

Genealogy - April Report

The April meeting considered family history sites on the internet.

Family history research has been revolutionised in the last generation by the availability online of historical genealogical records. There are many sites offering records of a particular type but a few set out to be a 'department store' offering nearly everything you need. Switching metaphors, the front runners are FamilySearch, Ancestry, FindMyPast, and MyHeritage with TheGenealogist somewhat behind. A number of other sites 'also ran' but can't compete for the top spot for various reasons.

The most important factor is the number of historical records that you can access through the site. All four sites provide the basics of census records, the BMD indexes, parish records and probate records but there are many other record sets that can help. FamilySearch and Ancestry have most records – around 10 billion – but many are in North America. FindMyPast is definitely best for the UK whilst MyHeritage is stronger in Europe.

Other useful facilities available from these sites are the ability to build a family tree and DNA testing and matching. These are available elsewhere separately but linking them with the records and with each other provides extra power.

You need to be able to find your ancestor in the records and the user interface and the hints provided is usually the deciding feature for most people but it is a personal choice.

Most of us cannot justify paying for multiple subscriptions even if each one only amounts to the cost of a cup of coffee once a week so a choice has to be made. FamilySearch has to be the best value – it is free – but provides no DNA matching. The list price for MyHeritage is twice that for Ancestry or FindMyPast but a 50% discount can be negotiated.

In May the topic will be 'Irregular Marriages' – at Gretna Green and other places. The meeting will again be by Zoom, as usual on the first Thursday of the month, May 5th, at 2pm. Details will be circulated to Genealogy group members nearer the time.

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