Getting started
#2: recording information

It is always best to record what questions you have asked of whom and any information you glean from your sources. Even if you don't get answers, it is best to record that you have tried so that you do not go over old ground unless new information has come to light.

Many genealogists use notebooks while they are researching in the field, whether that is chatting to a relative or working in a library or archive. A camera is also a useful addition and sometimes much easier than requesting a photocopy of a document or photograph. Another very useful piece of equipment is a small scanner. A handheld scanner such as scanner mouse or a FlipPal can be invaluable. Check whether the person or archive is happy for you to use a camera or a scanner. Because some archives use photocopying, scanning documents and photographs as sources of revenue, don't be surprised to find that scanners and cameras are not allowed. Other archives have fees associated with using a camera or a scanner.

Once home, transferring the information on to something more readable and searchable becomes the priority. Unless you are competent on a computer and wish to use a genealogy program right from the outset, putting the data down on paper is a good way to begin. Many start with a chart. NZSG has blank charts available, downloadable here, (Family Group Sheet and Pedigree Chart), or you can create a simple chart yourself.

NZSG also has a research notebook containing the above charts that is a handy resource to carry around with you. This notebook can be bought from the FRC or from the shop on the website (www.genealogy.org.nz).

It pays to be consistent in how you record information. Here are some simple rules:
- always use BLOCK CAPITALS for surnames;
- use birth surnames where ever possible, including a woman's maiden name rather than her married name;
- use day/month/year format to record dates and use all the year numerals (2015 for instance instead of just '15);
- use c. (for circa) for approximate dates or calculated dates
- use ink for proven information where you have clear evidence to support the fact and pencil for details yet to be proven;
- always record the sources of your information to support the authenticity of your work;
- if your chart has either an even and an odd number in each box, record male ancestors in the even-numbered boxes and female ancestors in the odd-numbered boxes and
- a family group chart can be compiled for each couple on your pedigree chart.

If you want to use a genealogical computer program to record your family details, you will need to refer to the specific program menu and help files for instructions.