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What Are You Paying For?

by Barbara J Starmans

Ancestry.co.uk

In March of this year, Ancestry said “a fond farewell to Old Search” and introduced new sliding controls to the standard primary search. In a blog post, they explained that preserving the two search functionalities was taking too many resources as the old search became more and more fragile and that it was simply not scalable to mobile devices, new operating systems and browsers. Ancestry now has more than 13 billion records published online and that number is growing all the time. In September 2013, they announced a new joint agreement with FamilySearch to begin a five-year effort to digitise and index 1 billion new records from around the world and in January 2014, they announced an extension of their collaboration with FamilySearch with plans to make an additional 1 billion records already indexed by FamilySearch available on their website.

Search

A sample search from the home page for my great-aunt, Laura Jane Williams, born 1867 on the Isle of Wight, England, with the default search filters returned 3,111,027 records. Of the first five, three records are relevant to my great-aunt and include:

- 1871 census: Archive reference RG10, piece number 1165, folio 102, page 26
- Christening: Holy Trinity, Ryde, 7 April 1867
- Birth: 1st quarter of 1867, district Isle of Wight, volume 2B, page 552, line 19

The records returned include results for Laura Jane, Laura J and Laura as both a first and middle name with the default name filter applied. The harder to find 1881 census record for Laura Williams is the eleventh record in the list, while the 1891 census record does not appear at all because ‘Laura’ has been mistakenly transcribed by Ancestry as ‘Sawa’.

Collections

Standard collections include the 1841 to 1911 census records from England and Wales and the 1841 to 1901 census indexes for Scotland, the indexes to birth, marriages and deaths from 1837 to 2005 and a host of other specialised records including criminal registers, directories, military records, parish records, probate and tax records, educational records, occupational records, and many more.

Source Citations and Record Group Information

Each record includes a detailed source citation and record collections have an in-depth explanation of what the record contains, why it was created, where originals can be found and the quality of the collection.

Pricing

Essential membership includes UK census, Birth Marriage and Death, Tree Builder and costs £83.40 for 12 months. The Premium membership includes essential records, parish records, military, immigration and Irish records and costs £107.40 for 12 months. The worldwide membership includes premium records, entire library, new releases and overseas records for £155.40 for 12 months. There is no pay-per-view offered.

What I like:

- The search from the home page helps beginners search effectively using the 'less is more' theory of database searching while the advanced search, accessible from the search menu, allows more control for focused searching.
- Huge range of data collections, many offering custom search options.
- Records have clearly marked source citations and record descriptions.
- Card Catalogue simplifies searching by collection.
- Mistranscribed records can be easily annotated with corrections.

What I don't like:

- Previously viewed records are not marked in anyway, making it difficult to tell what has been viewed or not viewed, when looking at a long list of possible records.
- Trees of other Ancestry users appear in search results by default.
- Slider settings are not displayed unless the slider is actively being moved.

Find My Past

Find My Past has recently updated their website, moving to a new technology platform and changing their search. In a blog post, they explained the upgrade was necessary because technology has changed since they first launched the website ten years ago and by making this change, they will be able to provide new features and release new records more often. Since the launch of the new site, the user community has been critical about the changes, saying that search is broken and the site is much slower. Find My Past admitted they had "met some challenges and some mistakes were made." They have assured users that they are working hard to improve the experience and fixes are being implemented regularly. Find My Past has more than 1.5 billion records, with new record sets being added daily.

Search

A sample search for my great-aunt, Laura Jane Williams, born 1867 (+/- 2 years) on the Isle of Wight, England, with name variants checked for the first names and uncheck for the last name, the new Find My Past UK search returns only three results and each is relevant to my great-aunt.

- Birth: 1st quarter of 1867, district Isle of Wight, volume 2B, page 502, line 19 (source should read page 552, it has been wrongly transcribed)
- 1871 census: Archive reference RG10, piece number 1165, folio 102, page 26.
- 1891 census: Archive reference RG12, piece number 890, folio 77, page 18.

The listing for Laura in the 1881 census is missing and is only found when I search again with her second name 'Jane' removed from the search criteria. Seemingly 'Laura' is not a variant of the name 'Laura Jane' although 'Laura J' is.

Collections

Standard collections include census records from England, Wales from 1841 to 1911 and Scotland from 1841 to 1901 as well as indexes to civil birth marriage and death records. Special collections include a wide selection of military records, parish records from 1538 and millions of pages from historical British newspapers. More records are being added daily as part of their 100 record sets in 100 days program.

Source Citations and Record Group Information

There are no source citations nor is there enough information about the source of the many of the records to allow the genealogist to craft an accurate source citation manually. For example, for the Chelsea Pensioners British Army Service Records, there is no reference number, nor is there even a suggestion that record is from WO97 collection from the National Archives. Information about most of the record sets is limited.

Pricing

A 12-month subscription for access to British records only costs £99.50 and a world 12-month subscription costs £129.50. Find My Past offers pay-per-view credits with 60 credits valid for 90 days at £6.95 or 280 credits valid for 365 days for £24.95.

What I like:

- Check marks show if a record transcription or image has been previously viewed.
- Mistranscribed records can be annotated with corrections.
- Filters are helpful to narrow results.

What I don't like:

- With limited details on the search results screen, each record found must be viewed.
- No source citations and often limited information about the sources.
- When a multiple page record is found, the image must be downloaded one page at a time.

The Genealogist

The Genealogist's master search page is minimalistic looking but has some powerful options. Search for a person, family or address in all records or in a specific record group. Fields include forename, surname, keywords such as a place or occupation and year of event.

Search

Searching from the master search screen for my great-aunt, Laura Jane Williams, born 1867 (+/- 2 years) on the Isle of Wight, England, returns 97 results.

The first three records be relevant and include:

- 1871 census: Image reference RG10/1165/F?, folio and page not given
- Birth: District Isle of Wight, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, page 552, volume 2B, registered January – March 1867
- 1881 census: Image reference RG11/1178/F?, folio and page not given

The 1891 census record does not appear in the results because the family surname has been wrongly transcribed as 'Weltham'.

Collections

Standard collections include census records from 1841 to 1911 for England and Wales, birth, marriage and death indexes from 1837 to 2005. Specialised record collections include transcripts, parish and nonconformist records, land and tithe records, military records, directories, court and criminal records, and many others.

Source Citations and Record Group Information

Source information is available on the records, but it is not always complete. Limited information about the record groups in the collection is available from the research guide under the help menu, but is not accessible from the records themselves.

Pricing

What I like:

- Search results include enough details to find the correct record without having to open each transcription or document.
- Family search and address search are helpful when searching the census records
- Matching records can be saved to a research log or the online tree and results of later searches show if these records have been viewed or saved previously.
- Often, after finding a relevant record, there is an opportunity to perform a 'smart search' of another record group, based on the information from the found record.

What I don't like:

- There is no advanced search page although some record specific fields are available after selecting certain record types.
- Source and record group information is not complete or easily accessible from the search results.

My Heritage

After uploading or entering your family tree on the My Heritage website, use the recently launched SuperSearch to find Record Matches in their collection of more than 5 billion historical records. Records available for the UK include England Births and Christenings 1538-1975, England Marriages 1538-1973, England Deaths and Burials 1538-1991, full index and images for the 1841, 1871, 1881, 1891 and 1901, burial records from Find a Grave and Billion Graves and many more worldwide records.

Pricing

A basic account is free to create for 250 ancestors and 500 MB of storage with basic smart matching. A premium account lets your tree grow to 2,500 people and 1,000 MB of storage with enhanced smart matching and priority support for £6 a month billed yearly. The Premium Plus account offers unlimited tree capacity, unlimited storage, enhanced smart matching, priority support, ability to search trees, the power features of timeline and time book for £10.60 a month billed yearly.

Origins

Origins.net has over 130 million British and Irish records and is divided into four main sections including British, Irish, Scottish records and the National Wills Index. Their British census collection is not complete, nor do they offer access to the birth, marriage and death index, but they do have an

interesting collection of specialised records not available elsewhere including wills and probate records that date back to 1100.

Pricing

Origins Total Access is available for 72 hours for £8, monthly for £10.50, annually for £55. British Origins and the National Wills Index is £7 for 72 hours or £9.50 monthly. Irish Origins only is £6 for 72 hours or £9.50 monthly. A subscription does not include the original document images which cost £6.50 for 60 credits or £13 for 140 credits.

Family Relatives

Family Relatives has a growing list of worldwide records including records from England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Australia, Canada and the United States. Their UK records currently include the English and Wales birth, marriage and death records from 1837 to 2005 as well as various lists and directories. Sections of record collections can be searched individually but there is no general search yet.

Pricing

A limited number of records are free to search, browse and view while other records require a subscription at £25 or can be accessed with pay-per-view for £6 for 60 units valid for 90 days.

Sidebar

Most Wanted

The last known whereabouts of Laura Jane Williams, the subject of the test searches in this article, was in the 1891 census where she appeared with her parents George and Harriet Williams and her illegitimate daughter Florence. By 1901, Laura was no longer living with her parents, although her daughter was. Any information about what might have happened to Laura Jane Williams after 1891 would be welcome.