Parish made easy!

We're adding new counties all the time as we build the most comprehensive archive of parish records. Now we've given you an easy way to find your ancestors' local registers.

Over the past year, we've added new collections from London, Yorkshire, Warwickshire, Dorset, Liverpool and Ireland to the millions of parish records already at our site. Our latest addition lets you search Dorset baptisms, marriages and burials going right back to the 16th century.

We're not stopping there either – we'll be adding even more counties over the next 12 months. Our aim is to build the most comprehensive archive of parish records, to help you trace your family's births, marriages and deaths all the way to Tudor times.

With so many records to wade through, it could become difficult to pinpoint the ones you're looking for. That's why we've come up with a new way to search our parish collections, making it easy to locate the records for your ancestors' places and times. It all starts at our new parish page.

1) Our parish page provides a complete map of the UK. If you want to learn more about parish records, scroll down to watch our introductory video. When you're ready, simply select a region where your ancestors lived from the list on the left.

2) On each region page, you can watch another video to learn about that area's history and records. You'll also see a list of all the local counties where we have parish records. Simply click on your county for more information.

3) For many counties you'll find details of our other records for that area, plus a timeline of the local history. Most importantly, though, you'll see links to all our parish collections for that county, showing the types of record included and the dates they cover. Click one to start searching.

4) You can search for your ancestors by name, key dates, places and often other family members – depending on what's included in the records. Just type in what you know and click Search, then see what turns up.

Top tip

As an alternative to searching, you can work your way through all our records for a particular parish. Just look for the 'Browse this collection' options on the right of any each collection Search page.

War Horse competition

Win a family holiday in a majestic film location, plus a series of exciting weekly prizes, as we team up with the creators of the World War I blockbuster

War Horse is Steven Spielberg's epic new adventure, set on World War I's Western Front. We've teamed up with the people behind the film to give you the chance to win a series of blockbuster prizes.

Our grand prize is a thrilling family holiday in a picturesque War Horse location. You and three members of your family can enjoy horse-riding, hot-air ballooning and much more in the heart of rural Devon.

Each entry will also count towards our weekly prize draw. At the end of each week, we'll give away top prizes including a pair of tickets to the War Horse premiere in London; a private War Horse screening for you and 20 friends; an Apple iPad 2 with annual Premium membership to Ancestry.co.uk; and a holiday in a National Trust cottage.

To enter, simply visit our War Horse page (http://www.ancestry.co.uk/warhorse), click Enter now and fill in the basic form. You can enter once every day until the end of January to improve your chances of winning.

While you're at our War Horse page, take the chance to find out about the film, watch the official trailer and learn about the history of World War I. We've brought together some of the most moving true stories of Britain's heroes, and provided a timeline of the War's key events.

You'll also find links to our key World War I records. Our Service Records and Pension Records help you piece together where and when your ancestors fought, while our Medal Records reveal the awards they earned.

All three of these crucial collections are completely FREE for everyone to search on every Saturday throughout January. So, you have the perfect chance to discover your family's war heroes.

Top tip

The National Army Museum is running a special War Horse exhibition until August 2012. If your ancestors fought alongside horses, send us their stories and you could win a place in the exhibition.

Get started with… Family trees

Make the most of our exclusive Family Tree Builder to keep track of your ancestors' stories and make new discoveries

Your family tree is the web that connects all your discoveries about your family's past. Our onsite Family Tree Builder not only makes it easy to record all your ancestors' details – it also provides a host of extra features to help you dig deeper into your family's past.

It's a good idea to begin your family tree as soon as you start using our site. Start with yourself, then add your parents, grandparents, and as many generations as you can. Don't worry if you're not sure of birth and death dates – just have a guess and you can always change them later.

Very quickly, you'll find that green leaves – or Hints – appear above some of your relatives' names. As you add each person, we automatically search for them in our records – every time we think we've found someone, we give you a Hint.

Click on a leaf to see what we've found. The hint may provide new information about that person, or even suggest further relatives for you to explore. You can add these people to your tree, then see what new Hints appear about them – continually working your way back through your family history.

All the information you collect about each person is kept on their profile screen. As well as key details such as dates and places, you can save your ancestors' actual records to this screen, so you can find them again easily. You can even upload photos and stories, to really bring them to life.

You can choose to keep your tree private. However, if you're willing to share it, you'll find it's a useful way to share your findings with other members. Click on the Member Connect tab on each profile screen to see who else is looking into your ancestors and compare your information – perhaps you'll discover some long lost living cousins!

Top tip

Why start again?
If you've already started your family tree, either on another website or using software such as Family Tree Maker, you don't need to start from scratch – you can import your work as a GEDCOM file. Find out more

Who Do You Think You Are? Live 2012

The UK's biggest family history event is less than two months away. We have the latest show news, plus a bargain-price ticket offer!

If you don't have the dates inked into your diary yet, we suggest you find a pen right away. 24th-26th February is when Who Do You Think You Are? Live 2012 – the UK's biggest family history show – hits London's Olympia exhibition centre.

In last month's Updated, we told you what to expect from the event, and filled you in on the main changes from last year. We also promised a return for the ever-popular Ancestry.co.uk stand – complete with free access to all our records – and the Ancestry Academy, where we'll run a series of free workshops all weekend.

Now we can reveal some of the specifics of this year's show, which have been confirmed over the past few weeks.

Firstly, two celebrities from the Who Do You Think You Are? television show have agreed to appear at the live event, to share their stories and answer your questions. Actor Larry Lamb, most famous for his role in Eastenders, will take the stage on Friday 24th February to discuss his traveller ancestors. Then Richard Madeley, one half of Richard and Judy, will shed more light on his North American roots on Sunday 26th February.

Also this month, the Society of Genealogists has released full details of its Workshop Programme, including times and speakers. The society's workshops delve into many of the more specialist areas of family history research, from adoption records to Scottish church registers. See the full timetable.

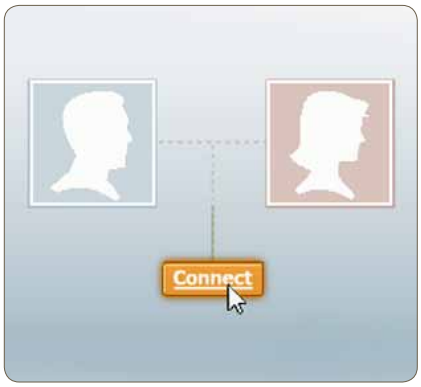
If that's whet your appetite, make sure you don't miss out. Our special offer gives you two show tickets for just £22! Buy now – quote ANC2422 to take advantage, offer ends 10th February 2012.

Top tip

Remember to keep checking our Who Do You Think You Are? Live page for the latest news and full details of the Ancestry.co.uk stand and Ancestry Academy.

Have you tried… Member Connect

Find completely new branches of your family and discover living relatives you never knew existed – all from your Ancestry.co.uk family tree!



You probably know that your family tree can give you Hints to help you find your ancestors in our records. But did you know that it can also put you in touch with other members who have the same people in their own trees – making them your long lost cousins!

It all happens through Member Connect. This exclusive feature looks at all the names and dates in your tree, then scours the 29 million other public trees across Ancestry.co.uk for the same details.

Member Connect brings two huge benefits. Firstly, you can view the other members' entire trees, assuming they've agreed to make them public. That means you can follow your shared branches, and look for new ancestors you haven't yet found – or extra details on the ones you have.

On top of that, you can easily get in touch with your new cousins through our Messages service. You could discuss your discoveries, share photos and memories, or even arrange a family reunion!

To start connecting, visit your family tree or if you don't have one, start a new tree. Hover over any ancestor's name, and click **View profile**, then select the **Member Connect** tab.

You'll see a list of **Suggested Connections**. For each one, you can see the name of the member who created the tree, plus the details they've compiled about this particular ancestor. Any differences to your own discoveries are highlighted in red, so you can quickly work out if you're looking at the same person.

If you find a match, click the **Connect** button to add it to your **Connections** list. You can then go through each detail in turn – including extra family members – and decide whether to make any changes to your own tree.

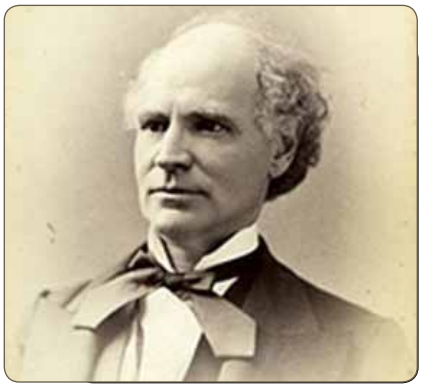
To view the other member's complete family tree, select the name of the tree at the top of the Connection details. And if you'd like to get in touch with your new relative, simply click on their name. You'll probably have a lot to talk about!

You may have Suggested Connections waiting for you at your family tree.

Member Connect is only available to current members.

Ask the experts

Our resident professionals answer your questions on all things genealogical. This month, we search for a soldier's birth and provide Irish research tips.



Welcome to our 'Ask the experts' section. This is where we answer your questions on all things genealogical, so if you have any pressing queries, send us your questions now*.

If your question doesn't appear here, you can email our Member Services team at support@ancestry.co.uk or call **0800 404 9723**, and they'll help you with your research.

This month's questions are answered by professional genealogists Antony Adolph and Chris Paton.

Bios

Anthony Adolph has written several books about family history, and presented TV shows such as Gene Detectives, in addition to his 20 years' experience as a professional genealogist.

Chris Paton is a professional genealogist with both Scottish and Irish roots, and expert knowledge of records from all over the UK.

Question 1

Census gap

My great-grandfather James Gregory isn't on any census until 1871. He was born in Birmingham (he claims) in 1838 but I can't find him at all until his marriage on 22nd December 1861.

On his marriage certificate he said his father was John Gregory, a police officer. There seems to be no record of a John Gregory at all. I have emailed the Police Archives and nothing.

His occupation is a journeyman toolmaker and steel pen maker. Can you help please?

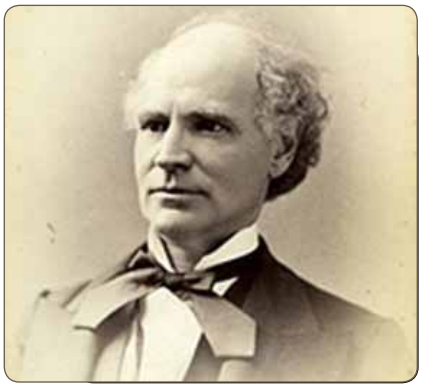
Carole

Answer

The apparent absence of James, like so many young men before they appear on a marriage record, could be due to a spell in the armed forces. Ancestry.co.uk has many early military records, including Army and Navy medal rolls. Try a speculative search from the main military search page.

Tool- and steel pen-making are both very distinctive Birmingham occupations, suggesting that James and his father should appear in the Birmingham area in earlier censuses. A quick look at the online censuses shows that there was a small but definite population of Gregorys in Birmingham.

Ask the experts (continued)



Instead of worrying about the two you can't find, I suggest spending some time investigating those who are clearly visible in the censuses, and work on building your family tree, going further back into the parish registers, wills and other sources to try to link them up. In the course of this you're likely to come upon your John and James.

Anthony Adolph

Question 2

Missing soldier

I'm trying to trace the birth of my grandfather, Herbert William Dunham of the Kings Own Scottish Borderers No 27280.

He was born in Australia about 1883 according to his WWI medals. He married in 1915 in Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, and I have the marriage certificate. He died on 23rd September 1917 and is buried in the White House Cemetery, St Jean les Ypres.

I have his medals and also a photograph of his grave. I have found the war diaries for his regiment but it states how many died but no names. I have looked through the burnt records but there's no information about him there.

Any pointers you might be able to give me would be greatly received.

Graham Swift

Answer

The British Commonwealth War Graves Registers 1914-1918 collection contains a Herbert William Dunham, but this was a private in the Australian Infantry. So, I checked the Commonwealth War Graves Commission site, and found your Herbert, noted as being the son of Robert Dunham and Frances Ellen Sharp (formerly Dunham) of 21 Scalford Road, Melton Mowbray.

I've also found Herbert in the Soldiers Died in the Great War collection. His entry mentions an Australian birth, but I can't find him in the Australian civil records collection.

A Frances Ellen Sharp is recorded in the Death Indexes as having died in Melton Mowbray in 1977. However, with her date of birth given as 18th October 1893, she was clearly not Herbert's mother. It is possible that she was a sister and the CWGC entry is wrong. Pursuing Frances further may solve the problem.

Chris Paton