

U3A GENEALOGY GROUP

WHERE TO BEGIN, AND HOW TO PROGRESS

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SOME GENERAL TIPS

- Always, but always, begin your family history search with yourself and your immediate family. Don't fall into the trap of starting with a famous person of the same name and trying to work back to you. Invariably this does not work.
- Be prepared for the long haul – a lot of time and effort is required to build up your records. Things don't always fall into your lap easily and you really do have to do the “hard yards” yourself. If you are not prepared to do this, you may wish to pay a researcher.
- In this technological age we expect instant gratification, but research takes time. You will not create a whole family tree, with every piece of information that is available, on one trip to a library or family history centre.
- If people are prepared to share information (and most people are), remember that this is an absolute bonus to you. Offer to recompense them in some way (e.g. pay for any photocopying), and also offer to share with them any information that you might have.
- Some people will not be willing to disclose family details to you (keep in mind that not all people come from happy families), and some will not be willing to share with you what they themselves have researched.
- Respect the views and efforts of others, and don't expect them to provide you with the results of all their hard work – it should not be taken for granted that this will occur.
- Be prepared for some shocks and disappointments along the way, as well as some nice surprises.
- Remember that there is always a cost to the researcher in terms of his/her time, Internet usage, photocopying costs, telephone calls, trips to libraries and other resources, etc. Many of us believe that what goes around comes around, i.e. that things balance out, but sometimes this isn't true.
- Always acknowledge correspondence of any kind, and thank people no matter how small the gesture. A telephone or handwritten “thank you” could be appropriate at times, in addition to an Emailed one.
- If you have a computer but are not confident using it, think of enrolling in a computer class.
- A “sink or swim” approach is best once you go beyond gathering together what you have at your fingertips – go to a library, go to a Family History Centre, and start somewhere.
- Don't be afraid to “have a go” yourself, and don't expect others to do everything for you – this would in fact spoil the thrill of some spectacular finds along the way.

HOW TO BEGIN YOUR SEARCH

- Consider how you might record the information that you are about to seek, and how you might store that information. Gather together a “kit” of materials you might use initially – family record sheets, binders, plastic sleeves, exercise books, etc. Examples of different paper forms are in the folder prepared for this discussion.

- When you have gathered some basic information, create a family record sheet for yourself and your immediate family (spouse/partner, children). Record all the information you can find on a form that you have chosen to use. It may be wise to start using a pencil, as initially you may make lots of mistakes.
- If there have been two marriages then make up two sheets, with only the information that is relevant to each particular couple on each sheet (if one couple had two children, and there were no children by the second marriage, then the children would only appear with their two parents).
- If your children are married and have children, then you will need to start a separate sheet for each one.
- If you have never married, then your first sheet might start with your parents and would include yourself and any siblings. You could create a separate record sheet for yourself, but it would not be very detailed without a spouse and children.
- Once you have completed your immediate family, then you create another page for your parents. You and your siblings would be included on this sheet. Similarly, you create another sheet for your grandparents that would include your parent and his or her siblings.
- At this point, you are going to have to decide if you wish to follow your mother's line as well. If you do, then you need to start separate sheets for her family. The first on your mother's line would be for her parents, it would include your mother and all of her siblings.
- Talk to relatives, especially "elders", and people who knew family members. Also, try to discover if anyone else is researching your particular family lines.
- Buy or borrow books on individuals, families, towns, countries (check second-hand book shops, the annual Lifeline book sale etc.). In libraries and bookshops etc., check the index/contents pages of books for possible connections.
- Buy a cheap book on how to use the Internet, buy or borrow from a library any sort of magazine or book that will help you get started (at least one computer magazine has a genealogy section). If borrowed, keep notes on (or photocopy) any sections of interest.
- As you gain more knowledge of your family and where they lived, buy an atlas or individual maps of interest, download maps from the Web or copy them from books.
- If you are using a computer, in a search engine such as Google, simply type the family name you are interested in + the State or country name of interest + the word "genealogy", and away you go. Example: Gow + Perthshire + Scotland + genealogy. You will follow some meaningless paths, but you will also make discoveries you didn't think were possible.
- If you do not have access to a computer and the Internet at home, the same preparation rules apply for when you visit a library or other resource. Once there, just start somewhere, with a name, a town or city, or even a country, and see where that leads you.
- From the beginning, always record your sources (film number, date, where found, who provided the copy to you etc.). Also, record your name and a date on things given to others. It is frustrating, years down the track, not to be able to follow up on something that has come to you or has been found by you but you have no idea where it came from.

GENEALOGY SOFTWARE/PROGRAMS

- If you have a genealogy program installed on your computer (Family Tree Maker [purchased and downloaded], Personal Ancestry File [PAF] downloaded from the LDS Church website, Legacy downloaded from the internet etc.), always read the instruction manual carefully or check the Help section before you begin to add data to the program.

- Genealogy programs are like a book – they have pages similar to family record sheets to which you must add data, but these are all linked together so that when you click on a name, the program “turns the page” and opens at the page that is relevant to the person whose name you clicked. You are able to move backwards and forwards through families over countless generations, if of course you have added that much data.
- There are options for completing detailed “Notes” on an individual (you can write or add as much detail about them as you like), and you can also add short and sharp “Facts” other than those that appear on the basic page for an individual. For example in the “Facts” section, you may wish to record under “Residence” where that person was living at the time of his or her death; you may wish to record under “Military” that he served in the Light Horse during World War I.
- You can add any information you have found, directly into the program. You will still need to retain paper files – there are documents you just can’t add to a computer program, and you will frequently want to go back to the “original” resource to check on certain aspects of it. For example, you may wish to include in the computer program some of the detail that appears on a convict’s Ticket of Leave – but you wouldn’t then throw away the copy of the original because it is a priceless piece of your history.
- Don’t split families when starting up with a Family Tree Maker-type program – include all your family lines in the one file (it is just too difficult down the track to try to combine the separate trees). You may want to start a separate file for your spouse’s lines to reduce the overall size, and that is fine, but do keep all of your own lines together.
- Genealogy programs allow you to produce entire “family tree reports” of different kinds (you can choose the style and how much information is to be included), and you can also produce “charts” of different styles.
- From some genealogy programs, you are able to produce something called a GEDCOM (a standard file format for exchanging information between genealogy programs). These are used when you want to share the information in your program with another researcher. You are able to include as much or as little as you wish in a GEDCOM. You can sometimes download someone else’s GEDCOM from the Web to add to your records, but you must be using a genealogy program that supports GEDCOMs (i.e. you need the right software installed on your computer to enable the information to be read).

WHERE TO SEARCH FOR INFORMATION, IN YOUR OWN HOME

- Letters
- Cards/Invitations
- Photos
- Diaries
- Funeral/Death Notices from newspapers (the online Ryerson Index is very useful)
- Funeral Service sheets/Return Thanks cards
- Obituaries
- Newspapers, books, magazines
- Old newspaper clippings
- BDM certificates
- Family Bibles
- Old legal documents (e.g. leases, Wills)

WHERE TO START SEARCHING, BEYOND YOUR OWN HOME

- Make use of local resources (e.g. Richmond-Tweed Regional Library, LDS Family History Centre [FHC], Lismore Library, Casino Family History Group [FHG], Richmond-Tweed FHG, Historical Societies)
- Visit cemeteries (remember to take your camera and a notebook)
- Check for cemetery lists/headstone photos on the internet (not all are available)
- Look for books/fiche/CDs on monumental inscriptions for particular cemeteries (held in libraries, by Family History Centres etc.) (different places hold different collections)
- Look for Pioneer Indexes (generally in book form in libraries, Family History Centres etc.)
- Use the various indexes held by libraries etc. (some of these have been created by local people, from local resources)
- Browse local library shelves or bookshops, or those in towns you pass through or visit
- Talk with family members and friends of the family
- Use the Internet – an unbelievable resource

THINGS TO WATCH FOR

- Names may not be recorded as you expect them to be. Names in old documents were often written as they were pronounced (e.g., Still rather than Steele). It also depended very much on the education of the recorder of the information. The spelling of surnames can vary quite considerably, given names can be reversed or abbreviated or be quite different to what you think they should be. The birth of a child was not always registered but if it was, the name may not be as was presumed down the years. Burial registrations can hold a lot of wrong information – it depends on the knowledge of the informant.
- The registration place for BDMs may not give a true indication of where individuals lived and died (registration places for some towns/villages/suburbs may have been quite distant from where the actual event occurred). Also, registration places have changed over time.
- If you don't succeed with a search, think laterally and try lots of different options. When searching online, you are sometimes better off using less information as a search term rather than more. If there is an option to use a "soundex" system (= sounds like), use it if your first attempt with the proper spelling doesn't succeed.
- Some indexes on the Web are updated regularly so always go back and check from time to time.
- Years ago, following the death of a spouse, people often married very quickly, especially if there were children. If searching for family in England, it is wise when looking at film of Old Parish Records to check the death registrations, this way you can see if a wife or husband died and then you can look for a second marriage, you can also track what became of family members, etc.
- The LDS Church does not generally record deaths on its IGI records (FamilySearch website) but the death entries on the Old Parish Records were filmed and so these records can usually be found.

WHAT TO TAKE TO A LIBRARY, BASIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR OTHERS, ETC.

- When you go to a library or other resource centre, you will need to take information already held that will assist you in your search, an exercise book for recording any information you find on the day, and you will need money for any photocopying you may wish to do or films you may wish to order (always remember that a library or whatever may not have the change for a note of say \$50 or even \$20).
- You are not able to borrow items held in the reference collections at a library, or the LDS Family History Centre. You are able to use the resources in those collections, view them, copy them, but

you cannot take them away. These resources are precious and in some cases could never be replaced if they were loaned and not returned.

- My suggestion for an initial visit to a resource such as the Regional Library is that first of all, you ask the staff for some basic guidance. They will be able to assist you in how to find out what is in their catalogue. In some libraries you may be able to browse through a printed catalogue, in others you may have to do a search on a computer screen, at the Regional Library you could ask if they had anything on a particular cemetery in Sydney (for example), and they will then tell you what they have.
- Staff will be able to advise what is held on the shelves, and show you what makes up the other components of their collection (films, fiche, CDs etc.). If you get to that stage on your first visit, they will be able to assist you with techniques for loading and searching a particular CD, placing a piece of microfiche on the microfiche reader, loading a film onto the reader/printer, navigating your way around the film, etc. Depending on which resource you are visiting, technical assistance is perhaps all they will be able to give you (it depends on the individual's workload, how many people are also seeking help that day, and, in some cases, on the level of the staff member's personal knowledge and skills).
- It is always helpful to take the time to browse the shelves and filing cabinets on your first few visits, so that you can see what is in printed form or available on film and microfiche. Great discoveries can be made this way. Expect the unexpected. You can go back to the shelves and cabinets, time and again, and find new information.
- When handling films and fiche etc., it is preferable that you use pencils for recording information in your exercise book rather than pens (to avoid the risk of marking the resources with ink).
- Never mark a book or any other resource – remember that these resources are for *everyone* and a big cross beside someone else's name of interest could spoil that resource for another person.
- Whilst at the library or any other resource, think about others who are there to do their own research (of whatever kind). Most people are too polite to say if someone speaks really loudly or talks "at" people about an entire family history that really is only of interest to them, but it can be extremely frustrating and time-wasting when this occurs. Just remember that another person in the library on that particular day may only have that one opportunity to do their research, and their time spent there may be really limited.
- Work quietly, and seek help from the staff rather than other researchers (unless of course they offer to help). Researchers can be most helpful, but the time spent with you is time they don't have to do their own research.

RECORDING AND FILING WHAT YOU FIND

- When you visit a resource such as the Regional Library, you may find several pieces of information that are instantly recognizable as pertinent to your own family. You may also find material that could prove useful in the future (i.e. you may think there is a link with your family, but can't prove it right there and then). In your exercise book, you can jot down the detail for either, but do remember to record exactly where you found the information (i.e. the source document or film, whatever).
- You may prefer to photocopy what you have discovered, but you should still pencil on the back of the photocopy, the film number and name, the date you copied the page, where you copied the page (e.g. Regional Library Lismore). You will not remember, in five years' time, where and when you copied every single piece of paper that you have gathered.
- To use a reader/printer at either the Regional Library or the LDS FHC, you must make a booking in advance. There are dedicated researchers who sometimes have regular bookings (e.g. people who index *The Northern Star* for all of us to use), and you will soon find when it is best to do your own research. It will also be necessary to make a booking if you wish to use a computer. It is wise

to mention what you plan to use on the computer when making the booking (if you know), as some information is only loaded onto a particular computer and that may already be booked.

- Computers are generally linked to excellent printers that will give you very clear copies of anything you find on a CD, on the Web etc.
- On a reader/printer, you are able to make prints of information or documents that have been recorded on either microfiche, or film. Different settings are required for the two, and you will need to seek assistance from the staff in this regard.
- On a microfiche reader, you can look at the information on the fiche and make notes of what you have found in an exercise book. If you do wish to have a print of that information, you would need to check with the staff about when you could use the reader/printer – depending on bookings you may not be able to do this until another day. If you record the name/number of the microfiche with your notes (and even the drawer number where it is housed), you will be able to relocate that microfiche again quickly, on your return visit.
- As you find material, either at home or at a library, your own personal collection will expand and you will need to file the paper documentation. You may start with one lever arch file or binder, but then need to increase the number of binders as more families and material are added to your collection. You may wish to separate the information by category within each binder (shipping records, BDM information, certificates, maps, whatever). Go to a stationery shop/supermarket and check what is available – there is an enormous range. A good time to buy and perhaps stock up for the future is “Back to School” sale periods, when incredible bargains can be had.
- Scrapbooking is becoming a popular way of displaying family records and is worth considering.

SCANNING/PHOTOCOPYING OF DOCUMENTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

- If you are able to scan documents or photographs, you will then be able to share these with other family members or researchers. You can send them as an Email attachment, add them to a CD for sharing and/or safekeeping, add them to stories you might wish to prepare, or add them to your family history program on the computer.
- A relative may hold family photographs that you have never seen before and may also be willing for those to be copied and shared. Between you, you may be able to identify people in those photographs, work out locations, etc.
- If you do wish to scan photographs, it is best to scan them at a high resolution, e.g. 600 dpi (dots per inch). The reason for this is that you can then enlarge the photograph on your computer screen, and it will not pixelate. It also makes it easier if someone has the skill to restore the photograph (“replace” torn sections, remove dirt spots, etc.).
- If you do not have a scanner, you can photocopy photographs and enlarge them. The photocopiers at the Xerox Shop in Lismore or at Officeworks in Lismore have a facility for photocopying photographs. A tiny box brownie photograph enlarged to A4 size can show detail that has never been noticed before.
- If you prefer, you can pay to have your photographs copied, enlarged (if you wish) and printed. Whilst you get a far better result, this is of course more expensive than photocopying.

SHARING OF INFORMATION

- There is need for caution as sometimes people may go ahead, without your knowledge, and publish information on the Web that you have shared with them. You may be prepared for your own information to be made public in this way, but what about your siblings, or your children – would they have given their approval, had they been asked? It pays to ask if the person has any intention of publishing the information on the Internet – you may wish to stipulate that you be asked before

your information is published or passed on to others. The same courtesies apply in reverse of course – you should always ask if it is okay to pass on to others, material that has been given to you.

- Many family trees you find on the Web include references to “Living” people (i.e. people not wanting their personal details published, or perhaps due to the contributor’s own approach to privacy issues). If you are interested in a particular tree found on the Web and some of the people recorded as “Living”, then you would need to write to the person who published the tree to see how you might make contact with the people of interest. Normally, the contributor would approach the person who appears in the published tree, and ask if they wish to be contacted by you.
- If lending material or books to others, keep a record of the item, when it was loaned, to whom, and when it is returned. A small exercise book is very handy for this purpose.
- If copying material to share with people, mark the original somehow so that you know which version to retain (pencil an “O” on the reverse if the document does not already have your source notes recorded).

THE VALUE OF RESEARCHING OTHER FAMILY LINES

- As you progress in your research, you might find it valuable to branch out and look at other family lines. If you limit yourself to your own immediate line, you are probably going to miss out on vital information and sometimes, remarkable documents that other people and distant relatives hold. Those people might never know you are out there researching, if you don’t broaden the scope of your search.

HOW TO SEARCH ON A SEARCH ENGINE (SAY GOOGLE) FOR BEST RESULTS

- This could be the subject of an entire meeting, but a brief example:
 - Search Angus Kennedy
 - Search “Angus Kennedy” “Kennedy, Angus”
 - Search “Angus Kennedy” + “Kennedy, Angus”+ genealogy

SOME FAVOURITE RESOURCES

- Richmond-Tweed Regional Library (and Genealogy Centre)
6 Centenary Drive, Goonellabah
Telephone 6625 1415
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS Family History Centre)
3 Glen Court Goonellabah (off Ballina Road)
Telephone 6624 1317 (only during opening hours)
- Casino & District Family History Group Inc.
98 Walker Street Casino
Telephone 6662 8114
(extensive collection including cemetery records for New England area of NSW and possibly now with access to LDS Church films etc.)
- Richmond-Tweed Family History Society (PO Box 817, Ballina 2478)
- Kiama Family History Group (many South Coast people relocated to the North Coast)
- Family History Societies or Groups
- State Libraries

- Department of Lands (access to linen plans, old maps, topographic maps created by the Central Mapping Authority that show large rural properties and their names etc.)
- NSW State Archives (copies of Probate documents etc.)
- Southern Cross University Library

SOME RESOURCES AT RICHMOND-TWEED REGIONAL LIBRARY (sample only)

- Two reader/printers, several fiche readers, several computers with internet access
- Archives Kit from NSW Archives Office
- Books/magazines etc. (entire wall of)
- Fiche, film (entire file drawers of) and CDs
- Pre-1856 BDMs (film)
- Convict records (film)
- Colonial Secretary's Correspondence (film)
- Shipping – Assisted Immigrants, Coastal Shipping (includes New Zealand to Australia) (film)
- NSW Hotel Licences (indexed) (film)
- Depasturing Licences (indexed) (film)
- Cemetery records (fiche, some books)
- William Riley funeral records
- Probate details (fiche)
- Census Collectors Books (give some census information) (fiche)
- *The Northern Star* (film) (some years indexed by local researchers)
- Other local papers (film)
- Pioneer Registers (books)
- Tasmanian headstones
- Victorian headstones (scans of handwritten cards, with lots of information)
- BDMs for other States

FAVOURITE WEB SITES (sample only)

- NSW Births Deaths and Marriages
- Australian War Memorial (especially their Biographical Indexes, and photos)
- Commonwealth War Graves Commission (covers all conflicts)
- NSW State Records (bounty immigrants, convicts, probates, divorces, etc.)
- National Archives of Australia (more recent immigrants, personal war records, photos)
- Society of Australian Genealogists
- Government Departments (e.g. Lands)
- Cemetery lists for Lismore and surrounding villages (Lismore City Council website)
- Cemetery lists for Brisbane
- Cemetery lists online
- Claim-a-Convict
- University collections e.g. The University of New England
- Family History Groups
- Town/city websites
- Shipping Lists (including Convictions)
- Mailing Lists
- Surname Lists
- *Maitland Mercury* newspaper
- Newspapers
- Illawarra Images (old photographs from around Wollongong etc.)

- Tasmanian State Archives
- Tasmanian State Library e-Heritage (headstone details and photographs)
- WA site on convicts and shipping
- CoraWeb
- Cindi's List
- Ancestry.com
- RootswEB (Family Trees, Mailing Lists, Surname Lists etc.)
- LDS Church's FamilySearch (IGI, 1881 Census, plus much more) (Australian records included in "South Pacific" region)
- Links from *any* website that lead you to other relevant websites (it is wise to bookmark or add to Favourites any original site that you have found, as it is very easy to get lost as you go from one link to another, and then another)

FAVOURITE UK WEB SITES (sample only)

- Free BMD (September 1837 onwards)
- GENUKI (covers United Kingdom and Ireland)
- Access to Archives (A2A)
- 1901 Census (free)
- County Councils (e.g. Surrey County Council, Wiltshire County Council)
- Online Parish Clerks (available for some Counties only)
- Libraries (e.g. Manchester Library)
- Individual County websites (indexes of BMDs, transcribed census records etc.)
- Churches (photographs of)
- Monumental Inscriptions for some cemeteries

When accessing a website for the first time, consider browsing the Home page initially so that you can see just what is available on that site. Sometimes sites have many more sections to explore than you would expect. If you use a web address that has been provided to you, try your luck at the Home page if that isn't where you first begin.

NB: Since this paper was written eight years ago, much more information has become available online. For example, the 1911 UK census records have been made available, service records are available for all Australian World War I servicemen/women and for some who served in World War II, more cemetery records have been made available, etc.

More people are using paid sites such as Ancestry and Findmypast (some information is available free of charge), but there are many other sites that are free – just three examples are the Ryerson Index (Australian death and funeral notices), Australian Cemeteries Index, and Trove (digitized newspapers, photos etc. available on the National Library of Australia website). Library membership (e.g. regional, State Library of NSW, National Library) will enable access to each library's long list of e-resources – e.g. British newspapers can be accessed by members of the State Library. If you join your local library you can also access Ancestry.com for free – you simply make a booking to access the site using a library computer.

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