

The Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain



Freedom of Information Requests for Naturalisation Files



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by

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Freedom of Information Requests for Naturalisation Files

Introduction

This document explains the step by step process of how to make a request to get a UK naturalisation file opened when it is closed by using a Freedom of Information (FOI) review request. It relates only to files held by the UK's National Archives, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/

1. Search for your file on the national archives website, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk
2. If or when you find that the file you want is closed, you will see the following information on the website

This document is closed and cannot be viewed or re-produced as a digital or printed copy.

You can [submit a FOI request](#) to The National Archives to review the reasons why it is closed to see if it can be made open. As part of the review we will consult the responsible government department. If the document can be opened, it will be made available for public access and for copies to be made. It is possible that only parts of the document can be opened.

We will send confirmation that we have received your request and you will then be contacted about your review request within 20 working days. Please note that in certain circumstances the review process will take slightly longer. More information about the [Freedom of Information at The National Archives and the review process](#)

3. First you need to understand about the process. You can learn more by reading about it – click on the **red writing** “Freedom of Information at The National Archives and the review process”.
4. Read the section about “Making an FOI request”. The page tells you how to make a Freedom of Information request to The National Archives, (TNA).
5. Now that you understand more about the process, you are ready to make your FOI review request:

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Freedom of Information Requests for Naturalisation Files

6. Click on the **blue** words “Submit an FOI request”. It is good to use the online form because most of the information you need will be entered in to the form automatically.
7. You need to include your full name and postal address in the request, and information that says the person who is the subject of the file is dead. You should include the reference to their death record in your request. This is the same information you would use to order a copy of the death certificate from the General Register Office, (GRO). The GRO is the UK Government's own official website for birth, marriage and death certificates for England and Wales. Certificates from Northern Ireland and Scotland are obtained elsewhere.
8. Caution: the Naturalisation file will NOT be opened if the person had a child or spouse who was naturalised with them on their file and their spouse or child is still living.
9. When you make your request you must make sure that the first line in the information box is the document's full reference, e.g. Document Reference: HO 405/XXXXX - (the x is numbers in your request – it is the file number.)
10. Complete the information and explain that this is the naturalisation for your relative, give their full name and date of birth and death, give the full reference for the death record, as noted above. Note that the spouse (give their full name, and maiden name if applicable and dates of birth and death) has also now died and that the couple left no children. Ask for the file to be opened and for you to be notified of the result of your FOI request.

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Freedom of Information Requests for Naturalisation Files

11. Do not send an email like this:

“Please tell me everything that is in the file HO 405/XXXXX because it belongs to my family. We lost contact with my uncle Josef before the Holocaust in Austria and only heard from him once after the war when he said he was in London. I want to know what happened to him and if I have any cousins. I would like to fill the gaps in my family tree. We don’t know if my uncle had any children and we think we are the only surviving relatives.”

If you send this, your file will stay closed and you will get a standard reply about how to learn to research your family history and how to employ a researcher to do research for you. (Yes I have seen an example almost exactly like this!)

12. What happens when you have submitted (sent in) your FOI request?
13. You will get a standard reply, and you now have to wait for a reply from TNA with the result of the FOI review. The file will be opened eventually, but it takes about 1 month for you to hear that this will happen. You do not need to thank TNA for their reply.
14. After the review you will get an email telling you that the file will be made available for viewing after [date]. It is best to wait a few weeks after this until you can see from the catalogue (search under the file number) that the file has been made ready to view at TNA. Last time I did this with someone, the file took about 2 extra months from the date that we were told it would be available to view for it to be ready to see. It can also take time from when the file is ready before it appears on the catalogue.
15. You may be told in your reply that some pages were redacted – this means that some pages in the file were edited to remove sensitive information. It will not affect your genealogy not to get this. In naturalisation files it usually refers to one of the people who did some of the work on the file rather than to your relative.

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Freedom of Information Requests for Naturalisation Files

16. When your file is available you can either visit Kew yourself to view the file, request e-copies or employ someone to visit for you, to take copies of the file.
17. If you ask for e-copies, this can sometimes be expensive – see TNA's schedule of costs. I asked for a file to be opened once and it had over 50 pages in it, but most files have less than this! Someone else once asked for a CD with e-copies and this cost £70 for 28 e-files (October 2010 prices). You can pay for your copies by credit card and can order online. There is no need to be in the UK to do this.

Further Information

The National Archives www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/

The Information Commissioner's Office www.ico.gov.uk/

General Register Office (England & Wales) www.gro.gov.uk

Can you help?

If you have a suggestion for an update to this information, please send your suggestion to education@jgs.gb.org.uk Thank you.

Jeanette Rosenberg
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