ARMED FORCES**

Records of those who served in the First World War are online at The National Archives. For later service, especially the Second World War, either the person him/herself has to apply or you need to prove you are next-of-kin or researching for a legitimate purpose.

[www.gov.uk/get-copy-military-service-records](http://www.gov.uk/get-copy-military-service-records)

**Forces War Records** was set up by veterans and has less information. It's not an official site and it costs money but it does have other sources that may be of interest.  
[www.forces-war-records.co.uk](http://www.forces-war-records.co.uk)

**The Commonwealth War Graves Commission** was set up in to preserve and care for the graves of servicemen and women who died in the two World Wars. As well as the date and place of death, location of the grave, etc. it sometimes includes information about place of residence and next of kin.

[www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org)

**The Armed Forces Memorial roll of honour** commemorates members of the armed forces killed since the end of World War II.

<http://veterans.mod.uk/>

### **CHURCH OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS**

The Church of Latter Day Saints' (the Mormons) London base is currently located at TNA. They hold a number of microfilms of material from various Caribbean record offices, including all the parish registers of Jamaica, and can order (for a small fee) films from the main repository in America if they are not located there.

### **SOURCES OVERSEAS**

Each of the former British colonies has a record office but unfortunately there are few or no local researchers. You may have to go there.....

### **BIRTH, MARRIAGE AND DEATH CERTIFICATES**

The British set up similar systems of BMD registration in their colonies, but each territory started at different dates in the late 19th century. Check with the local government website for how to obtain certificates.

### **PARISH REGISTERS**

Before General Registration the main source of family information are the baptism, marriages and burial registers of individual parishes on the islands. Many have been filmed by the Church of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons). See their website for holdings. [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

### **MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION**

As well as BMD certificates and parish registers, the British government introduced other institutions, which were the same as those in Britain, like inquests, electoral registers, poor relief, hospitals, etc. Surviving records will be in the local Record Office of each territory

### **OTHER SOURCES ONLINE**

**Family search** is the old, free site run by the Church of Latter-Day Saints. It's worth trying first, especially as many Bajan and Jamaican church registers are there. [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

**Ancestry**, run by the Church of Latter-Day Saints, is the most extensive of the genealogical websites. However it has not digitised or uploaded material from many of the smaller Caribbean islands because it depends on, usually American, sponsorship to be able to access records.

[www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)

[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

This site has the digitized lists of slaves made by the British government in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century between 1812-1834. This can be searched by the name of the owner or the estate. Not all of the pieces have been digitized: some still have to be consulted in TNA. The LDS also has a few lists made for St Thomas/StCroix.

[www.ancestry.com/search/collections/britishslaves/](http://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/britishslaves/)

**Rootsweb** is primarily to connect people researching their family history across the world and is useful to post messages and ask questions. It has recently been taken over by the LDS so the emphasis is now on America.

<https://home.rootsweb.com/>

**Legacies of British Slave Ownership** is a project that started out by identifying all those slave owners compensated under the 1833 Act. In the second stage they tracked back to c. 1763 the ownership histories of the 4000 or so estates identified in the first phase. This is on-going.

[www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/)

### **NEWSPAPERS**

**The British Newspaper Archive** has newspapers from c. 1700 to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. You need to pay to access it, but it is free via other websites and some libraries have access. The ones on this site are largely British but some overseas newspapers are held in Britain. Some early newspapers from the Caribbean have been digitized and can be seen either in the British Library or online at home. Others can be ordered and consulted in the British Library. You will need to get a readers' ticket to use the British Library and its online collections.

www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk  
www.bl.uk

**The Gleaner**, the Jamaican newspaper established in 1834, has its past editions online on the Newspaper Archive website. This is run by the Church of Latter-day Saints and you can get a certain number of searches free.  
<https://gleaner.newspaperarchive.com/>

## READING LIST

Since most of the following books were published, more sources have gone on line or been made accessible, so you need to check.

Crooks, Paul *Ancestors* by (Black Amber, 2002) is about how he traced his own ancestry, but he made a lot of mistakes along the way, so it's not a very accurate guide, although it is inspiring.

Grannum, Guy, *Tracing Your West Indian Ancestors* (Bloomsbury, 2012). This covers both white and black people. He has also written a guide on the BBC's website  
[www.bbc.co.uk/history/familyhistory/next\\_steps/genealogy\\_article\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/familyhistory/next_steps/genealogy_article_01.shtml)

Lane, Geraldine, *Tracing Ancestors in Barbados: A Practical Guide* (Genealogical Publishing Co Inc, 2005)

Mitchell, Madeleine E., *Jamaican Ancestry: How to Find Out More* (Heritage Books, 1998)

Porter, Stephen D., *Jamaican Records. A Research Manual: a two-part guide to genealogical & historical research using repositories in Jamaica & England* (Stephen D Porter, 1997). Now out of print but in some libraries.

Titford, John, *My Ancestor Settled in the British West Indies* (Society of Genealogists, 2011). This mainly relates to the white colonists, but does give information about kind of records which will be useful to general researchers.

White, James E. & Quenum, Jean-Gontran, *The How to Guide for Tracing African-American and West Indian Roots Back to Africa and Going there for Free or on a Shoestring Budget!!* (Booklocker.com, 2004)

**DNA** does not have all the answers, but these guides might be helpful:

Pomery, Chris, *DNA and Family History* (The National Archives, 2004)

Shawker, Thomas H. *Unlocking your Genetic History: A Step-by-Step Guide to Discovering your Family's Medical and Genetic Heritage* (National Genealogical Society Guide 6, 2004)

Smolenyak, Megan & Turner, Ann, *Trace your Roots with DNA: Use your DNA to Complete your Family Tree* (Rodale Books, 2004)