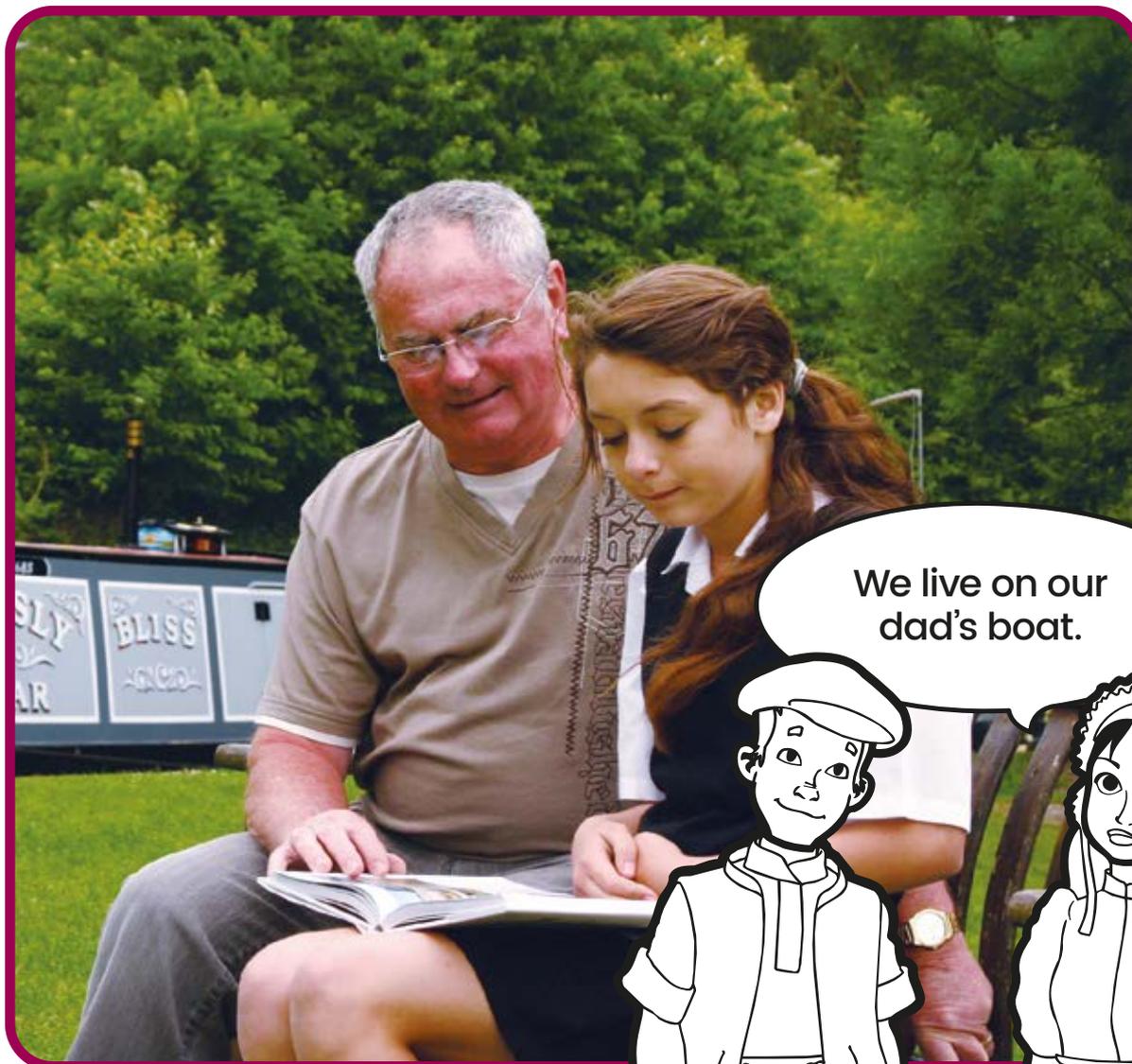


Who do we think we are?



We live on our dad's boat.

I was born on the boat at Wheelock.

Exploring your family history

History is not just about the lives of kings and queens or famous thinkers and leaders – it's also about ordinary people. These people are our ancestors too. There aren't any history books about them, but can we find out about their lives?



Why not:

Create a family tree or write a biography of one of your ancestors.

Create a scrapbook with all the information you find about your family, include any drawings or creative work inspired by your research.

Some words to help you

Archive – A controlled space where old documents are stored which members of the public can visit by appointment.

Biography – A written account of someone's life and what they did.

Birth certificate – All births are recorded. Birth certificates can provide useful information about the parents of an ancestor.

Census return – The government records everybody living in Britain once every ten years. The census information also includes where people live and their dates of birth.

Family tree – This is a way of laying out the members of your family on paper, so you can easily see who is related to whom.

Generation – We call each level of the family tree a generation. Your parents are the generation before you.



Supplied by: The Waterways Trust Archive

Families lived in the tiny back cabin on narrowboats



Supplied by: The Waterways Trust Archive



Do you think any of your relatives are in this picture?

May Roberts has researched her family history. Her ancestors worked on the waterways in the past, in Cheshire, where May's family still lives.

We're going to follow the steps May took to research her family tree to help you research yours.



May and Terry Roberts exploring the cabin of a narrowboat

What do you know already?

May thought about these questions. See if you can answer them about your own family.

1. Ask your family about the names and dates of family members, such as your grandparents and great-grandparents. With the help of your family, can you draw your own **family tree**?
2. Can you find any **photos** of the people in your family tree?
3. Ask your family if there are **stories** they remember about their parents and grandparents. Imagine what it might have been like to be a child when they were growing up.
4. Investigate your **family archives**. Ask your family if they have kept any documents about people in the past, such as birth, marriage or death certificates.
5. Investigate other **archives**. You could look at the census records online or at a library to see if you can identify your ancestors.
6. With the help of **The Waterways Archive**, see if your family have a connection to a waterway, and worked on a canal or river?
7. Has your family always been connected to the **place** you live in now? For example, did they work on the waterways, the land, in local factories or mines? If your ancestors came from somewhere else, what can you find out about that town or country?



Supplied by: The Waterways Trust Archive



This baby was born in a boat because her family lived and worked on the canal.

Creating a Family Tree

A family tree is a simple diagram that shows how people are related to each other.

May began by talking to her grandfather. She started a family tree using her grandfather's recollections, photographs and family documents, and then did some more research about her family to fill in more gaps. **You** could try using May's method of putting your family tree together.

- 1 Our story begins with you, so place yourself in the centre of the tree, and add your birth date. In our example, we begin with May. You can put in the year you were born. May was born in 1997.

May Roberts 1997

- 2 Add your **parents'** names and dates above yours, with a line to show you are their child. You can show they are married with the letter 'm' or the = symbol. May's parents are Paul and Amanda (Simpson was Amanda's surname before she married Paul).

Paul Roberts 1970 m Amanda Simpson 1968

May Roberts 1997

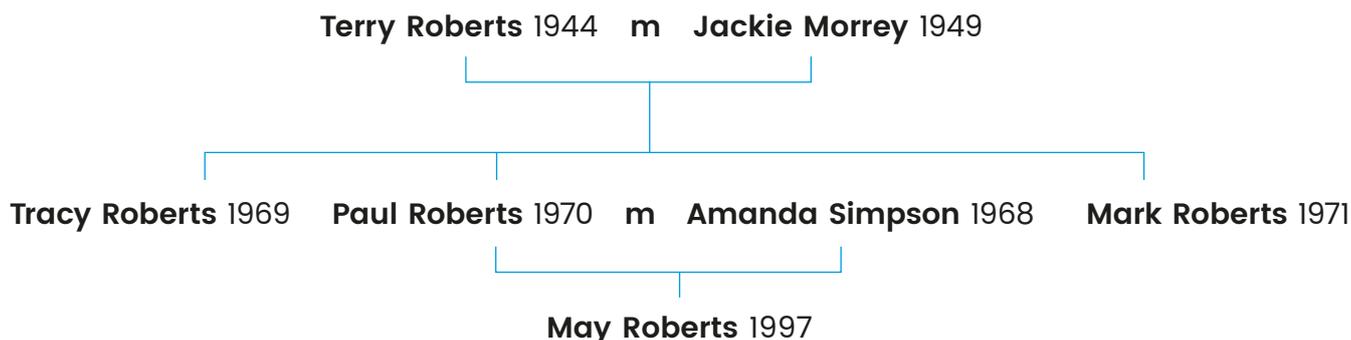
- 3 You can go on adding any **other family members** you know about. May's father Paul has a sister and a brother, so May added them to her tree. If you are adding brothers or sisters, put them in age order, starting on the left with the eldest one.

Tracy Roberts 1969 Paul Roberts 1970 m Amanda Simpson 1968 Mark Roberts 1971

May Roberts 1997

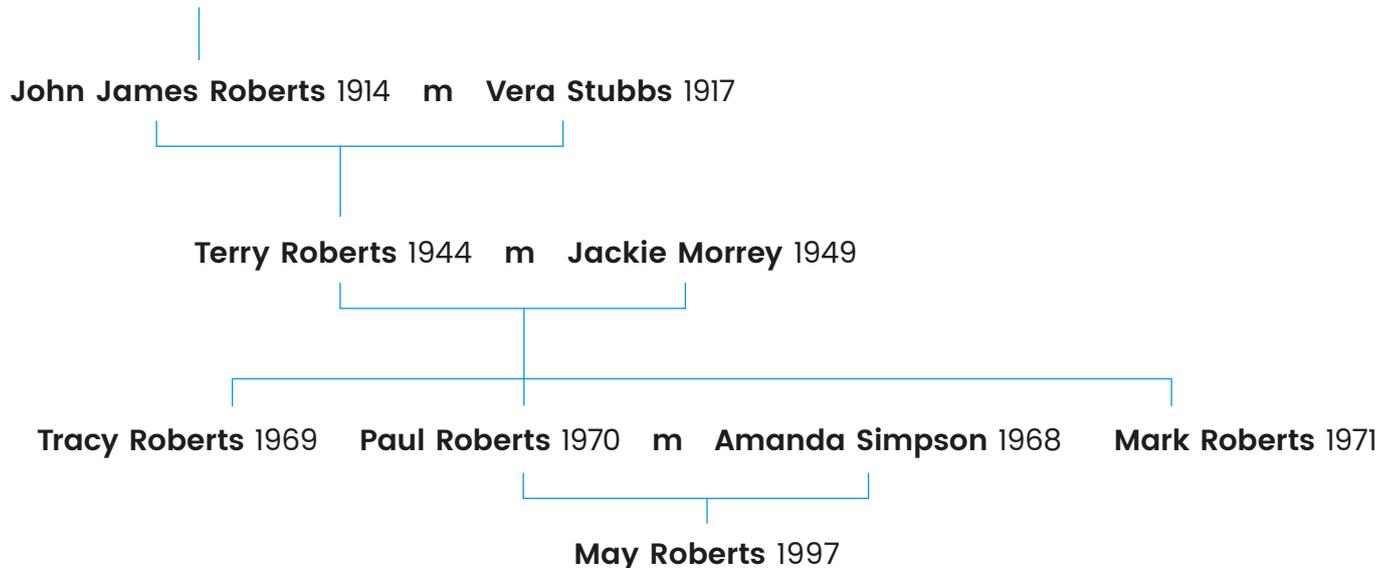
Creating a Family Tree

4 Go back another generation, and add in **grandparents**. You can choose to follow either your mother's or your father's family. May decided to follow her father's family line, so she put in his parents:



5 Can you find out any more about **earlier ancestors**, and add in more generations to your tree? May's family had kept a marriage certificate for her great-grandfather, John James Roberts, and her great-grandmother, Vera Stubbs. They got married in Sandbach in 1940. From this marriage certificate, she found out the name of John James Roberts' father, George Edward Roberts, who was a canal boatman.

George Edward Roberts 1888



Creating a Family Tree

6 May then ordered a copy of George Edward Roberts' birth certificate and looked him up on the 1891 and 1911 censuses. This gave her the name of George's parents, his wife and children.

May Robert's Family Tree

George Edward Roberts 1859 m **Hannah Minshull** 1857
Walsall The Potteries

Mary Ada **George Edward Roberts** 1888 m **Edith Ollerhead** 1889
Canal Boat 'Sarah', Chester Wheelock

Ada 1909 **Rhoda** 1910 **John James Roberts** 1914 m **Vera Stubbs** 1917
Halsall Green Wheelock Wolverhampton Sandbach

Terry Roberts 1944 m **Jackie Morrey** 1949
Sandbach Sandbach

Tracy Roberts 1969 **Paul Roberts** 1970 m **Amanda Simpson** 1968 **Mark Roberts** 1971
Sandbach Sandbach Stoke-on-Trent Sandbach

May Roberts 1997
Crewe



What was life like for May's family?

One of the canals the Roberts family lived and worked is the Trent & Mersey. We know this because people were born at places on the canal, for example Halsall Green and Wheelock.

The Trent & Mersey Canal was constructed in the 1770s. It links the River Trent at Shardlow, near Derby, to the Bridgewater Canal at Preston Brook in Cheshire, which in turn links to the River Mersey. The canal opened up trading routes from Hull and Liverpool through Staffordshire and south to the industrial Midlands. Narrowboats carried materials for making pottery, as well as the finished pottery, to and from the area round Stoke-on-Trent known as the Potteries.

The other main cargo carried along this route was salt, which was mined in Cheshire and Staffordshire and could be carried in bulk along the waterways. The Ollerhead family lived at Wheelock Wharf in Cheshire – ‘wharf’ tells us the houses were right next to the canal. Edith Ollerhead was born at Wheelock and went on to marry George Roberts, a boatman.

On many canals, whole families lived on their narrowboats although in some places boats had all-male crews. The men made enough money for their wives and children to live in houses beside the canal. We know from his birth certificate that May's great-great-grandfather, George Roberts, was born in the canal boat ‘Sarah’ in 1888.

May found out that narrowboat ‘Sarah’ was owned by the Shropshire Union Railways & Canal Carrying Company, so she investigated this too.



Supplied by: June Barnet

What was life like for May's family?

The **Shropshire Union Railways & Canal Carrying Company** (sometimes shortened to SURCCo rather than SURCCCo) was formed in the 1840s and operated boats on the Montgomery Canal, Shrewsbury, the Shropshire Union Canal and the Trent & Mersey Canal. They carried limestone from South Wales to ironworks in Shropshire, iron ore from Burslem and coal from Welsh collieries.

By 1889, the company owned 395 narrowboats!

May discovered that a Jack Roberts had once worked on a Shropshire Union fly boat called 'Saturn'. 'Saturn' was a cheese fly, meaning a boat built mainly for the fast carriage of cheese from Cheshire and Shropshire into markets like Manchester.

Today, Saturn is the only floating example of a horse-drawn Shropshire Union fly boat. You can find out more about her at saturnflyboat.org.uk and see her at events in the North West.



Saturn would have delivered goods to the North West, Midlands and Wales

The Roberts Family in the 20th century

When he grew up, George Roberts (born in 1888), followed in his father's footsteps and became a boater. The 1911 census records George, his wife Edith and their two young daughters living on board the boat 'Test', registered in Chester in 1893 and recorded as still trading in 1905, 12 years later.

As the amount of work on the canals dwindled, the next generation had to look for other ways to earn a living. The marriage certificate of May's great-grandfather, John James Roberts, in 1940, shows that John worked as a plater's help, a job in the metal industry. His father was still a boatman, though. By now, the family were living permanently in Sandbach, where May Roberts still lives.

May also found:

A photograph and map of Longport, where George Roberts' family lived in 1888. Longport is part of Stoke-on-Trent in Staffordshire. This area is known as the Potteries.

The history of the 'Sarah' at The Waterways Archives: owned by SURCCCo, she was registered in 1879 and was 'cut up' for scrap in 1925.

Now it's your turn. Follow the steps and make your own family tree and see if you can find out what life was like for **your** ancestors.

