

A genealogy research interview

There is no set formula for conducting a genealogy research interview with a relative (be guided by the age of the person, and the period they lived through).

The questions you ask may differ from one person to another, or you may ask a number of relatives the exact same question in order to get as many opinions or perceptions of an event or person as possible.

The list below contains some fairly general lines of enquiry which you might find useful as a starting point for finding family history stories and developing them. (I've deliberately omitted question marks.)

You will also want to ask your own questions about issues (or people) specifically affecting your family.

Basics

Full names. Baptism/confirmation names.
Nicknames. Maiden or former names. (Repeat all these questions for each of your relative's immediate family members.) Any explanation/history of family surname?

Birth

Where and when. At home or hospital. What day of the week. What time. Any family tales about the birth?

Family Life

Where did the family live when he/she was a child. Did the family move. Names and approximate ages of those in the household. What did he/she wear at home. Who made or bought the clothes. What times did the family get up and go to bed. What chores did he/she have to carry out at home. Who was the smartest of the family. Who had the best sense of humour. Who had a temper. How were birthdays celebrated. What rivalries existed among the siblings. Memories of mother. Memories of father.

The home

Apart from the main living areas, were there any outbuildings. Was the home connected to electricity and water supplies. Where was the bathroom. Where did he/she sleep. When did the family eat. What did they eat. Did the family eat together. Favourite/least favourite meals. What meals were typical of Christmas.

School

When did he/she start school (age). First impressions. What did he/she wear at school. When time of day did school start and finish. How did he/she get to school. What did the children eat at lunchtime. What subjects were studied. What sports were played. What games were played in the playground. What age did he/she finish school. Any surviving school reports or certificates? What level of education attained. Favourite subjects. Most disliked subjects. Happiest/saddest memories of schooldays.

What were the teachers like. What methods of discipline did teachers use. Who were her/his favourite teachers.

Leisure time up to adulthood

Was he/she a member of any clubs, organisations, sports teams, bands or choir. What were his/her hopes and dreams as a child/young adult. What were his/her friends like. What did they get up to (that they shouldn't have got up to!). What were his/her happiest memories of childhood/teenage years.

Did he/she attend a church as a youngster. Which one. Where was it located. How did you get there. Did all members of the family attend. Earliest recollections of church services. Who was the priest. What did he/she wear for first communion/confirmation. What recollections does he/she have of these events. Did all the family attend.

Marriage

Did he/she have any other boy/girl friends before they married. How did he/she meet the future spouse. What was he/she wearing. What was the main initial attraction between the two. Memories of the proposal. how long was the engagement. Where did he/she spend the night before the wedding. Where was the wedding held. Who attended. Who were the witnesses. What did the groom wear. What did the bride wear. What memories of the wedding day. Did they have a honeymoon. How did he/she adapt to married life.

Parenthood

When did he/she find out that the first baby was on the way. How did he/she feel at this news. Why did he/she choose the children's names. How did he/she adapt to parenthood. How did he/she manage work and parental responsibilities. What was he/she like as a parent. What was the spouse like as a parent.

Employment

What career had he/she imagined as a child. What was his/her first job. How did he/she land the job. Memories of first day. What were the best/worst features of the job. How long did he/she stay in the first job. Recollections of colleagues. How much was the pay. What could that amount buy at that time. How many hours were worked. What were the start and finish times. Was there a lunch break. What was eaten at lunchtime and where. How did he/she get to and from the workplace.

Major events

What major events occurred during his/her life. How did these impact on his/her life at the time. Or over the longer term. What did he/she think of these events. What did others in the family think of them. What did others in the community (neighbours or extended family) think of them.

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