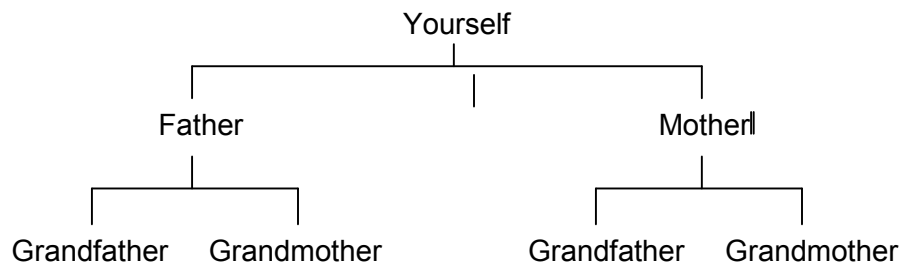


Tracing the Family Tree

We published an article back in 2016, Get into Genealogy (Focus F11), and it proved to be very popular. It seems many folk have an interest in tracing their origins which, with the information available via the Internet, isn't too difficult; provided they are prepared to spend a bit of time researching databases relevant to countries of birth. This, of course, can lead the way down various paths, particularly having regard not only to already-known facts such as where they themselves were born; but more importantly the places of birth, residence, and also the occupations of ancestors.

Most countries have records dating back to early times, so it is possible to track families which may have started out in one country, then migrated to another; sometimes more than one. So, it is just a matter of taking a step back to the immediate next of kin, perhaps father and mother; and finding out where they were in more recent times; then researching the records of that particular country. From this simple beginning, those who start compiling their family tree will discover how complex and convoluted the search will become. Despite this, it will doubtless prove to be a worthwhile and very intriguing exercise.

The basic family unit might be father, mother and any number of children who are related not only to their parents, but also their parents' parents; in other words, the grandparents. As the tree starts to branch out, more names and dates are added...



Where, though, does all of the information come from? Well, there are numerous sources, not the least being censuses. In the UK these began in 1841, and it was decided to compile future updates every 10 years. Data transposed from the original documents is available to the general public; but there is a rule imposed preventing access to records from the past 100 years; presumably to protect the privacy of those who may still be alive during this period. As a result, anyone using censuses as a research source in 2021 can view data no later than 1911. Even so, it is a good start, although not always perfectly accurate. Some of the reasons for this are covered in the Genealogy article, which is an interesting read.

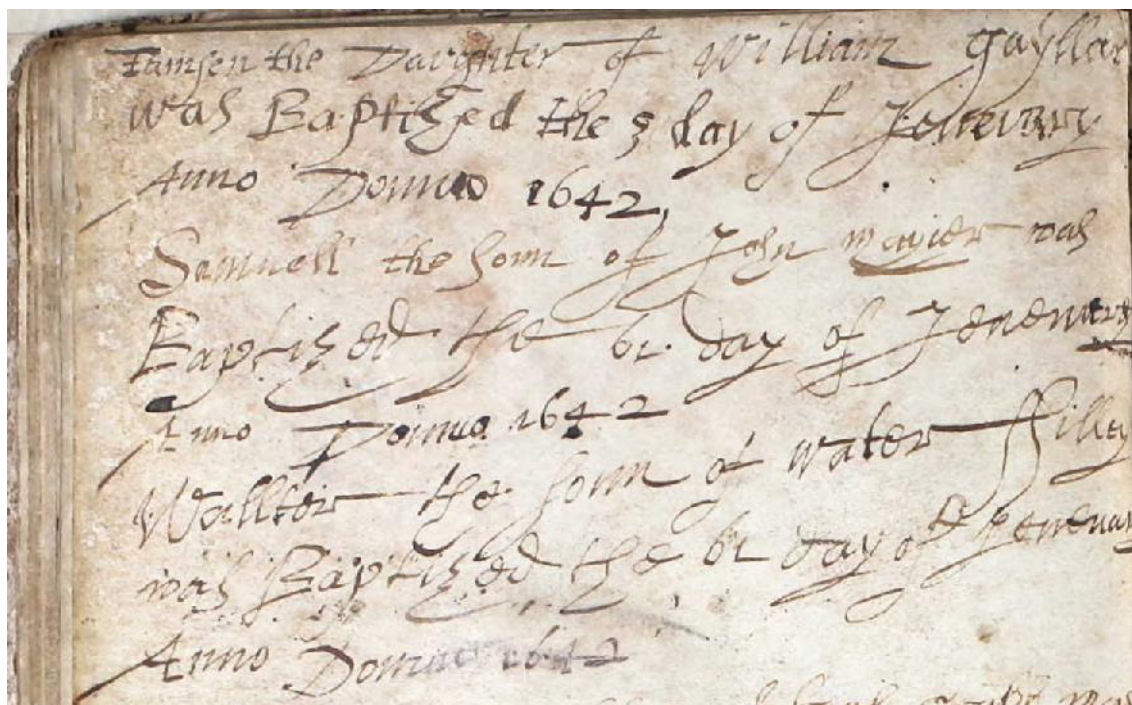
Other important sources for tracing early relatives, at least in the UK, are parish records. Fairly comprehensive, they can include records of births, christenings, marriages and deaths; always assuming none have been lost or destroyed, either by accident or design (funny things happened in olden times). Most, however, seem to have survived, as my

wife can testify to first-hand. While conducting her own research into both of our families, she had cause to contact historical societies to fill in some blanks she'd come across; or to query data entries which were thought to be wrong. One thing led to another and she eventually agreed to help out as an OPC - that's an Online Parish Clerk - for two small towns in the UK near where she was born. Now residing in Australia apparently wasn't a problem because, as her title suggests, the work is done via the Internet. Why do I bother mentioning this at all, when it would hardly impact on your own investigation of your family tree? Actually, aside from being an interesting exposé of how records are compiled; it also explains the difficulties incurred transcribing details from hand-written ledgers to a computer database; and how the mistakes of transcribers can send you down some blind alleys. Unforgiveable you may say. Why can't they just take a bit of extra time to get it right? I'll show you. The first example is part of the parish records for marriages in 1847:

1847. Marriage solemnized.								
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
22	23 December 1847.	John Reader	24	Single Bachelor	Cordwinder	Have Croft	Herbert Reader	Carter
		Maria Cox	24	Single Spinster	Supremaker	Have Croft	Richard Bennett	Labourer






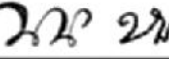


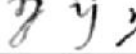
If you look closely, you can see discoloration under the script which I would suggest is writing that has leached through from the back of the page. I make this assumption because the obvious slope of the vague image towards the left is the reverse of that on the page being transcribed. In this instance it wasn't an issue as it was so faint.

This next image is a small extract from the records of baptisms in 1642. Staining of this paper/parchment is not as bad as some entries; but the flowery nature of the script makes it hard to interpret.



Added to this, those words in old English or Latin are not always familiar; and, in many instances, the way certain letters are formed, particularly upper case, is different to

modern day handwriting and even those scripted in the 1847 document above. When transcribing these records to the database, my wife often has trouble deciphering some letters, even by comparison with later or previous entries that may appear clearer. The 1616 pages and those of subsequent years were particularly difficult and she eventually researched the problem to come up with some lists of old English letters and their modern day equivalents. Here's an extract from one of the lists:

R		r	
S		s	
T		t	
U		u	
V		v	
W		w	
X		x	
Y/IJ		y/ij	

Transcribing information from ancient documents is a long-winded task requiring total focus and diligence. I often see my wife skipping from one computer to another just to verify a single entry by comparing it with a different source; and maybe then going to yet another website for confirmation. Some might wonder if this level of accuracy is really necessary; my wife, however, is adamant that it is. People like me, she will say, want to trace their ancestors, and they need data of past records to be as correct as it possibly can be. As far as she's concerned, if it takes all day to interpret only one page of old English script, so be it.

At least when you are tracing your own family tree, you can rest assured that the OPC's who have made this possible are doing their very best to help in your search. No doubt your investigations in this arena will be challenging; but hopefully the results of your findings will be as rewarding as they are for those who have opened up the doors to your particular family's past. With luck, it will turn out to be an exciting experience.

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