

Bringing history into the future

The internet enables you to search through archives on the other side of the planet and when you couple that to the latest software packages, you can turn yourself into a formidable researcher. **JAMES TAYLOR** shows you how

GENEALOGY HAS never been more popular, with dedicated magazines and TV series of which the BBC's *Who Do You Think You Are?* is the latest. This interest is being intensified by the internet, family history software and historical information on CD-ROMs.

The latter two have, in the last decade, given rise to specialist suppliers of which the top two, S&N Genealogy and TWR Computing, can sell you all the major software and data CDs.

A SMALLER PLANET

The internet has become a key source of information for family historians. It has almost eliminated the need to visit far-flung records offices and libraries. Using the internet, it is possible to find details of a forebear's birth and order a copy of the certificate from the comfort of your own home. You can also consult census information, discovering whole families in the process.

Start your trawling of the internet by using one of the free services. FamilySearch, www.familysearch.org is provided by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the Mormons), which has accumulated genealogical information from all over the world and makes it freely available on its website. Here you'll find the International Genealogical Index (IGI), which contains extractions from many British parish registers and the 1881 census index for England and Wales, as well as information submitted by the



Software package *Family Tree Maker's* editing and navigation screen is simple to use.

Church's own members. As with all internet records, you should use what you find as clues to research and attempt to verify the details yourself from the original records or other sources.

Another useful site is FreeBMD, <http://freebmd.rootsweb.com> (BMD stands for births, marriages and deaths). The information is contributed by volunteers transcribing from the original records. It's also incomplete but is continuously updated. The information you get from a successful search is enough to identify the certificate you need and the site can tell you where to apply for a copy. FreeBMD is associated with FreeCEN, <http://freecen.rootsweb.com> and FreeREG <http://freereg.rootsweb.com>, which give access to census (1841-1891) and parish register records. Again, these are transcribed by volunteers so you may have to wait for your family to be added.

There are also websites that charge you, either by subscription or pay-as-you-go. Possibly the most useful of these is the home of the online 1901 census. It's at

www.1901census.nationalarchives.gov.uk and unless they were at the Boer War, you almost certainly have relatives listed there. The initial search for a name is free and returns a list of possible matches. If you want to check the details of any name found it costs 50p; you can pay a further 50p to view transcribed details of the whole household, or 75p to view an image of the original census record. You can also search by place, institution or vessel.

1837 Online searches the www.1837online.com indexes of birth, marriage and death records in England and Wales from 1837 to the present day. Genes Reunited www.genesreunited.co.uk has a different approach. You either upload a family tree already prepared by your software or build it from scratch. The subscription site www.ancestry.co.uk is indexing most of the 19th century censuses, with 1891 complete, 1871 almost complete and 1901 underway, and a range of other records for England, Wales and Ireland.

NEW WAYS

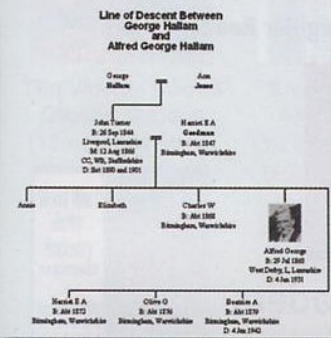
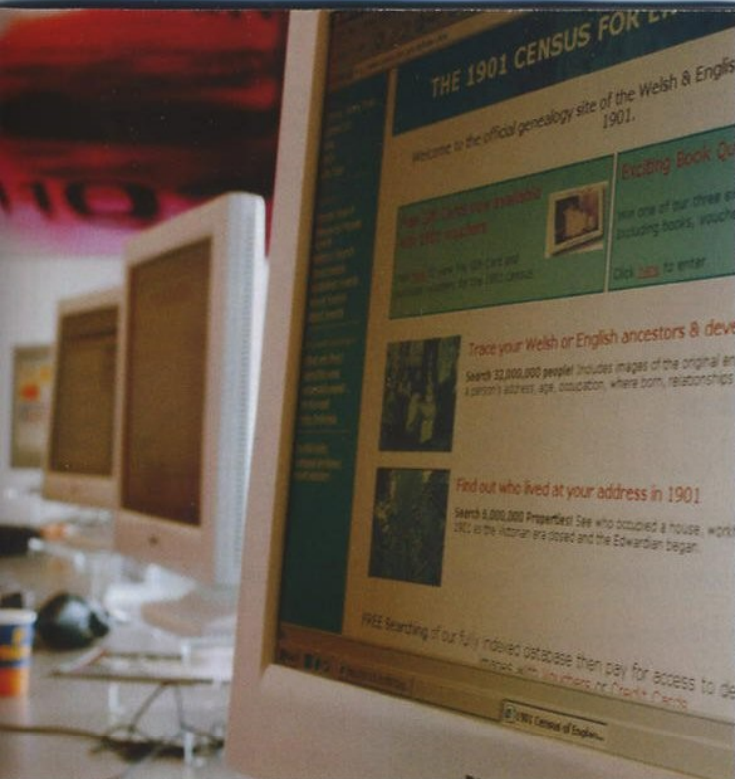
One thing's for sure: the internet will become even more important to family historians. Nigel Bayley of S&N Genealogy, says: "Online data services that give a greater range of features and provide new ways to explore the data that was once locked up in books and microfilm will be the way forward." American publishers are already combining online information with indexes on CD-ROM.

There's a variety of material



available on CD-ROM. This ranges from basic transcripts of parish records through to expertly scanned and indexed copies of old and rare books. On the way CD-ROMs take in antique maps, military, civil, and census records, directories and gazetteers, local history, parish magazines, churches and monumental inscriptions and even some family trees. Some of the larger publishers include Archive CD Books, Your Old Books & Maps, Archive Britain and British Data Archive. In addition, there are many family history societies publishing CDs for their areas – most can be read by both Windows and Mac machines. Trevor Rix of TWR Computing says: "The next big thing in genealogy will be many more records released on CD. We are planning searchable indexed transcriptions of the censuses for all of England and Wales for all the years from 1841-1901."

Once you've accumulated all this information from data CDs and the internet, not forgetting your own family of course, what are you going to do with it? The answer is keep it, organise it, analyse it, index it and pass it on, over and over again, perhaps in the form of a comprehensive book complete with narrative, photographs and neatly-drawn family tree charts. You can do all this relatively painlessly using family history software on a PC.



A classic drop-line descendant chart between named individuals, this one from *Ancestral Quest*.

The most common family history software programs are the lineage-linked databases. Every family history program can remember everyone you tell it about, together with all their personal details and especially their relationships with each other. Different family history programs, though, come with different priorities. One may concentrate on the production of charts, another provides lots of fields for record keeping, while good

RESEARCH TIP NET SAVVY

"Don't neglect the internet. New resources are being added all the time and old resources are being improved. Search sources like Access to Archives www.a2a.org.uk and TNA's online Catalogue www.catalogue.nationalarchives.gov.uk regularly to see if anything has appeared since you last looked. For example, TNA is putting the First World War Army medal cards online at the present." Hilary Jones is a Senior Archivist at the National Archives.

For family historians a computer connected to the internet is a valuable tool – almost essential.

presentation on paper is the forte of a third. All can document, store and display genealogy information – standard genealogy facts, notes, sources of information and, perhaps, digitised pictures. Unfortunately, not all can offer graphic family trees, though most can produce narrative text reports, which do describe the family relationships. Decide what you want from your software and make your choice accordingly. How will you decide? Read the reviews in family history magazines and interrogate one of the specialist suppliers.

COMPUTER OPTIONS

If the computer you use is an Apple Mac, there's only one software package readily available, *Reunion* from S&N Genealogy. If you are a Windows user, there is a larger collection of programs from which to choose. A quick poll

Data CDs can give your research a kick – this is from a football annual of 1885.

among specialist suppliers showed the best sellers to be *Family Tree Maker*, *Family Historian*, *RootsMagic* and *Generations*.

If you're interested in programs that can produce their own narrative reports, tracking all a person's descendants and their spouses, and printing all associated facts, events, notes, and even photographs, look for *Family Tree Maker 2005* <http://shops.ancestry.com>, *Family Historian v2.2.4* www.family-historian.co.uk, *Ancestral Quest v11* www.ancequest.com and *Legacy Deluxe v5* www.legacyfamilytree.com among others. Others worth considering are *Generations v8* www.twrcomputing.co.uk which is a good all-rounder and *RootsMagic UK Edition v2* www.genealogysupplies.com

James Taylor is a professional reviewer specialising in genealogy who has been evaluating family history software for many years. As an enthusiastic amateur family historian, he has established that he comes from a long line of peasants and labourers.

with its particularly impressive graphs with moveable boxes.

A computer-based system can be extremely tidy and readily retrievable with every fact and note is immediately to hand. So get your computer working on that family history now and soon you'll know who you are.

CONTACTS

S&N Genealogy www.genealogysupplies.com
Tel: 01722 716121

TWR Computing www.twrcomputing.co.uk

Archive CD Books www.archivecdbooks.com
Tel: 01594 829870

Your Old Books & Maps www.youoldbooksandmaps.co.uk
Tel: 01924 452987

Archive Britain www.archive.britain.com
Tel: 023 9229 6638

British Data Archive www.britishdataarchive.com
Tel: 01722 716121

For a list of family history societies, Tel: 0161 797 3843.