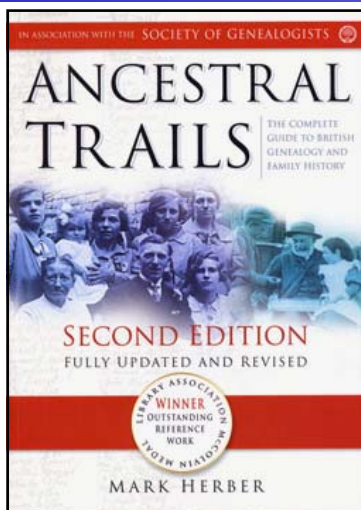


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Ancestral Trails: The Complete Guide to British Genealogy and Family History
by Mark Herber

Sutton Publishing, 2000

Reviewed by Richard Crowhurst

This book has been called the definitive guide to family history in the United Kingdom and, as such, is of interest to anyone with British ancestors. The first edition (published in 1997) is available in North America through Amazon, but the expanded and revised second edition is the preferred one—if you can get it. The comments below refer to this second edition but are equally applicable to the first.

Beginners with no experience might be put off by the weighty appearance and dense text, and this is understandable. If you have never embarked on tracing your family history before and know nothing about records, this is, perhaps, not the book for you. How-

ever, don't be misled into thinking that this book is only for professionals. Anyone who has an active interest in family history will find it useful and will also find that its usefulness grows with your research skills and knowledge.

The book begins by explaining the basics of family history—particularly the need to know what, or who, you are looking for before beginning your search. It explains the minute vagaries of the various legal and record systems used in Britain then expands on each one, chapter by chapter.

The section on common problems is useful for beginners and the more experienced alike, including things like a handwriting guide and a list of common Latin terms. The up-to-date nature of the book means it describes many useful Internet sites for different activities, although, like any such book, it becomes rapidly dated in light of continuing developments on sites such as Ancestry.com.

Different sources, from Census returns, civil and religious records, to trade directories, military service records, and emigration are all covered thoroughly. Not only does this book tell you where to find such information and how to search the various indexes for what you are looking for, but it also helps you decipher your findings and combine information from different sources. Of particular interest to Canadian readers will be the chapters on "Tracing Migrants and Living Relatives" and "Immigration, Emigration and Investigation Abroad." As more and more records become

available on the Internet, there is much in this book that amateur genealogists will find useful.

Mark Herber draws on twenty-five years experience to provide illustrations to many of the record types described throughout the book. As you'd expect from a serious, award-winning textbook, the contents are meticulously researched and backed up with detailed notes, cross references, and appendices.

There is no doubting that *Ancestral Trails* is not light bedtime reading—drop it on the floor and you'll wake the whole house up. However, as an essential reference to keep on your desk or beside your computer during your studies, it is invaluable. Once you own a copy, you'll find, as I do, that you return continually to its pages to check something, whether it's the exact date of the 1861 English Census (7th April), or the filing systems used for "soldier's documents" between 1760 and 1900. If you are at all serious about investigating your roots beyond your grand-parents' generation, you will find this book an invaluable companion.

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Richard Crowhurst is a freelance writer from Lincolnshire in England. He writes about many things but specialises in British history and heritage subjects. He is a keen amateur genealogist and (with help) has researched his own family history back to the early 1600s.

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