

# FACT SHEET

## FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH: ITALY

### Introduction

This fact sheet provides a brief description of the birth, deaths and marriages (BDM) records available in Italy. Also included are sample letters, in Italian and English, to help you in your family history research.

We recommend you conduct as much research as possible in Australia before embarking on a search of Italian archives. For more information, please refer to our fact sheet, [Family History Research: Australia](#). You may also wish to make use of our fact sheet, [Map: Italy](#).

Family history research is not a popular hobby in Italy. Officials are often reluctant to provide BDM records to the public by post. It can therefore be difficult to get a response to written requests for information, unless these are made via email. More successful are inquiries made in person, either by the researcher or someone living in the locality where the documents are held. Anyone conducting research in Italy is advised to first visit the local cemetery, where any individual family tombstone will provide the names and dates of birth and death of several generations of one family.

Be wary of heraldic organisations which produce family crests on commission. Unless you have evidence of an aristocratic title, it is unlikely that family history research would reveal any connection with the Italian nobility. However, every regional centre has its own crest which represents its population. Crests are available from each town council.

Although the Italian Historical Society is not a genealogical centre, we do have a limited number of publications designed for family historians. For Internet links to Australian and international sites relating to family history research, please refer to our [Links](#) page on the Italian Historical Society website.

### Publishing your family history

In most cases, family histories are self-published. The society has a number of such publications, which you can consult by appointment. Once you have completed your own family history, you may wish to deposit a copy with the IHS.

### History

A basic understanding of Italian history will help you locate records. Prior to the Unification of Italy in 1861, the region consisted of kingdoms and city and papal states, each with its own government and recordkeeping system. From around 1540 onward, priests were obliged by the Vatican to keep records of baptisms, births, deaths and marriages in their parish. Most towns began the systematic collection of civil records from 1866. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Napoleon initiated a more centralised and consistent system of recordkeeping which was adopted throughout Italy.

Since Unification, records of birth, marriage and death have been kept by the Ufficio di Stato Civile [Registry Office], usually housed in the Comune or Municipio [Town Hall or Municipal Office]. Over the centuries, wars, changes in national boundaries and natural disaster have contributed to the loss of records.

## Available records

### **Baptisms, deaths and marriages 1540-1866**

#### **Parish registries (Registri Parrocchiali)**

From 1540 onward, priests were obliged to keep records of births, baptisms, deaths and marriages in their parish. Requests for transcriptions of certificates from the parish registries must be made to the parish priest of the town where your ancestor was born, married or died.

Be aware that most churches in small towns do not have a photocopier or access to digital technology. In many cases, the priest is shared between a number of villages and has limited time to locate and transcribe family records.

### **Births, deaths and marriages 1866 onward**

#### **Council Registry Office (Ufficio di Stato Civile)**

While you can request either a copy of the original document or an extract, it is more likely that you will receive the latter. The original document provides details of the subject and his or her parents. The extract provides only the name of the subject, and the date and place where the event occurred. The names of parents are often omitted. Italian privacy laws, introduced in the 1950s, forbid the disclosure of the names of parents in public records. This law was designed to protect the children of single mothers and those abandoned on the doorsteps of the church from discrimination.

### **Sample letters with Italian translations**

We recommend you send a typed, rather than a handwritten letter. Please note that in Italy the postcode precedes the name of the town, e.g. 20100 MILANO, and that Italian correspondence differs slightly in structure and punctuation.

On the following pages, you will find English and Italian versions of the following:

#### **[1. Letter to persons with the family surname of your ancestor\(s\)](#)**

You can locate potential family members in the Italian White Pages for the town or district where your ancestor lived. The Italian White Pages (pagine bianche) are available online from [www.virgilio.it](http://www.virgilio.it) You will be asked to enter the following information: *Cognome* (Family name); *Nome* (Given name); *Dove* (Town).

#### **[2. Letter to parish priest requesting a copy of entries in the Baptism, Marriage and Death registers](#)**

Send a small offer in Euros (between €10-20) and a pre-stamped international envelope.

#### **[3. Letter to Council Registry Office requesting certificates](#)**

Do not send money to any official or individual.

In each letter, you will see instructions in red enclosed by [square brackets]. Insert the name and details of your ancestor in the spaces indicated by the square brackets. On pages 9-10, you will find a short glossary of English and Italian terms relating to family history research.

## 1a. Letter to people with same family name as the ancestor(s) [English]

Dear Sir/Madam

I am an Australian of Italian origin. I am researching the history of my ancestor(s) who migrated to Australia in [insert year of migration] from the town of [insert town of origin].

I am looking for information on the [insert name of ancestor's family] family and especially on [insert full name of ancestor].

I would like to establish contact with anyone related to this family or person. I hope in the near future to visit Italy to further my research. I would be most interested in meeting you.

Details of the ancestor(s) I am seeking information about are as follows:

Name of my ancestor(s) [insert full name of ancestor]  
Relationship to me [e.g. 'My grandfather'. See Glossary p. 9-10]  
Date of birth [e.g. '10 ottobre 1906'. See Glossary]  
Place of birth [insert Italian spelling of city, town or village]  
Year of migration to Australia [insert year of migration]

Looking forward to your reply,

Yours sincerely

[insert your signature]

[insert your name and address]

## 1b. Letter to people with same family name as the ancestor(s) [Italian]

Name [insert the recipient's name]

Street [insert the recipient's address]

Cap and Town [insert the recipient's postcode and town]

Italy [insert 'Italia']

Caro signore/Cara signora,

sono un'australiano/a di origine italiana. Desidero fare delle ricerche genealogiche sui miei antenati emigrati in Australia nel [insert year of migration] che provenivano da [insert town of origin].

Cerco informazioni sulla famiglia [insert name of ancestor's family] e in particolare su [insert full name of ancestor]

Vorrei mettermi in contatto con persone che sono legate da legami di parentela con questa famiglia. Spero in un vicino futuro di poter venire in Italia per approfondire la mia ricerca. Sarà per me un piacere fare la sua conoscenza.

### Dettagli

Nome e cognome del mio antenato/a [insert full name of ancestor]

Grado di parentela [e.g. 'My grandfather'. See Glossary p. 9-10]

Data di nascita [e.g. '10 ottobre 1906'. See Glossary]

Luogo di nascita [insert Italian spelling of city, town or village]

Data della partenza per l'Australia [insert year of migration]

Le sarò grato/a per una sua cortese risposta.

Cordiali saluti,

[Insert your signature]

[Insert your name and address]

## 2a. Letter to parish priest [English]

Dear Father

I am an Australian of Italian origin. I am researching the history of my ancestor(s) who migrated to Australia in [insert year of migration] from the town of [insert town of origin]

I am looking for information on the [insert name of ancestor's family] family and especially on [insert full name of ancestor]

I am seeking to obtain a transcription of [insert 'baptism'/'marriage'/'death', see Glossary p. 9-10] registration of:

Name of my ancestor(s) [insert full name of ancestor]  
Relationship to me [e.g. 'My grandfather'. See Glossary p. 9-10]  
Date of birth [e.g. '10 ottobre 1906'. See Glossary]  
Place of birth [insert Italian spelling of city, town or village]  
Year of migration to Australia [insert year of migration]

I include a pre-stamped envelope and a donation of Euros [insert size of donation in Euros].

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

[Insert your signature]

[Insert your name and address]

## 2b. Letter to parish priest [Italian]

Reverendo Parroco [insert name of priest if known]  
Parrocchia di [insert name of parish]  
Street [insert recipient's address if known]  
(Postcode and Town) [insert recipient's postcode and town]  
Italy [insert 'Italia']

Reverendo Padre,

sono un'australiano/a di origine italiana. Desidero fare delle ricerche genealogiche sui miei antenati emigrati in Australia nel [insert year of migration] che provenivano da [insert town of origin]

Cerco informazioni sulla famiglia [insert name of ancestor's family] e in particolare su [insert full name of ancestor]

Vorrei ottenere una trascrizione dai registri parrocchiali della [insert 'baptism'/'marriage'/'death'. See Glossary p. 9-10] di:

Nome e cognome del mio antenato/a [insert full name of ancestor]  
Grado di parentela [e.g. 'My grandfather'. See Glossary]  
Data di nascita [e.g. '10 ottobre 1906'. See Glossary]  
Luogo di nascita [insert Italian spelling of city, town or village]  
Data della partenza per l'Australia [insert year of migration]

Allego una busta pre-affrancata e una piccola donazione di Euro [insert size of donation in Euros].

La ringrazio per la sua preziosa cooperazione,

Cordiali saluti,

[Insert your signature]

[Insert your name and address]

### 3a. Letter to Ufficio di Stato Civile (Registry Office) [English]

Subject: Request for certificates

Dear Sir/Madam

I am researching my family history and require a certificate of: **[select certificate required]**

- birth
- marriage
- death
- family census

Name **[insert full name of ancestor]**

Son/Daughter of **[insert name of ancestor's father]** and **[insert maiden name of ancestor's mother]**

Date of birth **[insert ancestor's date of birth. See Glossary p. 9-10]**

Date of marriage **[insert ancestor's date of marriage]**

Date of death **[insert ancestor's date of death]**

Place of birth **[insert ancestor's place of birth]**

Place of marriage **[insert ancestor's place of marriage]**

Place of death **[insert ancestor's place of death]**

I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely

**[Insert your signature]**

**[Insert your name and address]**

### 3b. Letter to Ufficio di Stato Civile (Registry Office) [Italian]

Ufficio di Stato Civile  
Comune di [insert town]  
[insert recipient's postcode and town]  
[insert 'Italia']

Oggetto: Richiesta di certificati

Sto conducendo una ricerca sulla storia della mia famiglia e vorrei poter ottenere il certificato di: [select certificate required]

- nascita
- matrimonio
- morte
- stato di famiglia

di [insert full name of ancestor]  
figlio/figlia di [insert name of ancestor's father] e di [insert maiden name of ancestor's mother]

Data di nascita [insert ancestor's date of birth. See Glossary p. 9-10]

Data del matrimonio [insert ancestor's date of marriage]

Data di morte [insert ancestor's date of death]

Luogo di nascita [insert ancestor's place of birth]

Luogo di matrimonio [insert ancestor's place of marriage]

Luogo di morte [insert ancestor's place of death]

Spero che questa mia richiesta venga accolta favorevolmente.

Cordiali saluti,

[Insert your signature]

[Insert your name and address]

### Glossary A: General

The following words and terms will assist you in your quest for family records in Italy. We recommend you also purchase a small bilingual dictionary.

English	Italian
birth	nascita
birth/marriage/death office	Ufficio di Stato Civile
certificate	atto/certificato
country of emigration	paese di emigrazione
date	data
death	morte
deceased	deceduto
destination	destinazione
documents	documenti
luogo	place
marriage	matrimonio
parish of [followed by name of town]	parrocchia di [followed by name of town]
profession/trade	professione/mestiere
province	provincia
records	atti
relatives	parenti
resident of [town]/living at [street]	residente
street/road	via
town	paese
town council	comune
town hall	municipio
year of emigration	anno di emigrazione

### Glossary B: Genealogical terms

English	Italian
aunt	zia
brother	fratello
cousin	cugino
father	padre
first name and family name	nome e cognome
godfather	padrino
godmother	madrina
grandfather	nonno
grandmother	nonna
great grandfather	bisnonno
great grandmother	bisnonna
great great grandfather	trisnonno
great great grandmother	trisnonna
great great great grandfather	quadrisonno
great great great grandmother	quadrisonna
mother	madre
nephew/niece	nipote
siblings	fratelli
sister	sorella
son of [father alive when registration of event took place]	figlio di

son of [father deceased when registration of event took place]	fu
son/daughter of father	paternità
son/daughter of mother	maternità
spouse	coniuge
uncle	zio

### **Glossary C: Months of the year**

Note: In Italian, months of the year are written in lower case.

<b>English</b>	<b>Italian (months are not capitalized)</b>
January	gennaio
February	febbraio
March	marzo
April	aprile
May	maggio
June	giugno
July	luglio
August	agosto
September	settembre
October	ottobre
November	novembre
December	dicembre

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