

Genealogy Do-Over: Week One

As an old white wizard with a penchant for fireworks once said *"And so it begins, the greatest battle of our time"*.

Now I don't think he had reorganising genealogy in mind when he said it, but to many of us the thought of putting aside years of research is a battle; it's a battle with ourselves to avoid going back to old habits, it's a battle to stop yourself from chasing those shiny objects, or rabbits as Thomas calls them. For me, this is the greatest battle of my time and so *"I'm going on an adventure!"*

In this first week of our adventure focuses on three points; setting previous research aside, preparing to research, and establishing base practices and guidelines.

Setting Previous Research Aside

This task, for me, isn't too difficult. I've spent the last three years or so focused on my [One-Name Study](#) which has meant the personal ancestry has taken a back seat. The digital files were already set-aside.

However as part of having a clean start I cleared out my laptop. Unfortunately this wasn't as straight forward as it should have been, but after some head-banging-against-the-wall moments I got my machine up and running again. On the plus side it did mean that I now had a clear desktop (which I will not save things to, just keep repeating!), and the personal ancestry and One-Name Study are clearly defined with links to both. For those who may be interested I keep my One-Name Study files on [Dropbox](#) (which meant when computer was resurrected the files just synced back with minimal input from me), and my personal ancestry is kept on [Box](#).

The digital files which were on Box have now been moved to an external hard drive. This means that they are within reach when required, but because of the effort required to get external drive and plug it in, I won't be tempted to take a 'quick look' at something and then run off chasing those rabbits / shiny objects, thus repeating all my research mistakes both in terms of outcomes and processes.

I don't have that much in the way of paper files for my family ancestry; I started researching on the computer and I have continued to do so. Any visits to the local record office that did produce documents have already been digitised or recorded on the computer / photographs taken. The one thing I do have however are birth, marriage and death certificates. I have taken this opportunity to store them in a certificate binder using archival pocket folders (I bought my supplies from [My History](#)). This folder has been placed on my bookshelf, for ease of access.

One point that Thomas raised was that he hadn't scanned both sides of some pictures and he was planning on setting some time aside to do this. In much the same way, I have documents for my One-Name Study that I have not yet scanned, and so I have decided this year to join [Scanfest](#). The UK time is 7pm to 10pm, so I can take part once I get home from work. I've set aside time in my calendar and set up a notification reminder so that I do take the time to do this.

Preparing to Research

Thomas suggests that we create a list of things we need to have with us before we start to research. This will help to slow us down. A major problem is rushing off into things, albeit the newest release on your preferred commercial site or an impromptu walk around a graveyard / war memorial etc.

So here's my list (in no particular order I might add), where computers are allowed:

- Laptop power lead (don't laugh, it's not funny getting on the trail and then losing power)
- Citation templates
- Research Log (and remember RECORD NEGATIVE RESULTS)
- Master Index of People
- Notebook - that is relevant to the line you are researching
- Pencils
- Pencil sharpener, or extra graphite if you use a mechanical pencil!
- Family History Software Open
- Wifi off (what can I say? I'm easily distracted)
- Camera
- Camera image log

Where computers are not allowed;

- Printed citation templates / rules
- Research log
- List of those you came to research with key dates / events in their lives
- Notebook relevant to the individuals you wanted to research
- Pencils, sharpener etc.
- Camera
- Camera image log.

I think the main point in the preparation work is working out what you want to accomplish from the visit to the repository you're visiting / source list you're consulting. The hardest thing is sticking to it.

Base Practices and Guidelines

And sticking to it is where your base practices and guidelines come into play.

This has to be worked out as to how you work best, and so it will be different for everyone. This is what I aim to work by, these are my 'Golden Rules'.

1. **Cite, Cite and Cite again:** there is no point copying information if you don't know where it came from. How many times do we look at online trees and think you've broken down a wall or made a new connection only to find that there's no citation evidence and the connection becomes a clue, a hint of where you might find the information? This is one of the things I regret not doing from the start. I was very naive when I began this journey, now I'm very pedantic!
2. **Research Log:** this needs to be used, and yes I'm talking more to myself than to the wider audience. I may be pedantic, but I'm not very disciplined. I have a research log, I just don't use it properly. I should record WHO I was looking for, WHERE I was looking for them, OVER WHAT TIME PERIOD I searched, and if the search was SUCCESSFUL OR NOT. I didn't, the result being that I ordered a death certificate for one of my brick wall candidates, after waiting patiently for it to arrive I realised I'd already tried that GRO

reference four years ago and found it was the wrong one. Because I hadn't recorded it as a negative result it cost me £9.75 for the certificate and two weeks of my time. Research logs can save you time, energy, and in my case, money!

3. **Photo Log:** in much the same way as the research log should be used, using a photo log would stop me from looking at areas and house photos and thinking; 'who does that relate to?'
4. **Transcribe** the information contained within the record before adding it to the family history software. Analyse it, see where else it could take you.
5. **'If it's not been proved (and cited) it isn't going on';** This is my mantra for the Do-Over.

So finally, how will I improve my research techniques? Thomas challenged us to list five procedures that we will stick to in our future research. These are my five:

1. Enter people into my 'Master' spreadsheet one person at a time and ensure they are on the family history programme. Previously I would enter the entire family, say after finding a census record, without analysing the relationships, ages, birthplaces etc fully. This has led to me missing important clues and slowed me down considerably (in a bad way). It also meant that I had lots of 'catching up' to do in terms of entering them onto the family history software.
2. Cite each record source as I find it. Having not done this religiously in my One-Name Study I am now citing GRO references for about 2000 individuals. It is dull and time consuming but if I'd done them as I found them I wouldn't be wasting my time going back over it.
3. I will use the Research Log and RECORD NEGATIVE SOURCES!
4. I will use the Photo Log.
5. Make use of Research Notes. I will document my thought processes at the end of a search, I will note down why I was looking a such and such a data set, the date range I searched, if I found the information and where that information might take me next. If I can't find the information I will note my thoughts on why - is the source material complete? Are there gaps in the years / areas covered etc? Where else could the information be found? All of this will help me to pick up where I left off quickly.

What are yours?