Your NEW Help & Advice Centre

Have you hit a brick wall in your research? Perhaps your ancestral trail seems to be leading you into records you're unfamiliar with? Or maybe you're having some problems with our latest search features?

To help you get the most from your membership, we've launched our brand new **Help & Advice Centre**. Whether you're new to family history or have become a seasoned researcher, you're sure to find some valuable gems of advice.

This new addition to our site revolves around three main areas. In **'How to use our website'**, we show you how to make the most of all our useful tools. You'll find handy tutorials on everything from searching records and viewing original documents to setting up your own family tree.

'Exploring the records' is packed with fascinating articles explaining what our different collections contain, and how best to search them. If you're new to family history, you'll find our guides to census documents and birth, marriage and death records particularly helpful. Additionally, if you've taken your research back to the 1830s and want to make your next breakthroughs, check out our invaluable advice on searching parish registers.

Finally, check the articles in the **'Family history advice'** section. Here you'll find great tips on research strategies including how to avoid the most common family history pitfalls, using old photos as part of your research, interpreting old handwriting and more.

We'll be adding more to the **Help & Advice Centre** in the coming weeks and months – let us know what you'd like to see in **this month's survey**.

Top Tip

You can also find out what's happening in the family history world in our Events section of our Help & Advice Centre. Select Events from the Help & Advice home page.

Valuing your ancestors' homes

Everyone's heard of the Domesday Book – William I's survey of Britain in 1086. But did you know that in 1909, the Liberal government performed another huge audit of Britain's landowners? The Domesday Survey, as it was referred to at the time, resulted in the 1910 Valuation Books – and many of these important historical records form our latest new release.

Members of the **Ancestry World Archives Project** have just finished transcribing our new collection **London Land Tax Valuations, 1910**. This lets you search 4,000 crucial records from the Valuation Books, covering the City of London and Paddington. Whether your relatives were homeowners or tenants, you can find out what their house was like, where it was, how much land was involved, whether they owned it, and more.

This vital collection covers around 35,000 properties in London and includes more than 70,000 names. Because of the amount of migration to and from the capital around the turn of the century, most of you will find at least one ancestor among them. The pages also provide the houses' values, which act as an effective guide to how wealthy your forebears were.

The survey was actually used to work out how much each property had increased in value, and how much tax landowners would have to pay on these increases. As a result, it was hugely unpopular with wealthier members of society. In this case, though, our ancestors' loss is our gain, as we're able to uncover valuable details about their lives.

The Valuation Books are available to Premium and Worldwide members.

Top Tip

You can keep referring back to the London Tax Valuations as we add the 1911 Census over the coming year. Find a London family in the Census, then check to see what their home was worth.

Star attractions

Who Do You Think You Are? Live 2011 opens its doors at London Olympia from 25-27 February. This year's show is shaping up to be a cracker – if you haven't got your ticket yet, take advantage of our special 2 for £25 offer to make sure you don't miss out.

Hundreds of people have already confirmed they'll be there – including top celebrities from inside and outside the family history world. TV historian Tony Robinson will appear at the Ancestry.co.uk Academy on Friday 25 February.

Tony will be joined by some of your favourite stars from the latest WDYTYA? TV series, sharing their memories from the show and revealing more family secrets. Already confirmed for the Who Do You Think You Are? Theatre are celebrity gardener Monty Don for Friday, and Holby City actor Hugh Quarshie for Saturday.

If you're more interested in furthering your own research, the Ancestry.co.uk Academy will also host different workshops on getting started, going further and tracing forebears around the world. Plus, you'll find a separate tutorial on the new Family Tree Maker® 2011. Download your free timetable

The show's the perfect opportunity to mix with some of family history's most renowned experts, and get solutions to your research problems. Our knowledgeable team will be on-hand to help you on our main stand - 616, and you'll be able to meet top industry insiders from our partners in our exclusive Members' Lounge. You can also get your questions answered in the dedicated Ask the Experts area.

Completing the picture are representatives from family history societies up and down the country, in the Society of Genealogists Family History Show. It's your once-a-year chance to fulfil all your genealogical needs.

Top Tip

Make sure you don't miss your favourite stands and attractions with our free Who Do You Think You Are? Live 2011 day planner.

Have you tried…
Newspapers and periodicals

Popular opinion would have us believe that today's newspapers are tomorrow's chip paper. Ask anyone who's spent any time looking into their family history, though, and they'll tell you that old papers are actually hot news. As well as uncovering specific events from your ancestors' lives, they can help you put them in context alongside wider world issues.

Many of you will have tried our searchable articles from **The Times, 1788-1833**. You can either look for one of your forebears – if you think they'd have warranted a mention – find a report of a particular event, or browse the editions by date. We also have similar collections from local newspapers across Great Britain and Ireland – see them all in our **Card Catalogue**.

Alongside these headline items, we've recently added some other newsworthy releases. Perhaps most notable of these is the **Illustrated London News**, covering various years from the second half of the 19th century.

As its name suggests, this was the first British newspaper to regularly include pictures. Among our scanned and searchable pages, you'll see contemporary sketches of important historical events such as the Irish Potato Famine and the Boer War.

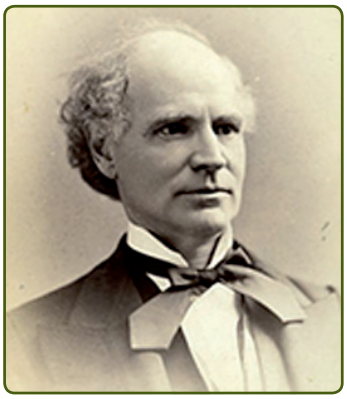
We've also released issues of the **Penny Magazine from 1832-44**. This budget-price journal brought education to the masses, with a mixture of culture, history and poetry. Even if you can't track down specific mentions of your relatives, you may find personal anecdotes about events they attended, or descriptions of places they once visited.

Also look out for brand new collections from Lancashire, Somerset, Nottinghamshire and other English counties – again, see them all in our **Card Catalogue**.

Top Tip

When you're searching our newspaper and periodical collections, the Keyword box is extremely useful. Type any word in that box, and we'll look for any mention of it in your chosen publication.

Ask the experts



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*

Thank you for all your questions so far. If your question doesn't appear here, you can email our Member Services team at support@ancestry.co.uk and they'll help you with your research.

This month's questions are answered by professional genealogist Anthony Adolph and top military historian Paul Reed.

Missing Will

Q. I've been trying to locate my 3x great-grandfather Walter Miles, born around 1855. The earliest I've located him is his 1876 marriage to Eliza Phillips, where he gives his father's name as Walter and his age as 21. All censuses state he was born in Hampstead/London. However, I can't find him in the birth index, nor in the 1861 or 1871 censuses, and as we're not from a religious background, no baptism records exist.

Unfortunately, I've not been able to locate him in the newly released National Probate Calendar either – he died in Bromley on 7 December 1928. Are there any other records that would prove useful?

Ant Miles

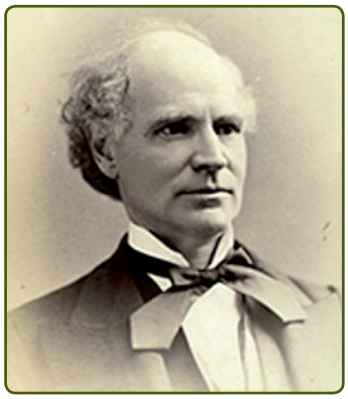
A. It's a shame that you can't find a will for Walter, but not everyone left one. Though the family may not have been very religious, you can't know that Walter was not baptised. Not to have been baptised would have been unusual in the 1850s, so you should look for a baptism record, starting with the **London Parish Records** at Ancestry.co.uk.

The age '21' given at marriage can simply mean that the person was (or claimed to be) over the age of consent. So, I would make a thorough search several years either side of 1855 in the **official birth index**, and also check under the possible variant Myles, and possible misreadings such as Mills, Wiles and Wills.

On the **1861 Census**, I've found a Walter Miles born about 1853, son of Walter, in Hackney. His birth place of Hackney doesn't match, but either it, or the later statement about Hampstead, may be wrong. The two aren't that far apart.

Anthony Adolph

Ask the experts (continued)



Secret Soldier

Q. The only record I have of my husband's grandfather Charles Watts, born 1880, is his marriage certificate in 1906. He states he's in the RFA, but he must have left at about this time as I find his first son's birth cert in 1907 and he's already working in Essex.

I've found quite a few of that name under the World War I medal rolls in the Royal Field Artillery. Will I need to check all the regimental numbers to see if he is there, or is there a short way to see if one of them is him?

Also, I know he joined the Army very young, aged about 15 or 16 after his father remarried in the late 1890s. Again, I can find no record of him in the 1901 census, when he would have been 21.

Yvonne Tyler

A. When soldiers joined the regular Army before WWI, they joined for specific periods; normally these involved a time as a full-time regular, followed by a spell on the reserve.

At this point they would leave the Army, return to civilian life and be able to pursue a career, but they would have to do regular training. They would be paid by the Army and in time of war they would be mobilised.

The only other way to leave the Army was to buy yourself out, something few could afford. It's therefore likely Charles Watts became a reservist sometime after 1906 and was recalled in 1914.

There's no easy way to work out which one of the men you've found on the **Medal Index Cards** is your man, but it would be worth checking them all against the surviving **Service** and **Pension** Records at Ancestry.co.uk.

Paul Reed

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