

## Family History on the Cheap: Tips and Tricks

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### Introduction

I remember many years ago attending a seminar by the late Janet Reakes on how to save money and time when doing family history research. I purchased her publication *Short Cuts and Money Saving Ideas for Genealogy* (1989) and it did save me time and money. I quickly recouped the cost of the book and in fact it paid for itself many times over.

Twenty years later there are even more ways to save time and money doing genealogy and family history research. This paper will look at seven areas where you can save either time, money or both.

### Organisation and Planning Are Key Factors

Most people only have a limited time to spend on their family history research. You don't want to waste it by spending time looking for information in your records or searching for something that you already have but may have forgotten about.

It is essential that you approach your research in a methodical manner so that you know what you have already done, what still needs to be done, where it can be found in your own records and more importantly, it is able to be understood by others.

A majority of researchers now use one of the popular, and relatively inexpensive, genealogy and family history software programs including:

- *Family Historian* <[www.family-historian.co.uk](http://www.family-historian.co.uk)>
- *Family Tree Maker* <[www.familytreemaker.com](http://www.familytreemaker.com)>
- *Hereditree* <[www.hereditree.com.au](http://www.hereditree.com.au)>
- *Legacy Family Tree* <[www.legacyfamilytree.com](http://www.legacyfamilytree.com)>
- *Personal Ancestral File* <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)>
- *Reunion* <[www.leisterpro.com/index.php](http://www.leisterpro.com/index.php)>
- *Roots Magic* <[www.rootsmagic.com](http://www.rootsmagic.com)>
- *The Master Genealogist* <[www.whollygenes.com](http://www.whollygenes.com)>

Most of the genealogical software programs have a trial version that can be downloaded from the Internet for free. This allows you to try out the different products before making a final decision. There are many timesaving benefits to using these programs including:

- The production of standard genealogical charts such as pedigree charts and family group sheets.
- Quick and easy family tree charts
- Allow you to include scanned documents and photographs
- Allow the easy exchange of information between families and also people researching the same set of ancestors
- Provide a 'to do' section and notes area

There are many ways to store original certificates and paper documents. The important thing is to set up a recordkeeping system early and then follow it so that you always know where your information is. Remember, file as you go or else you will have a big stack of filing and you won't be able to find anything.

Don't forget your electronic files, scanned documents and digital photographs. These too need to be organised in a logical and consistent system.

If you can personally visit the areas that you are researching, this saves the expense of having someone else do the research for you. However, you need to plan all trips carefully to make the most of a research trip, especially if you are travelling any distance.

Don't do anything that you can do locally. State libraries and major genealogy and family history societies often have the major published resources for all Australian states and even some major overseas published resources. This means that when you do travel, you should focus only on searching unpublished records or records that are only available interstate or overseas.

## **Family Sources**

Before you do anything else, make sure that you have thoroughly exhausted all family sources.

It is amazing what some of our older family members know and perhaps don't realise. A simple trick is to start showing them photographs as these often bring back memories. Where possible try to record family discussions so that you can listen again later or the interviews can become part of the family archive.

Don't forget to ask if there are any family documents:

- Original copies of marriage certificates
- Copies of birth and death certificates which may have been purchased for some reason
- Family Bibles
- Diaries
- Family Letters or postcards
- Medals
- Newspaper cuttings
- School reports or certificates of achievement
- Sporting trophies
- Photographs

All of this documentation may save you time and money by providing information that you need to know or points you in the right direction to get the information quicker and easier.

## **Don't Reinvent the Wheel**

One of the quickest and easiest ways to save money is to check if anyone else has already traced the family you are interested in.

A major resource on Australian researchers is the *Genealogical Research Directory* (GRD) which was published annually from 1981 to 2007. It lists people from Australian and all over the world and the surnames they are researching. The *GRD* can be found in most libraries and societies. It is also now available on CD ROM as fully searchable scans 1981-1993 while 1994-2007 is available as a searchable database on CD ROM.

The Guild of One Name Studies (GOONS) is another place to check if anyone is doing a dedicated study of an ancestral name. A search can be done on the GOONS website at <[www.goons.org](http://www.goons.org)>.

Rootsweb mailing list archives can be rewarding if you take the time to search them. It is a relatively simple matter to search them but I find that a lot of people don't even think to do an overall search of a mailing list archive.

Also there are linkup sites that people can join, either free or for a small fee, and post their research and hopefully another line of the family will contact them. Some examples include:

- Facebook <[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)>
- Family Link (previously We're Related on Facebook) <[www.familylink.com](http://www.familylink.com)>
- Genes Reunited <[www.genesreunited.com.au](http://www.genesreunited.com.au)>
- Lost Cousins <[www.lostcousins.com](http://www.lostcousins.com)>
- My Heritage <[www.myheritage.com](http://www.myheritage.com)>
- World Connect <<http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com>>

### **Using Professional Researchers**

Most people find that at some point in their research, they require the services of a professional researcher. This may be because of distance and the repository that holds a particular record of interest is too far to travel to. Petrol, accommodation and airfares all cost money and it can be cheaper simply to engage a search agent to obtain the information you require.

Archives and libraries often have a list of search agents who regularly do work in their organisations.

In Australia we have the Australasian Association of Genealogists and Record Agents (AAGRA) who have accredited members who can be engaged for a fee to assist with your research. The AAGRA list is available at <[www.aagra.asn.au](http://www.aagra.asn.au)>. The Society of Australian Genealogists (SAG) also maintains a list of people who have successfully completed the Diploma of Family Historical Studies and who are available to do research. The SAG list is at <[www.sag.org.au/downloads/diplomates.pdf](http://www.sag.org.au/downloads/diplomates.pdf)>.

### **Discounts – Why Pay Full Price?**

Birth, marriage and death certificates provide essential information for family history research and are a necessary expense. One easy way to save money is by looking up indexes and providing a reference number to obtain the certificate at a discounted price.

The majority of Australian states now have some BDM indexes online and searchable for free. Victoria is the only state that charges to search the indexes online.

Certificate transcription services only operate in New South Wales and recently started in South Australia. Using a transcription agent is cheaper than paying for a full certificate.

- Joy Murrin Family History Services  
<[www.joymurrin.com.au](http://www.joymurrin.com.au)>
- Transcriptions.com.au by Marilyn Rowan  
<[www.transcriptions.com.au](http://www.transcriptions.com.au)>
- South Australian Genealogy & Heraldry Society  
<[www.saghs.org.au/research.htm#transcription](http://www.saghs.org.au/research.htm#transcription)>

There are many ways of finding or narrowing down birth, death and marriage dates to avoid paying additional search fees. It is not possible in this paper to list them all, but some common examples are:

- Monumental inscriptions (MI's) can provide information such as death dates and other information such as birth dates or places, occupations, and so on
- Some local government councils have burial databases online
- Probate indexes - several State archives are gradually putting these online
- School admission registers often give dates of birth of students.

There are many reasons to join a local family history or genealogical society near where you live and perhaps also a society near where your ancestors came from. It is one of the quickest and easiest ways to gain access to a wide variety of resources for the cost of your membership fee.

Membership of a local family history or genealogical society provides:

- Regular access to their library
- Access to specialised databases, subscription databases or other resources
- Bookstalls (often online) to purchase latest books, microforms, CD ROMs and magazines
- A regular newsletter or quarterly journal to advertise research interests or publish articles on your family
- Regular meetings with informative guest speakers
- Seminar and other training sessions or workshops
- Useful information and links on their websites.

### **Can You Do It For Free?**

There is a wealth of information for family history research in libraries and archives and in most cases there are no entry fees and the only costs are for photocopies or microfilm printouts. There are often online library catalogues and digitised copies of popular resources.

When personally visiting an archive, remember to take along your digital camera so that you can take your own copies and save on photocopy costs.

EResources at <[www.nla.gov.au/app/eresources](http://www.nla.gov.au/app/eresources)>provides access at home to any Australian resident who holds a NLA library card. You can apply online for a free library card and get access to 65 subscription databases that are currently available.

A similar service is offered by the State libraries. Clients must live in the relevant State and have a registered library card. Examples include:

- The State Library of NSW has 18 subscription databases available  
<[www2.sl.nsw.gov.au/databases/athome.cfm](http://www2.sl.nsw.gov.au/databases/athome.cfm)>
- State Library of Victoria has 69 subscription databases available  
<[www.slv.vic.gov.au/catalogues/information\\_databases/offsite.html](http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/catalogues/information_databases/offsite.html)>

There are a number of Internet search engines that can also be used to search for ancestors. The more popular ones include:

- AltaVista <[www.altavista.com](http://www.altavista.com)>
- Bing <[www.bing.com](http://www.bing.com)>
- Google <[www.google.com](http://www.google.com)>
- Yahoo <[www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)>

Daniel M Lynch's book *Google Your Family Tree: Unlock the Hidden Power of Google* is a must read for tips on Google even though it does have an American bias. For Australian tips on search engines and browsers, Cora Num has some useful hints on her website <[www.coraweb.com.au](http://www.coraweb.com.au)>.

There are so many resources that are freely accessible via the Internet that it is not possible to list them all here. There are a number of gateway sites that assist researchers to find relevant resources including:

- *Web Sites for Genealogists* – An Australian gateway site for tracing your family history  
<[www.coraweb.com.au](http://www.coraweb.com.au)>
- *Cyndi's List of Genealogy Sites on the Internet* – 270,000 links for family history  
<[www.cyndislist.com](http://www.cyndislist.com)>
- *Genuki* UK & Ireland Genealogy large collection of genealogical information pages for England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man  
<[www.genuki.org.uk](http://www.genuki.org.uk)>.

### **Serendipity the Art of Finding Elusive Ancestors**

Anyone who has ever been to one of my talks will know that I am a great believer in serendipity which is where you accidentally find something that is of great relevance to your research. Many years ago I found a good percentage of my father's family in various police, court and prison records which was definitely not unexpected. Since then I check all sources because you just never know. If there is an index, put your names in and see what comes up.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has covered very broad subject areas in a very short space of time. It has provided a range of tips and tricks to save both time and money when doing family history and genealogical research. There are lots more tips and tricks out there and in the course of preparing this paper, I started to write a much longer manuscript. I am pleased to say that this has now been published by *Unlock the Past*.

Best wishes for your research in 2010 and thank you.

### **Further Reading**

Num, Cora, *Web Sites for Genealogists, 2008: An Essential Guide for Staying Up To Date with Local and Family History Sites on the Internet*, Cora Num, Moruya Heads, 2008

Hicks, Shauna, *Family History on the Cheap: Tips and Tricks*, Unlock the Past, Adelaide, SA 2010

Lynch, Daniel M, *Google Your Family Tree: Unlock the Hidden Power of Google*, Gould Genealogy and History, Modbury North, SA 2009

Reakes, Janet, *Short Cuts and Money Saving Ideas for Genealogy*, Genealogy Research Service Centre, Pialba, Qld, 1989

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