

Finding Genealogy on the Internet

by

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Published in London by
David Hawgood
2nd edition, 2002

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This electronic text was created from the page proofs of the Second Edition of *Finding Genealogy on the Internet*, published by David Hawgood in 2002 (ISBN-10: 0-948151-23-4).

The text has not been updated and therefore many of the internet resources mentioned will no longer be available or will be available at a different location.

Nonetheless, the *general* information in the text retains broad validity.

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1. Introduction

The Internet is now an essential tool for genealogists: more and more genealogists are getting on-line; almost every organization and institution involved in family history provides information via the World Wide Web; and an increasing amount of primary genealogical data is available over the Internet. But this means that it can be difficult to find the information you want. This book is intended to introduce some of the tools and techniques for finding genealogical information efficiently on the Internet.

This aim of this book is not to explain what the Internet is, how you get access to it, or how to use a Web browser, but rather to help you get the best out of these tools for your family history once you've got started. If you are not already familiar with a browser such as Netscape Navigator or Internet Explorer, and are not already using e-mail, you will need a basic introduction to them while using this book.

A catalogue of the Internet?

The Internet is sometimes compared to a library — so why isn't there an on-line catalogue? The problem is that in some ways the library analogy is misleading, because on the Internet there is no-one in overall charge, and new information is published without the selection and cataloguing procedure that a library uses. If the Web is a library, it is one where people are constantly bringing in new books and just putting them on the shelves, and where authors are frequently coming in to alter the content of their books.

Also, Web pages are not professionally indexed during the publishing process as books are. The Internet is generally indexed by "robots", which are computer programs that search the Web for new or changed pages, or trawl through the text of newsgroup messages, then submit their contents for automated indexing. But a computer program, unlike a human, can't easily tell which information on a Web page is important and which unimportant; and it doesn't know simple things that are obvious to any human reader, such as the fact that *Scottish records* might also be included on pages that simply talk about *British records* or *UK records* or even *Scots records*.

An e-mail directory for the Internet?

A frequently asked question from those new to the Internet is whether there is an Internet equivalent of the phone book, with everyone's e-mail address in. The answer to this question is 'no'. There may be as many as 500 million users on the Internet, each of whom will have at least one e-mail address.¹ Thousands of new e-mail addresses are being added daily as new users sign up with Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and more companies go on-line. But also e-mail addresses are lapsing as people move jobs or close one Internet account to open another.

Each ISP or organization is responsible for creating its own e-mail addresses — it does not need to register them centrally, and many ISPs allow subscribers to make up their own e-mail addresses without even bothering to inform the ISP. There is simply no way to find all the e-mail addresses currently in use and who they belong to.

¹ See Global Reach's Global Internet Statistics page at <www.greach.com/globstats/index.php3>.

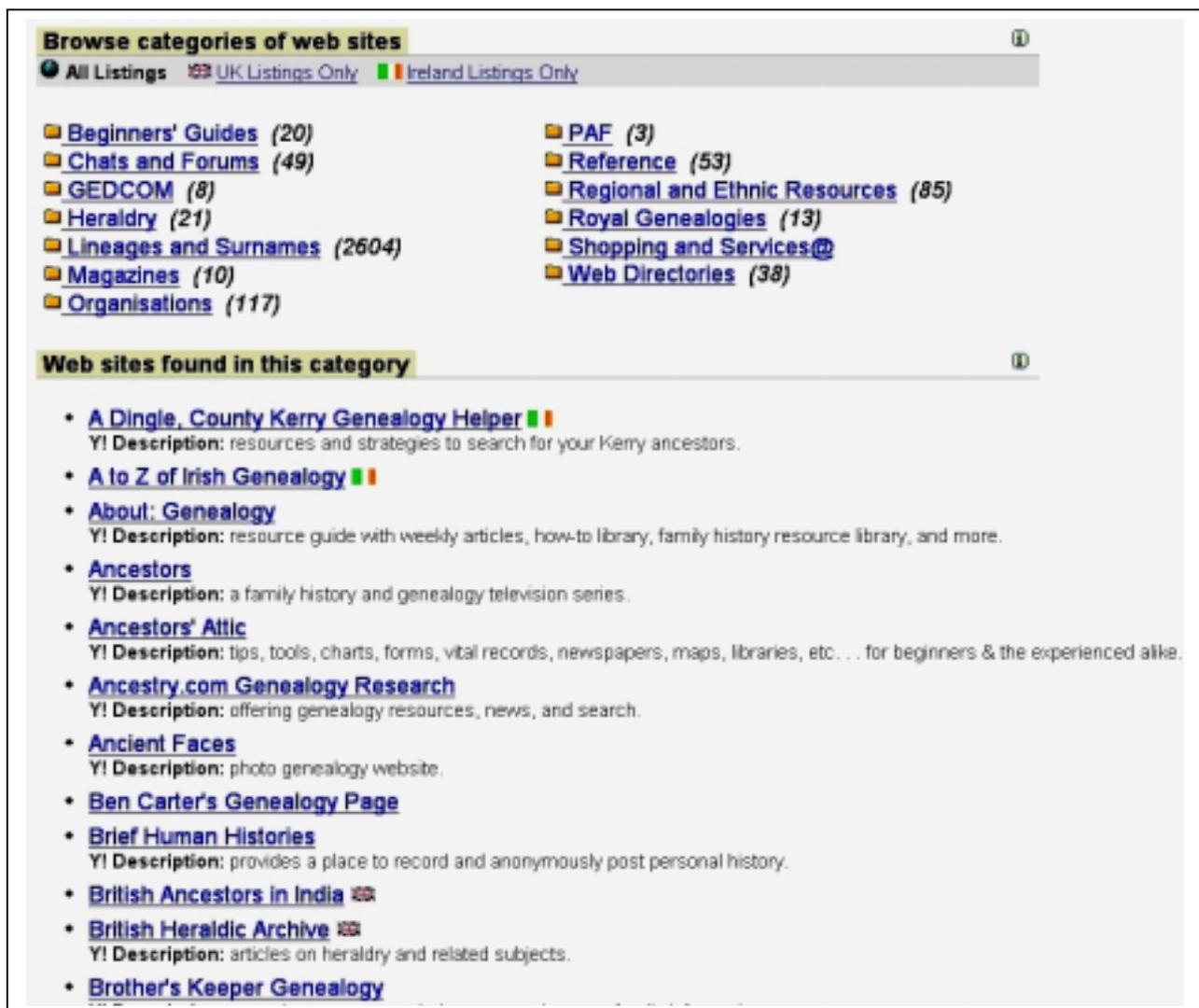
Resources and Strategies

If there aren't the basic information retrieval tools you're already familiar with, how do you find information on the Internet? The answer is that there is no single best way of finding a particular piece of information on the Internet — it depends on what you're looking for. However, there are a small number of basic types of Internet resource for information retrieval, and using the right one can make a lot of difference to how quickly and successfully you retrieve information.

You don't need any special software to find information on the Internet: you just need a Web browser and e-mail software, though there are software tools you may find useful, which are discussed in Chapter 5.

2. Directories

One of the main ways of locating Internet resources is to use a directory. A directory on the Web is exactly what you'd expect — a site with a categorized list of resources. The most widely used general directory on the Web is Yahoo at <www.yahoo.com>, and there is also a UK version of Yahoo at <uk.yahoo.com>.



The screenshot shows a Yahoo search results page for genealogy. At the top, there's a header "Browse categories of web sites" with a search icon. Below it are three tabs: "All Listings", "UK Listings Only", and "Ireland Listings Only". The main content is a grid of category links with counts in parentheses:

- Beginners' Guides (20)
- Chats and Forums (49)
- GEDCOM (8)
- Heraldry (21)
- Lineages and Surnames (2604)
- Magazines (10)
- Organisations (117)
- PAF (3)
- Reference (53)
- Regional and Ethnic Resources (85)
- Royal Genealogies (13)
- Shopping and Services@
- Web Directories (38)

Below the categories is a section titled "Web sites found in this category" with a search icon. It lists several genealogy-related websites with their descriptions:

- A Dingle, County Kerry Genealogy Helper** | | |
Y! Description: resources and strategies to search for your Kerry ancestors.
- A to Z of Irish Genealogy** | | |
- About: Genealogy**
Y! Description: resource guide with weekly articles, how-to library, family history resource library, and more.
- Ancestors**
Y! Description: a family history and genealogy television series.
- Ancestors' Attic**
Y! Description: tips, tools, charts, forms, vital records, newspapers, maps, libraries, etc. . . for beginners & the experienced alike.
- Ancestry.com Genealogy Research**
Y! Description: offering genealogy resources, news, and search.
- Ancient Faces**
Y! Description: photo genealogy website.
- Ben Carter's Genealogy Page**
- Brief Human Histories**
Y! Description: provides a place to record and anonymously post personal history.
- British Ancestors in India** | | |
- British Heraldic Archive** | | |
Y! Description: articles on heraldry and related subjects.
- Brother's Keeper Genealogy**

Figure 1: Part of Yahoo's main genealogy page

Yahoo UK's genealogy page (Fig. 1) is at <uk.dir.yahoo.com/arts/humanities/history/genealogy>. Like all Yahoo subject pages, it has two main parts. The lower part of the page is a list of individual Web sites, usually with a brief description. At the top is a list of further subject headings which have their own pages. Most of these are subdivisions of Genealogy, e.g. the beginners' guides at <uk.dir.yahoo.com/arts/humanities/history/genealogy/beginners__guides/>, but Yahoo also has cross-references to other related headings and this is indicated by the following @. For example, following the link from "Shopping and Services" on the page shown will take you to the "Business" area of Yahoo. The number after each heading indicates how many links there are on that page.

Directories are created by (teams of) individuals and are necessarily selective, often based on submissions by those wanting their Web site listed. This means you won't find everything by using a directory, and particularly smaller, non-commercial Web sites may not be included. Directories are therefore well suited for finding Web sites of institutions and, particularly, companies, but less good for finding personal Web pages devoted to a particular surname. But if you are looking for factual information, they can be ideal for getting a quick overview of what's on the Web for a particular subject.

Directories store the title of each Web page and a brief description, but do not index the entire contents of pages. This means they are only useful for finding the main subject of a particular site, and a directory will give no indication of, say, all the surnames mentioned on a genealogy page. In fact, directories rarely list more than one page of a site, generally only the Home Page. This means that they are best used for finding *sites* devoted to particular subjects, and are not meant for finding *individual pages*. Note that most Web sites are listed only once on a directory, so you have to find the right section. To this end, most directories have a search facility. Indeed some Web directories do not have a page for each subject area, but provide access to their material only via a search facility.

Some other directories are listed in Appendix B, and Yahoo itself has a substantial list of Web directories (search Yahoo on "Web directories").

3. Genealogy Gateways & Portals

The problem with general-purpose directories such as Yahoo and search engines such as those discussed in Chapter 5 is that they don't know anything about genealogy. They don't make any particular effort to discover genealogical Web sites, and of course are not able to evaluate their quality expertly. A solution to this is offered by a number of sites which are called "genealogy gateways" or "genealogy portals". Unlike "directory" and "search engine", there is no formal definition of what a gateway is, but in broad terms it is a special purpose directory, designed to provide a collection of selected links relating to a particular subject (and therefore called a subject gateway) or aimed at a particular group of users. The term "portal" is often used for this sort of Web site, though more for commercial ventures, or sites which are official or claim to be authoritative.

The advantage of genealogy gateways and portals is that they are created by people who know about family history and can be relied on to be selective where that is appropriate and inclusive where *that* is appropriate.

FamilyRecords

The FamilyRecords portal at <www.familyrecords.gov.uk> is the national gateway for official Web sites in the UK with genealogical information. The site offers basic information about researching your family history – including brief descriptions of the main types of public record – and provides links to the Web sites of the following national repositories:

- Public Record Office
- Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
- National Archives of Scotland
- National Library of Wales
- General Register Office
- General Register Office for Scotland
- British Library India Office

There is also a page at <www.familyrecords.gov.uk/linksmain.htm> with annotated links to other relevant Web sites.

Cyndi's List

The most popular genealogy gateway is Cyndi's List at <www.cyndislist.com>. This site is effectively the genealogical equivalent of Yahoo, i.e. it is accepted as the main general genealogical Web directory. The reason for its popularity is its comprehensive coverage of all aspects of genealogy on the Internet, with over 100,000 links to genealogical Web sites so far, categorized into about 120 subject areas, each with its own page.

The main categories on Cyndi's List are:

- Computers & the Internet
- Ethnic Groups & People
- Help from Others
- History
- Immigration, Emigration, Migration
- Localities
- Marketplace
- Military
- Miscellaneous
- Records
- Religions
- Research Tools & Reference Materials

At over 100k, the Home page for Cyndi's list is quite substantial, so once you are familiar with the List, you could use one of the other three start pages, which are all substantially smaller (about 40k). See Appendix B for Web addresses.

Other Gateways

Often you will want to find sites devoted to or containing information about particular geographical areas. The most important and most useful such site for any part of the British Isles is GENUKI, which is described in detail in the next chapter.

For other parts of the world, you will find pages for many individual countries on Cyndi's List, and the easiest way to see a complete list of these is on the Topical Category Index at <www.cyndislist.com/topical.htm#Localities>. But a more comprehensive resource is the WorldGenWeb project, which has pages devoted to every region of the world, and to many individual countries, each maintained by a volunteer with local expertise. The main WorldGenWeb page is at

<www.worldgenweb.org> and links to all the regional pages and general information about the project. Although there are pages for the UK under WorldGenWeb – BritishIslesGenWeb at <www.britishislesgenweb.org> – these are generally less comprehensive than the equivalent pages on GENUKI.

There are quite a few other genealogy gateways, none of which are as useful to British family historians as GENUKI and Cyndi's List, but each of which has its own strengths. Some of these are listed in Appendix B.

Alongside the major gateways there are many other pages on the Web with collections of links which make them good starting-points. For example, the Society of Genealogists page of "Essential Web Sites" at <www.sog.org.uk/links.html> has on a single page links to many of the main official sites relevant for British genealogy and to major on-line data collections. A more comprehensive listing is Geoff Riggs' Relative Links page at <homepages.rootsweb.com/~riggs/Links/>.

There are also specialist gateways which, while not primarily genealogical, have links to sites of interest to family historians. The UK government portal at <www.ukonline.gov.uk> provides links to official information on-line and acts as a gateway to all public bodies in Britain; Port, the National Maritime Museum's gateway to maritime resources at <www.port.nmm.ac.uk> has links of interest to those with seafaring ancestors; Church Net at <www.churchnet.org.uk> is a gateway to all UK churches.

4. GENUKI

GENUKI (the *UK & Ireland Genealogical Information Service*) at <www.genuki.org.uk> has a dual function: it is both a collaborative handbook on British and Irish genealogy, and a gateway to almost every important Web site relating to the subject. Unlike the sites mentioned so far, GENUKI itself contains extensive information and is not simply a collection of links. The great advantage of this, particularly for the beginner, is that all the links are in a context which makes it much easier to see whether they will be useful.

The content of GENUKI falls into three main parts: general information about British genealogy; national information relating to the major constituents of the United Kingdom (England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Channel Islands, Isle of Man); and local information relating to the individual counties and their constituent parishes. There are two (deliberate) limitations to GENUKI: it does not include information on or link to sites for individual surnames or personal genealogies, and it does not link to commercial Web sites unless they offer significant free resources.

There are quite a number of things you could be looking for on the Web where GENUKI would be the best place to start:

- County Record Offices (links from the GENUKI county pages)
- Family history societies <www.genuki.org.uk/Societies/>
- County mailing lists <www.genuki.org.uk/indexes/MailingLists.html>
- County surname lists <www.genuki.org.uk/indexes/SurnamesLists.html>.

Particularly for county materials, it is much quicker to go to the GENUKI county pages than to try and locate the relevant sites via a directory or search engine. Also, unlike other gateways, GENUKI provides information about institutions which are

important for genealogy but have no Web site, as is the case with some local Register Offices, for example.

In the absence of any co-ordinated management of on-line records for the British Isles, GENUKI is also the best place to find out which original records have been put on-line above and beyond the major national or international projects (Scots Origins, Debt of Honour Register, FamilySearch, etc., described in Chapter 6). Many GENUKI county pages provide links to material transcribed by individual volunteers and volunteer groups.

Other useful services include GENEVA, GENUKI's calendar of genealogy events in the UK at <users.ox.ac.uk/~malcolm/genuki/geneva/>, and an e-mail newsletter, Genuki Family History News which among other things lists recent additions to the site (subscription details at <www.genuki.org.uk/news/>). GENUKI also provides and links to a number of gazetteers at <www.genuki.org.uk/big/Gazetteers.html> if you need to find the location of a town or village.

GENUKI is a very large site, with over 30,000 pages, and if you have not used it before, it is worth consulting the "Guidance for First-Time Users of These Pages" <www.genuki.org.uk/org/> which explains how the information is organized.

The GENUKI search engine is discussed on page 14, below.

5. Search Engines

For a more comprehensive index of the Web than is provided by directories and gateways you need to turn to the search engines. A search engine is a piece of software which looks through an index of the Web and retrieves a list of pages containing the words you have searched for. The index itself is created by a "robot", as mentioned in Chapter 1. Unlike directories, search engines are not selective but inclusive — they index *everything* they find without regard to quality or usefulness (though even the best search engine indexes no more than half the Web, even excluding data held in databases). This means they are not appropriate for every type of search.

For example, if you search for "Public Record Office" on a search engine, it will list every Web page which mentions the Public Record Office, not just the official PRO Web site: Yahoo returns 7 matches for "Public Record Office", AltaVista at <www.altavista.com> finds over 30,000, and Google at <www.google.com> around 50,000. However, the advantage of this way of working is that a search engine will include all the personal genealogy pages it finds and index them under every surname mentioned, whereas a directory may list such a site only under a single main name. A search engine, however, will not know whether a name such as "Kent" is being used as a surname or a place-name on a page it has indexed.

Search engines generally rank their results to give higher position to pages where the search words occur frequently and occur in the page title, headings or page descriptions. As a result, Google, AltaVista and Yahoo all list the PRO's own Web site first in search results for "Public Record Office". However, this is not foolproof, and Google, for example, also uses "popularity" as a ranking factor. Many search engines allow you to look for words specifically in page titles, which can be a useful way of identifying sites rather than just pages.



Figure 2: FAST Search <www.alltheweb.com>

Although the different search engines vary widely in visual style, they all provide the same essentials on the front page, as FAST Search (<www.alltheweb.com>) does in the page shown in Fig. 2: a box to enter the words you want to search for (the “keywords” or “search terms”), and a button to click on once you’re ready to start the search. There may be a number of choices for where to search (in this example, Web pages, News, Pictures, etc). There will usually be a help page, and many search engines have an “advanced search” option.

Types of Search

While many users simply type in what they’re looking for and click on the Search button, this is not necessarily the best way to go about it. Search engines offer various types of search, and to get the best results you need to have some idea of what types are available on a particular search engine, and how they differ. Again, in spite of the differences between search engines, there are only a few basic types of search and they are common to most search engines:

OR	finds all pages with <i>any</i> of the search words
AND	finds only pages on which <i>all</i> the words occur
phrase	finds only pages in which the group of words occurs together
near	finds only pages where the words occur close together, usually within 25 words or so (some search engines only).

Some search engines offer what they call “natural language searching”, where you can type a complete question rather than keywords, e.g. “when did general registration start?”, but as far as I am aware, all that happens is that the search engine extracts the keywords and performs the normal keyword search.

Note that if you just type in a few words, some search engines will automatically do an AND search (most of them, in fact), but others, notably AltaVista, will do an OR search by default. On Google, you can’t actually do an OR search from the main search page.

On most search engines, if you just type in a name, you will usually just get an AND search (or worse, an OR search) on the forename and surname, whereas you need the name to be treated as phrase (see “Searching for Names” below).

The table on the right shows how much difference the choice of search type can make to the numbers of *hits*, i.e. pages found with each type of search using AltaVista with **Yorkshire** and **burials** as the search terms (though it's worth pointing out that it misses some of the 99 pages with the mis-spelling **Yorskhire**).

Search type	No. of hits
OR	1.6m
AND	2224
Phrase	3

There are three main ways in which search engines can provide a choice of search type:

1. A drop-down list box (like the one on the right, from Hotbot at <hotbot.lycos.com>) from which you can select the option you want.
2. Boolean search: the search engine recognizes the words AND, OR and NOT and allows you to construct a search expression, e.g. **London AND genealogy AND NOT Ontario**. These “logical operators” usually must be in capital letters (since most search engines ignore the words “and”, “or” and “not”), and parentheses may also be allowed for grouping.
3. Many search engines accept + to indicate terms which *must* be in the pages retrieved, and – to indicate terms which *must not* be present, e.g. **+London +genealogy -Ontario** is the equivalent of the Boolean example in 2. above. (This is how you get AltaVista to do an AND search.)

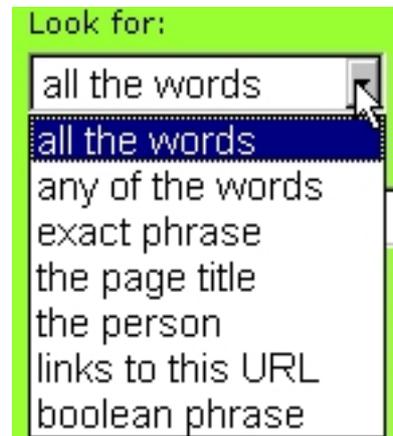


Figure 3: Hotbot search options

How can you tell what the default search is for a particular search engine? If you're lucky it will be obvious, as it is for Hotbot search in Fig. 3, where “all the words” tells you it's an AND search. Otherwise, all search engines have a help page which should tell you whether the basic search is an AND or an OR search. In any case, there's a simple test: just type in a few words which are unlikely to occur together very often. If you put *hippopotamus pillow* in the AltaVista search box, it will retrieve around 250,000 Web pages. Since there clearly cannot be that many pages containing both these words, you know that AltaVista's default search is an OR search (though the AND search produces a still slightly surprising 250 or so hits). Also, an OR search will always produce an increasing number of results as you add words to your search terms, while adding words to an AND search will produce fewer hits.

Searching for names

When searching for names, you need to be aware that different search engines have different capabilities. Most require you to put inverted commas round a name or select the “Exact Phrase” option. However, some have an option specifically for name searching (for example, the Hotbot, Fig. 3, has a “person” option). Others may recognize likely names even without inverted commas (try a search on *Father Christmas*) and some two-word place-names, but since this can't be relied on it's better to enclose any names in inverted commas.

One drawback in searching for place names is that there are many places outside the UK that have names in common with the UK, and there are many surnames which are

also place-names. If you're searching for **Sussex AND genealogy**, say, you will find references to Sussex County, New Jersey and Sussex County, Delaware. A search for **London AND genealogy** will bring up references to London, Ontario, not to mention Jack London. However, there is usually a way to exclude pages with particular words or phrases, either by using the minus sign or by prefixing a term with NOT (you may need to select an **advanced** option or a **Boolean search** option to use NOT). The figures below show the benefit of excluding terms you don't want, in a sample search on AltaVista for genealogy pages relating to the Johnson surname in Sussex:

Search expression	No. hits
+Sussex +genealogy +Johnson	7597
+Sussex +genealogy +Johnson -"New Jersey" -Delaware	4647

An OR search is useful if you are looking for genuine alternatives, such as variant spellings of a surname, e.g. "Weymark OR Waymark OR Wymark". Some search engines allow you to "truncate" a keyword: a search for "Wilkin*" will find "Wilkin", "Wilkins" and "Wilkinson". This can be useful for other keywords: "burial*" will find both "burial" and "burials".

Searching for images

While you can use the standard search facilities to look for photographs or scans of historical documents, you will be better off using dedicated image search facilities for this purpose. Otherwise, although you will find it easy to locate sites that are wholly devoted to photographs or postcards, it will be a time-consuming way to find individual images.

Many search engines offer specific image search options. In Figure 2, for example, you can see that FAST Search has a "Pictures" option. If you click on the images link on AltaVista's main page at <www.altavista.com>, you will see the search form shown in Figure 4, which allows you, among other things, to restrict your search to black and white photographs.

At the time of writing, the best image search facility is that provided by Google at <images.google.com>, simply because Google currently has the largest coverage of the Web of any of the search engines, which means it knows about the locations of more images – it claims to have over 330 million images indexed (see <images.google.com/help/faq_images.html>).

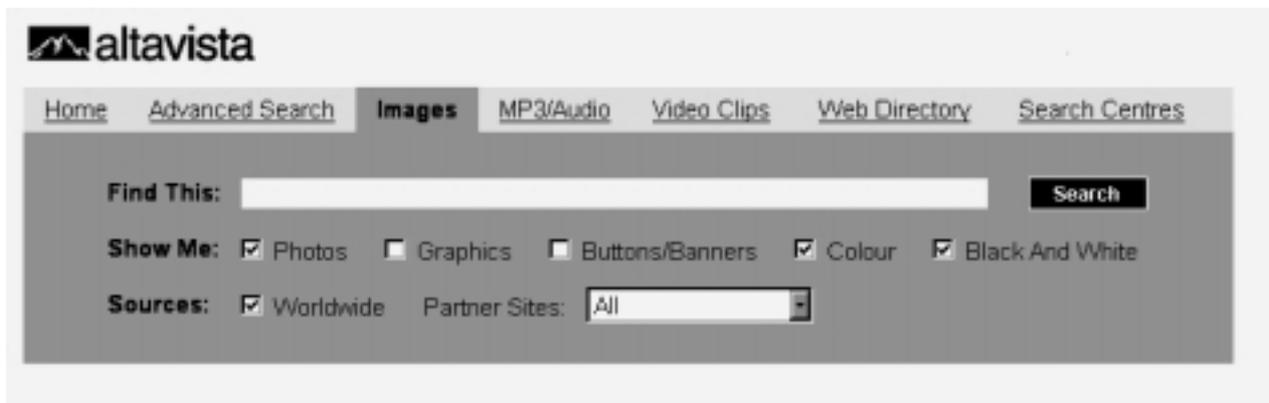


Figure 4: AltaVista's Image Search page

Which search engine?

It is impossible to say definitively which is the best search engine; and, even if it weren't, what is best at the time of writing may not be best by the time you're reading this. At the beginning of 2002, Google is certainly the most popular search engine, both because of its ease of use and because of its larger index. But, the basic search page on Google is very limited in its search options, and for more complex searches AltaVista's basic search is much more suitable. In fact, if you regularly want to carry out complex searches, then you will be better off using the advanced search facilities offered by many of the search engines.

However, size of index only matters if you are looking for hard-to-find information or you want your results to be as complete as possible – if you are looking for a particular ancestor, for example. If you are looking for a particular site – a genealogy software company, say – then any differences of index size will be much less significant.

In fact, if search results are to be useful to you at all, you really need the pages you are looking for to be returned among the first 50 hits or so, but it is more or less impossible to evaluate search engines objectively on this criterion.

You can get some idea of the coverage of the major search engines from the statistics collated by Search Engine Showdown shown in Fig. 5.

It is not possible here to discuss the ins and outs of the individual search engines, but there is plenty of evaluation on-line. For example, Search Engine Showdown has a comprehensive set of reviews, and a number of other sites with useful comparative information are listed in the Appendices.

Meta-Search Engines

As you will soon discover, running the same search on several search engines can be rather a tedious chore. One way round this is to use what is called a meta-search engine such as DogPile at <www.dogpile.com>. These are Web sites which take your query and submit it to many different search engines and then combine the results on a single page. This may suggest that there's no reason to use an individual search engine at all, but there are drawbacks: a meta-search engine cannot take advantage of the specific strengths of each search engine it calls, and it can necessarily use only the common features. Also, the most important limitation is that a meta-search engine will give you only the first few results from each search engine, typically 10, and may give none at all if the search engine does not respond quickly enough.

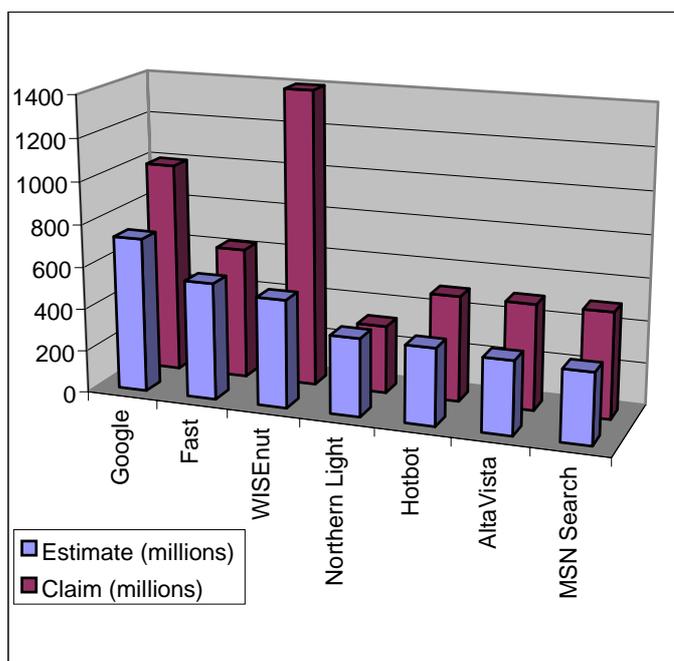


Figure 5: Sizes of major search engines, from <www.searchengineshowdown.com/stats/sizeest.shtml>, August 2001

For a complex search you'll get better results by formulating your search well, with a search engine you know. However, a meta-search engine can be useful for finding a specific Web site, if you have no success with a single search engine.

All-in-one Search Pages

A compromise between a standard search engine and a meta-search engine is what is called an "all-in-one" search page. This provides you with entry fields for a selection of different search engines all on a single page, so that you can easily run the same search on your own selection of search engines. Although you have to make each submission separately, you can easily copy and paste your search terms from one field to the next. A good example of this is Proteus Internet Search at <www.thrall.org/proteus.html>.

Cyndi's List has a small all-in-one search section on the search engines page at <www.cyndislist.com/search.htm#Forms>.

Genealogy Search Engines

It would, of course, be useful to have a search engine which listed only genealogy pages in its results, particularly, when searching on a name. While there is no way of doing this properly, there are a number of sites offers searches over a range of genealogy sites, notably those with surname and pedigree information. Cyndi's List has a list of these at <www.cyndislist.com/search.htm#Genealogy>.

Another technique is to include the phrase "surname list" in your search terms. Experience suggests that this occurs almost exclusively on sites with on-line pedigrees.

Rob Kuijsten's Genealogy Surname Navigator is an all-in-one search site, which lets you submit name searches to a number of different free databases. The page for UK records is <www.kuijsten.net/navigator/uk/>.

The GENUKI search engine at <www.genuki.org.uk/search.html> offers a combined search of a number of the main sites for British genealogy: Genuki itself, the PRO, the Society of Genealogists, the Federations of Family History Societies, the Guild of One-Name Studies, as well as all Family History Society and County Surname Interest sites listed on GENUKI.

Software for Searching

While you don't need any software beyond a Web browser to find genealogical information on the Internet, there are some software packages which aim to make the business of searching easier. These programs are called "searchbots", and they are essentially meta-search engines you can install on your own computer. They do not do the searching themselves, but automate the process of submitting a search to a variety of search engines. The advantage over a meta-search engine is that the results are automatically saved to your hard disk, making them easy to browse off-line and access again in future — you don't need to run the search every time.

There are dozens of these available for Windows; many are freeware, and the remainder are inexpensive shareware. You can find an extensive selection for downloading from TUCOWS at <tucows.mirror.ac.uk/searchbot95.html>. Of the many available, one of the most highly regarded is Copernic (Fig. 6), which is freeware, and can be downloaded directly from <www.copernic.com> or from TUCOWS.

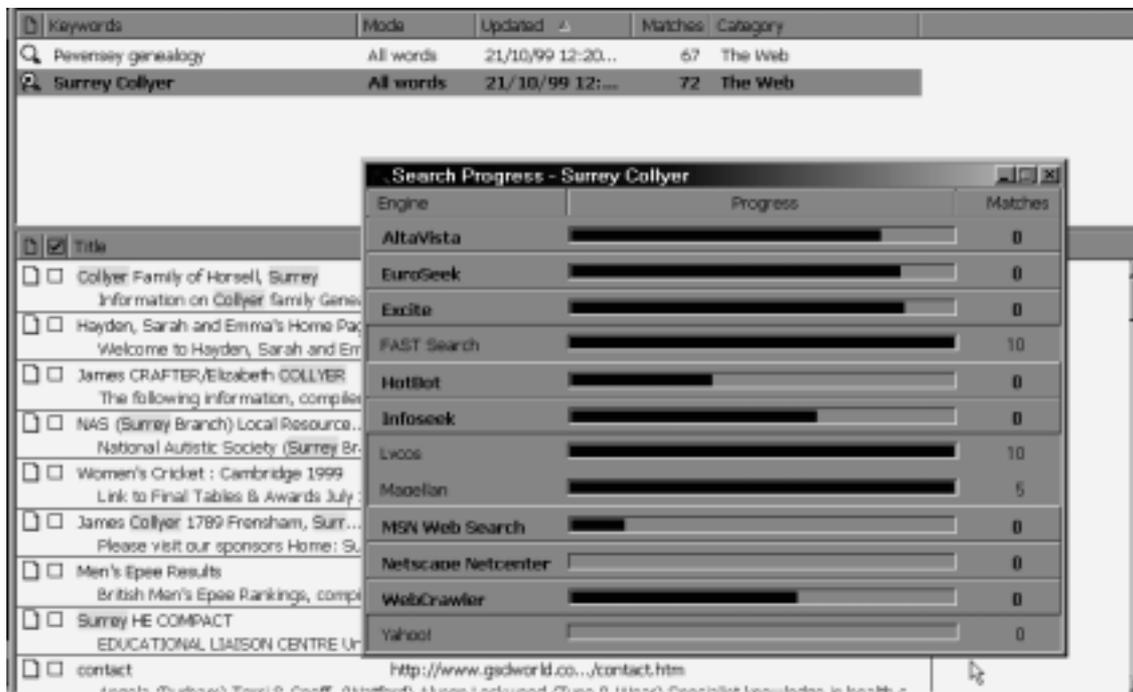


Figure 6: A searchbot in action (Copernic)

The window in the foreground shows a search in progress. In the background are the results from a previous search, with the search terms highlighted.

General Searching Tips

There are a few general pieces of advice which are relevant no matter which search engine you use:

- Don't just type in words and hope to get what you want — look at the options the search engines offer, and look at the Help or Tips pages.
- Don't necessarily expect your initial search to produce the results you want — refine your search if you get too many hits first time round.
- Spend time becoming familiar with a search engine — that way you will have a better feel for the results you get when searching in earnest.
- If you perform the same search on a regular basis, add the Web address of the results page to your bookmarks (Netscape) or favorites (Internet Explorer).

6. On-line Databases

Not all information on the Web can be found by using directories, gateways, and search engines. These are intended mainly to lead you to individual sites available, and to words and phrases contained in individual pages. However, much genealogical information, particularly record extracts and surname interests, is stored in on-line databases. Here the data is not placed permanently and openly on the Web, but kept in a database which can be accessed only by using the specific search facilities provided on the site. While you should be able to find a database itself via one of the resources mentioned above, the *contents* of the database can be discovered only by going to the database Web site and using its own search facilities. This means that you cannot expect to find *all* surname resources via search engines; you will need to go to each relevant database and search it separately, though some sites like Ancestry at <www.ancestry.com> or English Origins at <www.englishorigins.com> allow you to search multiple databases.

It is not possible here to list every genealogical database on the Internet, let alone discuss how to get the best out of each, but the same general principles apply to most of them and can be demonstrated with the Debt of Honour Register at <www.cwgc.org>. This is a database of all 1.7 million members of the Commonwealth forces who died in the First or Second World Wars. The search process is shown on the next page.

All databases start with a search page in which you enter what you are looking for (Step 1). Once you've clicked on the Search button to start the search, you will be presented with an index of results (Step 2). In most databases this will not normally give all the information available, just enough for you to recognize whether the person you are looking for is included. You then need to follow a link (usually from the name) to get the full details (Step 3).

The Debt of Honour Register is free, but many large datasets such as the 1901 Census and Scots Origins require payment. Usually, such systems either offer a free surname search (so you can see whether a surname occurs) before you pay to search in earnest, or you are required to pay before progressing from Step 2 to Step 3 in the process described. This is called "pay per view", as each payment allows you to view a certain amount of data. An alternative approach is that of Ancestry, where a quarterly or annual subscription allows access to any amount of data.

Some of the most important sources of UK data on-line at the time of writing are:

- ❑ 1901 Census for England and Wales at <www.census.pro.gov.uk> (charged)
- ❑ Scots Origins at <www.origins.net/GRO> – Scottish general registration to 1901, parish registers, censuses 1881-1901 (charged)
- ❑ FreeBMD at <freebmd.rootsweb.org> – data from GRO indexes (free)
- ❑ FamilySearch at <www.familysearch.org> – parish register extracts (free)
- ❑ English Origins at <www.englishorigins.com> – data collections from the Society of Genealogists (charged, with some free access for Society members).

The remaining UK censuses will be available on-line in due course. There are also many projects by record offices and universities to put smaller, often local, datasets on-line, many of which are listed in the Archival Research Projects Register <www.hmc.gov.uk/arpr/arpr.htm> — look under "digitisation". You can expect local on-line datasets to be linked from the relevant GENUKI county page.

Some of the largest data collections are not conversions of pre-Internet material, but pedigrees submitted by individual genealogists via the Internet, for example the massive name archives of the RootsWeb's WorldConnect Project, Gendex, or the Genserv GEDCOM server (see Appendix B for Web addresses).

7. Discussion Groups

If you've tried to find something using the methods above and can't get anywhere, then you can always ask someone who knows. The genealogy mailing lists, newsgroups, and message boards are full of people who know about various aspects of doing genealogy, and who know where particular resources can be found on the Internet. And it's a much better way to get recommendations about which resources are particularly useful or easy to use.

Mailing Lists

Although newsgroups and mailing lists are both types of electronic discussion forum, they have different strengths and weaknesses, which have an impact on which is better to use for a particular type of query. A mailing list is a closed discussion group. Everyone who joins the list (“subscribing” it is called, though no money changes hands) can send messages via e-mail to the list, which are then distributed automatically to all the list members, and will also receive copies of all other messages posted to the list. The great advantage of mailing lists is that they tend to be devoted to fairly specific topics, so you’re much more likely to come across people who share your particular genealogical interests and people who know answers to your questions.

The definitive source of information on genealogical mailing lists is John Fuller’s set of pages at <www.rootsweb.com/~jfuller/gen_mail.html>, though GENUKI has links to all those relevant to the British Isles at <www.genuki.org.uk/indexes/MailingLists.html>. Many genealogical lists are hosted by RootsWeb (full details at <www.rootsweb.org/~maillist/>). There is no definitive catalogue of non-genealogical lists, though there are some useful links to mailing list guides on the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions page on “Internet Mailing Lists Guides and Resources” at <www.ifla.org//training/listserv/lists.htm>.

It is actually rather inconvenient to have to join a mailing list in order to see whether anyone else is posting queries or interests relating to your surname, so if that’s all you want to do, you should see whether the mailing list has an archive, i.e. a collection of all the messages posted. (See, for example, the RootsWeb mailing list archive at <archiver.rootsweb.com>.) That way you can see what subjects and surnames crop up, without having the list messages delivered to your mailbox. Many genealogical lists have a Web page (linked from the pages just mentioned) with basic information about the list — this will tell you whether a particular list has an archive and how to access it.

One thing to bear in mind with mailing lists is that that you need a permanent e-mail address. This means that if you have not got your own Internet account with a service provider and are accessing the Internet from a library or a cybercafé, for example, you will need to set up an e-mail address with a Web-based mail system such as Hotmail <www.hotmail.com>, Mail.com <www.mail.com> or Yahoo! Mail <mail.yahoo.com>.²

Newsgroups

There are two basic differences between newsgroups and mailing lists: newsgroups are open and no “subscription” is necessary; newsgroups are fewer and each covers a broad subject area. The main English-language genealogy newsgroups are listed on the next page and a comprehensive listing is provided by John Fuller at <www.rootsweb.org/~jfuller/gen_use.html>.

To access a newsgroup, you need newsreading software. You will probably be using a browser that has newsreading facilities, but if not you can easily download a news reader from the Web (e.g. from TUCOWS). You also need access to a “news server”, which is where all the messages are stored. Most Internet Service Providers — though

² You’ll need to check such an account regularly, as all have limits on the number of unread messages which can be stored, and Hotmail will deactivate an account which has not been accessed for 30 days.

GENERAL	NATIONAL, REGIONAL & ETHNIC	SURNAMES
alt.genealogy	soc.genealogy.african	soc.genealogy.surnames
soc.genealogy.computing	soc.genealogy.australia+nz	soc.genealogy.surnames.britain
soc.genealogy.marketplace	soc.genealogy.benelux	soc.genealogy.surnames.canada
soc.genealogy.medieval	soc.genealogy.britain	soc.genealogy.surnames.german
soc.genealogy.methods	soc.genealogy.french	soc.genealogy.surnames.global
soc.genealogy.misc	soc.genealogy.german	soc.genealogy.surnames.ireland
	soc.genealogy.hispanic	soc.genealogy.surnames.misc
	soc.genealogy.ireland	soc.genealogy.surnames.usa
	soc.genealogy.italian	
	soc.genealogy.jewish	
	soc.genealogy.nordic	
	soc.genealogy.slavic	
	soc.genealogy.west-indies	

not usually the free ISPs — have a news server for their subscribers. If not, you'll need to use a Web-based service such as Google Groups at <groups.google.com>.

One advantage of newsgroups is that they can easily be searched. Some of the search engines offer this as an option (may be under “advanced”), and Google Groups also has a searchable newsgroup archive.

Note the difference from the mailing lists: the topics are very broad — there are only a handful of newsgroups, whereas there are thousands of genealogical mailing lists. Note also the existence of the *surnames* groups: these are the groups for posting surname queries and interests, which are not welcome in the general discussion groups.

In the early days of the Internet, there was a clear distinction between newsgroups and mailing lists because they needed different software to use them. Now that Web browsers can do everything this is not really an issue. Also, most of the main English-language genealogy newsgroups are available in mailing list format — this is referred to as a mailing list gateway. This means that you can choose which way you want to access the information. If you want to see every message, but find it tedious to remember to look at the newsgroup, you can get the messages delivered to you by joining the mailing list. If you prefer not to have your mailbox fill up with e-mail — and many of the newsgroups listed here receive dozens of messages per day — look at the newsgroup. If you want to do neither, you can still search the archives periodically to see if anything of interest has been discussed. Most of the newsgroups listed above have mailing list gateways but other mailing lists not related to newsgroups do not have this sort of dual personality.

Message and Query Boards

A more recent addition to the range of discussion systems is the Web-based message or query board, sometimes also called a forum. This is simply a Web page which lists queries submitted by readers, along with any replies to them, along with a Web-based form which allows you to submit a new query. The advantage of these forums is that they don't require you to have an e-mail address or special software. However, they tend to be very slow.

As far as I know, there is no comprehensive listing of genealogy message boards, though quite a few are listed at <www.cyndislist.com/queries.htm>, and many are hosted by Genforum at <www.genforum.com>. You can expect county-based forums to be listed on the relevant GENUKI county page. A general message board facility is provided by SmartGroups at <www.smartgroups.com>, which has quite a few boards devoted to genealogical topics.

Tips

All newsgroups and many mailing lists have a **FAQ**, a list of frequently asked questions, which is usually posted to the list or group on a regular basis (at least once a month). It will list what are and are not appropriate discussion topics or types of query, and provide answers to the commonest questions (so that they aren't repeatedly asked on the list or group).

To get the best from discussion groups, it is important to bear in mind some basic rules of on-line etiquette (or "netiquette").

- Post your queries in the right place — there is simply no point in posting a surname query to the soc.genealogy.computing newsgroup, as you won't get a useful reply.
- Make sure your subject line is explicit and helpful — don't use unhelpful subject lines like "genealogy" or "problem".
- Don't expect people to tell you things that you can easily look up for yourself.
- Be prepared to give help yourself, if someone posts a query in an area where you have knowledge or expertise.
- It isn't helpful to post virus warnings to mailing lists, as many are hoaxes — if you must, just inform the list owner, who can pass on the warning if it is genuine.

Further material on netiquette will be found in Appendix B.

8. Finding Surname Interests

One of the main things genealogists want to do on the Internet is make contact with those who share their particular interests, above all in individual surnames and families. If it's a broad interest (e.g. coalmining ancestors) or a geographical interest (e.g. a particular English county), then you will almost certainly be able to find a mailing list devoted to such interests (see Chapter 7). You should also be able to locate many of those who have their own Web sites through search engines, or from the listing of personal Web pages on Cyndi's List and the various genealogy gateways (see Chapters 5 and 3, respectively).

But how do you find the other people on the Internet who have an interest in a particular surname? There are three main options.

County surname lists

A surname list is a Web page with a list of surnames (usually with dates and places) along with the e-mail address of the person who has submitted each interest for inclusion. Do not expect to find genealogical information about individual ancestors on these sites — they just provide contacts with other family historians, who have

information about people bearing these surnames. For nearly every county in the British Isles there is a surname list and an up-to-date directory of these lists can be found on GENUKI at <www.genuki.org.uk/SurnamesList/>.

It is worth submitting your own surname interests to the appropriate county lists. Often this is done by e-mail, but many provide a Web page for new submissions. Before submitting a surname interest by e-mail, you should read the instructions on the Web page: most list maintainers will only accept material that is submitted in a standard format.

Surname mailing lists

While the most useful mailing lists are probably those relating to geographical areas or special interests, it is so easy to set up a mailing list that many individuals have started lists for their own surnames, either in general or for a particular area. You should certainly check whether there is a list for your surname. Many of these are run by RootsWeb, and are listed at <www.rootsweb.com/~maillist/surnames/>, and there is a comprehensive listing at <www.rootsweb.com/~jfuller/gen_mail.html#surnames>.

Surname interest databases

There are many databases of surname interests in addition to the County lists mentioned above. Most of these are traditional on-line databases, as described in Chapter 6, but some, such as Cliff Manis' Genserv system, accept queries by e-mail. Some will do nothing more than supply the contact details of the person who submitted the surname, others may include some genealogical information. See Appendix B for some initial suggestions, and consult Cyndi's List for more (<www.cyndislist.com/database.htm>).

9. Finding Living People

While the absence of a universal e-mail directory may be lamented, the fact is that the Internet makes it much easier to discover and contact living relatives than used to be the case. Also, on-line phone directories make it easier to find people who are not Internet users.

Finding living people who have their own Web pages is very straightforward — just use a search engine. Also, if the person you are looking for posts messages to newsgroups (under their real name) a search of the newsgroup archives should find them. To find living people with e-mail addresses, you need to use the e-mail address databases, such as Bigfoot at <www.bigfoot.com>, though identifying a particular individual from name alone may not be easy. There are two other words of warning: because the archiving of e-mail address information is not co-ordinated, you should not be too confident of success; and e-mail archives do not have any way of working out which addresses are still current, and they are full of expired addresses. Yahoo's People Search, for example, at <ukie.people.yahoo.com> has an e-mail address listed for me which expired in 1995! Further "people finders" are listed in Appendix B.

There many on-line telephone books, though coverage varies considerably between countries. The UK phone directories are on-line at <www.bt.com/directory-enquiries/dq_home.jsp>, while 192.com at <www.192.com> provides more extensive searching, including electoral rolls.

Appendix A: Further Reading

In Print

- Ernest C Ackermann & Karen Hartman, *The information searcher's guide to searching and researching on the Internet and World Wide Web* (ABF Content, 2000)
- Reva Basch & Mary Ellen Bates, *Researching online for dummies*, (IDG Books, 2nd edn 2000)
- Phil Bradley, *The Advanced Internet Searcher's Handbook* (Library Association, 1999)
- Peter Christian, *The Genealogist's Internet* (Public Record Office, 2001). List of contents at <www.spub.co.uk/protgi/>
- Brian Clegg, *Mining the Internet: information gathering and research on the Net* (Kogan Page, 1999)
- David Hawgood, *Genuki* (Federation of Family History Societies, 2000). Complete text on-line at <www.hawgood.co.uk/genuki/>
- Steve Lawrence & C. Lee Giles, "Accessibility of information on the Web" in *Nature*, 8 July 1999, pp. 107-109. Summary on the Web at <www.searchenginewatch.com/sereport/99/08-size.html>
- Alan M Schlein, *Find it online :the complete guide to online research* (BRB Publications, 2nd edn 2000)

On-line

- Joe Barker, "Finding Information on the Internet: A Tutorial" (2001) <www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/FindInfo.html>
- Phil Bradley, "Search Engines" in *Ariadne 20* <www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue20/search-engines/> (June 1999) review of tools for finding people on the Web
- Bright Planet, "Guide to Effective Searching of the Internet" <www.brightplanet.com/deepcontent/tutorials/search/> (2001), a very comprehensive tutorial on using search engines.
- Peter Christian, "Using Internet Search Engines" at <www.gold.ac.uk/infos/cs/c705.html> (2002), a brief guide to the basics
- Fondren Library, Rice University, "Internet Searching Strategies" <www.rice.edu/Fondren/Netguides/strategies.html> (2000), a useful one-page guide
- University of Manitoba, "Evaluation Of Internet Searching And Search Engines" <www.umanitoba.ca/academic_support/libraries/units/engineering/evaluate.html> (1999), useful collections of links to material on searching and evaluating information.
- Kimberley Powell, "Finding your ancestors on the internet" <genealogy.about.com/hobbies/genealogy/library/weekly/aa041700a.htm>
- Nancy Sirapyan, "Search Sites" (*PC Magazine* on-line, September 6, 1999) <www.zdnet.com/pcmag/stories/reviews/0,6755,2327803,00.html>
- A.M. Swain, "Finding images" <shannon.open.ac.uk/wh/resources/images.htm> (2001).
- Ruth S. Thomas "Finding Images on the Web" <www.bu.edu/library/training/webimages.htm> (2001)
- Ian Winship, "Web search tool features", <www.unn.ac.uk/central/isd/features.htm> (2001), useful comparison chart.

Web addresses given in the text and these appendices were correct as of January 2002, but are subject to change. Up-to-date links to all sites mentioned will be found on the Web site for this book at <www.spub.co.uk/fgi/links.html>

Appendix B. Recommended Web Sites

Directories (pp. 5-6)

Yahoo	<www.yahoo.com>	<uk.yahoo.com>
Yahoo UK's genealogy page	<uk.dir.yahoo.com/Arts/Humanities/History/Genealogy/>	
*About	<www.about.com>	<genealogy.about.com>
*Open Directory	<dmoz.org>	<dmoz.org/Society/Genealogy/>

Genealogy Gateways & Portals (pp. 6-8)

FamilyRecords	<www.familyrecords.gov.uk>
Cyndi's List	<www.cyndislist.com>
— the "no frills" category index	<www.cyndislist.com/nofrills.htm>
— the alphabetical index	<www.cyndislist.com/alpha.htm>
— the topical index	<www.cyndislist.com/topical.htm>
WorldGenWeb	<www.worldgenweb.org>
BritishIslesGenWeb	<www.britishislesgenweb.org>
*The Genealogy Gateway	<www.gengateway.com>
*Genealogy Links	<www.genealogylinks.net/index.html>
*The Genealogy Pages at	<www.genealogypages.com>
*The Genealogy Portal at	<www.genealogyportal.com>
*The Genealogy Site Finder	<www.genealogy.com/genealogy/links/>
*I Found It!	<www.gensource.com/ifoundit/>
SoG's "Essential Web Sites"	<www.sog.org.uk/links.html>
Relative Links	<homepages.rootsweb.com/~riggs/Links/>
UK Government Portal	<www.ukonline.gov.uk>
Port (National Maritime Museum)	<www.port.nmm.ac.uk>
Church Net	<www.churchnet.org.uk>

GENUKI (pp. 8-9)

GENUKI Home Page	<www.genuki.org.uk>
List of UK family history societies	<www.genuki.org.uk/Societies/>
GENEVA (events)	<users.ox.ac.uk/~malcolm/genuki/geneva>
Genuki Family History News	<www.genuki.org.uk/news/>
Gazetteers	<www.genuki.org.uk/big/Gazetteers.html>

Search Engines (pp. 9-15)

AltaVista	<www.altavista.com>	also: <av.com>
FAST Search (All the Web)	<www.alltheweb.com>	
Google	<www.google.com>	
Google Image Search	<images.google.com>	
Hotbot	<hotbot.lycos.com>	
*Lycos	<www.lycos.com>	<www-uk.lycos.com>
Dogpile	<www.dogpile.com>	
*TheBigHub.com	<www.thebighub.com>	
Proteus Internet Search	<www.thrall.org/proteus.html>	
Cyndi's List	<www.cyndislist.com/search.htm#Forms>	
Copernic	<www.copernic.com>	
*Yahoo's Search Engine Page	<www.yahoo.co.uk/Computers_and_Internet/Internet/World_Wide_Web/Searching_the_Web/Search_Engines/>	

Genealogy Surname Navigator	<www.kuijsten.net/navigator/uk/>
Genuki Search	<www.genuki.org.uk/search.html>
Search Engine Showdown	<www.searchengineshowdown.com>
*Search Engine Watch	<www.searchenginewatch.com>
*MMUs search tools page	<www.mmu.ac.uk/h-ss/dic/main/search.htm>
*Search Engine Guide	<www.searchengineguide.com>
*Web Search Cheat Sheet	<www.colosys.net/search/>
*Guide to Meta-Search Engines	<www.indiana.edu/~librcsd/search/meta.html>

Online Databases (pp. 15-16)

Ancestry	<www.ancestry.com>
Debt of Honour Register (Home Page)	<www.cwgc.org>
LDS FamilySearch	<www.familysearch.org>
FreeBMD	<freebmd.rootsweb.org>
Scots Origins	<www.origins.net/GRO/>
1901 Census	<www.census.pro.gov.uk>
English Origins	<www.englishorigins.com>
WorldConnect	<worldconnect.genealogy.rootsweb.com>
Gendex	<www.gendex.com/gendex/>
Genserv (Gedcom server)	<www.genserv.com>

Discussion Groups (pp. 16-20)

John Fuller's list of mailing lists	<www.rootsweb.com/~jfuller/gen_mail.html>
British Isles genealogy mailing lists	<www.genuki.org.uk/indexes/MailingLists.html>
RootsWeb	<www.rootsweb.org/~maillist>
Internet Mailing Lists Guides & Resources	<www.ifla.org//training/listserv/lists.htm>
Hotmail	<www.hotmail.com>
Mail.com	<www.mail.com>
Yahoo! Mail	<mail.yahoo.com>
Google Groups	<groups.google.com>
Genealogy newsgroups	</www.rootsweb.org/~jfuller/gen_use.html>
GenForum	<www.genforum.com>
SmartGroups	<www.smartgroups.com>
*The Core Rules of Netiquette	<www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html>
*Vmyths (virus hoaxes)	<www.vmyths.com>

Surname Interests (pp. 20-21)

UK County Surname Lists	<www.genuki.org.uk/indexes/SurnamesLists.html>
RootsWeb's Surname Mailing Lists	<www.rootsweb.org/~maillist/surnames/>
John Fuller's list of surname mailing lists	<www.rootsweb.com/~jfuller/gen_mail.html#surnames>
Databases, Search Sites, Surname Lists	<www.cyndislist.com/database.htm>

Finding Living People (p. 21)

Bigfoot	<www.bigfoot.com>
Yahoo! People Search	<people.yahoo.com> <ukie.people.yahoo.com>
*Who Can People Find?	<www.dcn.davis.ca.us/~vctinney/find.htm>
*Infospace (UK page)	<www.infospace.com/intldb/intl-uk.html>
UK telephone numbers	<www.bt.com/directory-enquiries/dq_home.jsp>
192	<www.192.com>

* Sites asterisked are not mentioned in the text.