

For The Price of a Weekly Cup of Coffee:

The Benefits of Subscribing to an Online Commercial Database

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I first took out a *World Vital Records* (WVR) subscription in 2006 mainly because of its United States and Canadian collections. A number of my families also ended up in the USA and Canada and this was one way of trying to trace them myself. My subscription to WVR became more attractive when they included a licensing arrangement with *Find My Past* for access to the British census and of course more and more collections were being added each year. In 2009 they added an Australasian collection and as my subscription is a World one, I also now have access to the Australasian content.

I have noticed over the years the subscription price has come down and with the rising value of the Australian dollar, a subscription is cheaper than ever. For example, the World annual subscription price is now (Oct 2009) A\$120 or \$10 per month or \$2.50 per week, hence the title of this article. It is possible to subscribe just for a month but it is a little more expensive on a monthly basis.

World Vital Records from time to time offer free trials and every day there is a selection of databases that are available for free. So you do need to visit regularly to see what is on offer if you don't have a subscription. Make sure that you are in the Australasian site at www.worldvitalrecords.com.au otherwise the offers and databases will be for American users. There are some useful tips for searching in Alan Phillips blog post *World Vital Records: How To Get Better Search Results* on 20 October 2009 on the **Unlock the Past** website at www.unlockthepast.com.au.

As the Australasian component is still in its infancy, there is a wide range of collections in a number of broad categories outlined in the table below. Coverage of each category varies depending on what State you are interested in.

Categories of Records in <i>World Vital Records Australasia</i>	
Births, Marriage and Death Records	Directories and Almanacs
Electoral Rolls and Census	Family History and Biography
Family Trees	Genealogy Guides
Government Records	Immigration Records
Newspapers and Periodicals	Probate, Land and Court Records
Maps, Atlases and Gazetteers	Military Records
Miscellaneous Records and Reference	Religious Records
Social, Regional and General History	

Those who have heard me speak over the years will know that I am a great fan of serendipity and that all databases are like a lucky dip to me. So what does this kind of searching turn up

in *WVR Australasia* collections? By selecting one Australian State, the search process can be narrowed further. I selected Queensland my home State and started with some of my more unusual surnames.

A search of Trevaskis turned up a reference in the *Queensland Government Gazette* for 1869. On page 104 in Revenue and Expenditure for the Municipality of Clermont and Copperfield, Jul-Dec 1868, Trevaskis was paid £59 7s 6d for a well in Copperfield. This tied into my family who had moved from Moonta, South Australia to Copperfield and also to some newspaper references to my Trevaskis doing work with the local council.

Another family name is Burstow and a search turned up Thomas Stephen Burstow in Fox's *History of Queensland: Its People and Industries* which has been digitised so that not only do you get the reference to Burstow in the book, but you can actually see the pages and print them and/or save a copy. This particular reference gave me almost a page of text plus a photo of him and his house in Toowoomba.

A reference to T S Burstow also turned up in *The Queensland Freeman* on 15 Mar 1887 and this outlined his involvement with the building of the new church on the Newtown estate just outside of Toowoomba. Burstow advised that the cost of the land and building had been about £160. This publication was a monthly journal of the Baptist Association in Queensland and was published between 1881-1888. It has been digitised and is now available as a CD publication or through *WVR Australasia* collection. This is a source that I would not necessarily have looked at and highlights the value of digitising and indexing and making available online in a commercial database.

An exciting find was the monumental inscriptions for Bulimba, South Brisbane and Toowong cemeteries where I did searches for quite a few surnames and found various family members. A person could spend hours delving into those records. Other Queensland cemeteries are also included and are located in the Births, Marriages and Deaths category of records.

A selection of Commonwealth electoral rolls for Queensland is also included. My GG grandmother Dorcas White is shown in the 1913 and 1922 Commonwealth electoral rolls as living at Moonstone Flat, Charters Towers. In the 1934 roll she is listed as living at Finlay's, Wilson Street, Paddington, Brisbane so sometime between 1922 and 1934 she moved to Brisbane. One of her daughter's had married a Finlay so I was suspicious of the reference to Finlay's on the roll. Another search revealed that her daughter Doris and her husband William also lived at Wilson Street, Paddington. Dorcas had obviously moved down to live with them. One frustrating aspect with the Commonwealth electoral rolls is that not all years are included in the *WVR* database but you can track family members over the years as illustrated by this example.

Also useful for tracing people over time is a wide range of post office directories, almanacs and telephone directories for various years. Exact titles and dates can be found listed in the Directories and Almanacs category of records.

Walter Eldridge turned up as a Queensland State School Committee member for Ma Ma Creek in the *Queensland Government Gazette*, 4 Dec 1897, page 1276. This is just an index reference to School Committee notices in the *Gazette* and digitised images have not been included so that will be a trip to the library to see what else is on the notice and who his fellow committee members were. Burstow, Atkinson and Potter were other family names that turned up references in the School Committee notices. This database is from 1876 to 1899 and includes 12,657 names so it is worth having a look to see if any of your ancestors served

on a school committee during those years. NB There are some digitised copies of the *Queensland Government Gazette* in WVR Australasia but not for the years that I wanted.

Another similar name index relates to teachers mentioned in the *Queensland Education Office Gazette* which was a monthly publication for teachers. It included notices of admissions, promotions, transfers, resignations, openings and closures of schools, scholarships and bursaries, examination papers and so on. There were two references to one of my teachers Florence Martha Dayman (although Martha was Marita in one of the entries; either an indexing error or wrong in the *Gazette*). The first entry was for Florence's admission as a pupil teacher at Innisfail State School in July 1914 and the second entry refers to a promotion in Nov 1920. The *Education Office Gazette* has not been digitised so to view the entries I will need to go to the State Library of Queensland.

Another exciting find was an entry in the *Queensland Police Gazette* for Sep 1868 relating to my GGG grandfather John Carnegie who was discharged from H M Gaol, Brisbane on 21 Sep 1868 after two months hard labour for assault. The *Gazette* states that he was from Scotland, aged 32, 5ft 4 ½ in tall, stout, fresh complexion, brown hair, blue eyes and that he had a number of tattoos. These included the Montrose coat of arms on his right breast, bracelets on both wrists and the American colours on his right arm. There is no surviving photograph of him so this information is simply wonderful. I had been aware of his time in prison through prison records at Queensland State Archives but at the time I did that research in the 1980s, police gazettes were not on open access to the public. Now they are digitised and available online which shows that you always need to go back over your research as new resources become more easily accessible. The *Police Gazettes* don't just list criminals – they also have information on the victims of crime so don't hesitate to give this category of records a try!

Other commercial genealogical and family history databases such as *Ancestry.com*, *Footnote* and *FindMyPast* are similar to *World Vital Records*. When you break down the weekly cost of subscription and consider the ease of access that an annual subscription gives you, these sites can represent value for money. The hardest part is deciding which one to subscribe to but this will depend on your own research needs and which site best meets those needs. I tend to use the other commercial sites as necessary and payment is on a pay as I use basis. For example, *FindMyPast* has Victorian content as the Genealogical Society of Victoria was a data contributor to the Federation of Family History Organisations database which was acquired by *FindMyPast* a couple of years ago. The other alternative, depending on where you live, is to use these commercial sites at your local genealogical or family history society if available there or at your State library if that is more convenient.

Finally, remember this article has only looked at a small selection of what I found in the Queensland section of the *World Vital Records Australasia* database. When time permits I will explore the other States and see what exciting leads I can discover. I would be interested to learn of any real breakthroughs in your research using this database and best of 'luck' with your research.

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