

Battling the Brick Walls

Part I

It is often said in this life of ours, two things are inevitable, taxes and death. As a family historian I would like to add a third - sooner or later we all come up against a brick wall. We cannot find a birth, baptism, marriage or a death. To give a little encouragement to those who are stuck, let me briefly explain my own first foray into family history. We all know we start from ourselves and work backwards. My own parents separated when I was three years old, and there was no contact between the two families for many years. By the time I started my own research on the WING family my father had been dead for thirty years. At this time the births of England and Wales were at the Marion Family History Centre and Frank Abbot volunteered to search through the indexes for those who were interested. (I lived in Whyalla at that time.) I received a letter from Frank informing me that there was no registration recorded of a John Wing (his birth date was 29th December 1904.) Of course I thought he had made a mistake and duly sent off what was then £10 to St.Catherine's House, only to receive a letter back a few weeks later plus a partial refund, no John Wing! So who was this strange man who paid for my school fees at an English public school, took me on holiday to Austria and Germany, and was not only a Free Mason but a Grand Master of his own Lodge? Had I gone to the funeral of a man who did not exist? It was not until the births arrived at the Whyalla Family History Centre that I checked for myself. He was baptised Jack William Wing and obviously at an early age changed it to John. Not an encouraging start on my part.

If anyone asked me today "How do I start my family research?" I'd give them a pedigree chart and then ask them to fill in as many details as possible and also start talking to as many elderly relatives as possible! Then suggest they look in the Genealogical Research Directory to see if anyone else is researching the same name, not necessarily the latest edition. I only advertised once and that was in 1989, but I'm still researching my family history, so do not be put off by earlier editions of the G.R.D. Nothing can be more annoying than to start on ones own, and bear the initial cost of sending for certificates which seem to become more expensive each year, only to find out after months, sometimes even years, that somebody else has traced your line back several hundred years. Far better to write a number of letters in the first place than to spend hundreds of dollars on research for nothing. (Please enclose three international reply coupons when you write overseas.) A visit to your local family history centre or the Mortlock Library should be your next step. If you have an idea from where your ancestors came look up localities, this will give you an idea of what records are available on microfiche, microfilm, or CD ROM, covering that area. Things that come to mind are: church records, wills and probate records, obituaries, histories of places, parish registers and vital records and civil registrations. Places, like people go up and down on the local scale depending on the economic circumstances at the time. I thoroughly recommend reading as many books as possible on the area one is researching to give you a broader appreciation of how your family lived and why they were working there at a certain period of time.

Moving on, also look up author and subject titles which will give you every catalogue record, e.g. pedigrees, genealogies, family histories, biographies and autobiographies. Please don't get excited if you are related to the Plantagenets who were Kings of England from 1154 to 1399. So am I, proving it is another thing!

The I.G.I. (International Genealogical Index) can be helpful, but it is what it says, and unless one can reach back to approx 1850 it is not much help and is not one hundred per cent accurate. I find that every record is worth checking and rechecking. On my mother's marriage certificate there is an address where my mother lived and another one where my father lived - both false! They just wanted to be married in a certain church in south-east London and gave the addresses of friends who lived in that area so that the banns could be read.

Parish registers - if you know where your ancestors came from and have a fair idea of which parish, look up in Parish and vital listings and this will give you the availability of church records for that

area. Bear in mind it was usual to marry in the bride's parish, but yet again, this was not always the case. In the next issue I will provide a brief history which might be of some assistance.

Part II

The following brief history might be of assistance in understanding how to use Parish Registers.

- 1538 Henry VIII having broken away from the church of Rome and formed the Church of England, issued an injunction to all parish ministers to keep registers of baptisms, marriages, and burials under the penalty of a fine. Many ministers commenced registers in 1538 but others did not comply immediately, so some registers did not commence until a later date.
- 1598 Many ministers were not keeping registers, while other registers were being kept in a poor condition. The law was reinforced and provision was made for the keeping of better and more permanent registers. The keeping of Bishop's Transcripts was introduced.
- 1754 The law required that separate registers be kept for marriages and the entries to be written in a special register consisting of printed forms. These called for: Signature of the officiating minister Signatures of two witnesses Signatures of the Bride and Groom Whether they were Bachelor, Spinster, Widow or Widower The parish of residence of both Banns to be called in the parish of residence of both persons for three successive weeks.
- 1783 A stamp duty of 3 pence was introduced on every entry recorded in the parish records.
- 1793 This duty was repealed as a large number of families were not having their children baptised, or some families were recording themselves as 'pauper' to avoid the payment of the Tax.
- 1812 A new form was introduced for baptisms, marriages and burials; this is a great advantage to the researchers today.
- 1837 Civil Registration was commenced on 1 July for all births, marriages and deaths.
- 1853 An Act of Parliament was passed that permitted the opening of new cemeteries and the closing of many of the towns' churchyards that were full. This means that many parishes in towns have no Burial Registers after 1853 as they shared a common cemetery.

Civil registration began in England and Wales in July 1837 for registration of all births, marriages and deaths. Because of spelling mistakes on the part of the enumerator, or the dialect in which the surname was pronounced quite often it is difficult to find the surname one is searching for. Quite often people might add or subtract a few years from their actual age, even if they actually knew it, for fear of perhaps losing their job, because of old age, or having to move into a poorhouse. On the other hand, one will come across cases such as one of my wife's lines' where there is a relation in the 1851 census who gives his occupation as agricultural labourer, birth place Blandford in Dorset. In the 1881 census he says he was born in Martok, Somerset and his occupation is a chimney-sweep. I imagine you could call this a step up in life! So certainly in 30 years his circumstances changed for one reason or another.

I feel in researching our ancestors one of the strongest points is the variation of spelling not only of surnames, but of Christian names also. You might be looking for a Margaret. Variations of Margaret are Peggy, Meggy, Meg, Mags, Maggie, Margie and Marge. Lots of other names also have variations you need to be aware of.

The following I have enclosed is from the Church of Latter-day Saints (for which I believe there is no copyright).

Timothy Wing

IF YOU NEED	LOOK FIRST IN	THEN SEARCH
Age	Census, Civil Registration, Church Records	Cemeteries, Obituaries, Military Records
Birth Date	Civil Registration, Church Records	Obituaries, Newspapers, Military Records, Occupations
Birthplace	Census, Civil Registration, Church Records	Obituaries, Newspapers, Occupations, Military Records
Place of Foreign Birth	Church Records, Census	Emigration & Immigration, Military Records
Parish, district and county boundaries	Gazeteers	Maps, History
Death	Civil Registration, Church Records, Obituaries, Newspapers, Cemeteries	Probate Records, Court Records, Land & property
Historical Background	History, Genealogy	Church History
Immigration Date	See research outline for country to which ancestor immigrated	Emigration & Immigration, Church Records
Living Relatives	Directories, Civil Registration	Societies, Newspapers, Periodicals
Maiden name	Civil Registration, Church Records	Obituaries, Newspapers
Marriage	Church Records, Civil Registration, Genealogy, Periodicals	Newspapers, Biography, Nobility
Occupation	Church Records, Census, Directories, Civil Registration, Occupations, Probate Records	Court Records, Obituaries, Officials & Employees
Parents, children & other family	Census, Obituaries, Probate Records	Church Records, Newspapers, Civil Registration
Physical Description	Military Records, Court Records	Church Records, Newspapers, Civil Registration
Place-finding Aids	Gazetteerw, Directories	History, Taxation, Land & Property Periodicals
Places of Residence	Census, Church Records, Directories	Land & Property,
Place of residence when you only know the country	Directories, Census, Probate Records, Civil Registration	Church Records, Taxation
Previous Research (compiled genealogy)	Biography, Genealogy, Societies	Nobility, Periodicals
Record-finding aids	Archives & Libraries, Genealogy	Societies, Periodicals
Religion	Church Records, Biography, Obituaries Civil Registration	Cemeteries, Genealogy, History