

Newsletter



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Editorial

In the last Newsletter I started a series of articles to try and help you with your family history research. Pages 3 and 4 of this Newsletter will try to help you get over that elusive brick wall and designed so that you can keep this one sheet in your records as a prompter in the future. The type set is one size smaller than I usually use as I could not fit everything on one sheet. All the members of my extended family who are researching family history have come up against the same brick wall and don't we all complain about our elusive ancestor. We all live in hope that we will discover his past in the next document we find.

I have said it before and I know I will say it again but I really don't know how family history research can be carried out today without a computer. There is so much out there on CD's or specialist websites that is unavailable if you do not have access to a computer. There is an excellent website called Parish Chest that puts you in touch with lots of family history research suppliers. One supplier has a CD of Staffordshire monumental inscriptions including Hanley St Johns and Bethesda as well as Stoke Minster. Another supplier has many local Parish Registers available on CD.

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Norton-in-the-Moors Parish Church.



The first church in Norton-in-the-Moors was probably built in the 12th Century but the present church was built in 1737 and enlarged in 1915. A note in the Church Registers states '*The old Church was begun to be taken down May 3rd and the foundations of the new Church marked out May 6th 1737.*' In April 1733 Joseph Bourne was baptised at Norton and later married Ellen Steele. Their fifth child was Hugh Bourne who was baptised at Bucknall Church, and later became a Primitive Methodist.

During the early to mid 1700s the average number of marriages in Norton Church was in the region of 15 per year but by the latter half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century many Potteries people went to Norton Church to be married and up to 245 couples a year were married there. This practice was stopped in 1822 when a new Marriage Act was passed and in 1823 the Registers record only 20 marriages. Norton is a daughter church of Stoke on Trent and it was possible to marry in any of the old churches throughout the parish, hence Norton, Bucknall, Newcastle and Whitmore became popular marriage venues. Many couples who lived in the six towns thought that getting out of the Potteries smoke and into the countryside was a pleasant way to start a married life.

If you cannot find the marriage of an ancestor who lived in the Potteries from about 1750 to 1823 in might be worth a look in the Parish Registers of Norton-in-the-Moors, Bucknall-cum-Bagnall and other nearby country churches and chapels..

John S Booth

Murphy's Genealogy Laws

1. The will you need is in a safe - onboard the Titanic
2. You finally obtain the marriage record for your ggg grandfather Thomas Williams - only to find he married Elizabeth Smith, whose parents were John Smith and Mary Jones
3. After 20 years of searching for a vital piece of information - your aunt says 'I knew that!'
4. You inherit a box of old family photos – and not one has a name on it
5. You are informed that the family bible was left in the attic of house of an uncle - which was then demolished.
6. You find that a relative died in an accident – and all the records of the inquest have been shredded by your friendly local council
7. You need to search a census return - only to find it was incinerated when the storeroom was bombed in the war
8. You learn there is a county history on microfilm for the area your distant ancestors originated -It is 20,000 pages long – and not indexed
9. You read that your distinguished ancestor participated in a public ceremony where the platform collapsed underneath him – and it turned out to be on the gallows!
10. You eventually establish where your ancestor was buried – and when you visit the graveyard you find that it's now a shopping centre

Sent in by Janice Bebbington.

An email from member Nancy Evans

Dear John,

I thought that the following might be of interest to some of the members.

CYRIL GEORGE HARDING
LIEUTENANT, ROYAL AIR FORCE
FIRST WORLD WAR

Whilst looking through the entries on the Llandeilo War Memorial, www.laugharnewarmemorial.co.uk, I came across the above-named entry. Lieutenant Harding was the son of Mr. F. S. Harding, of Church House, Stone, Staffordshire. Details of his war service in the R.A.F. can be found on the above site. Unfortunately he died of sickness, aged 19, on 9 November, 1918, just two days before the Great War ended.

He is buried at Stone (All Saints) Churchyard. A photograph of the grave appears on the website.

Nancy Evans

Editors note.

I have looked on the above website and, though dedicated to all the men and women of Carmarthenshire who died in both World Wars, it is a mine of military information for the family historian and well worth a look as there were many training camps in South Wales where our local lads were sent to before going to France.

Thank you Nancy.

Brick Walls

- 1 [Re-examine everything](#)
- 2 [Search all available sources](#)
- 3 [Name variations](#)
- 4 [Age variations](#)
- 5 [Collateral lines](#)
- 6 [Social history](#)
- 7 [Other researchers](#)

1. Re-examine everything

The first step in overcoming a brick-wall is to re-examine how you got to this point in your research.

Going back over all of your research is an extremely useful course of action. Not only will it refresh your memory of how far you have come, and give you a wider context for the elusive ancestor you are struggling with, but it may well throw up the answer.

Something that was not relevant when you found it months ago may provide an all-important clue. A previously unknown person on your family's census entry, someone with a similar name in the birth, death or marriage index that you had previously ignored, or ruled out. Check for clues in what you have amassed so far, as well as mistakes that you might have made first time round.

It is equally important to question everything that you think you know about the missing ancestor. Whether you are working on assumptions, hearsay or even information taken from an official document, it may well be incorrect. Mistakes can be found on a certificate as well as in a relative's testimony. Check for proof of everything that you think you know, double-check ages and places, spellings and dates.

If, to this point, you have been working solely on what you have been told, either by relatives, family tradition, or someone else's research, you should look to get concrete evidence for yourself, from the records.

2. Search all available sources

Often a brick wall can be overcome by broadening your search. The first step is to try to locate all possible records for the person, try to find them in every relevant census, birth, marriage *and* death records. Make sure that you obtain the documents as proof. Double-checking and cross-checking details such as the name, age and place of birth is essential when you encounter difficulty.

If you have exhausted all of the core records, it is time to branch out and investigate the many millions of other records available .

There are a great number of resources available, both

online and offline. Libraries and local family history societies may be able to help. The answers that you are looking for will be out there, but you'll need to look in new ways.

Always note your sources, whether it's a book, relative or online resource. Note the library, website or record office that you found it in. This will allow you to go back over what you have found, double-check and confirm that you have interpreted all of the information correctly.

3. Name variations

The further back in time your research takes you, the higher the chances are that you will begin to encounter name variations and miss-spellings.

Literacy levels were considerably lower in previous centuries. There is a good chance that an ancestor wouldn't have been able to tell an enumerator the correct spelling of their name, nor indeed recognised if it had been written down incorrectly. The spelling of names was more fluid, and phonetic, until the early Victorian era, meaning that if you are tracing ancestors beyond 1850 you should expect to encounter variations.

Name changes are not always accidental. Some people deliberately change spellings to Anglicise their name, preferred to use a middle name, or nickname, and some change their name in order to start again, or distance themselves from their past.

If you are having difficulty in locating someone try name variations. Be creative; think of how a name could be spelled phonetically. In the case of the census it would have been taken down by an enumerator and therefore reliant upon their interpretation of what they heard. Try different vowels and any obvious possible alternate methods of spelling, search using known middle names or nicknames.

4. Age variations

In the same way that a name you have may be noted slightly differently in the records, an age can also be a source of difficulty.

An ancestor may have deliberately altered their age at one time or another, for many reasons. Perhaps they needed to be older to enlist in the military or to gain employment, maybe they were marrying someone much older (or younger) than themselves and wanted to reduce the margin. Misinformation stated in one record has a habit of creating a knock-on effect, making the job of locating them harder.

If possible always double-check ages, collating all available certificates and matches on the various

censuses. This should help to pin down an accurate date of birth, and help to locate a person throughout their life.

5. Collateral lines

If you have tried all of the above and still not got any closer to overcoming your brick wall, do not give up. You should remember that it doesn't signal an end to your growing family tree, and that the next step you take in your research may very well lead you to a solution.

Researching other lines of your family tree; the siblings of ancestors and other wider family, is not only an equally valid and vital part of one's family history, but also a good way of finding answers to problems on your direct line. Collateral kin, as these ancestors are known, may be the key to unlocking the secrets of your more immediate relatives.

Whilst collateral kin may seem remote, or perhaps even irrelevant, when viewed from a modern vantage point, there would have been a time when their ties to your own ancestors were much closer. The siblings of grandparents, or their cousins, might appear too distantly related to have a bearing but that is not the case. Researching these lines, finding their certificates and other records may well lead you back to your direct line, from a new and interesting angle.

Perhaps the elusive ancestor you have been unable to trace was staying with them on the night of the census, perhaps they were mentioned in a will, appear as a witness on a death certificate or even married within the family. Marriages between cousins was not uncommon.

Researching collateral lines will provide you with a wider view of your family history, and help to put it into context. It will also allow you to uncover many relatives that you were unaware of, some of whom you may wish to meet.

6. Social history

The history of your family is inextricably linked to the history of their time, and place. Part of the appeal of genealogy is discovering how your family lived, and how different their world was. Events of their day would have had a marked effect on their day to day lives, perhaps causing them to leave an area, pursue a different line of work or even causing their death.

Knowing that a deceased male ancestor was of fighting age in 1914, for example, would naturally lead you to check for his death in the World War One records. Between 1914-1915 an estimated 250,000 British teenage boys enlisted whilst under-age; 120,000 of them were killed. Their death records will refer to them as being older than they actually were, due to their having adjusted their ages when signing up.

On a smaller scale the industrialisation of the country led to marked changes in employment, as well as a large-scale movement of people. You may have an ancestor's dates of birth and death but what happened in between? Why did they live where they did, who did they move with, or towards? All of these questions can be useful when looking to trace a problem ancestor.

Understanding an area at the time when your ancestors lived there is key. You may find them in local newspapers, or in legal documents relating to land, property or local government. It will also enrich your understanding of where your family have come from, and tie you to an area you had never previously taken an interest in.

7. Other researchers

During your research you may have found new relatives, or got back in touch with others that you hadn't spoken to for a time. It is always worth asking any new relatives for help. Find out what they know, if they have photographs, stories or even research of their own to share with you.

It is also worth sharing your findings with your close relatives, particularly any who you spoke when you started to build your family tree. Something or someone that you have found in your family history research may spark a memory, or a connection that they had previously forgotten. They may have heard a story about the elusive family member which, however trivial it may seem to them, could be of enormous use in narrowing down places and ages.

With the prevalence of genealogy resources and message-boards on the internet it has become possible to contact others who may have researched branches of your family. Whilst this can be of use it is always important to check for yourself, using someone else's research as a guide rather than taking it as fact.

Checklist

- Re-examine everything; a small error in your research can create a knock-on effect. An incorrect date, or name, may be the cause.
 - Don't limit yourself to the birth, marriage, death and census records. There are millions of other resources, try them all.
 - Be wary of name variations, particularly as you begin to go further back in time. Expect differences in spelling.
 - Remember that people's ages may also vary, they may have been liberal with the truth, or simply not known their exact date of birth.
 - Research collateral lines - investigating more distant branches of the family may lead you to solving the problems in your direct line.
 - Discover more about the history of the area and time period in which your ancestors lived: understanding exactly how they lived is key.
- Continue to ask for help from your family, and the new relatives that you uncover with your research. Share your family tree online.