

Researching your French Ancestors

General Information

Once you have identified that your ancestor was born in France you may be able to trace your family tree back further using the French Archives. A major digitisation programme in France has meant that the majority of Civil and Parish records of births, marriages and deaths up to the 20th century can now be viewed online, rather than having to visit the Archives in person.

The one vital piece of information which is necessary to be able to search the French records is the name of the Commune or town in which the person you are researching was born, married or died. Without this piece of information it is impossible to search for the record you require, as everyone is recorded in the Commune in which the event took place.

How to find the name of the Commune using sources at the Archive

The sources that can be used at the Jersey Archive to help locate this key piece of information are:

Aliens Registration Cards, D/S/B

These were introduced as a result of the Aliens Restriction Act. On 17th February 1920 the States of Jersey enacted the principles of the 1914 English Aliens Restrictions Act. Under the law all aliens over the age of sixteen resident in Jersey had to register with the Immigration Officer. Every alien in the Island was required to register, no matter how old they were or how long they had been living in Jersey.

These are one of the most useful sources as they nearly always give the place of birth of the person. There are some errors with the spelling of the names of the communes, as many of the French immigrants giving the information were unsure of exact spellings. The series reference for these cards is D/S/B and they have all been indexed by name on the Archive Catalogue.

It is worth noting that Aliens Registration cards are closed for 100 years from the date of the individual's birth, so if your ancestor was born less than 100 years ago their record will not be available to be viewed.

Marriage Registers, D/E/B & G/C

Often the person being researched was deceased prior to the introduction of the Aliens cards and therefore it is necessary to find another source for this information. If the person was married in Jersey, then the marriage records which can be viewed at the Archive are really useful. Following the introduction of Civil Registration in 1842 the place of birth was recorded on the marriage record. There are two series of records which can be viewed; the Parish Church Marriage records, reference G/C and the Superintendent Marriage records, reference D/E/B.

Occupation Registration Cards, D/S/A

The entire civilian population over the age of 14 during the Occupation were issued with an Occupation registration card and the official set is housed at the Jersey Archive. There are over 31,000 cards in total. If you are unable to find an Alien Registration Card it is worth checking if there is an Occupation Registration Card for the person that you are researching. The series reference for these cards is D/S/A.

Often with the Commune name it will also list the Department (region) of France, which will enable you to decide which Departmental Archive to consult. If this is not recorded simply google the Commune name and the relevant Department can be found. In many of the records at the Archive you will see that one of the Departments is recorded as Côtes-du-Nord, as this was the former name of Côtes d'Armor. You need to look in the Côtes d'Armor Archive for these records.

The majority of the French migrants who came to Jersey were from the Departments of Manche, Côtes-d'Armor or Ille-et- Vilaine, which are geographically the closest regions to Jersey.

Manche Archive – St Lo

Web address:

www.archives.manche.fr

Cotes-d'Armor Archive – St Brieuc

Web address:

<https://archives.cotesdarmor.fr>

Ille-et-Vilaine Archive – Rennes

Web address:

<https://archives.ille-et-vilaine.fr/en>

Manche also has a genealogical society called **Cercle Généalogique de la Manche**, which is similar to the Channel Island family History Society. They are in the process of transcribing the civil records of Manche, which can be accessed via their website at www.cg50.org for a very modest annual subscription.

Tips to help you find a Birth, Death or Marriage record

All three websites are slightly different in terms of search methods, so you will need to familiarise yourself with them. Look for the term 'Archives en ligne' for the online records and also 'Etat civil' for records post 1793 and 'Paroissaux Registre' for records prior to 1793.

There are index tables called 'Tables Décennales' to help confirm whether you

are looking in the correct Commune and to help you locate the entry. Using the information from the index you can then go to the appropriate volume to view the document. You may still need to use the index in the volume to obtain the entry number and this is always at the end of each year of records.

Sometimes the writing in the index and the record can be very difficult to read. Use the zoom function on the page as the quality of the digital image is generally very good and this will help enormously.

The date of registration of the BMD is not always the date on which the event happened, and particularly with births and deaths it generally happened the day before the registration took place.

The French Republican Calendar or French Revolutionary Calendar was a calendar created and implemented during the French Revolution, and used by the French government for about 12 years from late 1793 to 1805. If you are having difficulty with the dates of entries which are within this date range we would recommend that you refer to various online websites which will help you to understand and convert the date to the Gregorian calendar which is used today.

Useful Terms for Family History when using the French websites

Rechercher = Research

Etat civil = Civil Records

Registres Paroissaux = Parish Registers

Tables Décennales = Index Tables

Baptême = Baptism

Mariage = Marriage

Sépulture = Burial

Naissance = Birth

Décès = Death

The purpose of the Jersey Archive is to identify, select, collect, manage, preserve and provide access to the Island's records on behalf of the whole community, promoting Jersey's culture, heritage and sense of place, both within its shores and beyond.

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Opening Hours: 9am to 1pm & 2pm to
5pm, Tuesday to Thursday.

Open 9am to 1pm on the third Saturday of
the month.

To book an appointment, please phone or
email.

The information in this leaflet is accurate
as of October 2020. Please be aware that
the Jersey Archive receives new
collections on a regular basis and ask staff
if you have any queries