

**Family History in England, c. 1945 - 2006:
Culture, Identity and (Im)mortality**

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PhD

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September 2006

Abstract

This thesis provides the first cultural history of the family history ‘phenomenon’ of the late twentieth century. Rather than conceptualising such pursuits solely as popular interest in the past, however, it examines family history and genealogy on their own terms – both tracing their growth, extent and nature, and their diversity and cultural work.

The extent of this phenomenon, its precursors and subsequent expansion are thus tracked and a close examination of the practices of family historians reveals that it is inadequate to refer to a unified family history ‘phenomenon’. Rather, hidden underneath a purely quantitative account of the growth of, say, record office use, are a series of stages of growth based upon different practices, and the different categorisations that are given to them. Indeed, a range of cultural uses of family history are identified in terms of cultural capital and what I call ‘professional-amateur’ status.

Crucially important in this regard is the identification of the late-1970s as a period of disjuncture of ideas concerning family history. The emergence of family history societies, a shift in attitudes amongst archive professionals and the appearance of family history on television screens all articulated a shift towards a more democratic genealogy which had the potential to tell practitioners ‘who they are’.

Furthermore, diverse practices have enabled a ‘lack’ of rootedness to be redressed through a search for identity that allows practitioners to at once construct their own identities whilst nonetheless retaining the primordialism of blood-ties. In addition, existential questions may also be addressed through such practices, which can provide a site for the stretching of longevity beyond the limits of death, without recourse to the eternal memory of God. Such analysis of family history on its own terms thus challenges any overly simplistic dismissal of family historians as undifferentiated ‘amateurs’.

For my fathers

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ORIGINALS OF FIGURES 1-7, 9, 12-16, 22, 24-26, 28 AND 32 ARE IN COLOUR

Acknowledgements

It is a pleasure to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Council for the support that made this thesis possible, and particularly to thank the many people that have helped me along the way.

I am most grateful to Mark Jenner and Elizabeth Buettner, under whose guidance the thesis has taken shape. They have been consistently supportive, intelligent, good-humoured and at once enthusiastic and patient in their advice. In addition, Mark's meticulous inspection of every sentence and footnote of every draft has been heroic and I am deeply indebted in this regard. I would never have believed that an offhand comment about a radio programme made over coffee in spring 2002 would lead this far. I am eternally grateful. I also extend my thanks to other colleagues and friends for their help, comments and criticism: Simon Ditchfield, Richard Bessel, Staf Vos, Craig Fox, Paul Brand, Louise Wannell, Julie Rugg, Chris Webb, Erin Bell, Ann Gray, Franz-Josef Bruggemeier, Claudia Haake, Henrice Altnick, Jim Walvin, Alan Mann, Emma Keightley, Michael Esbester, Emma Watson, Christian Hogsbjerg, Carlos Meissner, Stephen Milne, Tim Owston, David Annal, Nick Barrat, Kimberly TallBear, Emma Robertson, and Martin Bashforth. I also wish to thank the archivists and librarians at the institutions I have visited for all their assistance, as well as the many friendly and helpful family historians that I have spoken to.

To my family, however, I am most indebted. My parents have supported me in everything that I have done, through the ups and the downs, and I cannot thank them enough. I can only reiterate what I said at the wedding – that if I can be anywhere near as loving parents as they are, I will be truly blessed. I could not wish for a better family (defined cognatically, affinitively, biologically, socially and religiously!) Their support and love is deeply valued. Similarly, I also wish to extend special thanks to my grandmother, a keen family historian, whose labours I have taken in a very different direction, whilst somehow retaining many of the same motivations. The person to whom I owe the most, however, is my wife. Without her daily encouragement, patience and sacrifice, this work would simply not have been possible. Words cannot express what her love means to me, and I hope that in some small way these labours contribute to whatever the future of our own fledgling family holds in store.

Introduction

When the Public Record Office's website providing access to the 1901 Census went online on 2 January 2002, it made the headlines for all the wrong reasons. *The Guardian* teasingly reported that although the online census made the records of 32.5 million residents of Edwardian Britain available to family historians, some 'thoroughly modern server problems' prevented the public from accessing the records.¹ The extent of the demand that caused the crash was astonishing. Approximately 7 million people tried to access the service



Figure 1. The closure of the Family Records Centre, 2 January 2002.²

¹ '1901 Census goes Online', *The Guardian*, (2 January 2002), <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/internetnews/story/0,7369,626730,00.html>> (accessed 5 August 2006).

² Michael Armstrong, '1901 Census Online Launch Sunk on First Day: Researchers Demand Availability in Other Formats', *Family Tree Magazine*, 18(4) (February 2002), p. 4.

during its inaugural week, causing British Telecom to disconnect the website from the public domain. Indeed, whilst it was designed for 1.2 million users a day, the 1901 census site attracted as many in an hour.³ This is a graphic example of how in the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries genealogy and family history have become a mass pursuit. As David Hey has recently written, 'Future historians will look back with some astonishment at the extraordinary growth in the popularity of family history during the last few decades of the twentieth century... In Britain, in the United States of America, and in many other countries the growth of interest has been phenomenal'.⁴ This is clearly no understatement.

However, the development of family history in England since 1945 has received little attention from historians and other scholars. This is surprising as they are increasingly interested in the vitality of various engagements with the past in contemporary culture. Some of such works are highly critical of some of this focus, characterising the National Trust, for instance, as 'an ethereal kind of holding company for *the dead spirit of the Nation*'.⁵ Meanwhile, others scholars meditate on the concern with preservation in contemporary Western society, arguing that 'in recoiling from grievous loss or fending off a fearsome future... heritage consoles us with tradition'.⁶ A further body of work has examined the suppression of certain memories and reverence for others.⁷ Historians have thus tended to

³ Sean Dodson, 'Web Watch: History Lesson', *The Guardian*, (10 January 2002), <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/online/story/0,3605,629947,00.html>> (accessed 5 August 2006).

⁴ David Hey, *The Oxford Guide to Family History* (Oxford, 2002), p. 1. Hey's work has chiefly involved attempting to further family historians' understanding of the broader historical context of their ancestors' lives. See, for instance: David Hey, *Family History and Local History in England* (London and New York, 1987).

⁵ Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London and New York, 1985), p. 66; Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London, 1987).

⁶ David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (London, 1996), p. ix; Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory. Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London and New York, 1995); Michael C. W. Hunter (ed.), *Preserving the Past: The Rise of Heritage in Modern Britain* (Stroud, 1996); Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York, 1998).

⁷ James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford, 1992); Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (trans. A. Goldhammer), (Paris, 1984-1986, 3 vols.); Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983); Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1995).

comment on family history and genealogy incidentally under the headings of ‘heritage’ and ‘history and the public’, rather than exploring and analysing the activity itself and thereby subsuming it under such headings. For instance, when discussing family history and genealogy after a recent conference at the Institute of Historical Research on ‘History and the Public’, David Bates pointed to the huge demand of those searching for their ancestry, but was able to conceive of it only in terms of an ‘interaction between the professional custodians of the past and the interested public’. Such an approach explores how those with ‘professional responsibility’ for the interpretation of the past communicate with a ‘seemingly insatiable public enthusiasm for matters historical’. The corollary of such framing of questions is that a sense of ‘public engagement with the past’ has similarly emerged in other sectors, from the Heritage Lottery Fund to museums, galleries and archives alike. As such, Bates remarks that ‘the central conclusion was that the subject of “History and the Public” is both extremely important and extremely complex. On the one hand, popular enthusiasm and expertise needs to be listened to. On the other hand, on occasion the public needs quite simply to be better informed’.⁸ As such, this enterprise subsumes family history under this wider professional-public dialectic and does not examine family history directly.

The professional historians’ duty of ‘to satisfy’ a ‘popular craving for history’ is not a new theme. It has run through the field for some years. When Stan Newens discussed the new interest in family history in 1981, he saw it ‘as a means of raising the level of historical consciousness among the population as a whole’ that ‘must now be recognised by all who are interested in encouraging people to study their own history’.⁹ Similarly, David Hey wrote a

⁸ David Bates, ‘Historians and the Public’, *History Today*, 56(7) (July 2006), p. 70. For an American perspective, see: Peter Andrews, ‘Genealogy: The Search for a Personal Past’, *American Heritage*, 33(5) (1982), 10-17. For Australia, see: Graeme Davison, ‘The Broken Lineage of Australian Family History’, in Donna Merwick (ed.), *Dangerous Liaisons: Essays in Honour of Greg Dening* (Parkville, Victoria, 1994), p. 333.

⁹ Stan Newens, ‘Family History Societies’, *History Workshop Journal*, 11 (Spring 1981), p. 155. Newens provides the chief exception, in that he did focus his historical work specifically on the phenomenal explosion of interest in family history and genealogy. However, his account of the emergence of family history societies remains quite anecdotal, conducted in brief and generalised terms which have not been developed in the past

book intended to broaden the historical background of family historians in 1987, to 'bring to the attention of family historians recent work on matters that were of vital concern to their ancestors; work on the family, mobility, population trends, housing, health and so on'.¹⁰ The most detailed discussion of family history proceeded from the heritage debate of the 1980s. This was also couched in terms of a popular interest in the past, albeit – in the case of the work of Patrick Wright and Robert Hewison – with a negative slant.¹¹ In his critique of this approach, Raphael Samuel argued that the term 'heritage' had been capacious enough to accommodate wildly discrepant meanings throughout the twentieth century. These ranged from 'Whig' history's reference to freedom broadening out from precedent to precedent, to British Communist Party attempts to present Communism as English, 1950s folk-song circles, the 'Heritage Year' of 1980 (during which rural buildings such as village wash-houses were brought within the category of historic monuments), the rise of football club museums, the National Trust, the recording of local dialects, Routledge's 'critical heritage' series, and, indeed, 'that army of "do-it-yourself" genealogists who went in search of family "roots"'.¹²

Nevertheless, while taking issue with Wright's argument that a heritage obsession is a symptom of national decay, Samuel retained the sense that family history was just one manifestation of a popular obsession with the past. Furthermore, he argued that the development of this expanding historical culture – which he termed 'resurrectionism' – had as its hinge the post-war reaction to a fragmented modernity. By employing Fredric

twenty-five years. For an even briefer account of the Victorian and Edwardian 'pioneers' of genealogy, see: Simon Fowler, 'Our Genealogical Forebears', *History Today*, 51(3) (March 2001), 42-43.

¹⁰ David Hey, *Family History and Local History in England* (London and New York, 1987), p. 2.

¹¹ Wright argued, for example, that the National Heritage Act (1980) epitomised a preservation mindset that defined a range of property to be preserved as 'the heritage' for display to a salivating public. The backdrop to such legislation, for Wright, was an emergent, sickening, and widely supported, notion of "the past", "the public", and "the-history-to-be-saved...and displayed". Wright, *On Living in an Old Country*, p. 44, p. 56. In contextualising this sense of 'public history', however, Wright made no mention of family historians.

¹² Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, p. 205-15.

Jameson's notion of a 'desperate desire to hold on to disappearing worlds'¹³ to characterise the activities of resurrectionists, in Samuel's analysis family historians came to stand alongside the Cavern rock pilgrimage to the replica of the Beatles original music cellar, post-1955 industrial archaeology, and even environmentalist groups such as Friends of the Earth which he argued were seeking to resurrect a prehistoric balance of Man and Nature.¹⁴ The family historian's preservationist celebration of cataloguing and the anti-motorway protest are thus united by the common denominator of 'a vertiginous sense of disappearing worlds' that has, since the 1950s, spoken 'to a lost sense of the indigenous'.¹⁵ This was, sadly, the point at which Raphael Samuel left his discussion of family history, with the view that 'today, the past is seen not as a prelude to the present but as an alternative to it, "another country"'.¹⁶

David Lowenthal has reached similar conclusions, arguing that the rise of such a heritage drenched culture is a new cult, a new faith.¹⁷ 'Until modern times most people trusted tradition, lived in accordance with what was constant and consistent, and customarily communed with ancestors,' he writes, developing a line of argument which the rise of family history research seemingly furnishes with plentiful supporting evidence. Indeed, for Lowenthal, the millions who hunt their roots 'generally dote on times past' as 'obsessive concern with rooted legacies is more backward- than forward-looking'.¹⁸ As such, both Samuel and Lowenthal assimilate family history and genealogy into their concerns with heritage and assume that family history is just one example of a popular pursuit of the past.

¹³ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London and New York, 1991), p. 279; Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, p. 140.

¹⁴ Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, p. 153, p. 139, p. 140.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 158, p. 148 p. 160.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

¹⁷ Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade*, p. 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13, p. 11.

They do not and did not explore the activities of family historians and genealogists themselves more closely.

Outside history departments, however, various sociologists, geographers and anthropologists during the last fifteen years have initiated a closer examination of family history and genealogical research. In 1991, Michael Erben, for instance, attempted to establish the importance of genealogy (by then an increasingly popular recreational activity) for British sociological research. For Erben, the universality of genealogical activity attests to the necessity of its investigation, seeing as ‘the keeping of genealogies seems to have been a feature of most societies – industrial and pre-industrial’.¹⁹ Noting that genealogies have occupied a place in both epic literature and folk tales, as well as frequently providing the point of human purchase upon a religious narrative, Erben raised plenty of intriguing questions for sociologists to take up: ‘In searching for and finding ancestors one is discovering both communality and individuality (sameness and differences),’ he noted.²⁰

British sociologists have not, on the whole, risen to this challenge, but their American counterparts increasingly have. Intrigued by the impact of Alex Haley’s *Roots*, broadcast in 1977, Cardell Jacobson conducted pioneering studies of members of the Wisconsin State Genealogical Society. Jacobson concluded that ‘the popular, intuitive characterisation of the typical genealogist as an elderly, probably retired man or woman is not inaccurate’ and noted that ‘more women than men are engaged in such research’.²¹ Jacobson found that ‘genealogists also tend to be from middle- and upper-class backgrounds rather than from working-class backgrounds’,²² such that ‘we have found traditionality, not change, to be

¹⁹ Michael Erben, ‘Genealogy and Sociology: A Preliminary Set of Statements and Speculations’, *Sociology*, 25(2) (May 1991), p. 275-77.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

²¹ Cardell K. Jacobson, Phillip R. Kunz and Melanie W. Conlin, ‘Extended Family Ties: Genealogical Researchers’, in Stephen J. Bahr and Evan T. Peterson (eds.), *Aging and the Family* (Lexington and Toronto, 1989), p. 203-04.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 204.

related to genealogical interest'.²³ In reaching such conclusions, Jacobson was in dialogue with the work of Robert Taylor Jr. Taylor calculated American genealogical interest statistically, and presented it a series of quantitative peaks of research and family reunions since the mid-nineteenth century. This 'suggests a cyclical pattern of public curiosity about forebears, a generational phenomenon perhaps,' Taylor argued, which demonstrated a public concern about the function and future of the family.²⁴

From the mid-1990s, Ronald Lambert took sociological understanding a stage further by exploring the motivations of his samples of genealogists through questionnaires. A mail survey of 1348 members of the Ontario Genealogical Society in 1994, for instance, concerned not just age and sex, but motivations for research and their temporal orientation. This opened up a whole new series of themes, as Lambert's questionnaires revealed quite a diversity of motivations which practitioners saw as important to them. These included: 'to learn about my roots, about who I am' (80.5%), to 'come to know my ancestors as people' (79.4%), 'for posterity, for grandchildren, nephews or nieces' (73.1%), 'to restore forgotten ancestors to the family's memory' (55.4%), 'because I like to solve puzzles' (46.5%), 'because I enjoy being the family historian' (35.1%) and so on.²⁵ Organising these motivations in terms of their temporal orientation to the past, present or future, Lambert concluded that 'given the bias of its subject matter towards the past, one might have expected

²³ Cardell K. Jacobson, 'Social Dislocations and the Search for Genealogical Roots', *Human Relations*, 39(4) (1986), p. 356. For further examples of such a quantitative sociological approach, see: R. E. Bidlack, 'Genealogy Today', *Library Trends*, 32 (1983), 7-23; Peggy T. Sinko and Scott N. Peters, 'A Survey of Genealogists at the Newberry Library', *Library Trends*, 32 (1983), 97-109; S. J. Ball-Rolkeach, J. W. Grube and M. Rolkeach, "'Roots: The Next Generation": Who Watched With What Effect?', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 45 (1981), 48-68; Jennifer Fulkeston, 'Climbing the Family Tree', *American Demographics*, 17(12) (1995), 42-50.

²⁴ For another post-*Roots* discussion from this perspective, see: Tamara K. Hareven, 'The Search for Generational Memory: Tribal Rites in Industrial Society', *Dædalus*, 107(4) (1978), 137-49.

²⁵ Ronald D. Lambert, 'The Family Historian and Temporal Orientations Towards the Ancestral Past', *Time and Society*, 5(2) (1996), p. 122.

genealogists to approach it with a similar temporal orientation. The data presented here, however, point to a more complex interplay among temporal orientations'.²⁶

By focusing on the activities and motivations of family historians themselves, Lambert was thus able to raise far more interesting questions than the purely quantitative and functional approach of earlier sociological work and the assumptions made by historians that family history is one 'thing'. The present and future concerns hidden behind a seeming fascination with the ancestral past became visible for the first time. In subsequent work, Lambert explored how Australian genealogists 'reclaimed the convict stain' in their narratives about deported ancestors through emphasising their roles as nation-builders, by minimising the gravity of their offences, by empathising with them, and by seeing them as embodying 'interesting stories'.²⁷ This more narrative-based analysis was conducted through interviews rather than questionnaires, whilst a further study combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyse a sample of Australian and Canadian genealogists' attitudes to death. Whilst religion played no statistical role in motivating research in his sample, Lambert's analysis of narratives relating to death concluded that 'a number of respondents, both Canadian and Australian, 'placed a "spiritual" as opposed to a "religious" interpretation on their genealogical experiences'.²⁸ Belief in an afterlife, for instance, was rejected by a statistically significant portion of the sample, providing a 'significant predictor for interest'.²⁹ As in his earlier research, Lambert qualified the idea that genealogy was purely preoccupied

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

²⁷ Ronald D. Lambert, 'Reclaiming the Ancestral Past: Narrative, Rhetoric and the "Convict Stain"', *Journal of Sociology*, 38(2) (2002), p. 111. For another narrative-based approach, focused on genealogy and autobiography, see: Julia Watson, 'Ordering the Family: Genealogy as Autobiographical Pedigree', in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (eds.), *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography* (Minneapolis and London, 1996), 297-323.

²⁸ Ronald D. Lambert, 'Constructing Symbolic Ancestry: Befriending Time, Confronting Death', *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, 46(4) (2003), p. 319.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

with the past, showing that analysis of family historians themselves could shed light on contemporary culture.

Further examples of this approach have begun to emerge in Britain in recent years, particularly with regard to the interest of those with 'British ancestry' in their Irish and Scottish roots. Catherine Nash has explored the construction of genealogical identities and the cultural geography of nation, ancestry and diaspora amongst those conducting genealogical and genetic research regarding their Irish ancestry.³⁰ The anthropological work of Paul Basu, meanwhile, has examined the 'roots-tourism' of those returning to their Scottish Highland roots, and has placed a similar focus upon the construction of identities through genealogical practices and travel.³¹ The same theme of the relationship between genealogy and identity has been taken in a different direction, by Mary Bouquet, however, in her examination of the genealogical diagram and its historical precursors and epistemology.³²

³⁰ Catherine Nash, 'Genealogical Identities', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 20 (2002), 27-52; Catherine Nash, "'They're Family!': Cultural Geographies of Relatedness in Popular Genealogy", in Sara Ahmed and others (eds.), *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* (Oxford and New York, 2003), 179-203; Catherine Nash, 'Genetic Kinship', *Cultural Studies*, 18(1) (January 2004), 1-33. See also: Paul Gilroy, 'Roots and Routes: Black Identity as an Outernational Project', in W. H. Harris, H. C. Blue and E. H. Griffith (eds.), *Racial and Ethnic Identity: Psychological Development and Creative Expressions* (London, 1995), 15-30.

³¹ Paul Basu, *Homecomings: Genealogy, Heritage-Tourism in the Scottish Highland Diaspora* (London, 2006); Paul Basu, 'Pilgrims to the Far Country: North American Roots-Tourists in the Scottish Highlands and Islands', in C. Ray (ed.), *Transatlantic Scots* (Tuscaloosa, 2005); Paul Basu, 'Roots-Tourism as Return Movement: Semantics and the Scottish Diaspora', in M. Harper (ed.), *Emigrant Homecomings: The Return Movement of Emigrants, 1600-2000* (Manchester, 2005); Paul Basu, 'Macpherson Country: Genealogical Identities, Spatial Histories and the Scottish Diasporic Clanscape', *Cultural Geographies* 12(2) (2005), 123-150; Paul Basu, 'Route Metaphors of Roots-Tourism in the Scottish Diaspora', in S. Coleman and J. Eade (eds.), *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion* (London, 2004); Paul Basu, 'My Own Island Home: The Orkney Homecoming', *Journal of Material Culture* 9(1) (2004), 27-42. On roots tourism, see also: Gary McCain and Nina M. Ray, 'Legacy Tourism: The Search for Personal Meaning in Heritage Travel', *Tourism Management*, 24 (2003), 713-17.

³² Mary Bouquet, 'Family Trees and Their Affinities: The Visual Imperative of the Genealogical Diagram', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 2(1) (March 1996), 43-66; Mary Bouquet, 'Exhibiting Knowledge: The Trees of Dubois, Haeckel, Jesse and Rivers at the *Pithecanthropus* Centennial Exhibition', in Marilyn Strathern (ed.), *Shifting Contexts* (London, 1995). See also: Robert Parkin, 'Kinship with Trees', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 3(2) (June 1997), 374-76; André Burguière, 'La Généalogie', in Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de Memoire*, III, (Paris, 1984); Carlo Ginzburg, 'Family Resemblances and Family Trees: Two Cognitive Metaphors', *Critical Inquiry*, 30 (Spring 2004), 537-56; Paul Atkinson, Evelyn Parsons and Katie Featherstone, 'Professional Constructions of Family and Kinship in Medical Genetics', *New Genetics and Society*, 20(1) (2001), 5-24.

Thus where historians have assumed family history to be one ‘thing’, sociologists and anthropologists have shown it to be far more interesting by beginning to raise fascinating questions about various aspects and themes of genealogical practice. Their diverse approaches have, nonetheless, not done so from a historical perspective and important questions remain unanswered. How and to what extent have genealogical practices grown and developed over the past one hundred and fifty years? What were the key developments throughout the period that have led to the huge demand witnessed in the rush to access the 1901 census? Has supply driven demand or vice versa? Have discourses and categorisations of genealogical activity changed, and in what way? Whilst such questions must be treated from a historical perspective, historians such as Samuel and Lowenthal that have attempted to contextualise the rise of family history enthusiasm failed to do so because of their principal focus upon the heritage debate. Nor were they able to address important questions about family history and the sense of the past in twentieth-century society. For example, in what ways have family historians and genealogists – this new ‘popular’ interest in the past – seen themselves in relation to ‘professional’ history? Is there a simple dichotomy of professional: amateur historian? Furthermore, what in particular about late twentieth-century culture has made family history activities appeal so widely, and on such a mass level? How can the emergence of family history at the top of bestsellers lists and television ratings, and on the cover of national newspapers – as with the furore surrounding Alex Haley’s *Roots* in 1977 – help us to understand this?

Meanwhile, the insights of Lambert, Nash, Basu and the rest raise further questions about the late twentieth-century emergence of family history and genealogy as a mass pursuit that requires a fuller treatment, an analysis moving beyond interviews and questionnaires to the products, debates and guidebooks of family history practice. How have identities been constructed by family historians in the last three decades of the twentieth century? Have such processes been uniform, or did they vary? Furthermore, how has the construction of

identities in family history related to other discourses and cultural currents in this period, ranging from adoption to genetics, from family values to an uncertainty about ascribed identities? Why should such interest be focused on the deceased? How did the discovery of ancestors in the archives relate to reunions with living relatives facilitated by family history research? What was the significance of family historians' fascination with the lives of the dead? Do family historians address their own mortality in resurrecting so many forgotten forebears? These questions are all examined in this thesis.

In the course of my research I have thus explored a wide variety of source material to this end. Firstly, the pamphlets, books, and newsletters produced by genealogists and family historians prove immensely useful if read as evidence for cultural activity. These publications, not as yet treated by historians with any seriousness, provide a valuable insight into the cultural history of the later twentieth century. Over the course of the research I surveyed a multitude of such books and pamphlets – as well as the complete runs of the newsletters of family history societies and 'one-name' societies³³ – at the British Library, Borthwick Institute, York, and various other repositories.³⁴ Virtually all of the newsletters were standardised A5 format, consisting of A4 pages folded in half and stapled, but the books and pamphlets varied in size and format. Many were produced by the author, either typed or word-processed according to when they were produced, and being anything from 20 to 600 pages in length (with the majority being between 50 and 100 pages). Whilst some were published, roughly half were not, as they were generally circulated privately within the family concerned. For example, some explicitly state that they are 'for private circulation',³⁵

³³ These explore the family history of a particular surname.

³⁴ I also consulted these items at: York City Archives, York City Library, York Minster Library, the Society of Genealogists, London, Lincoln Central Library, Cornwall County Record Office, and Leeds Central Library. Many of the volumes that I examined were deposited by the authors at repositories where they conducted some of their research, with the important exception of the British Library.

³⁵ L. W. and W. R. Norfolk, *The East Drayton Norfolks: A Family History* (S.I., 1980), p. i.

whilst those that were professionally printed and published were apparently done at the expense of the author, and limited to – at the very most – a hundred copies. At opposite ends of the spectrum, some family histories were simply hand-written and bound together by treasury tags, whilst others boasted that they were ‘for three centuries preservation, printed on 60# Warren’s Olde Style wove paper’.³⁶ Meanwhile, a unique and particularly helpful pair of volumes, produced in 1974 and 1981 by the Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry entitled *Personally Speaking ~ About This Ancestry Business*, proved to be a goldmine of insight into the attitudes of practitioners in this first local British family history society. Members were asked to reflect on their practices and experiences just as the mass thirst for ancestral roots was taking off, providing a total of 187 invaluable typed accounts.³⁷

In addition to this material, the essential tool of any newly enthused genealogist – the ‘how-to’ guides – provide perspectives on motivations for tracing ancestries, as well as on the practices themselves. These publications have proliferated since the 1960s, although a few date from as early as 1937, before which such manuals were predominantly aimed at professional genealogists, topographers and peerage lawyers. Thus, whilst the focus here has mostly been upon publications aimed at those researching their own family, nonetheless I have examined genealogical manuals dating back to 1828. As well as such general guidebooks, the Federation of Family History Societies has, since the late 1970s, produced a steady stream of more specialist guides, designed to assist researchers exploring more unusual lines of family history, such as locating lunatic ancestors, using Latin documents, Quarter Sessions Records and so on. I have also worked through about thirty of these, as well as further miscellaneous genealogical books and pamphlets – ranging from the

³⁶ J. N. Booth, *Booths in History: Their Roots and Lives, Encounters and Achievements* (Los Alamitos, California, 1982), back cover.

³⁷ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking ~ About This Ancestry Business*. *Members of the Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry Recount their Genealogical Adventures* (Birmingham, 1974); Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking ~ Again (About this Ancestry Business)* (Birmingham, 1981).

collections of papers given at genealogical conferences, to accounts of family history and hereditary disease, instructions to librarians on how to cope with genealogical beginners, family history dictionaries, novels and tales of psychic connections to ancestors.

Furthermore, I have explored a wide range of genealogical magazines – particularly the entire run of *Family Tree Magazine* since its inception in 1984 and the *Genealogists' Magazine* which began in 1925. The former proved invaluable as it was set up and run by family history enthusiasts, who contributed articles, subject matter and all manner of queries and discussion within its pages.

Internet newsgroups have also provided plentiful source material, having come to provide a medium for sharing information and discussing a wide range of genealogical topics in the twenty-first century. The newsgroups run by *RootsWeb* are the most popular (providing both national and international forums), and I have made a close study of their content, even contributing on occasion from 2003-2006. Furthermore, the proliferation of genealogical websites in the early twenty-first century has proven similarly revealing, and I have examined numerous sites ranging from those providing genealogical records, to those displaying particular family histories and genealogies, as well as ones intended to foster genealogical research and instruct people in it. Coverage of family history and genealogy in *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *Daily Express* and *Guardian* since 1945 has also been surveyed, and I have made a close-reading of Alex Haley's genealogical slave saga, *Roots* (discussed in Chapter 4), which was published and appeared on television in the late-1970s to spectacular sales and viewing figures.

In addition to this diverse source material, the annual reports of British archives since the 1940s have provided a useful means by which to begin to reach a more quantitative appraisal of the growth of the phenomenon, as they detail statistics regarding the genealogical use of archives through the latter part of the twentieth century. In addition to this the recent surveys of visitors to British archives by the Public Services Quality Group,

and the online records of the Family Records Centre provided more detailed data for the late 1990s and early twenty-first century. Whilst the annual reports of local archives thus provide some helpful quantitative data, they only present the public face of the developing archive perception of and response to their growing use by ancestor hunters, however. Fortunately, I have also been able to inspect the minutes of library and archives committee meetings for the same period, where they are available, and – more helpfully – the attached private reports of archivists and librarians which have been kept and are open for public inspection. By far the most extensive that I located were held at North Yorkshire Record Office.

Finally, alongside this documentary research, I also conducted a few informal conversations with the practitioners that I encountered at various archives, libraries and family history events, predominantly in passing. These informal interviews allowed me to avoid the awkwardness of confronting people with a Dictaphone, and consequently I followed a more anthropological ‘participant observation’ research strategy, speaking casually to practitioners as ‘informants’ and recording their responses in occasional ‘field notes’.³⁸ As I have noted above, more formal interviews and questionnaires have been compiled by sociologists concerned with synchronic analysis, and therefore (as well as the fact that I had such a huge supply of textual source material) such anthropological research remained minimal.

Indeed, the self-produced family histories, websites, magazines, newsletters, guidebooks and so on, being produced by family historians themselves, provided an exceptionally rich and as yet unexplored body of source material through which to compliment the more synchronic sociological methodology of interviewing and questionnaires. Furthermore, such source material also facilitated an examination of the discourses and cultural practices of the period, to allow a more historically specific analysis

³⁸ Roy Ellen (ed.), *Ethnographic Research: A Guide to General Conduct* (London, 1984).

of the second half of the twentieth century than has as yet been undertaken by historians – to allow us to get inside the activities of genealogists and family historians on their own terms, and thus deepen our understanding of their labours.

This thesis aims, therefore, to reinvigorate and develop both the synchronic and the diachronic understandings of family history and genealogy. I approached them, firstly, as a set of cultural practices, and, secondly, I have historicised such practices – both tracing their growth, extent and nature, and their diversity and cultural work. As such, Chapter 1 provides the first attempt to map out and establish the extent of the growth of this ‘phenomenon’, tracing its nineteenth-century precursors and tracking subsequent expansion through the second half of the twentieth century. Chapter 2 assesses how we are to understand such growth. Is visiting a church vestry in the 1950s to examine parish registers as a suspicious clergyman hovers by the door the same as surfing the internet for genealogical connections in the twenty-first century? At what point do terms such as ‘pedigree-hunting’ and ‘genealogy’ come to be replaced by ‘family history’? Through this focus on the differences and continuities in research practices and conceptualisations of them, Chapter 2 thus develops a more nuanced account of the ‘irresistible rise’ of family history and genealogy. In particular, it proceeds chronologically, firstly by exploring the shift from mid-nineteenth-century attempts to enter Burke’s Peerage to the critical genealogical school of Horace Round and the associated foundation of organised genealogical societies and beginnings of the demotic cataloguing of records within them. The beginnings of ‘do-it-yourself’ genealogy in the mid-twentieth century and the rise of a discourse of ‘genealogy for all’ is then examined, as are the interplay of various push and pull factors in the subsequent explosion of genealogical research and the emergence of ‘family history’ as a new ontologically and socially distinct stage of development in the foundation of family history societies. Finally, the relationship between the increasingly straightforward supply of genealogical source material, the

proliferation of access routes into researching ancestry, and the relationship between family historians, computers and the Family Records Centre are explored.

It is inadequate, I argue, upon closer inspection of these various aspects of genealogical practice, to refer to a unified family history 'phenomenon'. Demand did not appear from out of thin air, nor did more easily available source material simply give rise to the demand. Rather, a series of stages of growth based upon different practices, and the different terms and categorisations that are brought to bear on them is hidden underneath a purely quantitative account of the growth of, say, record office use. Consequently, rather than seeing a rising enthusiasm for the ancestral past as simply a reflection of a certain aspect of society, or as a 'social trend', I argue that family history practices are not best understood as the straightforward reflection of any one mindset and cannot be reduced to overly simplistic conclusions.

Nevertheless, despite this complex development in terms of practice and conceptualisation, such analysis does reveal that the late-1970s were a crucial period of disjuncture of ideas concerning family history and genealogy. The emergence of family history societies, a shift in attitudes amongst archive professionals and the appearance of family history on television screens all articulated a discursive shift towards a more democratic genealogy which had the potential to tell practitioners 'who they are'. Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 therefore make a close study of these crucial years, examining the distinctions that began to emerge between practitioners and the fanfare to family history sounded by Alex Haley's *Roots*, respectively. Chapter 3 explores the 'professionalising techniques' that have persisted amongst genealogists as well the emergence of a family history 'society culture' and family historians' negotiation of a discursive shift from 'pedigrees' for the upper crust, to 'family histories' for all. In particular, I argue that despite the new democratic ethos, nonetheless distinctions continued to be articulated through family history practices, particularly in the rise of what I term the 'professional amateur'.

Chapter 4 examines the disjuncture of the late 1970s through a close reading of *Roots* not as a determinant of this new ‘family history’ interest, but as a historically symptomatic text, watched and read by millions, expressing particular desires to find out ‘who I am’. Crucially, this allows us to examine the meanings which were being articulated at the time – most notably a desire for rootedness, expressed in a coinciding of genealogical and geographical belonging – which *Roots* so strikingly articulated by dramatically revealing that even the most marginal and oppressed can uncover their familial past and thus find themselves. This is the key to understanding how *Roots* could appear from a particularly African-American cultural context, and yet appeal internationally, and articulate a growing thirst for the ancestral past amongst those who came to see themselves as in some way previously excluded from such knowledge.

The importance attached to Alex Haley’s discovery of his own identity through that of his apical ancestor, Kunta Kinte, raises further questions about the broader processes of identity construction through family history and genealogical practice. Why, for instance, should the family provide the site for redressing a ‘lack’ of identity, to help people discover just who they are? What is this cultural uncertainty about ideas surrounding the family and in what ways are identities constructed through family history practices? Chapter 5 argues that diverse family history practices and the identities that could be constructed from them have enabled a lack of rootedness to be redressed through a reflexive search for identity that has allowed practitioners to construct their own identities by following their own particular interests through the ancestral record, whilst nonetheless retaining the implicit primordialism of blood-ties alongside it. The poles of practice which I term ‘genealogical’ (consisting of family trees) and ‘family historical’ (a more biographical approach to particular ancestors) are thus compelling *because* of their paradoxical complementarity, allowing diverse practitioners to both articulate and redress a sense of lack and to ‘find out’ who they are by learning more and more about their ancestors. Indeed, the conjunction of the two poles of

practice make for various ‘flashpoints’ of identification, ranging from finding a name on a census, to holding a family reunion or making a pilgrimage of ‘roots tourism’.

Why, though, should such a search for identity be embodied in the lives of the dead? Why should the resurrective practices of family historians have been so concerned with bringing long forgotten ancestors into the present? In Chapter 6, I argue that, surprisingly, existential questions have been addressed through such practices in the later twentieth century, even if this process has often remained frustratingly implicit. Questions of mortality may be hidden by the very practices of family history and genealogy, which can provide a site for the stretching of longevity beyond the limits of death through the remembering and recording of ancestors’ lives. Genealogies and family histories thus remain perpetually unfinished, providing a lineal memory machine that symbolically keeps the dead alive in the present whilst promising to bear the practitioner into the future, even after they have themselves died. A significant portion of practitioners, it emerges, began their researches after they had lost parents and grandparents, and were keen to pass on their findings to posterity. As such, through family history, formerly religious spaces and documents such as churches, family Bibles and parish registers have come to provide a quite different means of addressing questions of mortality, and an anti-religious ‘spiritual’ understanding of self-identity is in evidence amongst family historians in the later twentieth century. Genealogy has thus provided an immortality strategy, a cultural framework based on remembering primordial and historical ‘information’ which accommodates the certainty of death without recourse to the perceived ‘uncertainty’ of immortality, or the eternal memory of God.

Rather than being simply a ‘public engagement with the past’, then, family history and genealogy are diverse practices which must themselves be historically contextualised and examined on their own terms. Fundamentally, culture is not coterminous with mentality, and family history is not a reflection of a mindset. Rather, it is a set of practices and activities which are variegated and complex. In short, they do cultural work of their own, and cast as

much light on the present concerns, dilemmas and desires of the ancestor hunters as they do upon those who emerge from the archives to live again through such resurrective practices. Before exploring these cultural themes, however, we must lay the groundwork, establishing the extent of this phenomenal explosion of ancestor hunting by tracing its precursors and tracking its expansion through the second half of the twentieth century down to the present day.

The Irresistible Rise of Genealogy and Family History?

As the 1901 Census debacle demonstrated, the number of family historians runs into millions today.' However, fifty years ago there were few signs of what lay ahead. In 1979, Anthony Camp, director of the Society of Genealogists, recalled its quaint nature in the 1940s and 1950s: 'Until long after the war the members tended to be people of the professional class, often retired... The Society was a sort of club, with afternoon tea served by a resident housekeeper... They kept the library open late on Monday evenings by taking it in turns to be responsible for the locking up'.¹ Before exploring the cultural work of genealogy, this chapter will map out this growth, and explore how family history went from a 'sort of club' to a mass pursuit. It establishes the extent of this 'phenomenon', tracing its precursors, and tracks its expansion through the second half of the twentieth century. Indeed, we have very little solid information on the growth of the phenomenon and both this and the next chapter thus seek to provide a solid basis for subsequent discussions.

The researching of genealogical information is not a solely twentieth-century phenomenon. In some areas of the English-speaking world, genealogy has seen other periods of relative popularity. The New England Historic Genealogical Society, the first such in the U.S., was founded in Boston in 1845. By the 1870s there was a rising public sentiment for rediscovering and renewing kin ties; the numbers of genealogies and family reunion reports

¹ Anthony J. Camp, 'The Society in a Changing World', *Genealogists' Magazine*, 19(11) (September 1979), p. 384.

deposited in the Library of Congress peaked in 1890 and again during the great depression of the 1930s. This latter decade also saw the foundation of the Federation of American Family Associations, the establishment of the National Archives and of the Institute of American Genealogy. *The American Genealogist* journal was launched in 1932 and by 1936 the members of the Institute of American Genealogy were researching over 10,000 surnames and the New York Public Library had over 40,000 registered genealogical users.²

Nor was such late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century interest limited to the United States. In Britain the Society of Genealogists (S.O.G.) was founded in 1911 'to promote, encourage and foster the study, science and knowledge of genealogy by all lawful means'.³ At the inception of the society's official organ, the *Genealogists' Magazine*, in April 1925, Lord William Farrer (1861-1924) – the Society's President – stated that 'we aim at true and not faked pedigrees' as 'stunts have had their day, and even the Welsh have ceased to trace all their origins to King David'.⁴ However, the foundation of the Society marked not the start of genealogical pursuits but the institutionalisation of a growing movement in critical genealogy dating from the nineteenth century.

The first British genealogical periodicals were edited and published by John Gough Nichols (1806-73), joint editor of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. These began with his *Collectanea Topographica et Genealogica* which first appeared in 1834. This, which ran until 1843, and its successor, *The Topographer and Genealogist* (1846-58) were principally outlets for extensive antiquarian genealogical, heraldic and topographical material, such as documents, record extracts and old pedigrees. However Nichols' third periodical, *The Herald and Genealogist* (1863-74), founded after he had ceased to be owner and editor of the

² Robert M. Taylor, Jr, 'Summoning the Wandering Tribes: Genealogy and Family Reunions in American History', *Journal of Social History*, 16(1) (1982), p. 22, p. 32.

³ The Society of Genealogists, 'About the Society', *Society of Genealogists: Family History Library and Education Centre*, (April 2006), <<http://www.sog.org.uk/membership/about.shtml>> (12 July 2006). This societal aim dates from its foundation. See: Anthony Camp, 'Family History', in David Hey (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History* (Oxford, 1996), p. 170.

⁴ Lord Farrer, 'Preface', *Genealogists Magazine*, 1(1) (April 1925), p. 2.

Gentleman's Magazine, was more comprehensive and contained critical discussions, book reviews and essays on heraldic and genealogical topics, as enthusiasm continued to grow.⁵

The number of British genealogical guidebooks also steadily increased throughout the century, beginning with peerage lawyer Stacey Grimaldi's (1790-1836) *Origines Genealogicae; or the Sources whence English Genealogies May Be Traced from the Conquest to the Present Time* in 1828.⁶ A steady stream of such works appeared throughout the century and seems to have catered to a growing interest in the field.⁷ For instance, in his guidebook published in 1861, Richard Sims remarked that: 'The study of heraldry and genealogy... [and] the number of students [following them] in the department of history is daily on the increase; hundreds of persons derive pleasure from this mode of passing their leisure hours'. Sims saw such instruction manuals as contributing to this growing interest, reflecting that they had 'tended to simplify and popularise this interesting study', such that 'the riches of the valuable libraries in different parts of the kingdom [have been] rendered more available'.⁸

By 1893, organised genealogical practice began for the first time, with the establishment of the Genealogical Co-operative Research Club (G.C.R.C.), which set about

⁵ This forum saw the beginnings of a more critical school of genealogy, which, after Nichols' death, was continued by George William Marshall, whose *The Genealogist* (1877-1922) held similar aims. Other genealogical periodicals published in this era include: *Miscellanea Genealogica et Heraldica* (1866-1938), founded by Joseph Jackson Howard, and *The Ancestor* (1902-5), edited by Oswald Barron. For further discussion, see: Anthony R. Wagner, *English Genealogy* (Oxford, 1960), p. 345; Camp, 'Family History', p. 169-70.

⁶ Stacey Grimaldi, *Origines Genealogicae; or the Sources Whence English Genealogies May Be Traced from the Conquest to the Present Time: Accompanied by Specimens of Ancient Records, Rolls and Manuscripts, with Proofs of their Genealogical Utility etc.* (London, 1828).

⁷ Noteworthy examples include: Richard Sims, *A Manual for the Genealogist, Topographer, Antiquary and Legal Professor* (London, 1856) and later editions in 1861 and 1888; Walter Rye, *Records and Record Searching: A Guide to the Genealogist and Topographer* (S.I., 1886) and *Records and Record Searching* (London, 1897, second edition); William P. W. Phillimore, *How to Write the History of a Family: A Guide for the Genealogist* (London, 1887) and *A Supplement to How to Write the History of a Family* (London, 1900). These dates of publication suggest a flurry of such books in the late 1880s, which may have given rise to a 'peak' in genealogical interest roughly contemporary with that discussed above in New England. A detailed comparative analysis of late nineteenth-century genealogy in Britain and America is, unfortunately, beyond the limits of the present enquiry.

⁸ Richard Sims, *A Manual for the Genealogist, Topographer, Antiquary and Legal Professor* (London, 1861), p. v-vi. See also H. A. Crofton., *How to Trace a Pedigree in the British Isles* (London, 1911), p. ix.

indexing classes of records at the Public Records Office.⁹ The endeavours of the G.C.R.C. were spearheaded by Charles Allan Bernau, and it was Bernau and a group of other middle class professionals that, in 1911, founded the Society of Genealogists in the London office of George Frederick Tudor Sherwood, a professional genealogist, with the intention of centralising genealogical research materials.¹⁰ Whilst there was enough interest to sustain the society, it remained very small.

Membership of the Society of Genealogists can be traced from the *Genealogist's Magazine* which began publication in 1925, three years after the demise of George Marshall's *The Genealogist*, largely replacing it as the forum of genealogists and pedigree hunters. From its inception, the *Genealogists' Magazine* printed annual lists of new members. Whilst 96 new members joined in 1925 (a high figure presumably due to the publicity generated by the new magazine and society), only 54 joined in 1935, and 62 in 1945. By 1955 however, 187 joined, and this escalated to 261 new members in 1965 and 592 in 1975 (see Figure 2 below).¹¹ John Unett's remarks, in 1971, reinforce the picture painted by the membership statistics: 'In 1933 the Society of Genealogists' membership remained static; new members balanced those dying, the Society just kept afloat. All that has now changed. New members pour in. Interest in genealogy is enormous and growing'.¹²

The steady growth of the 1950s and 1960s thus gave way to a sharper increase in the 1970s, which by the 1980s became so numerous that they could no longer be listed within the pages of the magazine. The stirrings of this dramatic rise in interest were apparent as early as

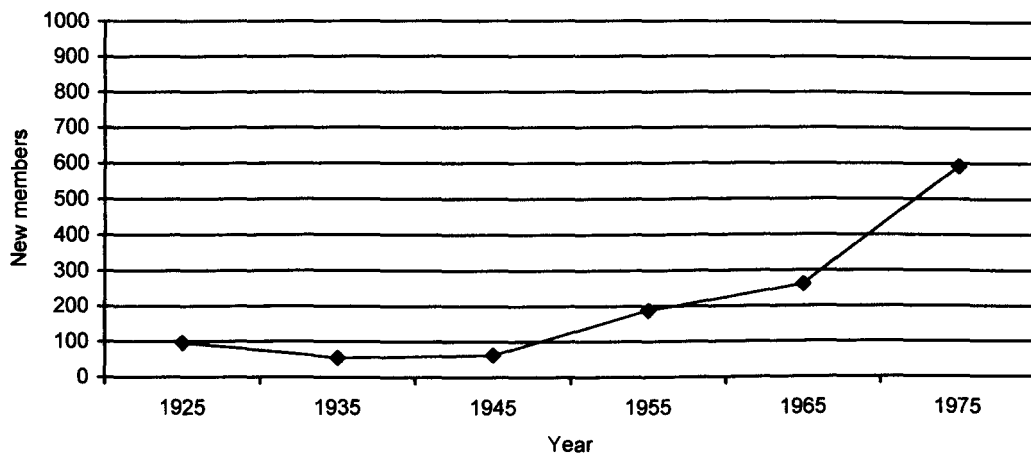
⁹ This excludes, of course, the College of Arms, which arguably constitutes a different kind of genealogical enterprise, against which the critical genealogists defined themselves, as discussed in Chapter 2 below.

¹⁰ Camp, 'Family History', p. 170.

¹¹ Compiled from: *Genealogists' Magazine*, 1 (1925), p. 23, p. 59, p. 92, p. 123; *Genealogists' Magazine*, 7 (1935), p. 22, p. 75, p. 119, p. 194; *Genealogists' Magazine*, 9 (1945), p. 476, p. 510; *Genealogists' Magazine*, 12 (1955), p. 20, p. 60, p. 97, p. 129; *Genealogists' Magazine*, 15 (1965), p. 37-39, p. 86-89, p. 134-6, p. 155-56; *Genealogists' Magazine*, 18 (1975-6), p. 101-104, p. 151-54, p. 214-16, p. 256-58.

¹² John Unett, *Making a Pedigree* (London, 1971), p. 5.

Figure 2. New members joining the Society of Genealogists, 1925-1975



the 1950s when the first British guides to what Raphael Samuel called ‘do-it-yourself’ genealogy appeared:¹³ Leslie Pine’s *Trace your Ancestors* (1953) and Arthur Willis’s *Genealogy for Beginners* (1955).¹⁴ Both were aimed at those with no previous involvement or experience in genealogical societies such as the S.O.G., and the latter was still the most popular guide for the amateur interested in tracing his or her ancestry when Sir Anthony Wagner, the then Richmond Herald and Garter King of Arms at the College of Arms, published his 1960 historical survey, *English Genealogy*. At this point, whilst an increased interest was apparent, it could not be described as certain, or as indicating any future acceleration in such interest. Wagner could only state his ‘belief that an interest in family origins is widespread and tending to increase among the peoples of English descent throughout the world, especially perhaps outside the mother country... It cannot, probably, be either proved or disproved. But I think that my opinion will in the main be shared by those who are in one way or another targets of enquiry in these matters...[who] would agree

¹³ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory. Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London, 1994), p. 148.

¹⁴ Leslie G. Pine, *Trace your Ancestors* (London, 1953); Arthur J. Willis, *Genealogy for Beginners* (London, 1955). Such ‘do-it-yourself’ genealogy antedated Willis’s guide in 1955, however – not least of all Willis’ own research and that of others at the S.O.G. in the inter-war era. The first family history of a yeoman family was probably: M. Higgs, *History of the Higgses, or Higgs Family of South Stoke, in the County of Oxford and of Thatcham, in the County of Berks* (London, 1933); Camp, ‘Family History’, p. 170.

that the volume of enquiry and the variety of geographical dispersion from whom it comes grow year by year'.¹⁵

From such remarks it is apparent that overseas enquiries were contributing significantly to the growing British interest. In fact, almost twenty years before Pine and Willis published their 'do-it-yourself' guidebooks, the first such American guide was published by Gilbert H. Doane, the Director of Libraries at the University of Wisconsin. *Searching for your Ancestors: The How and Why of Genealogy* ran to six editions, each responding to the increasing quantities of genealogical source material that became available throughout the twentieth century. In the first edition, Doane pointed out that the few similar books that had been published prior to his were privately issued volumes (by which he probably meant those associated with the New England Genealogical Society) and were not listed in the general trade catalogues.¹⁶ By the time the second edition was published eleven years later in 1948, some non-society demand was clearly apparent as Doane commented that 'since the publication of the first edition of this book, hundreds of people have written to me for help with particular problems which they have encountered'. However, the response was not overwhelming. Doane remarked: 'I have tried to answer them all'.¹⁷

Such stirrings of interest in the 1930s and immediate post-war period did not, however, lead to genealogical excursions to Britain on a mass level. Indeed, the first jet-propelled passenger air service across the Atlantic dated only from 1958,¹⁸ and therefore the vast majority of American enquiries before this were made *in absentia*. In fact, from the late nineteenth century the New England Historic Genealogical Society sponsored two

¹⁵ Wagner, *English Genealogy*, p. 1.

¹⁶ Gilbert H. Doane, *Searching for your Ancestors: The How and Why of Genealogy* (New York and London, 1937), p. vii.

¹⁷ Gilbert H. Doane, *Searching for your Ancestors: The How and Why of Genealogy* (New York and London, 1948, second edition), p. vii.

¹⁸ Edward Royle, 'Trends in Post-War British Social History', in James Obelkevich and Peter Catterall (eds.), *Understanding Post-War British Society* (London and New York, 1994), p. 12.

researchers, James Henry Lea and George Andrews Moriarty, to reside in England and conduct such research in the Public Record Office - alongside Charles Bernau and other British genealogists. They thus corresponded with Americans keen to learn about the lives of their settler ancestors before they left the mother country.¹⁹ From the late 1950s, however, with commercial air travel it became possible for some Americans and others to conduct their own research and indeed the third edition of Doane's popular guide book – published in 1960 – added a new chapter entitled 'Getting ready to cross the Atlantic'.²⁰

Increasing British genealogical interest in the 1950s and 1960s also proved too much for the Society of Genealogists. 'The leaflets published by the Society have helped some... [but] I am quite sure that the great growth of local family history societies in this country was largely due, in the first instance at any rate, to a feeling of dissatisfaction with the service provided by the society' reflected Camp in 1979.²¹ However, a more quantitative sense of the rise of genealogy and family history activity from the 1950s to the present can be pieced together from statistics relating to archive use contained in the annual reports of the county record offices which were established in the two decades after World War II.²² Nonetheless, it must be noted that the reports are neither standardised nor consistent as they do not always give usage figures, or break them down in a uniform way. In fact they can be used to highlight 'types' of users for polemical as well as reporting reasons, and thus do not always

¹⁹ Wagner, *English Genealogy*, p. 354, p. 356-57.

²⁰ Gilbert H. Doane, *Searching for your Ancestors: The Why and How of Genealogy*, (New York and London, 1960, third edition).

²¹ Camp, 'The Society in a Changing World', p. 385.

²² As Chris Webb has noted, 'the history of the development of English archive services since the Second World War has been dominated by the growth of local record offices based on the administrative unit of the county'. Despite resistance from the Public Records Office, the Grigg Committee Report (1952) and the subsequent Public Records Act (1958) were the culmination of a movement towards the provision of local archives dating back to the origins of the Royal Commission of Historical Manuscripts in the nineteenth century. By the time of the Local Government Records Act (1962) nearly all of the county councils had set up a record office so that the act merely empowered local authorities to do what they had already been doing since before the war. C. C. Webb, 'Archive Services in England since 1945', *Archives et Bibliothèques de Belgique/Archief ~ En Bibliotheekwezen in België*, LV (1984), p. 49, p. 52-54.

note 'family historians' or 'genealogists' as a category. As such, their publication of statistics relating to the genealogical use of archives is piecemeal and indeed, the form of public reports varies according to whether the archive was seeking that year to demonstrate rate payers' usage of archives, or to emphasise the wonders of an archive's collections through the range of projects currently being undertaken there.

For instance, the Cornish Archivist's Report for 1958-61 stated that professional historians, students and other educational users came to work at the office and that the number and variety of collections received and catalogued increased. However, genealogists are not mentioned at all, and were presumably included in the 'other' category of archive users. It is not unlikely that family historians played at least some role in the increase from 65 searchers in 1955 to 500 searchers in 1961, but they are sidelined in the report, due to the apparent concern of the archivist to emphasise educational use.²³ As such, genealogists probably provided a good 25% of users, but verifying this remains impossible. What is unstated and under-stated in the reports draws attention to what James Scott calls a 'hidden transcript' – something that is suitable for private discussion among archivists, but not in a public context.²⁴ Indeed, the archivist described a further growth in the total use of the Truro office from 620 searchers in 1961 to 1,284 in 1966 as due to 'genealogists which contribute significantly to the classification of "historical enquiries" that account for the greatest number of visitors'.²⁵ Consequently a picture of genealogical archive use in Britain since the 1950s must be assembled using the data that is, sporadically, made available, using a selection of different counties to cover the period where data is lacking for others.

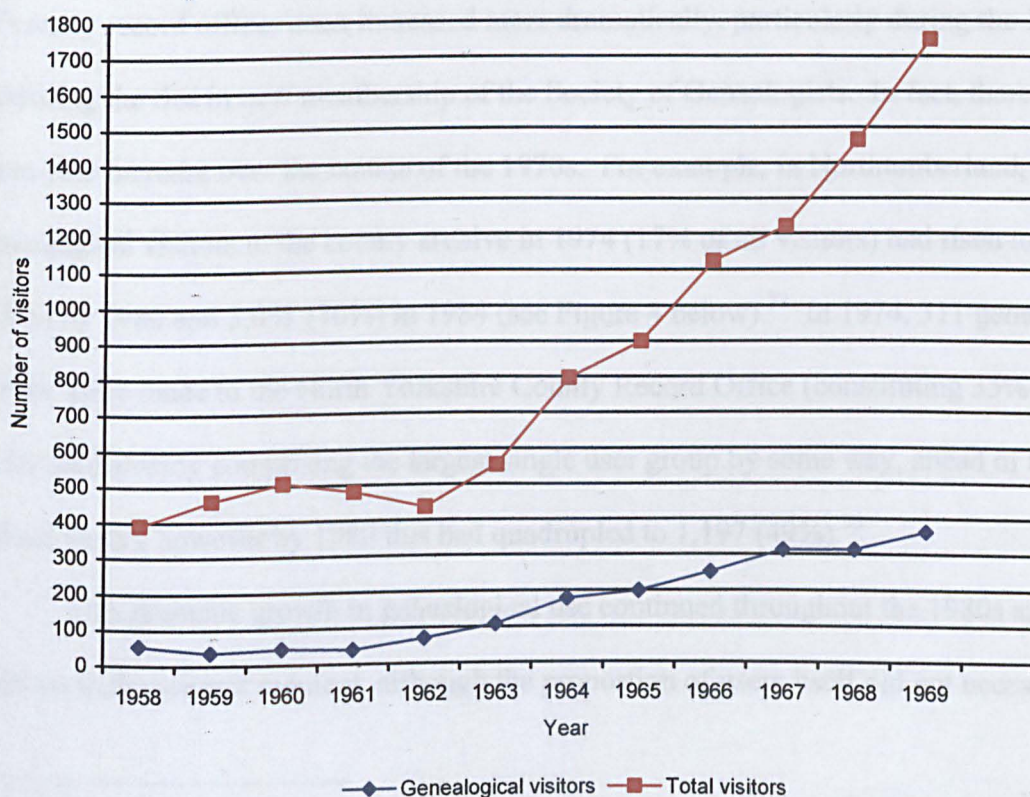
²³ Cornwall County Council, *Third Report of the Work of the Cornwall County Record Office, 1958-61*, p. 7.

²⁴ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, 1990).

²⁵ Cornwall County Council, *Fourth Report of the Work of the Cornwall County Record Office, 1961-66*, p. 3.

The Leicestershire Record Office did not see a significant increase in searchers during the 1950s, but saw a steady one during the 1960s (see Figure 3 below).²⁶ The number of ‘genealogical visitors’²⁷ increased from 36 in 1959 to 363 in 1969. This also presented an increase in terms of the percentage of total visitors from 8% to 21% respectively, although genealogists did not yet constitute the principal users in Leicestershire. ‘Academic researchers’ provided the majority of use at this time in Leicestershire – constituting 734

Figure 3. Genealogical and total visitors to Leicestershire Record Office, 1958-1969



²⁶ Compiled from: Leicester County Council, *Third Report of the Work of the Leicestershire Record Office, 1958-1960*, p. 7; Subsequent reports: *1961-1963*, p. 7; *1964-1966*, p. 9; *1967-1969*, p. 7; *1970-1972*, p. 7 etc.

²⁷ To clarify terminologically, ‘genealogical visitors’ implies not the number of reader visits, but the quantity of individual visitors. Thus, each entry of ‘family history’ or ‘genealogy’ in the register has not been counted as one visit, but rather the one person who appears for, say, six weeks researching on different occasions counts as one ‘genealogical visitor’. Generally archivists listed ‘visitors’ in the 1960s and 1970s, before shifting to the number of ‘visits’ in the subsequent decades, when archive use was far greater.

(65%) of the users in 1969.²⁸ Similarly, in Lincolnshire, there was little genealogical use of the archives in the 1950s. In 1950, of the 876 reader 'visits',²⁹ 578 were by five local non-genealogical readers, although the report mentions 'those pursuing their families into their past' as a component of the remaining 300 visits without giving further information on them.³⁰ By 1967, however, the number of genealogical visits to the Lincoln office numbered over 300.³¹

Thus, whilst genealogical use of archives was growing steadily throughout the 1960s, there was no overnight boom, nor were genealogists the principal users of the records offices in the late 1960s, when they generally constituted less than half of all users. Genealogical use of county record offices soon increased more dramatically, particularly during the 1970s, mirroring the rise in new membership of the Society of Genealogists. In fact, there was up to a ten-fold increase over the course of the 1970s. For example, in Northumberland, the 212 genealogical visitors to the county archive in 1974 (17% of all visitors) had risen to 2,122 (58%) by 1980 and 3,051 (70%) in 1984 (see Figure 4 below).³² In 1974, 311 genealogical 'visits' were made to the North Yorkshire County Record Office (constituting 35% of total visits, and already comprising the largest single user group by some way, ahead of the 194 school visits), however by 1980 this had quadrupled to 1,197 (49%).³³

This dramatic growth in genealogical use continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s right up to the present moment, although the proportion of users itself did not necessarily

²⁸ Leicester County Council, *Fifth Report of the Work of the Leicestershire Record Office, 1964-1966*, p. 9.

²⁹ In the Lincolnshire case, and in North Yorkshire (discussed below) 'visits' were thus counted rather than 'visitors' far earlier than elsewhere.

³⁰ Lincolnshire Archives Committee, *Archivist's Report, 1st April 1949-31st March 1950*, p. 66.

³¹ Lincolnshire Archives Committee, *Archivist's Report, 1st April 1967-16th March 1968*, p. 70.

³² Compiled from: Northumberland County Council, *The Northumberland Record Office Annual Report 1974*, p. 5. Subsequent reports: 1975, p. 7; 1976, p. 6; 1977, p. 7; 1978, p. 6; 1979, p. 6; 1980, p. 4; 1981, p. 4; 1982, p. 4; 1983, p. 6; 1984, p. 6.

³³ *North Yorkshire County Record Office Journal*, X (July 1984), p. 20.

increase. For example, in Gloucestershire, the number of genealogical ‘visits’ grew from 4,041 in 1984 to 5,522 in 1994 (see Figure 5 below).³⁴ However these visits actually declined in terms of proportion, from 67% to 62%. Meanwhile, in North Yorkshire, by 1994, 3,355 of all visits were for the purposes of genealogical research, constituting a comparable 69% of all visits.³⁵ This proportion remained relatively constant throughout the late 1990s and into the twenty-first century, when it also saw a slight decline. In 2000, for instance, 3,738 genealogical visits (69% of the total) were made, whilst only two years later there were just 3,268 (63%) such visits (see Figure 6 below),³⁶ with the archivist asserting that ‘the fall can be explained by the increasing use of internet sources by genealogists.’³⁷

What becomes clear from this data on archive use – particularly in the more detailed case of North Yorkshire – is that whilst the number of non-genealogical users of archives remained relatively constant throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the increased use was principally genealogical. By the late 1980s and 1990s, however, the increase in genealogical use of the county archives continued in proportion to growth in total use as alternative means of researching became available. The most startling growth, then, coincided with both the arrival of family history on television screens, most notably in Alex Haley’s *Roots* (broadcast in Britain in April 1977 and viewed by a record audience of almost 20 million), discussed in Chapter 4, and with the foundation of a vast majority of local family history societies during the 1970s and 1980s based upon the units of region, county, city or religious denomination.

³⁴ Compiled from: Gloucestershire County Council, *Sixth Report of the Records Committee of the County Council 1968-1969*, p. 7; Subsequent reports: 1970-1971, p. 6; 1974-1975, p. 9; 1977-1978, p. 8; 1978-1979, p. 8; 1984-1985, p. 6; 1987-1988, p. 4; 1989-1990, p. 3; 1990-1991, p. 11; 1991-1992, p. 11; 1992-1993, p. 9; 1994-1995, p. 7.

³⁵ *North Yorkshire County Record Office Review*, 1994, p. 7.

³⁶ Compiled from: North Riding Record Office, *North Riding Record Office Report for 1966*, p. 11; North Riding Record Office, *Annual Report 1967*, p. 6 etc.; North Yorkshire Record Office, *North Yorkshire County Record Office Journal*, X (July 1984), p. 20 etc.; ‘The Report of the County Archivist 1994, Item 7’ in North Yorkshire County Council Library Archives and Museums Committee, *Public Section of the Minutes of a Meeting held at County Hall, Northallerton on Friday 10 March 1995*, 3.2 etc.

³⁷ *North Yorkshire County Record Office Review*, 2000, p. 7; *North Yorkshire County Record Office Review*, 2002, p. 4.

Figure 4. Genealogical and total visitors to Northumberland Record Office, 1974-1984

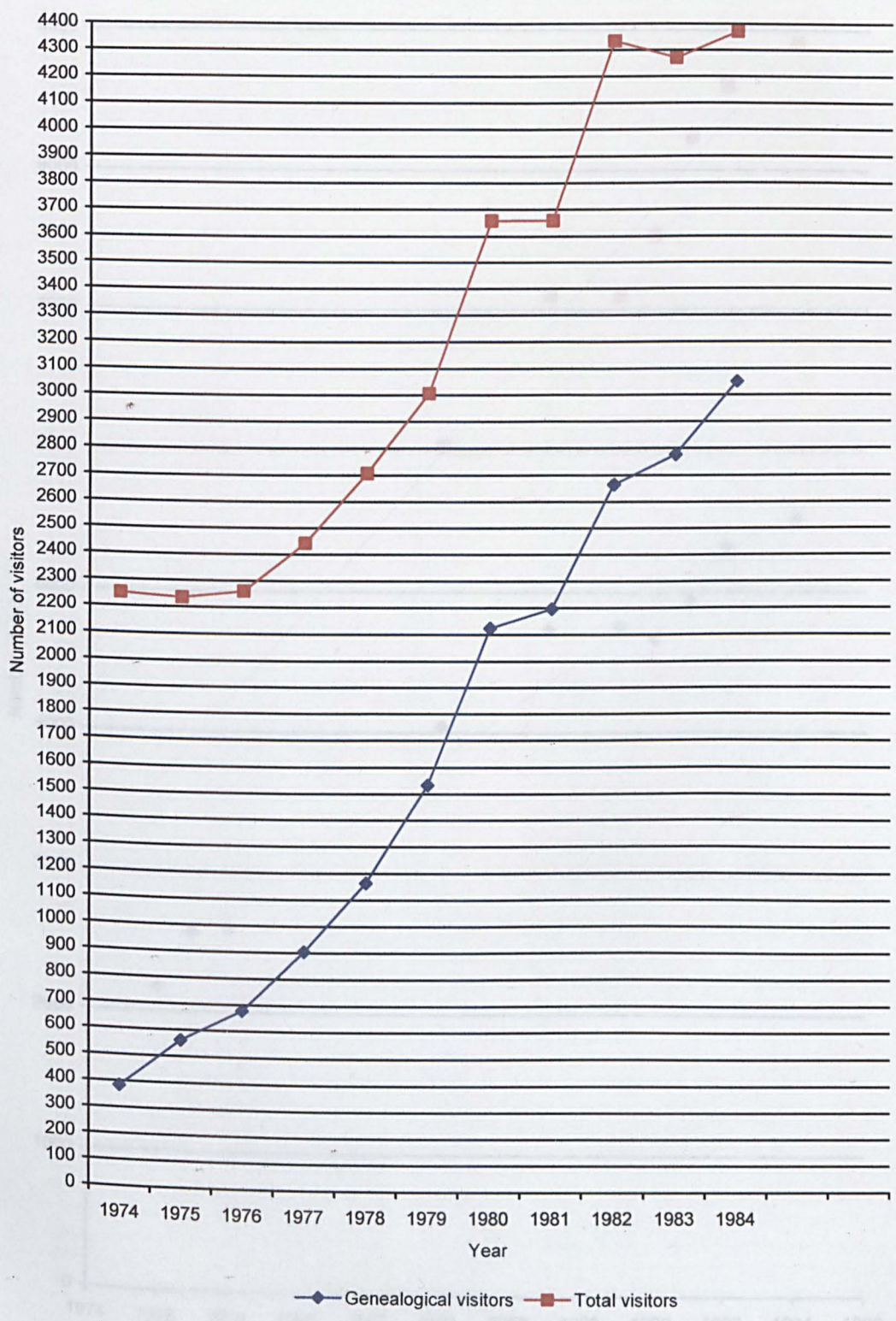


Figure 5. Genealogical and total visits to

Figure 5. Genealogical and total visits to Gloucestershire Record Office, 1976-1994

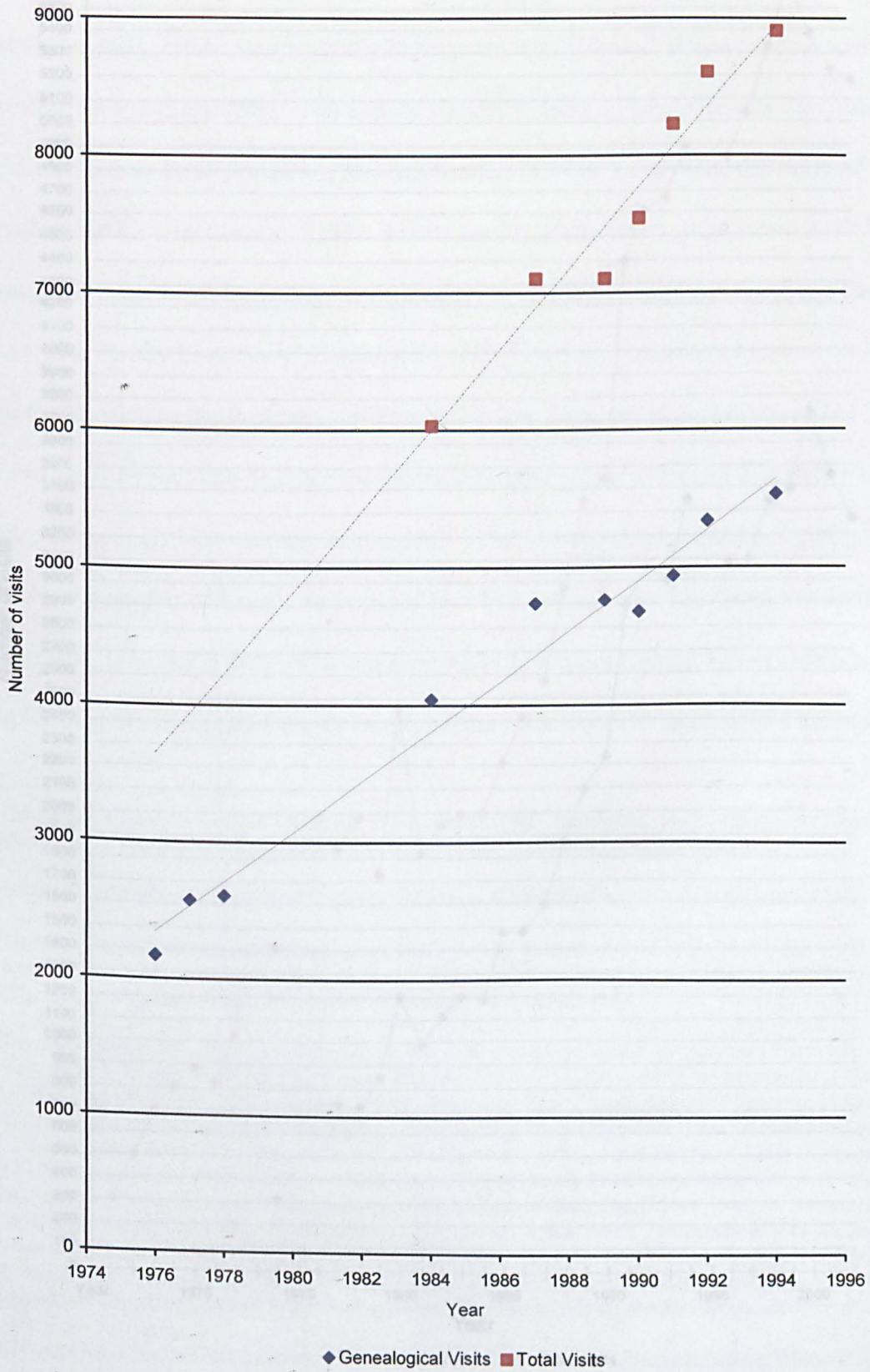
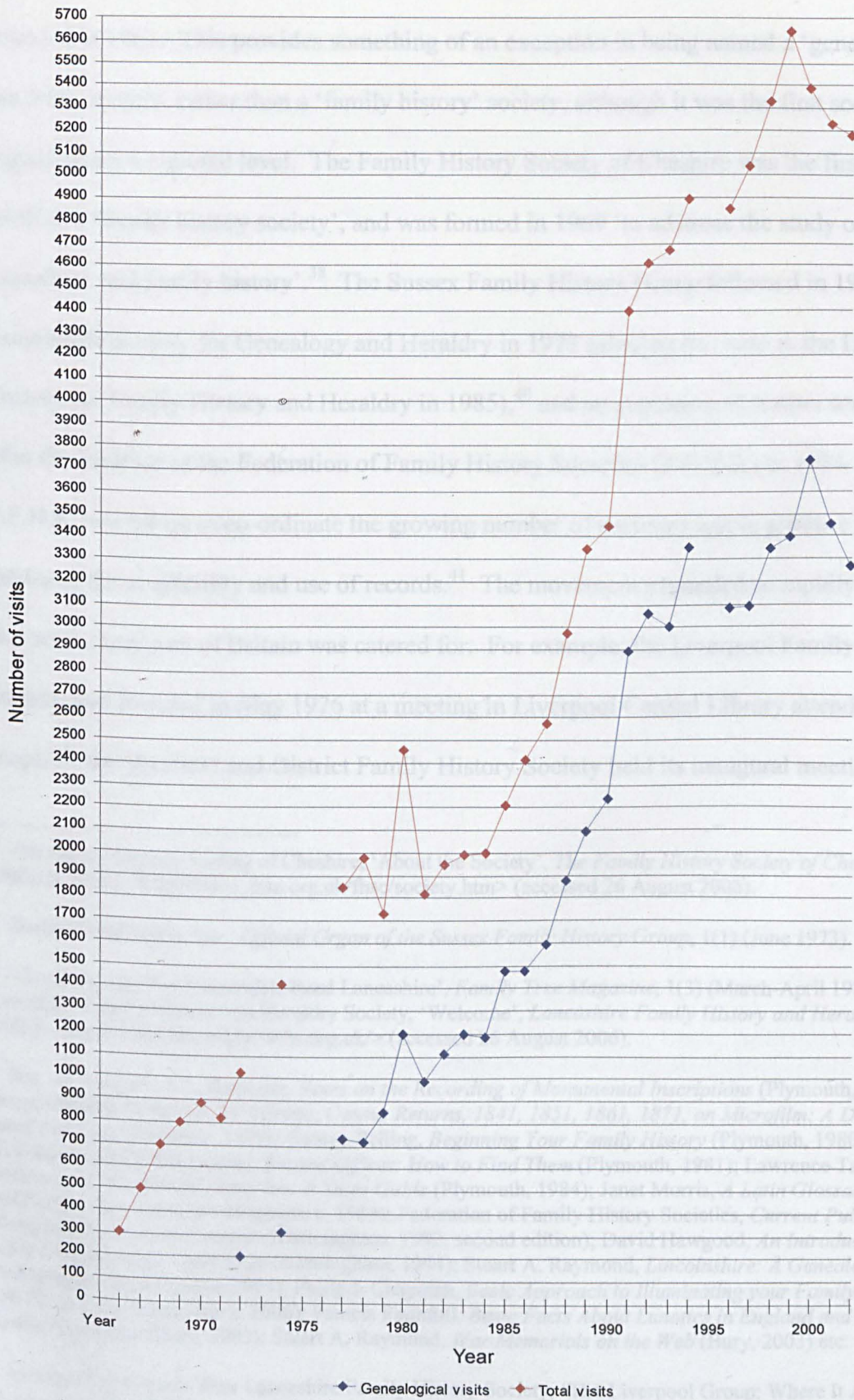


Figure 6. Genealogical and total visits to North Yorkshire Record Office, 1966-2002.



Indeed, the Society of Genealogists was the only British society for practitioners until the Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry (B.M.S.G.H.) was founded in 1963. This provides something of an exception in being named a 'genealogy and heraldry' society, rather than a 'family history' society, although it was the first society to be organised on a regional level. The Family History Society of Cheshire was the first to label itself as a 'family history society', and was formed in 1969 'to advance the study of genealogy and family history'.³⁸ The Sussex Family History Group followed in 1972,³⁹ the Rossendale Society for Genealogy and Heraldry in 1973 (altering its name to the Lancashire Society for Family History and Heraldry in 1985),⁴⁰ and an explosion of further societies after the creation of the Federation of Family History Societies (F.F.H.S.) in 1974. The F.F.H.S. was set up to co-ordinate the growing number of societies and to produce booklet guides to the availability and use of records.⁴¹ The movement expanded so rapidly thereafter that soon every part of Britain was catered for. For example, the Liverpool Family History Society was founded in May 1976 at a meeting in Liverpool Central Library attended by 30 people,⁴² the Sheffield and District Family History Society held its inaugural meeting on 10th

³⁸ The Family History Society of Cheshire, 'About the Society', *The Family History Society of Cheshire*, (19 February 2005), <<http://www.fhsc.org.uk/fhsc/society.htm>> (accessed 26 August 2006).

³⁹ *Sussex Family Historian. Official Organ of the Sussex Family History Group*, 1(1) (June 1973).

⁴⁰ 'Guest Society: For Rossendale Read Lancashire', *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(3) (March-April 1985), p. 15; Lancashire Family History and Heraldry Society, 'Welcome', *Lancashire Family History and Heraldry Society*, (2002), <<http://www.lancashire-fhhs.org.uk/>> (accessed 26 August 2006).

⁴¹ See, for instance: J. L. Rayment, *Notes on the Recording of Monumental Inscriptions* (Plymouth, 1978, second edition); Jeremy S. W. Gibson, *Census Returns, 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, on Microfilm: A Directory to Local Holdings* (Tollerton, 1979); George Pelling, *Beginning Your Family History* (Plymouth, 1980); Jeremy S. W. Gibson and Pamela Peskett, *Record Offices: How to Find Them* (Plymouth, 1981); Lawrence Taylor, *Oral Evidence and the Family Historian: A Short Guide* (Plymouth, 1984); Janet Morris, *A Latin Glossary for Local and Family Historians* (Birmingham, c. 1989); Federation of Family History Societies, *Current Publications on Microfiche by Member Societies* (Birmingham, 1992, second edition); David Hawgood, *An Introduction to Using Computers for Genealogy* (Birmingham, 1994); Stuart A. Raymond, *Lincolnshire: A Genealogical Bibliography* (Birmingham, 1995); Philip J. Chapman, *Basic Approach to Illuminating your Family History with Picture Postcards* (Bury, 2000); Pamela Faithfull, *Basic Facts About Lunatics in England and Wales for Family Historians* (Bury, 2002); Stuart A. Raymond, *War Memorials on the Web* (Bury, 2003) etc.

⁴² Liverpool and South-West Lancashire Family History Society, 'The Liverpool Group: Where It All Began', *Liverpool and South-West Lancashire Family History Society*, (2006), <<http://www.liverpool-genealogy.org.uk/Liverpool/History.htm>> (accessed 26 August 2006).

February 1977,⁴³ and the Aberdeen & North-East Scotland Family History Society was founded in 1978.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, alongside the rise of organised family history societies, the Guild of One Name Studies was formed in 1979 as the umbrella organisation for those establishing groups researching a single surname.⁴⁵ As David Hey has noted, all of these societies 'have been crucial to the great growth of interest in family history in the last three decades of the twentieth century'.⁴⁶

The tendency was for such groups to be more formally founded – and registered as charities. By 1994, there was even a family history society for Romany and Travellers.⁴⁷ Membership of family history societies, like the use of archives, grew dramatically in these decades.⁴⁸ The annual number of new members of the York and District Family History Society, for instance, leapt from 17 shortly after the inauguration of its newsletter in 1980, to 63 in 1990, and 158 in 2000 (see Figure 7 below).⁴⁹ This presents a steady increase in new members, which would of course have added to the total membership year on year. Some have grown to a very considerable size. By 2006 the Devon Family History Society, for

⁴³ Sheffield and District Family History Society, 'Sheffield and District Family History Society 21st Birthday Celebration', *The Sheffield and District Family History Society Website*, (2001), <http://www.sheffieldfhs.org.uk/about_con/celebration.htm> (accessed 4 July 2003).

⁴⁴ D. Anderson, 'Welcome to the Aberdeen and North-East Scotland Family History Society', *Aberdeen and NE Scotland Family History Society*, (7 May 2003), <<http://www.anesfhs.org.uk>> (accessed 4 July 2003).

⁴⁵ Publication of the *Register of One-Name Studies* by the F.F.H.S. began in 1977.

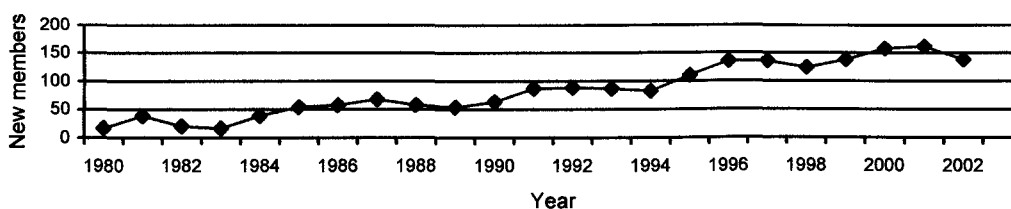
⁴⁶ David Hey, *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History* (Oxford, 1996), p. 174.

⁴⁷ 'The Romany and Traveller Family History Society', in Robert Blatchford (ed.), *The Genealogical Services Directory: Family and Local History Handbook* (York, 2001, fifth edition), p. 216-17.

⁴⁸ This is also true of Australia, where Graeme Davison has calculated that a ten-fold increase in membership was in evidence between the mid-1970s and 1990s. Graeme Davison, 'The Broken Lineage of Australian Family History', in D. Merwick (ed.), *Dangerous Liaisons: Essays in Honour of Greg Dening* (Parkville, Victoria, 1994), p. 334.

⁴⁹ Compiled from: *York Family History Society Newsletter*, 4 (Autumn 1981) to *Journal of the City of York and District Family History Society*, 4(2) (May 2003).

Figure 7. New Members of the York and District Family History Society, 1980-2002



example, had 5,500 members,⁵⁰ whilst the East of London Family History Society had 3,500 British and international members.⁵¹ The F.F.H.S., moreover, had some 300,000 British and international members in 2006; it currently advises and supports some 210 family history societies.⁵²

Alongside the rise of the family history societies, in the 1980s, family history arrived on the magazine racks. *Family Tree Magazine* – initially run from the Cambridgeshire home of Mr Michael Armstrong – was established in 1984, and already had a monthly readership of 30,000 by May 1986, rising to 55,000 by 1990.⁵³ Meanwhile, the Public Records Office (later the National Archives) began publishing its guide to *Tracing Your Ancestors in the Public Record Office* in 1981, almost ninety years since Bernau and the G.C.R.C. set about indexing genealogical records there. As genealogical queries came to dominate the P.R.O. on a daily basis through the 1980s and 1990s, *Tracing your Ancestors in the Public Record*

⁵⁰ Devon Family History Society, 'About DFHS', *Devon Family History Society*, (9 April 2006), <<http://www.devonfhs.org.uk/about.htm>> (accessed 10 July 2006).

⁵¹ East of London Family History Society, 'East of London FHS', *The East of London FHS*, (2006), <<http://www.eolfhs.org.uk/eolintro.htm>> (accessed 10 July 2006).

⁵² The Federation of Family History Societies, 'Federation of Family History Societies Homepage', *The Federation of Family History Societies*, (2006), <<http://www.ffhs.org.uk>> (accessed 10 July 2006).

⁵³ *Family Tree Magazine*, 2(4) (May-June 1986); 2(5) (July-August 1986); ABM Publishing Limited, personal communication.

Office grew in both depth and extent of records discussed, with its sixth edition published in 2002.⁵⁴

Although records concerning the growth of genealogical use of the P.R.O. are hard to come by (private files currently remaining under the 30 year closure period), by the early 1990s it seems that the P.R.O. could no longer cope with the volume of family historians. Accommodation at the national archive was based at Chancery Lane and developed on an additional site at Kew, Surrey in the 1970s. With this still insufficient, the plan devised by the P.R.O. in the 1990s was, as Iain Watt explained in his official write-up, 'to extend the modern facilities at Kew and to leave the Chancery Lane site. However, a commitment was made to retain a central London facility for the most popular records on microfilm'.⁵⁵ By 1996/7, 52% of the total visits to the national archives were made by those heading for the genealogical microfilm rooms – 81,000 annual visits in total. Furthermore, a staggering 94% of P.R.O. users in the late 1990s were family historians, 42% of whom were over 60 years of age and many of whom were 'on restricted incomes and travel long distances to make use of the facilities (40% from outside London)'.⁵⁶

Out of this situation, Watt explains that the Family Records Centre (F.R.C.) was born: 'The P.R.O. had the need to find a new location for its Central London Reading Room. It conceived of the idea of a 'Family Records Centre' which would bring together on one site all three of the national collections used by family historians' – the other two being the Office for National Statistics, covering Births, Marriage, Deaths and Adoptions and the Principal Registry of the Family Division, covering wills since 1858. A *national* family history centre devoted solely to genealogy was unprecedented and demonstrates the

⁵⁴ Amanda Bevan, *Tracing your Ancestors in the Public Record Office* (Richmond, 2002, sixth edition).

⁵⁵ Iain Watt, 'The Family Records Centre: Government Joins-Up to Serve the Family History Researcher', *Archivum*, 45 (2000), p. 233.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 233-4. This suggests that perhaps cost as well as convenience encouraged more to research their family history.

remarkable extent of growth of genealogical enthusiasm. Indeed, once the Family Records Centre opened in 1997, the number of annual visits doubled to 140,000 per annum. Opening hours outside normal working hours may have played a large part in this, as the F.R.C. responded to family historians' concerns by staying open until 7 p.m. on two nights a week.⁵⁷ Use continued to grow into the twenty-first century, and within a few years of its opening, the maximum capacity 'for comfortable use' of the 250 seats was being pushed. As the annual capacity of 200,000 visits was approached in January 2002, a further surge of interest was expected due to the release of the 1901 Census, leading the P.R.O. 'to seek digitisation of the 1901 census and distribution via the internet...at the F.R.C.' and in the homes of family historians with internet access.⁵⁸

The success of putting source material online has, however, contributed to the planned closure of the F.R.C. and proposal to move family history services back to Kew by the end of 2008. Indeed, in the F.R.C.'s newsletter, *The Family Record*, it was pointed out that 'now that the census returns from 1841 to 1901 are available online, we no longer need to provide a central London site for the public to consult them'. Furthermore, genealogical use of the F.R.C. has begun to fall since the 'peak year of 2002-03'. Nevertheless, the popularity of the F.R.C. (annual use remaining close to 200,000 annual visits) despite such a decline does not seem to have influenced the National Archive's decision not to consult its users. 'The F.R.C. has been very popular, so we knew the vast majority of users would oppose the withdrawal from Myddleton Street' the *Family Record* noted, before concluding that 'the transfer is an operational necessity'.⁵⁹

The growth up to the peak of F.R.C. use in 2002 and subsequent shift to digitisation certainly sheds some light on the run-up to the 1901 census debacle, discussed in greater

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 233-5, p. 238.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

⁵⁹ 'A New Vision for the Future', *The Family Record: The Newsletter of the Family Records Centre*, 35 (July 2006), p. 3.

detail in Chapter 2 below, however. Furthermore, the internet provides another means of tracking the growth of genealogical activity outside the local and national record offices from the turn of the twenty-first century, when the 'internet age' of family history began to dawn. In April 2005, for instance, 1.7 million British internet users – 7% of the total people online that month – were searching for details of their ancestors (a proportion very close to the 8% of American users doing the same).⁶⁰ As we have seen, record office, Family Records Centre and family history society activity have all also continued to grow into the twenty-first century, but none at such an explosive rate as the internet. Interestingly, it seems that a new generation has been attracted to the pursuit in this latter, most recent, growth. In 1994, *Family Tree Magazine* reported that 7% of its readership was less than 30 years of age, and in June 2005 only 7.3% of F.R.C. users were under 34 years.⁶¹ However, of the new online users in April 2005, 26% were under 34 years. Whilst the 50s (42%) remain the main online user group by some way, there is evidence here that the internet has facilitated family history interest amongst a new generation – particularly when one considers that the number of genealogical researches conducted online rose by 800,000 from 2004 to 2005 alone.⁶² In this regard, it is also intriguing that the website favoured for family history research amongst British practitioners has become *Genes Reunited*, the sister site to *Friends Reunited*, a site designed to reunite old school friends. The audience growth of *Genes Reunited* stood at 183% from April 2004 to April 2005 (when it received over 1 million monthly visits), at a time when other popular sites such as *RootsWeb* and *Ancestry.com* grew in use by 5% and 27% respectively (and received approximately 350,000 monthly visits each). A key element

⁶⁰ Nielsen//NetRatings, 'Surfing the Family Tree: More than 1.5 Million UK Surfers Research their Family History Online, 24 May 2005', *Nielsen//NetRatings*, (2005) <http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/pr/pr_050524_uk.pdf> (accessed 12 December 2005).

⁶¹ *Family Tree Magazine*, 10(6) (April 1994), p. 31; The Family Records Centre, 'Family Records Centre (FRC) Customer Survey' – June 2005', *Family Records Centre – Your FRC – Surveys*, (June 2005), <http://www.familyrecords.gov.uk/frc/your_frc/survey_06_05.htm> (accessed 12 December 2005).

⁶² The demographic composition of family historians is explored in as much detail as is possible in light of the evidence for it that exists in Chapter 2 below.

**Rethinking Genealogical Practices:
Beyond a Unitary Family History ‘Phenomenon’**

As we have seen in Chapter 1, the growth of genealogical activity over the later twentieth century has been phenomenal. The number of those researching their ancestry in local record offices, at national archives, and over the internet has been remarkable, with growth verging on the exponential since the 1970s. In the early 1980s some historians, such as Robert Taylor Jr suggested a cyclical history of genealogy. For Taylor, the growth of U.S. genealogical interest began with the New England Historic Genealogical Society led to two ‘peaks’ of pre-World War II enthusiasm in the 1890s and 1930s, and experienced a further such peak in the late-1970s. Taylor measured these through the quantity of genealogies and family reunion reports deposited in the Library of Congress.¹ However, as the previous chapter has established, this ‘peak’ did not stop there. It continued in the decades following Taylor’s work in the early 1980s. In any case, to tell the story of family history and genealogy like this is to view the growth as the rapid rise of a ‘thing’, and to see all genealogical activity as trans-historical and uniform. But is ploughing through reel after reel

¹ Taylor argues that the surge of interest leading to the first peak of the 1890s was focused upon New England and began as a moral crusade among middle-class white Protestants, whose small town laissez-faire attitudes embracing hard work, thrift and conformity were inadequate to handle perceptions of a society heading in the opposite directions of anarchism and corporate capitalism. The spectre of economic ruin and the concomitant impact on families in the 1930s precipitated a similar concern about the function and future of the family institution, provoking further reactionary genealogical enthusiasm, for Taylor. Meanwhile, after a mid-twentieth-century lull, Taylor identified a further analogous reaction to social dislocation as responsible for the late-1970s peak – this time the dislocation of ‘an unpopular war, civil rights, women’s liberation, the so-called “generation gap”, and other domestic issues [which] were the prime agents in a new wave of debates on the survival of the family’. Robert M. Taylor, Jr, ‘Summoning the Wandering Tribes: Genealogy and Family Reunions in American History’, *Journal of Social History*, 16(1) (1982), p. 21-23, p. 31-33.

of microfilm in a county record office in the 1980s the same as clicking surnames on *Genes Reunited* in 2005? Is attempting to establish a school of 'critical genealogy' the same as trying to find somebody with your surname in a late nineteenth-century census?

As such, two related strands emerge. Firstly, if we are going to explain the rise of family history, we need to think about a range of interconnected factors which are partly about social change (e.g. leisure) and about cultural concern about the family and deracination, but also to think about the developments which make it easier to do family history. These include the local provision of records and microfilms, activists' actions and media coverage. Various push and pull factors thus both impel research and facilitate it, thereby preventing the beginner from giving up after half-an-hour. Secondly, once we begin to think about what was involved in family history in the 1960s, 1970s, or 1990s – that is, consider family history as a chronologically specific set of practices – then it starts to seem that there is not a 'thing' called family history, but rather a series or set of clusters of genealogies and family histories characteristic of different periods and involving different sets of practices and practitioners.

This chapter, like the previous one, is, chronological. It sets out the changing nature of family history, but is concerned to bring out these two strands. In the first section, I show that the Society of Genealogists was not engaged in the same project as family history societies were in the 1980s. In the second, I show that, paradoxically, the scholarly project of critical genealogy opened it out from its preoccupation with the peerage. In the third section I show that there was not simply a growing demand for 'family history'. Its expansion was also informed by supply side changes in terms of both accessibility of records, and various vital social developments. In the fourth section, I argue that the emergence of 'family history' societies in the late-1970s and 1980s constituted a new stage of both the practice and the conceptualisation of the field. In the final section, I show that the arrival of computers and the Family Records Centre demonstrate a further shift in practices, as well as the

proliferation of access routes into increasingly diverse genealogical activities. By this identifying of key developments the most important can be treated in more detail in subsequent chapters. Others would be worthy of further study but, for reasons of space and time are only discussed in passing. I hope any comments will spark further research by rethinking family history and genealogy.

Genealogy in the Age of Burke's Peerage: Social Climbing and the Love of Dust

It is tempting to see the establishment of the Society of Genealogists as an early stage in the growth of genealogical interest much as Taylor presented the New England Historic Genealogical Society and the Institute of American Genealogy in his study of the United States. It was no such thing, however. The S.O.G. was founded 'to promote and encourage the study of genealogy and topography' and it was the institutionalisation of a critical approach to British genealogy.² This approach sought to purge the practice of its associations with fictional family trees and social climbing, and to thereby establish it on a scholarly and even scientific basis.³ Nineteenth-century genealogical practice certainly involved many attempts by those who had acquired land through fortunes made in industry or trade to gain entry to the *Peerage* by grafting themselves onto medieval noble pedigrees.⁴

² Lord Farrer, 'Preface', *Genealogists Magazine*, 1(1) (April 1925), p. 1.

³ Earlier genealogy, associated most significantly with the endeavours of the Burke family, many of whose fanciful genealogical claims in the *Peerage* (which began publication in 1826; annually from 1847) and *Landed Gentry* (from 1837) had come to be seen as somewhat dubious by critics of the College of Arms. See: John Burke, *A General and Heraldic Dictionary of the Peerage and Baronetage of the United Kingdom (British Empire)* (London, 1826-37, 1st-5th editions); John Burke and others, *A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary (History) of the Peerage and Baronetage of the British Empire* (London 1839-1937, 6th-95th editions); Sir John Bernard Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Landed Gentry; or, Commons of Great Britain and Ireland*. (London, 1837-8) etc. Criticisms of Burke's compilations increased throughout the century. Richard Sims, for instance, stated in his guide in 1856 that this view of critical genealogy as scientific would enlighten the endeavours of those 'very many, who – labouring under some real or fancied wrong – toil incessantly for the discovery of facts wherewith to connect the broken chain of a descent, and establish a claim to wealth or title'. Richard Sims, *A Manual for the Genealogist, Topographer, Antiquary and Legal Professor* (London, 1856), p. v.

⁴ David Hey, *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History* (Oxford, 1996), p. 61, p. 400.

Beginning in the pages of Nichols' *The Topographer and Genealogist* (1863-74) and continuing in Marshall's *The Genealogist* (1877-1922), the criticism of Burke's reached a crescendo in the work of great scholars such as the medieval historian Horace Round (1854-1928), who came to be known as 'the critical genealogist'. Round was a disciple of Oxford historian William Stubbs (1825-1901), himself a genealogist, who guided his childhood interest in history and genealogy towards the study of the records of English medieval government and inspired the huge stress Round placed upon 'accurate genealogy as a foundation of family history and the history of the local communities of which those families formed a part'.⁵ As such, Round's pioneering work on Anglo-Norman history and the Domesday Book proceeded hand in hand with the construction of genealogies for the period. From 1893, Round scathingly attacked and dismissed the 'errors, mis-statements and absurdities' of Burke's *Peerage*, 'nailing them up one by one, as a gamekeeper nails up his vermin', and immersed himself in genealogical material at the Public Records Office.⁶ Round's writings on genealogy repeatedly made errors in Burke's their point of departure. "Burke" knows, of course' he teased on disputing the dating of the creation of the Fauconberg Resolutions.⁷

His skill in puncturing genealogical wishful thinking entertained and inspired his readers in essays such as 'Tales of the Conquest' and 'The Great Carington Imposture', and Round was well aware that he was upsetting the genealogical status quo. 'That the rejection of fabulous pedigrees, the exposure of spurious records, and the substitution of fact for fiction in the realm of family history will, in some quarters, prove distasteful is only what one

⁵ Edmund King, 'Round, John Horace (1854-1928), Historian and Genealogist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2004), <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35847>> (accessed 28 August 2006). See also: W. Raymond Powell, *John Horace Round: Historian and Gentleman of Essex* (Essex Record Office, 2001).

⁶ John Horace Round, *Family Origins and Other Studies* (ed. W. Page) (Constable, 1930), p. 5.

⁷ John Horace Round, *Peerage and Pedigree: Studies in Peerage Law and Family History. Volume 1* (London, 1910), p. 267; Anthony R. Wagner, *English Genealogy* Oxford, 1961), p. 342-46.

must expect', he wrote in 1910.⁸ This 'professionalization' of genealogy, then, made use of the same discourse of science and facticity as the language of scholarship and source criticism by which professional historians established themselves.⁹ This is particularly intriguing in light of the fact that professional historians often do not now consider genealogy as an academic and scholarly field and – as is shown in Chapter 3 – that its 'professional' status is even more complex today. In any case, the success of Round's attack, and his labours in the Public Records Office, undoubtedly gave rise to the formation of the first organised genealogical practice outside the College of Arms in Bernau's G.C.R.C. and at the Society of Genealogists.

Indeed, the S.O.G. constituted a new field of genealogical knowledge, a claim to critical genealogical professionalism which was interested solely in genealogical truth, as opposed to facilitating claims to upward social mobility. Genealogies produced by nineteenth-century enthusiasts thus often came to be referred to dismissively within the Society, tainted as they were with the seemingly dubious practices of the College of Arms. Former Director, Anthony Camp, for instance, recently commented that 'of the family histories published in the nineteenth century, few have much merit'.¹⁰ Such scepticism was foundational to the new field that the S.O.G. came to embody and can be seen in the pedagogical approach it adopted at the outset. The first article published in the new *Genealogists' Magazine*, for instance, was compiled by Lord William Farrer because 'the editors have asked me if I can supply a "key" pedigree to show what is meant by a simple "tree"'. Using wills, court rolls and parish registers, Farrer proceeded to trace the eldest male line of the Nutters of Reedley, the intention being 'to show the importance of a clear

⁸ Round, *Peerage and Pedigree*, p. xiii.

⁹ See: Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886* (Cambridge, 1986); Michael Bentley, *Modern Historiography: An Introduction* (London and New York, 1999); King, 'Round, John Horace (1854-1928), Historian and Genealogist'.

¹⁰ Anthony Camp, 'Family History', in David Hey (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History* (Oxford, 1996), p. 170.

intention to trace one male descent as accurately as possible over a considerable period of time, and the possibility of an amateur doing this from a Court Roll where assisted by a competent professional searcher'.¹¹ Like the scholarly guidebooks that emerged throughout the nineteenth century, the practices of such scholarly genealogy and its court rolls are a long way from the family historian of the 1970s examining the Mormon-compiled International Genealogical Index (I.G.I.) on microfiche, or the late 1990s internet genealogist. Indeed in Farrer's genealogy lesson, it was certainly not expected that a genealogist would be able to do much unaided.

Furthermore, the creation of the S.O.G., was not a manifestation of mass popular appeal. If anything, it was a scholarly reaction to the enthusiasm of certain elements of Victorian British society. It was much smaller than that of the late 1970s and motivated by different reasons. It marked an attempt to educate and regulate interest by constituting genealogy as a field of scientific knowledge. Nor was the club-like composition of the Society of Genealogists in any way demotic, being predominantly middle class and professional. The emphasis was definitely not upon researching one's own roots either: there was still a considerable element of snobbery in much of the work that was done, with an accent on 'good lines' and royal descents, and typical articles on 'Eton records', 'Some of the sixty-four ancestors of her majesty the Queen' and 'Genealogy and the Order of Merit'.¹² While critiquing the fanciful claims of nineteenth-century commercial genealogy with a new vigour, the S.O.G. thus partly retained its preoccupation with upward social mobility by keeping it in check.

The contrast with the 'do-it-yourself' family history of the later twentieth century is particularly striking when we consider the etymology of the practices. The nineteenth- and

¹¹ Lord Farrer, 'A Key Pedigree: Nutter of Reedley, Pendle, Lancashire', *Genealogists' Magazine* 1(1) (April, 1925), p. 15.

¹² R. A. Austen-Leigh, 'Eton Records', *Genealogists' Magazine*, 5(2) (September 1929); Anthony R. Wagner, 'Some of the Sixty-Four Ancestors of Her Majesty the Queen', *Genealogists' Magazine*, 9(1) (March 1940); B. S. Bramwell, 'Genealogy and the Order of Merit', *Genealogists' Magazine*, 9(13) (September 1945).

early-twentieth-century 'genealogists' were concerned with 'pedigrees'; a different name – 'family history' – emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. Those congregating under this latter label saw themselves as distinct from 'pedigree hunting' just as Horace Round distinguished his efforts from those of Sir John Burke. The data of the 'irresistible rise' of genealogy and family history thus begins to look more like a series of steps or blocks – of people doing different things at different times and in different places, albeit with various elements of continuity.

From Peerage Puncturing to Do-It-Yourself Guides: Genealogy for All

As we have seen, in critiquing the fanciful claims of nineteenth-century commercial genealogy with a new vigour, the Society of Genealogists in the process partly retained a preoccupation with social climbing. However, the *Genealogist's Magazine* reveals the new directions that genealogy began to take from 1925. Its content marked the culmination of a shift from the antiquarian publishing of extensive pedigrees and extracts from source material to articles on genealogical problems and on the scholarly methodology that had begun with Nichols, Marshall, Round and the rest. Moreover, the S.O.G. began to amass genealogical data rather than to publish selected genealogies. It concentrated on the collection of typescript and manuscript copies of parish registers and indexes of these and other records for its members' use.¹³ Of particular interest here was the typewritten index to the marriage records of 16 counties put together by a stamp-collecting merchant from London named Percival Boyd (1866-1955). This was compiled from parochial marriage registers, Bishop's Transcripts and marriage licenses, from the inception of parish registration in 1538 to 1840, the beginning of civil registration. The index was assembled chiefly by Boyd and his staff, at his own expense, between 1925 and 1955, running to various editions and constituting part of

¹³ Wagner, *English Genealogy*, p. 348.

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¹³ Wagner, *English Genealogy*, p. 348.

the promotional and pedagogical remit of the new society to encourage genealogical study.¹⁴

The society accompanied its initial publication in 1937 with a *Catalogue of the Parish Registers* then in its possession and a *National Index of Parish Register Copies* (1939).¹⁵

Thus, in the inter-war period we see certain members of the S.O.G. directing their genealogical endeavours towards concerns that broadened the society's remit considerably. Crucially, focusing on such sources turned attention away from the upper crust. The source critical method remained the centre of the society's activity, but at the same time Boyd's index in many respects anticipated the similar activities of post-war family history societies. Indeed Boyd has come to be presented as one of the founding fathers of popular family history. In 1985 an article in *Family Tree Magazine* emphasised how he told the *Evening Standard* in 1937 that 'I'm not interested in pedigrees, although my index will help a lot of people to trace their ancestors. No, I'm doing it because, to me, the lives of ordinary men and women are the real history of England. Not the dates of reigns and battles we were taught at school'. As such, he is held up as 'an inspiration and example to us all' – a model of the selfless, altruistic, enthusiastic family historian always keen to share information, a type that becomes more and more apparent in the post-war period.¹⁶

The compilation of lists like Boyd's facilitated a new type of genealogical activity – examining lists compiled by fellow searchers – and aided the prospective searcher in locating the records he or she required from such lists. Such aids go a long way to enabling an

¹⁴ See, for instance: Percival Boyd, *Particulars of the New Marriage Index of the Society of Genealogists: 98 Volumes, 952,000 Names and Growing at a Rate of 10,000 Names per Week* (S.I., 1930); Percival Boyd, *A Marriage Index on a New Plan: A Key to Boyd's Marriage Index. Being a List of the Parishes Covered by the Index, together with an Explanatory Introduction* (London, 1963); Society of Genealogists, 'Boyd's Marriage Index, 1837-40', *The Origins Network* (2006), <<http://www.originsnetwork.com/help/aboutbo-bmi2.htm>> (accessed 12 July 2006).

¹⁵ Society of Genealogists, *Catalogue of the Parish Registers in the Possession of the Society of Genealogists* (London, 1937, second edition); *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(5) (July-August 1985), p. 10; Kathleen Blomfield, *National Index of Parish Register Copies* (London, 1939). See also: Wagner, *English Genealogy*, p. 348.

¹⁶ *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(5) (July-August 1985), p. 10. Boyd's work was not entirely unprecedented, however. In the nineteenth century the Harleian Society (established 1869), the Yorkshire Parish Register Society (which later became part of the Yorkshire Archaeological Society) and the Lancashire Parish Register Society (established 1898) had all been publishing transcripts, for instance.

enthusiast to go it alone, where in 1925 Lord Farrer had insisted on the importance of working alongside a professional genealogist. Therefore this does not constitute quite the same activity, and the notion that ‘genealogy’ is one discrete entity becomes problematic. Indeed, a key difference is motivational and consequently opened up a distinction between categories of practice. Rather than concerning himself with aristocratic genealogy, Boyd rejected ‘pedigrees’ in favour of making it easier for ‘ordinary’ men and women to trace their ancestry.

This redefinition of practice is particularly significant in that it occurred in the years prior to the beginnings of an increase in genealogical use of the new local record offices in the 1950s. The number of new members joining the S.O.G. did begin to increase gently in the 1950s after all. This growth recalls Raphael Samuel’s statement that demotic ‘preservation mania... first appeared in reference to the railways in the early 1950s’.¹⁷ Indeed, in Boyd’s wake, ‘do-it-yourself’ amateur guides first emerged in Britain in the early 1950s.¹⁸ An examination of these guides and the response to them provides further insight into the nature of family history in this period. Willis’s *Genealogy for Beginners* (1955) was still the most popular guide for the newcomer interested in tracing his or her ancestry in 1960 when Anthony Wagner – the then Richmond Herald, shortly to become Garter King of Arms at the College of Arms – noticed the increased activity. Wagner’s response to and understanding of it is fascinating. He thought he was witnessing for the first time a form of genealogical interest that was divorced from status claims and which came from those of lowly origins. For Wagner, the exploration of genealogy by such people had for a long time been prevented by ‘the feeling of many people that while the pedigree of a noble or ancient

¹⁷ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory. Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London, 1994), p. 139.

¹⁸ Leslie G. Pine, *Trace your Ancestors* (London, 1953); Arthur J. Willis, *Genealogy for Beginners* (London, 1955).

line may be an interest and satisfaction to its possessor, those of humble and obscure families can probably not be traced at all or if traced will be uninteresting or even mortifying’.

In identifying this, however, and seeking to overcome the sense of genealogical exclusivity, Wagner managed at the same time to reinforce it in equal measure. ‘It is, of course, true that noble pedigrees are more easily traced. Indeed it is the definition of a noble family that its pedigree is already known... But, this having been said, it is equally true that very many humble pedigrees can be traced (though not so easily) through many generations and can fairly often be illustrated with biographical detail. The great fact to be grasped here is that Englishmen and those of English descent are fortunate in the immense bulk of the records kept and still preserved in England as compared with most other lands’.¹⁹ A newly democratic genealogy – or in Wagner’s terms the endeavours of those with ‘humble pedigree’ – was thus beginning to be identified as a possibility by those professional genealogists that had been the intellectual and social masters of such records for so many centuries.

To research one’s genealogy was thus not necessarily to be a social climber, and to possess a humble pedigree for a humble pedigree’s sake was no longer necessarily a source of shame – it was as true as a noble pedigree, and probably truer for that matter. ‘Away with such snobbery. It is the vice of England’ Leslie Pine, a peerage lawyer who had contributed to Burke’s *Peerage* enthused in his guidebook in 1953.²⁰ This attack perhaps has affinities with post-war changes such as the worry among some about the new society, notions of a grammar-school educated meritocracy and a distancing from excessive tradition.²¹ ‘An interest in genealogy need not be limited to those who are hoping to trace their descent from the Norman invaders, to revive a dormant peerage or, perhaps, just to gate-crash into

¹⁹ Wagner, *English Genealogy*, p. 5-6.

²⁰ Pine, *Trace your Ancestors*, p. 11. For an example of an early family history society member inspired by Pine’s guide, see discussion of Lawrence Osbourne of the B.M.S.G.H. in Chapter 3.

²¹ See: Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford and New York, 1998).

“County” society,’ wrote Arthur Willis in his guide two years later. ‘There is much in the subject of interest for the ordinary man’, he continued, before describing source materials to beginners and giving ‘an account of the researches into my own family pedigree’ as a pedagogical example.²²

Willis and Pine, then, mark a shift in the nature of genealogy which moves it away from hunting for noble ancestors to a generalised practice. However, whilst containing such radical possibilities for a newly democratised genealogy in terms of practice, the *language* of pedigree-hunting and of the noble and the humble permeated Willis’s, Pine’s and Wagner’s writing alike. In 1961, for instance, Wagner lectured the S.O.G. on the topic of ‘Genealogy and the Common Man’. The new interest in humble origins was – to professional genealogists such as Wagner – a mere pastime.²³ His advice to the would-be humble pedigree hunter was thus quite out of step with the do-it-yourself guides and based on the resources used to explore noble ancestry. Furthermore, for Wagner, the amateur could not get far unaided: ‘He can start by consulting Marshall’s and Whitmore’s Guides to see what pedigrees of the families which concern him are in print. He can then consult any pedigrees he finds there... If there is no pedigree in print there may still be one in manuscript in the official records or the unofficial collections of the College of Arms, or among the manuscript collections in the British Museum, the Bodleian Library at Oxford and elsewhere’.²⁴

Thus, despite his lip service to the humble pedigree, Wagner did not imagine the amateur starting independently from scratch and saw genealogy as an area of various ‘expertises’ of certain counties and of certain centuries: ‘This is a trade where complexities take years to learn and one in which emphatically a little learning is a dangerous thing’. The amateur was characterised as hurried and unsystematic: ‘Even when he goes to the right

²² Willis, *Genealogy for Beginners*, p. 9-10.

²³ The dichotomy of genealogy as ‘pastime’ and ‘profession’ goes back to the work of American genealogist Donald Jacobus. See Donald Jacobus, *Genealogy as Pastime and Profession* (New Haven, 1930).

²⁴ Wagner, *English Genealogy*, p. 359.

record and can read it he may still miss what it has to tell him'.²⁵ In promulgating this distinction, Wagner was of course drumming up trade for himself: 'To search the records for oneself can be fascinating... On the other hand the work is laborious, time consuming and beyond a certain elementary range can be very difficult... Unless one's problem has an easy solution, the moment will come when one must either give up or enlist professional help'.²⁶ These distinctions of professional and amateur are discussed in much more detail in Chapter 3, but in the meantime it is important to note that, whilst professional genealogists such as Wagner did refer to the existence and locations of records useful to the beginner, they did not yet envisage it as a pursuit to be undertaken independently.

A stark contrast was provided by the newly emergent guidebooks. For Pine, the expense of employing a professional genealogist did indeed put many off. Instead he enthused: 'Come then to the search of your predecessors. Do it yourself, and you will find it much cheaper'. He then proceeded to describe how much (at least for the first few generations) could be researched without paying someone else. By questioning one's father (who in 1953 Pine assumed would have been born around 1882) and pursuing his civil registration details through Somerset House, one could reasonably expect to reach back from this certificate to the details of one's grandparents, themselves born possibly thirty years earlier in 1852, and from there to the marriage certificate of one's great-grandparents, who, if the practitioner was fortunate, would have married after 1837, when civil registration began.²⁷

Pine, a peerage lawyer and editor of Burke's, may well have written this guidebook in an attempt to ride on the crest of a new wave of interest in popular genealogy, combining the search for royalties and genuine enthusiasm. Certainly, looking at Pine's guidebook, it

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 360-61.

²⁶ Wagner, *English Ancestry*, p. 164-65.

²⁷ Pine, *Trace your Ancestors*, p. 11-18.

would seem that, to ‘do-it-yourself’ was simply to go to Somerset House, then seen as ‘synonymous with the Inland Revenue’ – the ‘H.Q. of the tax-gatherer’ – a place from which to order a birth certificate for the purposes of validating the receipt of a pension. Pine was desperately keen to share his discovery of its genealogical potential. One could feasibly get ‘back to 1837 for 30 shillings’, and this could be even cheaper if one had visited Somerset House in person rather than paying for a search of the registers at a distance. Upon payment of 1s 6d, ‘you will be shown into the galleries’ to search the registers, Pine explained, with an additional charge of half a crown for a copy of the relevant certificate, whereas to request this to be done by a member of staff at Somerset House cost 7s 6d.²⁸

It is important to note that getting ‘back to 1837’ was, by 1953, a more striking historical achievement than it had been in the late nineteenth century. Pine suggested augmenting what one had found through Somerset House with visits to the P.R.O. to look at the two censuses then available – 1841 and 1851 – to find, for instance, the locations of great-grandparents’ residence after making an informed guess based on their marriage certificate. One could thus progress to the relevant parish registers, in order to go back beyond 1837 and 1841, possibly as far as the sixteenth century.²⁹ We should not read this suggested research trajectory on to actual practice unquestioningly, however. Pine was editor of the *Peerage* and thus was thinking through the potentialities of genealogy for all. He was not an ‘amateur’ practitioner himself. Undoubtedly the availability of records in the capital could be of some use to the emergent genealogical enthusiasm, but one still had to travel there or be told of its existence, and in either case to pay for the privilege. Furthermore, the usefulness of censuses and civil registration certificates was to grow as the second half of the twentieth century passed, as more of the former became available and as a practitioner could get four or five generations back through the records of civil registration alone. However,

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16, p. 14-15.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15, p. 18, p. 20-21, p. 32.

when we look at the guidebooks produced in the 1950s by those whose profession was *not* genealogy, a somewhat different picture emerges.

Arthur J. Willis was not a peerage lawyer, but a quantity surveyor from Winchester, who had joined the S.O.G. during Boyd's endeavours and who traced his ancestry in his spare time. In his guidebook, Willis was keen to emphasise more locally available sources: his suggested research trajectory began with speaking to close family members and looking for inscriptions in family Bibles or other family documents close to hand. Recourse to Somerset House was seen as a last resort, 'when confirmation of such records is required'. For instance, 'If there is reluctance to ask a particular aunt her age', he wrote, 'it will not usually be difficult to lead her to talking of her place of birth: then a search at the Principal Registry at Somerset House should find the date'.³⁰ Getting back to great-grandparents in Somerset House alone for 30 shillings is one thing, using it as a last recourse to avoid spending any money at all and to save auntie's blushes is quite another. It is clear that even in the 1950s, genealogical practice was quite diverse and do-it-yourself interest would not necessarily develop along the lines envisioned by experienced professionals like Wagner and Pine. Indeed, for Willis, once family Bibles, papers and memories had been exhausted, parish registers provided the most useful source material for information both before and after the institution of civil registration in 1837: 'Parish registers are probably the most important source of genealogical information' wrote Willis. Indeed, 'if in a country village and with a name not too common, it may be easier to turn to parish registers to find the next earlier generation than to look for it at Somerset House'.³¹

In the 1950s parish registers were still, for the most part, in the charge of the parish incumbent, and – as long as a family had not moved far – could be consulted locally, and far more easily (unless, that is, the practitioner lived in London). Already at this early stage,

³⁰ Willis, *Genealogy for Beginners*, p. 17-19.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19, p. 32-33, p. 26.

some copies of parish registers had been made by members of the S.O.G. and Willis recommended consulting the pre-war S.O.G. parish register lists to establish this, as 'it is much easier to read than the early handwriting of the original'. Willis similarly recommended Boyd's Index, albeit with the complaint that 'it is not, of course, complete, particularly as many registers have been copied since its compilation'. Nonetheless, for now, Willis recommended the originals, not least because, in his own experience, errors and omissions were often made by copyists.

In 1955 this involved a journey into the unknown. 'The attitude of their guardians varies considerably,' remarked Willis. His experience varied from open churches with unlocked register chests, to registers left in the charge of a verger, parish clerk or 'local *grand-dame*' by an uninterested parson, to an incumbent who 'may so feel his responsibility that he will not allow the registers out of his sight but insists on standing over the searcher at work'. The latter was a common experience of pioneering humble pedigree hunters like Willis. He recommended that the researcher always arrange appointments, name dropping the S.O.G. in the process, and even then to be prepared for a suspicious reception.³² In any case, such adventures in quiet churches were not to be the staple of genealogical practice, and in the meantime the retention of the registers by clergy frustrated genealogists, both humble and otherwise.

Pine wrote that 'even now the priceless parish records are left to the mercies of private individuals, and the state does nothing to ensure their preservation'. He toyed with the idea of a central depository, before concluding that the best alternative was to expand the cataloguing, copying and indexing work begun by the S.O.G. Little was Pine to know that family history societies would come to provide 'the vast amount of labour still needed' for this over the coming decades.³³ Wagner, for his part, was aware of the significance of parish

³² *Ibid.*, p. 27-28.

³³ Pine, *Trace your Ancestors*, p. 34-36.

registers in tracing the pedigrees of 'a poor and obscure family', especially as, in theory, a genealogy could be traced back if a family had remained resident in the same parish for generations. However, he warned, 'I confess that I have not yet had the fortune to meet one'. Nevertheless, Wagner did remark intriguingly that 'if a wealthy foundation or a welfare state put astronomical funds at our disposal for providing all its citizens with a pedigree... we should, I suppose, no longer put first the pursuit of individual pedigrees but should rather concentrate on whole records and classes of records... made available in one place and their analysis and indexing would provide a central theme round which much else would be grouped'.³⁴

This was (explicitly, for Wagner) merely utopian thinking, however. No such public or private funds were available. There was to be no Family Records Centre in 1960. Wagner's idea that all county record offices should also become central depositories for pedigrees and hubs of co-operation between genealogists, archivists and historians seemed equally fanciful. Critical genealogy had begun to uncouple genealogy from being the legitimisation of social status and to assert the value of knowing a genealogy for its own sake. However, the practice of genealogical research was, as we have seen, still rather parochial and awkward, expensive and uncertain. As such, the numbers of those undertaking it in record offices in the 1950s and 1960s while noteworthy, were relatively low all the same (see Figure 3 above). The labours of these self-ascribed 'genealogists' to assemble their 'pedigrees', what Willis called his 'genealogical adventure', used whatever was available, close to hand, and cheap.³⁵ And, most significantly of all, such searches often led to the frustration that records were not more systematically compiled and easily accessible. As we will see in the next section, 'family history' grew in part because of the way that county record offices smoothed out this frustration.

³⁴ Wagner, *English Genealogy*, p. 370-71.

³⁵ Willis, *Genealogy for Beginners*, p. 85.

Parish Registers and Leisure Time: The Push and Pull of New Practices

As soon as professional archivists began to take up appointments at the new county record offices, generally in the inter-war period or just after World War II, potential genealogists immediately began to demand their attention.³⁶ Appointed in 1949 as the first County Archivist for North Yorkshire, Mr M. Y. Ashcroft took up a post created along with the Record Office in 1938 but vacant until his arrival. In 1974, he recalled that: 'Demands from the general public were small at first: personal visits in the first year of the archivist's office numbered less than a dozen. Soon however, scholars, students and visitors of all descriptions learned of the archivist's appointment: they began to call at the office in search of information and to send more queries through the post: please help me to find my ancestors, how can I find the history of my house, how many whales have been washed up on the coast of Yorkshire, have you any records of convicts transported to Australia?'³⁷ At a time when universities were not widespread, the development of county record offices dovetailed with the level of genealogical interest articulated by Willis – a keenness to search close to home, with whatever resources were available. Despite the fact that parish registers remained in churches for the most part, Willis remarked in 1955 that 'there is now a tendency to transfer archives [of wills] in the Direct Registries to the care of County Authorities, and in a number of cases the transfer has already been made'.³⁸ Nevertheless, in the absence of parish registers, Willis used Hampshire Record Office purely for 'filling in the detail' that he had found through his investigations in churches and at Somerset House: 'I did not expect to find anything that would extend the pedigree further, but rather was looking for fuller

³⁶ C. C. Webb, 'Archive Services in England since 1945', *Archives et Bibliothèques de Belgique/Archief ~ En Bibliotheekwezen in België*, LV (1984), p. 49.

³⁷ Michael Y. Ashcroft (ed.), *A History of the North Riding of Yorkshire County Council 1889-1974* (Northallerton, 1974), p. 118.

³⁸ Willis, *Genealogy for Beginners*, p. 40, p. 63-64.

information on the generations already proved'.³⁹ This more biographical interest in the details of ancestors' lives – moving beyond the pedigree itself as practitioners became less concerned solely with social mobility – was indeed, as we shall see, to become a central feature of the 'family history' movement.

Such enquiries are somewhat different from those recalled by Ashcroft, however. With growing awareness of local archives, it seems that by c. 1960 they came to be a first port of call for those with an impulse to know their genealogy. The new Cornish record office, for instance, opened at Truro in 1951 and minutes of a County Record Committee Meeting at the County Hall that year stated 'that space in the [new] muniment rooms be allocated primarily according to the relative value of the records, in the following order:- (i) Mining records, (ii) Tithe maps and enclosure awards, (iii) Probate records, (iv) Manorial records and borough records, (v) Parish-civil and ecclesiastical, (vi) Business and private records'. At its inception, therefore, genealogical interest was clearly unexpected – parish records languishing in the list of priorities – and yet, it was also recommended 'that the Bishop of Truro be asked to recognise the County Record Office as a repository for ecclesiastical records'.⁴⁰ By 1954 the Bishop had agreed that registers, especially those in urgent need of repair, could be deposited at the record office.⁴¹ Thus began a process of deposition which would continue over the coming decades. Many parishes deposited their archives in record offices in the 1960s and local record offices in turn attempted to make their facilities well known and attractive to parochial councils.⁴²

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁴⁰ Cornwall County Record Office, 'County Records Committee Minutes of a Meeting of the County Records Committee held at the County Hall, Truro, on the 22nd January, 1952', *County Records Committee Minutes 1951-57*, p. 3.

⁴¹ Cornwall County Record Office, 'County Records Committee Minutes of a Meeting of the County Records Committee held at the County Hall, Truro, on the 14th January, 1954', *County Records Committee Minutes 1951-57*, p. 1.

⁴² Parish registers were thus undergoing a complementary movement at the same time as the localisation of record offices. In 1929, the Parochial Registers and Records Measure had already given bishops the power to direct that parish records should be cared for in the parish which produced them or deposited in a diocesan

As parish registers came in, so too did genealogists. In North Yorkshire, after a survey of parish registers was undertaken in 1966, the records of 34 parishes were deposited in 1967. 700 research visits were made that year, compared to only 304 in 1965 (see Figure 5 above).⁴³ Registers continued to come in steadily over the next twenty years (10 in 1969, 32 in 1976, 16 in 1980, 46 in 1984), the numbers of genealogists at Northallerton continued to grow accordingly,⁴⁴ and county archivists reacted in a wide variety of ways, often in *ad hoc* responses to its new users. In 1973 for instance the Library, Archives and Museums Committee of North Yorkshire 'agreed that the Record Office provide a photocopying service... [to] provide a method of insuring unique documents, reduce wear and tear of original records [and] improve accessibility to records'.⁴⁵

In other words, the genealogical demand revealed in the data on archive use and noted by historians such as Raphael Samuel and Stan Newens, must also be understood with reference to supply side changes and pull factors. Rather than concentrating solely on

record office established or appointed by the relevant bishop. However, as Chris Webb has pointed out, this led in most cases to the bishop selecting an existing county record office before their deposition from the 1960s. See: Webb, 'Archive Services in England since 1945', p. 61. In this respect, it thus seems that the Bishop of Truro was somewhat ahead of the national trend, partly explaining the greater use of the Cornish Record Office in evidence in the 1950s seen in Chapter 1. The Office certainly did attempt to promote itself to church councils, undertaking surveys of both Church of England and Non-Conformist registers, by sending questionnaires and making personal visits. Attempts were also made to stimulate public interest in Cornwall. In July 1953, for instance, it was decided that to stimulate public interest, the County Archivist submit articles to the local press, with particular reference to the quarterly accessions list. See: Cornwall County Record Office, 'County Records Committee Minutes of a Meeting of the County Records Committee held at the County Hall, Truro, on the 26th June, 1952', *County Records Committee Minutes 1951-57*, p. 3; Cornwall County Record Office, 'County Records Committee Minutes of a Meeting of the County Records Committee held at the County Hall, Truro, on the 5th April, 1956', *County Records Committee Minutes 1951-57*, p. 1; Cornwall County Record Office, 'County Records Committee Minutes of a Meeting of the County Records Committee held at the County Hall, Truro, on the 3rd July, 1953', *County Records Committee Minutes 1951-57*, p. 4.

⁴³ *North Riding Record Office Report for 1966*, p. 11; North Riding Record Office, *Annual Report 1967* (Northallerton, 1967) p. 7-13; North Riding Record Office, *Annual Report 1968* (Northallerton, 1968), p. 8.

⁴⁴ North Riding Record Office, *Annual Report 1969* (Northallerton, 1969), p. 3-5; *North Yorkshire County Record Office Journal*, III (April 1976), p. 7-11; VII (May 1980), p. 8-9; X (July 1984), p. 18-19.

⁴⁵ 'The Report of the Library, Archives and Museums Committee, 6th December 1973' in *Meeting of the North Yorkshire County Council, 30th April 1973. Report of the Committee for the County of North Yorkshire*, p. 117. Whilst wear and tear of the registers concerned the committee, however, microfilm was still not economically viable and was rejected as too expensive in 1974 in the North Riding. See: North Yorkshire County Council, 'Library, Archives and Museums Committee, 29th August 1974' in *Library, Archives and Museums Committee Minutes 30th May 1973-10th October 1975*, p. 203.

demand – thus conceptualising family history as a mindset, mentality or uniform phenomenon – material changes undoubtedly permitted and facilitated this rising demand. Whilst a few humble pedigree hunters were already in evidence, the very existence of record offices provided a first point of enquiry for many more who would probably not otherwise have considered it. A localised practice of genealogy thus focused more upon working through records that had recently been deposited than on going to as yet non-existent, or rare, indexes of them. Furthermore, whilst those making such enquiries were notable, county archivists still felt the need to follow a number of possible avenues to drum up interest in their accessions, as it was still unclear, as records continued to be gathered together and became readily available for the first time, the direction from which interest would come.

Thus, although such changes in archival practice and holdings contributed to the growth in family history, they do not explain it entirely. Other material and historical factors certainly contributed to the growth of genealogical activity in the 1950s and 1960s, and especially from the 1970s. For example, the leisure historians Gershuny and Jones have observed that the average working hours for 25-60 year old men and women in Britain fell considerably between 1961 and 1984. The average full-time paid working week in 1961 was 47.9 hours, but this fell to 44.6 hours in 1984.⁴⁶ Leisure time⁴⁷ is shown to have increased substantially across this period, by 13% for men and 19% for women.⁴⁸ Clearly, with this increase in free time, there is a greater potential for people to pursue their families into the past. The startling extent of this increase even led some economic commentators to envisage ‘the collapse of work’ and to suggest strategies to combat the perceived problem of ‘the

⁴⁶ J. Gershuny and S. Jones, ‘The Changing Work/Leisure Balance in Britain, 1961-1984’, in John Horne, David Jary and Alan Tomlinson (eds.), *Sport, Leisure and Social Relations* (London and New York, 1987), p. 33-36. Calculations cited here summarise and simplify Gershuny and Jones’ statistics.

⁴⁷ ‘Leisure time’ is defined by Gershuny and Jones as ‘the residual time once work and personal care [time are]... removed’. Gershuny and Jones, ‘The Changing Work/Leisure Balance’, p. 37.

⁴⁸ Gershuny and Jones, ‘The Changing Work/Leisure Balance’, p. 48. Again, calculations cited here summarise and simplify Gershuny and Jones’ statistics.

leisure shock' in the time of mass unemployment of the late-1970s and the 1980s.⁴⁹

Although the increase of leisure time was not limited to the post-war period,⁵⁰ Celia Brackenridge and Diana Woodward argue, crucially, that steadily increasing leisure time and activities have only coincided with increased affluence in the post-war period, with real disposable income almost doubling between 1951 and 1974 alone.⁵¹ Light is thus shed on the fact that the steady growth of a more democratic interest really began to take off in the mid- to late-1970s.⁵²

To this end, it is important to examine the demographic composition of those researching their family histories in the last three decades of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, the exact social composition of family historians remains somewhat obscure because, firstly, such data was not collected by record offices until the late-1990s and, secondly, it has not been possible to locate archives' visitors books or membership records of family history societies which would allow a geographical analysis by postcode.⁵³ A broad indication may nonetheless be obtained from data such as a B.M.S.G.H. volume of member's family trees compiled in 1974. Less than half of the 131 members that contributed to this gave their date of birth, perhaps reflecting a disinclination of the older members to share such

⁴⁹ Clive Jenkins and Barrie Sherman, *The Collapse of Work* (London, 1979); Clive Jenkins and Barrie Sherman, *The Leisure Shock* (London, 1981).

⁵⁰ Hugh Cunningham, for instance, argues that the mid-nineteenth century saw leisure become implicated in the process of class consciousness when middle-class people began to seek control of formerly public spaces in order to privatise them for newly approved leisure activities. Peter Bailey also locates middle-class ideas of 'rational recreation' in this process in the late nineteenth century, however, as discussed above, much nineteenth-century genealogical activity was often commercial activity undertaken at the behest of middle class aspirations and thus was not strictly recreational as such. See: Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution, c.1780-c.1880* (London, 1980); Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England* (London, 1997); Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1982* (Cambridge, 1983), ch. 4.

⁵¹ Brackenridge and Woodward point out that the amount of non-work time available to the average male worker during his or her lifetime continued to increase steadily over the course of the twentieth century - a total increase of 70% since 1900. Celia Brackenridge and Diana Woodward, 'Gender Inequalities in Leisure and Sport in Post-War Britain', in James Obelkevich and Peter Catterall (eds.), *Understanding Post-War British Society* (London and New York, 1994), p. 193-94; Central Statistics Office, *Social Trends*, 10, (London, 1980).

⁵² Indeed, family history can actually be fairly cheap in comparison to many activities.

⁵³ There has unfortunately not been scope for such an extensive sociological task in the present thesis.

information. However, of those that did, 8 were in their 20s, 5 in their 30s, 8 in their 40s, 23 in their 50s, 6 in their 60s, 3 in their 70s and 1 in his 80s. As such, at least 61% (and probably more) were aged over 50. Also, of the contributors to the volume, 65% were male and 35% were female.⁵⁴ A survey conducted in *Family Tree Magazine* in 1990 similarly revealed that 63% of the respondents were over 50, although it reported that 66% were female.⁵⁵ A further survey made in 1997 found 69% to be over 50, and 58% to be female, whilst revealing that ‘as we all must suspect, family history is largely undertaken by retired people – 60% fall into this group’.⁵⁶ This certainly reinforces the data discussed in Chapter 1 in indicating that relatively few practitioners have been in their forties or younger. In any case, the evidence suggests that family historians have consistently been predominantly over 50 years of age, whereas their gender balance has varied. By the time the Public Services Quality Group (P.S.Q.G.) began surveying visitors to British Archives in 1998, 61% of all users of British archives were for the purposes of family history and 67% were aged over 45.⁵⁷

Meanwhile, of these users only 2% had an ethnic group other than ‘white’.⁵⁸ Indeed, in the late 1980s a number of comments to *Family Tree* were also suggestive of the rising family history interest in terms of race and class. ‘I wonder why family history research

⁵⁴ Compiled from: Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking ~ About This Ancestry Business. Members of the Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry Recount Their Genealogical Adventures* (Birmingham, 1974). For further calculations on this data regarding the proportions of practitioners with deceased relatives, see Chapter 6 below.

⁵⁵ Michael Armstrong, ‘This May Interest You: *Family Tree* Survey Summary’, *Family Tree Magazine*, 13(6) (April 1997), p. 58. This compared the results of three surveys made in 1990, 1994 and 1997. In 1986, only 40% of readers were over 50, although detailed data breakdown was unfortunately not provided. See: ‘Our Questions... Your Answers’, *Family Tree Magazine*, 2(5) (July-August 1986), p. 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁵⁷ Public Services Quality Group, *Survey of Visitors to British Archives: June 1998* (London, 1998), p. 10; Appendix 4, p. 5. No statistics regarding family historians age in particular were provided, however.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Appendix 4, p. 5. See also: Public Services Quality Group, ‘Survey of Visitors to British Archives – February 2001’, *The National Archives: Working Parties*, (2001), <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives/psqg/pdf/nationalresults2001.pdf>> (accessed 29 August 2006), Section C, p. 47.

seems to be primarily a white middle-class preoccupation?’ asked Jane Baker of Bristol. ‘Certainly in my area... I know of no ethnic groups investigating this subject’.⁵⁹ Letters following up on Baker’s remarks only affirmed this, particularly in ethnic terms.⁶⁰ We may thus proceed cautiously with the image of family historians in the period of sustained growth of record offices (developing it in this and subsequent chapters where possible) as predominantly over 50, retired and white.⁶¹

Such evidence is particularly enlightening in light of the fact that further factors, such as earlier retirements, increased longevity and cheaper travel in the post-war era must also be considered alongside (and, in the case of retirement and longevity, contribute to) the increase in affluent leisure time as historical conditions informing the post-war surge of interest in family history. As Kohli and Rein point out, the decrease in the age of exit from gainful work in all Western societies has been one of the most profound and homogenous structural changes since the 1960s. They state that ‘the period spent in retirement is expanding in both directions as a result of an early exit at the lower end and increasing life expectancy at the upper end’.⁶² In each decade of the twentieth century, fewer British men over 65 have, according to the censuses, been in gainful employment and the numbers of those in their late fifties and early sixties who regard themselves as permanently retired have increased in

⁵⁹ ‘Viewpoints’, *Family Tree Magazine*, 6(1) (November 1989), p. 3.

⁶⁰ See, for instance: ‘Letters’, *Family Tree Magazine*, 6(6) (April 1990), p. 8.

⁶¹ Indeed, the same may well be true amongst practitioners with ‘British ancestry’, as the research sociologists in the 1980s and 1990s have uncovered similar statistics. Ronald Lambert’s research of a Canadian and Australian genealogical society in 1994, for instance, found 75% of the former to be aged over 50, whilst the mean age of the latter was 63 years. 63% of the Canadian and 70% of the Australian respondents were female. Meanwhile Jacobson *et al* found the typical members of the Wisconsin State Genealogical Society in 1974 to be ‘a retired man or older woman of middle-class background’. Ronald Lambert, ‘Constructing Symbolic Ancestry: Befriending Time, Confronting Death’, *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, 46(4) (2003), p. 306; Cardell K. Jacobson, Phillip R. Kunz and Melanie W. Conlin, ‘Extended Family Ties: Genealogical Researchers’, in Stephen J. Bahr and Evan T. Peterson (eds.), *Aging and the Family* (Lexington, Mass and Toronto, 1989), p. 198. See also: P. T. Sinko and S. N. Peters, ‘A Survey of Genealogists at the Newberry Library’, *Library Trends*, 32 (1983), 97-109; W. A. N. van den Bossche, ‘Amateur Historical Inquiry in the Tracing of Ancestry: Establishing a Profile of a Genealogist’ (Unpublished MEd. Thesis. University of Melbourne, 1988).

⁶² Martin Kohli and Martin Rein, ‘The Changing Balance of Work and Retirement’, in Martin Kohli and others (eds.), *Time for Retirement: Comparative Studies of Early Exit from the Labour Force* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 1.

successive decades.⁶³ Meanwhile, life expectancy increased from 66.2 and 71.2 for a man and woman respectively in 1951 to 71.5 and 77.4 respectively in 1985 – a trend that shows no sign of abating.⁶⁴

A lengthened retirement and longer life undoubtedly provide plenty of time to spend digging through parish registers and census returns in local archives, as the demographic data above suggests. As Phillipson *et al* have pointed out in their research in Wolverhampton, Bethnal Green and Woodford, in the 1950s, ‘a generation of older people were largely unprepared for retirement’ leading to stigmatisation and social withdrawal. However by the 1990s, travel had become a significant addition to the most popular leisure activities of the retired. Indeed, in their study 44% of respondents made ‘a new phase in your life’ by far the most popular conceptualisation of retirement. In a marked contrast to the 1950s, retirement has increasingly come to be seen as an opportunity for expanding and developing social capital in more creative and active ways during the post-war era.⁶⁵ As Peter Laslett has argued, the emergence of a Third Age of ‘personal achievement’ before a Fourth Age of dependence and decrepitude ‘is only possible in retirement’.⁶⁶ Laslett also notes that those in the Third Age have increasingly come to have ‘a lively sense of the future in relation to such matters as the environment and the preservation for posterity of our cultural inheritance’. Having ‘always looked forward to a time of freedom from the trammels of the Second Age [of maturity, independence, procreation, familial and social responsibility] in order to do

⁶³ Margot Jefferys and Pat Thane, ‘Introduction: An Ageing Society and Ageing People’, in Margot Jefferys (ed.), *Growing Old in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York, 1989), p. 14; General Household Survey, *General Household Survey* (London, 1984), p. 73.

⁶⁴ Anthea Tinker, ‘Old Age and Gerontology’, in James Obelkevich and Peter Catterall (eds.), *Understanding Post-War British Society* (London and New York, 1994), p. 76; Central Statistics Office, *Social Trends*, 12 (London, 1982); Central Statistics Office, *Social Trends*, 19 (London, 1989).

⁶⁵ Chris Phillipson and others, *The Family and Community Life of Older People: Social Networks and Social Support in Three Urban Areas* (London and New York, 2001), p. 234, p. 241-44, p. 258.

⁶⁶ Whilst Laslett is uneasy about using a ‘stage-based analysis’, due to the complexity of boundaries upon closer scrutiny, he nonetheless retains it because such rigid frameworks are used by many people themselves, and thus his research could only contribute to debates surrounding the ‘Third Age’ if he were to retain the stages.

what they have always wanted to do,’ for Laslett, this new space is one of a cultural freedom that itself also has its own history and context, developing as a ‘new division in the life course’ throughout the post-war era.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, as we shall see in later chapters, the importance of the meanings that are attached to such a stage of the life cycle are just as important, if not more so.⁶⁸

A key element of such new cultural freedom is travel. The number of private motor cars in Britain increased from 2 million before the war to 9 million by the mid-1960s and almost 20 million by the mid-1990s, ‘with revolutionary consequences for the individual’s freedom to choose... how to spend leisure time’.⁶⁹ In 1990, Michael Armstrong indeed reported a *Family Tree Magazine* survey’s findings that ‘Mr and Mrs Average are members of 2.25 family history societies’ – demonstrating the national element of family history research that was enabled by an increased volume of car travel. This was similarly apparent in earlier decades as when the composition of genealogical users of the Gloucestershire Record Office, when the boom in family history use was really taking off in 1979, consisted of 71% of users from the county of Gloucestershire, but also of 11% from neighbouring counties and 13.5% from elsewhere in Britain. Clearly the availability of relatively cheap independent travel provided a key historical condition for the development of family history as a massively popular pursuit. In addition, the remaining 4.5% of users of the Gloucestershire Record Office that year were from the U.S.A. and Commonwealth, and by 1998 the proportion of international users of British archives had increased to 12%.⁷⁰ Such a significant number of overseas users would simply not have been possible before the war.

⁶⁷ Peter Laslett, *A Fresh Map of Life: The Emergence of the Third Age* (Basingstoke, 1996, second edition), p. 192-202.

⁶⁸ Indeed, as I argue in Chapter 6, they prevent the arrival at an overly deterministic portrayal of family history and genealogical interest in the later twentieth century as a ‘stage in the life cycle’.

⁶⁹ Edward Royle, ‘Trends in Post-War British Social History’, in James Obelkevich and Peter Catterall (eds.), *Understanding Post-War British Society* (London and New York, 1994), p. 12.

⁷⁰ Gloucestershire Record Office, *Annual Report of the County and Diocesan Archivist 1978-79*, p. 8; Public Services Quality Group, *Survey of Visitors to British Archives: June 1998* (London, 1998), p. 24

As Jeffrey Hill states, 'Whilst in 1946 the number of overseas visitors was less than a quarter of a million, this had risen to over 11 million by end of the 1970s'.⁷¹ As mentioned above, the jet-propelled passenger air service across the Atlantic is vitally important in this regard.⁷²

Thus, along with the deposition of records vital as family history source material in the post-war decades, increases in leisure time, affluence, longevity, length of retirement, and affordable national and international travel were historical conditions that informed the blossoming of family history. In short, these 'push' and 'pull' factors allowed family history to become easier, and because of such social changes and increased accessibility, this section has shown how important it is to consider supply side changes alongside the beginnings of the growing demand seen in record office use. Nonetheless, these factors do not simply explain the rise of family history. After all, people could have taken advantage of all of these favourable conditions to spend more time bird-watching and never so much as contemplated their ancestry. Furthermore, as Chapter 1 has demonstrated, the most startling growth of genealogical activity did not begin until the 1970s. It is to these subsequent developments, in terms of both supply and demand, and new conceptualisations of 'family history' as a whole new phase of the rise of family history and genealogy that we now turn.

The Boom: 'Family History' Societies, Archivists and a New Conceptualisation of Practice

As we have seen in the statistics presented in Chapter 1, the astonishing boom in record office use began in earnest in the 1970s. The earlier gentle increase began to accelerate as the decade progressed, resulting in as much as a tenfold increase in under a decade. By the late-1970s, a frenzy of activity was underway. Family history societies were being formed all over Britain, family history was appearing on prime-time television, 'do-it-yourself' guidebooks proliferated, and a huge amount of transcribing and indexing activity

⁷¹ Jeffrey Hill, *Sport, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 84.

⁷² Royle, 'Trends in Post-War British Social History', p. 12.

was under way within the new societies. These developments are important not only in demonstrating greater demand, however, but also because the creation of family history societies denotes the appearance of 'family history' as a separate ontological category.

A shift thus began by which family historians came to over run local archives, and which some archivists at the time saw as not necessarily 'proper' archive use. They were thus, in the first instance, somewhat taken aback by the multitude of family historians, and found themselves having to find new ways to cope with, assist and facilitate the boom through, for example, the provision of photocopying and microfilm. Unfortunately, much of the process of user and provider interaction remains obscure because ironically archivists do not routinely keep records concerning their record office use or their responses to the new demand. However, in this section I draw extensively on the records of the North Riding (later North Yorkshire) County Record Office because it is much richer than elsewhere.⁷³ Furthermore, in addition to the factors discussed in the previous section, others must be considered. The arrival of the I.G.I. and censuses on microfiche, as well as the microfilming of records, both responded to the demand and facilitated the pursuits of family historians, for instance. Crucially, however, throughout the 1970s and 1980s archivists came more and more to recognise 'family history' as a distinct and collective body, or 'user group'. The increasingly self-defined and self-conscious family history societies thus provide the key to understanding the boom, constituting a new form of activity – a public-spirited, collective activity involving indexing, listing, a particular 'society culture', and mutual help amongst practitioners which defined itself as a new category that took 'family history' beyond 'genealogy'.

⁷³ This is particularly true of the enclosures to the minutes of Museum, Library, and Archive Committee meetings, which are far more detailed than elsewhere, particularly because, as discussed below, North Yorkshire introduced charging for 'non-educational' users and thus vigorously discussed how to deal with family historians in terms of categorisation. Indeed, such reference to one particular archive must in no way be considered representative of developments elsewhere, but does at least allow us to begin to reach an understanding of how the rise of family history and genealogy occurred and was responded to in a concrete local context as enthusiasm began to boom.

In 1974, the year in which the Federation of Family History Societies was formed, the North Yorkshire County Archivist, Mr Ashcroft, began to face up to the dilemma posed by a growing number of those researching their family history by differentiating the users of his archive. In a report on the future of the Archive Service (unaware that genealogical use was to continue to grow at an even greater rate) he wrote:

The use of the Record Office has grown very considerably in recent years: Those who use the Record Office fall into two main categories:

- a. Those whose interest is primarily in a particular locality – such as the history of their house or their village;
- b. Those who need to consult original records to carry out historical studies in greater depth or to cover a wide geographical area.

The needs of those in the first category can be met most effectively in the following ways: a. ... These people should be advised to use the printed local history books available at the County Library... b. Microfilms or original records could be lent by the Record Office to selected branches of the County Library which are equipped with microfilm readers... The second category of users of the Record Office are people who are normally professionally trained and accustomed to use original records, and who spend extended periods of time studying them for the purposes of lengthy original research, whereas those in the first category are generally unfamiliar with the skills necessary for understanding such records and have much more limited, personal and private aims.⁷⁴

In other words, 'send the amateurs to the library'. Five years before the foundation of the Cleveland, North Yorkshire and South Durham Family History Society in 1979, for Ashcroft, genealogists (who are not mentioned here by name as a distinct user group, but rather remain hidden alongside local historians under the category of 'those with interest primarily in a particular locality') were in no way seen as a potential growth area of archive use. In his report, Ashcroft thus made it clear in fact that he did not want those with personal or private interests darkening his doors, let alone those without a certain level of sophistication in document handling. His aims in 1974 were, rather, to improve the clientele at the North Yorkshire Record Office.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ M.Y. Ashcroft, 'The Organisation of Archive Services in North Yorkshire: Report of the County Archivist on the Future of the County Archives Service for Consideration by the Library, Archives and Museums Committee at its Meeting on Friday 11 October 1974', *North Yorkshire County Council, Library, Archives and Museums Committee Minutes 30 May 1973-10 October 1975*, p. 287, p. 289, p. 291.

⁷⁵ Indeed, it does seem that in some respects Mr Ashcroft was successful. When the new Northallerton Library was opened by the Duchess of Kent on 1 December 1976, it led the County Librarian to remark that 'historians and students of genealogy have been delighted to be able to use microfilms of the nineteenth-century census returns in the Local Studies Library, and the room is already attracting people from well outside the

This policy of seeing genealogists as non-scholarly, non-educational users had striking implications by the late-1970s, however, particularly as the numbers of those wishing to search for their ancestry continued to multiply. In Conservative-controlled North Yorkshire, for instance, by 1978 family history had been classified as 'a pleasure and leisure pursuit of interest to individuals but of no value to the community'.⁷⁶ This meant that they became liable to charging from 1 February 1981.⁷⁷ In response to complaints Ashcroft argued that 'people who... pursue leisure activities... frequently pay for their pleasures – if they join a tennis club, go swimming, visit the cinema'.⁷⁸ Late-1990s, inclusive 'Access to Archives' policy this most definitely is not. Rather, in the 1970s, archive policies were at

Northallerton area'. 'County Librarian's Report, North Yorkshire County Council Library, Archives and Museums Committee, 23 November, 1977, *North Yorkshire County Council, Library, Archives and Museums Committee Minutes 25 May 1977-12 January 1979*, p. 146. There is no evidence that this division of labour between local studies libraries providing access to census records and archives providing access to parish registers was as such in all county record office towns, however. The arrival of new, extremely useful genealogical source material – especially the censuses and the I.G.I. – could also revolve directly around the archives, without any redirecting of such material to local studies libraries. The reason for this division of labour may simply fall upon varying attitudes of archivists and librarians, particularly in light of the fact that the more rapid growth of the 1970s was unprecedented.

⁷⁶ M.Y. Ashcroft, 'Report of the County Archivist on Accommodation of the County Record Office County Record Office, 9 May 1978', *North Yorkshire County Council, Library, Archives and Museums Committee Minutes 25 May 1977-12 January 1979*, B.8: The Choice of a New Repository, p. 407 (Enclosure 8).

⁷⁷ In February 1979, it was first decided 'to examine the scale of fees relating to the provision of search facilities for the general public with the view to making recommendations to the Policy and Resources Committee for this section of the County Record Office to be made economically viable'. Thus, as the figures of increased archive use drew their attention, seemingly Conservative councillors at North Yorkshire County Hall began to wonder whether archive use 'of no value to the community' might therefore be milked as a market. M.Y. Ashcroft, 'Charges for Provision of Search Facilities for the General Public, 22 June 1979', *North Yorkshire County Council, Library, Archives and Museums Committee Minutes 16 February 1979-27 March 1981*, p. 123-25(Enclosure 7).

⁷⁸ The History Department at the nearby University of York sent a strongly worded letter of complaint at the fees, which argued that 'the need to secure exemption from admission charges for educational purposes (and what use of local archives can *not* be educational?) seems to illustrate extremely well the unnecessary complications caused by the present policy... We continue to believe that in the long term the only proper policy for any archive office financed by rate-payers is to positively encourage the public's visits to its records... Attempts to categorise the use of archives as a 'leisure activity' positively cloud the issues... We would not therefore see the analogies with playing tennis and visiting the cinema as very helpful here'. History Department, University of York, 'Some Comments on Behalf of the History Department of the University of York on the Report Relating to Admission Charges to North Yorkshire Archives, January 1982', *North Yorkshire County Council, Library, Archives and Museums Committee Minutes 28 May 1981-25 March 1983*, p. 223. On the introduction of charging at North Yorkshire, see: M. Y. Ashcroft, 'Report of the County Archivist on Certain Aspects of the Staffing of the County Record Office, 17 November 1978', *North Yorkshire County Council, Policy and Resources Committee, Personnel Sub-Committee Minutes, 25 September 1978-11 June 1979*, p. 537; M.Y. Ashcroft, 'Review of Charges: Archive Service, 9 January 1981', *North Yorkshire County Council, Library, Archives and Museums Committee Minutes 16 February 1979-27 March 1981*, p. 487 (Enclosure 5a).

once surprised by, struggling to cope with, and sometimes dismissive of, family historians. The introduction of charging was in no way representative of local government and archive responses throughout Britain, however, and the important point demonstrated by the North Yorkshire case is, rather, that archive responses to the growth of family history had a tendency to be *ad hoc*.⁷⁹ Others no doubt viewed family history as a problem to be managed (hence the shift to microfilm), whilst yet others viewed the societies as a political ally to raise money for the archives.

Archivists were thus forced to find new ways to cope with and assist the boom.

Before the introduction of charging, for example, in 1978 Ashcroft began to become concerned with staffing levels, the organisation of staff and archive accommodation that was beginning to prove inadequate. 'The existing record office accommodation... is too small,' he complained, adding that 'the deployment of staff in the record office is necessarily inefficient'.⁸⁰ The following year, as demand continued to grow in the aftermath of the screening of Alex Haley's *Roots* (discussed in detail in Chapter 4 below), this situation reached crisis point in North Yorkshire and the decision was taken in May 1978 to close the public search room for three days a week to prevent 'cut-backs in basic archival work'.⁸¹ This, unsurprisingly, produced a torrent of complaints from family historians that led to the prompt reopening of the search room. Makeshift measures were put in place, as 'until a full-time search room supervisor is appointed, archivists have to be diverted from more urgent

⁷⁹ In what was a staunchly Conservative council, Thatcherite cutbacks on local government spending seem to have had greater repercussions with regard to making family historians pay than in more urban, Labour-held contexts. Only in rural record offices at Devon and Gloucestershire were charges similarly introduced. Pressure from the County Council's Policy and Resources Committee as to the 'economic viability' thus played an important role in the introduction of charging.

⁸⁰ The archive's storage accommodation at this time was split between four separate locations in Northallerton County Hall, Northallerton Court House, and the east wing of an old workhouse at Ripon. See: M.Y. Ashcroft, Report of the County Archivist on Accommodation of the County Record Office County Record Office, 9 May 1978', *North Yorkshire County Council, Library, Archives and Museums Committee Minutes 25 May 1977-12 January 1979*, A.3: Location of archive storage accommodation, p. 391(Enclosure 8).

⁸¹ 'Libraries, Archives and Museums Committee, 'County Record Office – Provision of an archives service', *North Yorkshire County Council, Library, Archives and Museums Committee Minutes 25 May 1977-12 January 1979*, 4: Present Policy, p. 314, p. 316.

duties to deal with the public'.⁸² Family historians were thus forced to be made a priority, despite the view of them as leisure users in a conciliatory plan of muddling-through.⁸³ As Chris Webb has pointed out: 'With virtually no standards to go by, employers and archivists have invariably adopted a user-led approach to improvements in record office facilities' in light of 'the enormous growth of interest in genealogy'.⁸⁴

These *ad hoc* responses also involved the provision of different services (such as photocopying), different forms to facilitate the consultation of records (such as microfilm), and newly available source material (such as the I.G.I. and census returns). Cornwall, for instance, saw a 40% increase in users in the 'Roots year' of 1977 alone, and yet no charges were introduced for the production of documents. Instead, it was decided that 'a charge be made of 50p per reel of microfilm made available to searchers [and] the existing photocopying charge be increased from 8p... to 15p per sheet... from the 1st November 1979'.⁸⁵ New search room assistants to help the influx of family historians were thus partly funded by both microfilm and photocopying income, which generated £1,100 and £1,500 a

⁸² 'Libraries, Archives and Museums Committee, 'County Record Office – Provision of an archives service', *North Yorkshire County Council, Library, Archives and Museums Committee Minutes 25 May 1977-12 January 1979*, p. 316.

⁸³ Indeed, a further report made by Mr Ashcroft in May 1978 regarding record office accommodation acknowledged for the first time the problem that 'increasing use of the records...have modified the needs of the record office', concluding that 'accommodation for consultation...[is] inadequate or insufficiently organised'. It seems that large numbers of family historians were spending mornings seeking seemingly trivial references, requiring a lot of staff time to do so, and then simply wanting a photocopy of their find. This was thus leading to a strain on those responsible for providing these services and offending their definitions of appropriate archival work. M.Y. Ashcroft, 'Report of the County Archivist on accommodation of the County Record Office County Record Office, 9 May 1978', *North Yorkshire County Council, Library, Archives and Museums Committee Minutes 25 May 1977-12 January 1979*, A.10: Accommodation for staff and public and official consultation and related purposes, p. 401; A.13: Conclusions, p. 403 (Enclosure 8).

⁸⁴ Webb, 'Archive Services in England since 1945', p. 66-68.

⁸⁵ 'Records Committee Minutes for a Meeting of the County Records Committee held at the County Hall, Truro on the 25th September 1979', *Records Committee Minutes Book 1970-89*, p. L13. Similar charges were also introduced in north Yorkshire in 1980. Xerox photocopying of genealogical documents also saw a price rise to 10p per sheet, as did the cost of copies taken from microfilm, and a minimum charge was introduced for all copying, in light of the 'disproportionate cost of staff time spent in making small numbers of copies...[and] to meet the unavoidable rising costs of processing and staff time'. M.Y. Ashcroft, 'Report of the County Archivist, Review of Charges: Archive Service, 4 January 1980', *North Yorkshire County Council, Library, Archives and Museums Committee Minutes 16 February 1979-27 March 1981*, p. 263-64 (Enclosure 6).

year respectively by 1986.⁸⁶ Similarly, before the opening of the local studies library, the North Yorkshire Library, Archives and Museums Committee had decided in 1973 that ‘the Record Office provide a photocopying service on the basis that the purchase price of copies should cover the cost of time and materials’, and ‘included a sum in this year’s draft estimates for the purchase of microfilm equipment’.⁸⁷ To read between the lines, excessive wear and tear of parish registers led to a make-shift system of photocopying the documents, itself only a short term solution to generate funds to buy microfilming equipment to put a permanent distance between family historians and original documents. First photocopying, then, microfilm thus came to dominate the statistics relating to document use at North Yorkshire throughout the 1970s and 1980s.⁸⁸ Newcomers to family history research were consequently less and less likely to begin by examining either original documents, or documents without indexes. By 1985 Ashcroft remarked that: ‘Information consulted is almost entirely in the form of microfilms, abstracts and transcripts of original documents. During the year a self service system was introduced for microfilms used by visitors in the search room’. The subsequent ‘reduction in staff and the abolition of admission charges to

⁸⁶ ‘Records Committee Minutes for a Meeting of the County Records Committee held at the County Hall, Truro on the 20th January 1986’, *Records Committee Minutes Book 1970-89*, p. J4. Other significant income to prevent the introduction of entry fees came from absentee search fees (£1,168) and sales of lists and guide books (£1,200) that year.

⁸⁷ ‘The Report of the Library, Archives and Museums Committee, 6 December 1973’, *Meeting of the North Yorkshire County Council, 30 April, 1973: Report of the Committee for the County of North Yorkshire*, p. 117. The minutes of the same meeting went on to point out that such microfilming would ‘improve accessibility to records, particularly those of a bulky nature, and make it possible for copies to be examined at a distance from the record office’.

⁸⁸ In 1978, 5,724 original documents were issued, alongside 1,140 microfilms. M. Y. Ashcroft, ‘Report of the County Archivist for 1978, 16 February 1979’, *North Yorkshire County Council, Library, Archives and Museums Committee Minutes 16 February 1979-27 March 1981*, p. 58 (Enclosure 10). By 1983, however, only 3,240 original documents were issued (6,160 less than the 9,400 issued the previous year), whilst 4,007 reels of microfilm were issued (over 1,000 more than the previous year). M. Y. Ashcroft, ‘Annual Report of the County Archivist for 1983, 25 March 1984’, *North Yorkshire County Council, Library, Archives and Museums Committee Minutes 17 June 1983-22 March 1985*, p. 211 (Enclosure 7). By 1984, the number of original documents issued to the public was only 1,466. M. Y. Ashcroft, ‘Annual Report of the County Archivist for 1984, 22 March 1985’, *North Yorkshire County Council, Library, Archives and Museums Committee Minutes 17 June 1983-22 March 1985*, p. 409 (Enclosure 7). It must be remembered, of course, that these figures relate to *all* documents issued – not just documents issued to family historians – although evidently microfilm use was dominated by family historians from the start.

the record office' demonstrate the extent to which family historians had come to both dominate the archive use, and to transform its practices.⁸⁹

Particularly important in the transformation of practices of family history research were the availability of new source material, such as the International Genealogical Index, a systematic index of births/baptisms and marriages covering most of the world, compiled by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the Mormons). The amassing of genealogical data by the Mormons is based upon the motivation of retrospective conversion - rendering deceased relatives eligible for temple rites and thus elevation to the higher levels of the afterlife which would otherwise be closed to them - and, from 1938, they set about gathering primary data from Britain and all over the world.⁹⁰ This became available to local record offices and libraries during the 1970s, often donated in exchange for Mormon use of the records in earlier decades. A copy of the I.G.I. was donated, for instance, to Gloucestershire in 1970.⁹¹ Significantly, this resource (described by Raphael Samuel as a 'bizarre databank... of dead souls which is the first point of call for those in search of lost ancestors')⁹² was, by its nature, already indexed, and thus provided further impetus to the shift towards indexed records, microfilm and mass family history research. Crucially, in the 1970s this first port of call provided a far more convenient locally available alternative to travelling to Somerset House to search civil registration records, although the British entries only stretched as far back as 1885.

⁸⁹ M. Y. Ashcroft, 'Annual Report of the County Archivist for 1985, 21 March 1986', *North Yorkshire County Council, Library, Archives and Museums Committee Minutes 22 May 1985-5 June 1987*, p. 290, p. 293 (Enclosure 7).

⁹⁰ Mark P. Leone, *Roots of Modern Mormonism* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1979), p. 195; Alex Shoumatoff, *The Mountain of Names: A History of the Human Family* (New York and London), p. 250-93; Hey, *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History*, p. 237, p. 173; Archibald F. Bennett, 'The Record Copying Program of the Utah Genealogical Society', *The American Archivist*, 16(3) (July 1953), 227-232.

⁹¹ Gloucestershire County Council, *Report: Gloucestershire Records Office 1970-1971*, p. 5.

⁹² Samuel, *Theatres of Memory. Volume 1*, p. 27.

The other key documents to become more widely available in the 1970s were the censuses. As late as 1969, census returns could still only be consulted at the P.R.O.⁹³ and it was only in 1971 (a year after it received the I.G.I.) that the Gloucestershire Record Office ordered a microfilmed copy of the 1851 census returns for the county, albeit as yet without an index.⁹⁴ By 1980 most county record offices and reference libraries held copies for their own locality.⁹⁵ These two sources thus provided yet further supply-side thrust to drive interest to even greater heights as, unlike parish registers, they provided data regarding ancestors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As their availability coincided with the beginning of a more dramatic increase in demand, this suggests that perhaps the immediacy of nuggets of information regarding a relative that lived, say, 150 years ago were of real importance to practitioners, and thus provide an easily accessible way for them to bridge the gap to the more distant centuries contained in parish registers.

However, as in the case of parish registers in previous decades, the acquisition of these sources and the microfilming of records was not purely a response to demand. Whilst helping us to understand the factors which partly responded to the new demand, but also partly helped to facilitate the research of those interested, they do not thereby 'explain it'. Indeed, record offices generally began microfilming their records in the 1960s and 1970s in Britain,⁹⁶ often pre-dating the acceleration of archive use. Furthermore, before they did so, the Mormons had often already provided microfilmed parish registers and wills, as well as the I.G.I. For instance, at Cornwall, the County Records Committee were approached by the Mormons for permission to film probate administration bonds for 1715-1829 in 1958, and

⁹³ Arthur J. Willis, *Genealogy for Beginners* (London, 1969, second edition), p. 57; G. Hamilton-Edwards, *In Search of Ancestry* (London, 1966), p. 38.

⁹⁴ Gloucestershire County Council, *Report: Gloucestershire Records Office 1971-1972*, p. 8.

⁹⁵ Don J. Steel, *Discovering your Family History* (London, 1980), p. 16.

⁹⁶ Microfilming of records in Britain, Australia and elsewhere in Europe apparently occurred a decade behind America and Sweden, who began using this new technology as early as the 1950s. See: D. Harland, *A Basic Course in Genealogy. Volume II: Research Procedure and Evaluation of Evidence* (Salt Lake City, Utah, 1958), p. 373.

resolved 'that permission be granted for the filming of the probate administration bonds with the request that, with the copy of this film, a copy...also be deposited at the County Record Office'.⁹⁷ By 1964, after the donation of Mormon filmed reels, it was decided 'that it would be desirable for a microfilm reader to be provided for copying records... [as this was] the cheapest method of copying',⁹⁸ and in 1969 – two years before Gloucestershire – the record office began purchasing censuses from the Public Records Office. With only a more limited genealogical use of archives at this time, it seems that in the retaining of a copy of the Mormon filmed bonds, in investing in a microfilm reader and in purchasing census returns, record offices were chiefly attempting to make economically prudent decisions in the acquisition of records available in a form that for the first time facilitated their local availability (as well as for conservation reasons, as in case of fire). Indeed, as we have seen, before the formation of family history societies archivists were by no means necessarily enthusiastic about the presence of too many family historians. Thus, for example, when the P.R.O. filmed census returns became available in the late-1960s, Cornwall County Record Office initially purchased only the 1841 returns (at £80), leaving the 1851 and 1861 returns (£175 each) for possible purchase in later years.⁹⁹ No rampant genealogical demand seems to have provoked this supply side change.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ 'County Records Committee Minutes for a Meeting of the County Records Committee held at the County Hall, Truro on the 3rd April 1958', *County Records Committee Minutes 1958-63*, p. 1.

⁹⁸ 'County Records Committee Minutes for a Meeting of the County Records Committee held at the County Hall, Truro on the 14th May 1964', *County Records Committee Minutes 1964-69*, p. 1.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ As demand continued to increase through the 1980s, 1990s and into the twenty-first century, however, more microfilmed censuses became available as the one hundred year privacy rule ceased to apply to more and more returns. The release of the 1881 and 1891 censuses was accompanied by a sense of excitement that simply was not present in 1951, 1961, and 1971 because of the fact that copies were not yet available locally or on microfilm and were only open for public inspection at Somerset House. By the early-1990s, indexes to search civil registration records even became available through local record offices and libraries for the first time, providing even easier access to records. See: Hey, *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History*, p. 95; David Hey, *Family History and Local History in England* (London and New York, 1987), p. 124.

Again, the key point is that developments were improvised by archivists as they came increasingly to recognise 'family history' as a distinct 'user group'. For instance, at the Gloucestershire record office, in 1973 the sole microfilm reader was given its own room. By 1977 – coinciding with *Roots* – this proved inadequate and a search room specialising in family history research was opened, stocked with new microfilm reader-printers on open-access shelving, permanently ending the use of many original documents by family historians eight years before North Yorkshire did so in 1985. In 1983 the record office began its own microfilming programme, the original microfilm readers were worn out by excessive use and were replaced, and by 1987 the record office had fourteen microfilm and the newer microfiche reader-printers.¹⁰¹

Much more important than the shifts in archivists' attitudes and conceptualisations, the availability of new sources, services and forms of record consultation, however, is that family historians themselves increasingly became a self-defined and self-conscious group in the late-1970s and 1980s. Indeed, the formation of 'family history' societies provides the key to understanding the astonishing boom in ancestral research – a boom with which the older national 'genealogical' societies simply could not cope. Upon taking up his post as Director of the S.O.G. in 1979, for example, Anthony Camp was becoming overwhelmed by the number of new members (see Figure 2 above). 'The Society itself cannot cope with a general education of all these people [in genealogical methods] – a hundred or so, you will remember, are being elected every month', he remarked.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Gloucestershire County Council, *Report: Gloucestershire Records Office 1974-1975*, p. 11. Subsequent reports: 1976-1977, p. 1; 1977-1978, p. 10; 1978-1979, p. 9; 1982-1983, p. 4; 1984-1985, p. 1; 1986-1987, p. 8. At Cornwall the microfilming of records was an ongoing process, far from complete in 1987, when concern still existed that original documents were being overused and a further microfilming programme by the Mormons got under way. 'Records Committee Minutes for a Meeting of the County Records Committee held at the County Hall, Truro on the 8th June 1987', *Records Committee Minutes Book 1970-89*, p. J9. As late as 1998, a national survey reported that 62% of all visitors to British archives used microfilm, not original documents, and that there was constant pressure on microfilm facilities which were still identified as a 'resource pressure point'. Public Services Quality Group, *Survey of Visitors to British Archives June 1998* (London, 1998), p. 18.

¹⁰² Camp, 'The Society in a Changing World', p. 385.

As Stan Newens noted at the time, the family history societies that sprang up certainly could cope with the multitudes of beginners swamping record offices and the S.O.G., however. 'Their meetings are often packed,' Newens observed in 1981, and their 'membership is expanding on a scale which will dwarf other historical societies'.¹⁰³ The reason for their success (and the inadequacy of the S.O.G.) was principally because the movement's ethos was one of both self-help and co-operation. Having formed the Essex Society for Family History in 1974, for instance, John Rayment presented a talk entitled 'The Functions of a Family History Society' at the inaugural meetings of the five Greater London family history societies in 1978. 'During the last century or so, genealogical researchers have tended to "beaver" away on their own,' Rayment noted in his talk, providing a sharp contrast with 'the prime function of the family history society. Communication... We all have some information, we all want more. Someone else in our society, in another society, or elsewhere, may have it, or may know where it can be obtained. We can therefore help each other'.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, many societies – such as the Ipswich branch of the Suffolk Family History Society, formed in 1981 – mushroomed after beginning with a few people (in this case, four) 'meeting to talk family history over a cup of coffee'.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, the decision to join a family history society was frequently, as in the case of William Burbidge of the

¹⁰³ Stan Newens, 'Family History Societies', *History Workshop Journal*, 11 (Spring 1981), p. 154-55.

¹⁰⁴ John Rayment, 'The Functions of a Family History Society', *Family Tree Magazine*, 5(3) (January 1989), p. 11. This is also vital to the forming of the connections between family history societies and the establishment of the F.F.H.S. The Rossendale Family History Society grew from its local interest in Rossendale in 1973, to link up with similar groups at Bury and Rowenstall in the first instance, then at Blackburn, Blackpool, Bury, Colne, Morecambe, Preston, Rawtenstall and Rochdale. This culminated in its renaming as the Lancashire Family History and Heraldry Society in 1985. 'Guest Society: For Rossendale Read Lancashire', *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(3) (March-April 1985), p. 15.

¹⁰⁵ 'Guest Society: The Ipswich Branch of the Suffolk Family History Society', *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(2) (January-February 1985), p. 20-21. For the similar development of the New Zealand Society of Genealogists, which began as a local society in a suburb of Auckland in the late 1960s, see: V. E. Mossong, 'The New Zealand Society of Genealogists Inc. – A Study in Organisation and Co-operation', in B. R. Blaze (ed.), *Genealogy in a Changing Society: Proceedings of the First Australasian Congress on Genealogy and Heraldry, Melbourne, Easter 1977* (Oakleigh, 1980), 174-182. As in Britain, heraldic connotations fell out of favour in New Zealand the mid-1970s.

B.M.S.G.H. in 1974, something to do when 'stuck', as through the society Burbidge enthused, 'I obtained much help'.¹⁰⁶

This ethos of both going it alone and providing mutual assistance had a number of consequences. So too did this new activity's 'content' of enabling others to reach an ever greater knowledge of their ancestors. For one thing, the family history movement constituted the institutionalisation of earlier tendencies towards the democratisation of genealogy.¹⁰⁷

Pioneers of a search for 'humble pedigrees', such as Willis, pursued a practice termed 'genealogy' by rummaging in church vaults and searching high and low for disparate source material had been similarly motivated by a newly democratised understanding of genealogy. However, by the late-1970s their old terminology of 'pedigree hunting' was becoming utterly obsolete. The 'history' of his 'family' was what drove Alex Haley, for instance, as his genealogical drama *Roots* stated clearly and emotively that family histories could be recovered in the most incredible of circumstances.¹⁰⁸ This message played a vital role in the acceleration of interest and swelling of the family history societies from the late-1970s.

Among the respondents to a *Family Tree Magazine* survey almost ten years after its broadcast, *Roots* was still one of the most popular reasons cited for taking up an enthusiasm in family history.¹⁰⁹ Thus, Rayment could proclaim in his inauguration address at the London societies that 'genealogy and heraldry were closely involved with social levels – the maintenance and elevation of one's station,' whereas for the new 'family historians' this was

¹⁰⁶ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 121.

¹⁰⁷ For an interesting perspective on this democratisation in relation to Victorian and Edwardian genealogy, see: Simon Fowler, 'Our Genealogical Forebears', *History Today*, 51(3) (March 2001), p. 42-43.

¹⁰⁸ Haley himself, however, was not a promoter of family history societies as such. He wrote, rather, from an African American cultural context. Thus, a closer reading on *Roots*, the resonances of its message outside an African-American cultural context, and its reception in Britain is vital to further understand this previously undocumented disjuncture and is the subject of Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁹ 'Our Questions... Your Answers', *Family Tree Magazine*, 2(5) (July-August 1986), p. 5. It is not unreasonable to thus correlate these responses in a family history magazine to family history societies. As we have seen above, the average *Family Tree* reader belonged to at least two societies. Stan Newens, in 1981 has also noted the link between *Roots* and the growth of family history societies. Newens, 'Family History Societies', p. 155-56.

definitively no longer the case. ‘We are now living in an age of equal opportunity, when, “Jack’s as good as his master,”’ he went on.¹¹⁰

The cultural shift whereby ‘to know’ one’s genealogy itself provided a cultural legitimacy that was once solely the preserve of the upper crust thus bore fruit in the family history societies. As such, local societies like the B.M.S.G.H. that were formed in the 1960s – before the self-consciously defined ‘family history’ movement – experienced a process of redefinition. It was not until the mid-1970s that the Birmingham Society began to reflect upon its naming, and then President, Lt. Col. Iain Swinnerton, remarked that much of the practice of the society had moved away from what had become perceived as the narrow stringing together of names and dates which had become synonymous with ‘genealogies’ and ‘pedigrees’. The members of the society interested in heraldry similarly became isolated and few.¹¹¹ Instead, Swinnerton pointed out that members had increasingly ‘gone into the background of the people concerned and found out what sort of people they were, where they lived and how they earned their living’. The origins of the Federation of Family History Societies – of which Swinnerton was the first President – can thus be detected in this development in the Birmingham Society, by which Swinnerton could proclaim, in 1974 that: ‘This is what genealogy is all about – Family History’.¹¹²

A further crucial development of the family history society movement, in terms of practice, then, was the urge to ‘deepen’ genealogies with biographical detail. Rayment could already observe in 1978 that ‘as societies grow, their members develop a new corpus of knowledge, based upon their own family findings’. This concerned not only the quantity of

¹¹⁰ Rayment, ‘The Functions of a Family History Society’, p. 11. The adoption of the language of equal opportunities is strikingly less familiar in the 1970s. Interestingly, for Rayment, this social flattening had also led to a decline in family values. The relationship of family history and family values is explored thoroughly in Chapter 5.

¹¹¹ See, for instance, Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 40, 98.

¹¹² Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, p. iii. On Swinnerton’s career, see: ‘Man at Top of the “Tree”’, *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(2) (January-February 1985), p. 8.

relatives, but historical detail about them. 'We should take off our blinkers, so to speak, and start to look around... Before we do so it is as if, having compiled our lists of names and dates, we are confronted by a silhouette... This does not satisfy the true family historian. He has to discover the person off duty, sleeves up, hair awry, working in the house, in the fields, the factory, the sweatshop, the office'.¹¹³ Thus, the BBC followed up on the viewing success of *Roots*, the continued growth of record office use and the rise of the family history societies with its five-programme BBC2 series entitled *Discovering your Family History* in 1980. It was presented by former news reader Gordon Honeycombe, who traced his own family history as an example to inform and enthuse viewers to do the same, and explicitly stated at the outset, in rather academic tones, that 'the main emphasis [is] placed on setting ancestors in their full social and local historical context'.¹¹⁴

This new categorisation of 'family history' thus entailed entirely new directions of research and could involve going to greater lengths in order to uncover details of an ancestor's life. It also developed a 'society culture' at which such research might be discussed, assisted and inspired. Lost relatives who met through the societies became research companions, heirloom, cheese and wine, discussion and costume evenings were held, and day trips were made to London to search for source material.¹¹⁵ Indeed, the family history societies that formed in the late-1970s and early-1980s were founded, as in the case of the Cleveland, North Yorkshire and South Durham Family History Society in 1979 with the expressed aim to 'promote the study of genealogy and family history and to educate the

¹¹³ Rayment, 'The Functions of a Family History Society', p. 10-11.

¹¹⁴ Don Steel, *Discovering your Family History* (London, 1980), p. 7. Steel's book was the companion volume to the TV series.

¹¹⁵ See, for instance: Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Journal*, 28 (February 1973), p.26; Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 89; 'Guest Society: For Rossendale Read Lancashire', *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(3) (March-April 1985), p. 15; Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 47.

public therein by holding meetings, sharing information, encouraging research, giving assistance, and producing publications for the public benefit'.¹¹⁶

This public-spiritedness and collective activity of family historians also completely transformed the preliminary 'genealogical' stage of compiling a family tree. As we have seen, by the mid-1980s, the shift to microfilm was well under way; however, alongside it family historians laboured to produce indexes and lists of records to facilitate a more rapid discovery of forebears. The local, grassroots nature of family history societies facilitated this as the shared realisation that searching through censuses and parish registers without indexes could be rather a thankless task dawned upon practitioners (with a greater amount of leisure time on their hands) up and down the country. Such projects could begin initially on quite a small scale. In York, for instance, transcriptions of parish registers in the city began to be completed after the York and District Family History Society was formed in 1975. Margaret Smith had completed transcribing the parish registers of St Martin for Coney Street, York from 1813-37 by 1978 – providing one of the first examples of such 'family history society' publishing for Yorkshire.¹¹⁷ By 1979, the births of the parish registers of St Giles, Copmanthorpe for 1759-1837 had similarly been transcribed,¹¹⁸ and in 1980, the East Yorkshire Family History Society (founded in 1977) got in on the act publishing transcriptions of the marriages of Holmpton, 1739-1837 and Skipsea, 1750-1837.¹¹⁹ The first

¹¹⁶ Cleveland Family History Society, 'Aims of the Society', *Cleveland Family History Society*, (June 2006), <<http://www.clevelandfhs.org.uk>> (accessed 13 July 2006).

¹¹⁷ St Martin (York), *The Parish Registers of St Martin, Coney Street, York, 1813-1837; transcribed by Margaret E. Smith* (York, 1978). This concern with the wear and tear of parish registers certainly coincides with the focus on parish registers (and concerns of archivists such as Ashcroft) in the first decades of the new democratic interest. See also: Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 34, 76 etc.

¹¹⁸ St Giles (Copmanthorpe), *The Parish Registers of St Giles, Copmanthorpe, York, 1759-1837; transcribed by John Harbidge* (York, 1979). See also: Holy Trinity Church (King's Court, York), *The Parish Registers of Holy Trinity, King's Court, York, 1813-1837; transcribed by the York Family History Society, 1975-1976* (York, 1979). This work complemented the earlier activities of the Yorkshire Parish Register Society.

¹¹⁹ *Holmpton: Marriages 1739-1837; transcribed by P.M. Pattinson* (Cottingham, 1980); *Skipsea Marriages 1750-1837; transcribed by P.M. Pattinson* (Cottingham, 1980).

census indexes did not appear in Yorkshire until the early 1980s when the Doncaster Society for Family History began to publish its indexes to the 1851 census.¹²⁰ In the case of both transcriptions and indexes, however, labours continued throughout the 1980s, thus making consultation of records gradually easier at a time when more and more people decided to begin to explore such records. Census indexes, being more extensive, took longer to complete – the full index for the 1851 census for Leeds was finished, for instance, in 1986.¹²¹ This work has continued throughout subsequent decades, remaining an ongoing task for the ‘hidden hands’ of family history society members, although some seem to have been more enthusiastic about this than others. ‘We are transcribing and indexing the 1851 census returns, some members doing their bit at home on their own microfilm readers’ announced the Lancashire Society in 1985.¹²² ‘I’ll bet a fiver... that every Family History Society with a programme of transcribing from parish registers and census returns would welcome more volunteers to help with the work’ wrote Michael Banister in *Family Tree* in 1990.¹²³ The diversity of such voluntary activity and the extent to which family historians would develop their enthusiasm thus highlights the ambiguous status of family historians, which is discussed fully in Chapter 3.

Practically speaking, both these public-spirited labours and self-definition of the new ‘family historians’ were vital in their recognition by archivists in the late-1970s and 1980s. In some cases the family historians kept record offices open. In North Yorkshire, for instance, Mr Ashcroft came increasingly to recognise family historians as a distinct ‘user group’, and began to talk to the new family history societies to attempt to keep the archives

¹²⁰ See, for instance: Doncaster Society for Family History, in conjunction with Doncaster M.B.C., *Index to 1851 Census, Vol. 3: Askern, Sutton, Owston, Skellow and Carcroft* (Doncaster, 1982); Doncaster Society for Family History, in conjunction with Doncaster M.B.C., *Index to 1851 Census, Vol. 7: Bentley-with Arsky* (Doncaster, 1983).

¹²¹ Yorkshire Archaeological Society: Family History and Population Studies Section, *Leeds 1851 Census Index, Vol. 1* (Leeds, 1986).

¹²² ‘Guest Society: For Rossendale Read Lancashire’, *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(3) (March-April 1985), p. 15.

¹²³ Michael Banister, ‘Why Not Be A Transcriber?’, *Family Tree Magazine*, 6(8) (June 1990), p. 40.

viable. The North Riding Libraries, Archives and Museums Committee Working Party (led by Ashcroft) exempted both 'volunteers' and those 'approved by the Committee' from charges. As such, family history society members indexing parish registers or working for the benefit of other family historians (much in the style of Percival Boyd) now came to be classified as welcome help to the Record Office.¹²⁴

The emergence of 'family history' as both a self-defined and self-conscious group in the family history societies thus provides a key to understanding the boom of the late-1970s and 1980s. Archivists simply could not ignore what they came to see as their main 'user group'; furthermore, family historians transformed the content of searching for ancestry both conceptually and practically by institutionalising it as a democratic, public-spirited pursuit with its own society culture. Family historians increasingly came to seek historical detail regarding the lives of their forebears and to 'know' one's family history became a mass pursuit which anyone could follow for themselves and yet for which a range of help became available from fellow enthusiasts. In terms of both index use (e.g. the I.G.I.) and index making, in the interplay between family history societies and archivists, and in the conceptualisation of the practice of 'family history' by both, this presents a new stage, a historical disjuncture, that is ontologically & socially distinct, and makes an account of the development of a uniform 'thing' called genealogy inadequate.

¹²⁴ W. E. Lockwood, 'Report of the Working Party, 9 January 1981', *North Yorkshire County Council, Library, Archives and Museums Committee Minutes 16 February 1979-27 March 1981*, p. 541 (Enclosure 8); Interestingly, throughout this period of charging, the number of those classified as 'volunteers' in archive use statistics (as distinct from 'genealogists') and thus exempt from charging was quite striking. The activities of such 'volunteers' in 1982 are noted as indexing censuses for 12 locales, transcribing 5 new parish registers, and donating 10 sets of complete monumental inscriptions. In 1982 there were 210 exempt 'volunteers' to 1,111 paying genealogists using the archive – almost 1 in 5 of users thus contributing to activities deemed for 'community use' by Ashcroft. This demonstrates quite a significant difference in terms of practice, again demonstrating the concept of a unitary family history phenomenon is too simplistic. Furthermore, the archive's embracing of such help is evident in that, alongside this voluntary activity, archive staff similarly laboured at parish register transcription and microfilming. More of the latter was in evidence, however, as the shift to microfilm gathered pace – with 25 Anglican and 3 Methodist parish registers microfilmed, along with 9 churchwarden's accounts in 1982, for example. M. Y. Ashcroft, 'Annual Report of the County Archivist for 1982, 25 March 1983', *North Yorkshire County Council, Library, Archives and Museums Committee Minutes 28 May 1981-25 March 1983*, p. 543, p. 541, p. 545 (Enclosure 6).

The increasing ease of accessing records did not, then, imply that a uniform practice similarly 'increased'. Rather, with the arrival of microfilm and family history societies, a proliferation of access routes emerged that was partly driven by the efforts of transcribers, indexers and an ever more organised family history community, and yet partly permitted by the technological shifts in practice which they made use of. Similarly, the subsequent technological development of 'internet genealogy', with its many family history websites and search facilities, genealogical newsgroups and online communities also did not appear from out of thin air. Nor did it simplistically 'produce' the genealogical interest of the twenty-first century. Rather, it simply added to the proliferation of access routes into ancestral research that was already in evidence from the boom of the late-1970s. The use of computers by family historians and genealogists in fact predated the internet by some time and could coincide easily with indexing projects. In 1985, for instance, the Ipswich branch of the Suffolk Family History Society began working on a project indexing the 1851 census for Ipswich and 'putting it on computer'.¹²⁵

Indeed, there is a long nuanced relationship between family historians and computers. The Society of Genealogists, for example, introduced their magazine *Computers in Genealogy* in 1986 at a time when those few family historians that could afford computers in Britain were using BBC systems simply to record their data. The progression for those eager to use such machines in the 1980s was from typewriters, to electronic typewriters and word processors, to BBC computers. This presents us with another distinct form of practice, therefore, as inputting data onto computers involved the arrangement of information from sources in a new way. Only with the advent of the internet, however, would computers provide both a source of information (accessed online) and the site for the input and

¹²⁵ 'Guest Society: The Ipswich Branch of the Suffolk Family History Society', *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(2) (January-February 1985), p. 20-21.

presentation of data found elsewhere. In the 1980s, and for most of the 1990s, these two elements of practice remained quite distinct.

Indeed, throughout the 1980s the recording of data by family historians, the products of family history research and the practices undertaken all varied considerably in light of the technological developments that came and went. In any case, equipment other than pencil and paper remained relatively expensive throughout the decade. In 1982, for instance, Ian Templeton enthused in his guidebook that 'several modern electronic typewriters incorporate justification along with pitch changes and typeface changeability,' however 'these new machines are rather expensive, around £1,500 new, or half that second-hand. They can be hired at about £15-£20 a week plus the cost of ribbons... Stencil duplication is the cheapest way of reproducing your family history'.¹²⁶ Only with the advent of the personal computer did costs gradually decrease, and in the late 1980s the emphasis shifted away from stencilling or typing a family history as software became available that could automatically convert names, births, marriages and deaths into a family tree. In 1988 a survey in *Computers in Genealogy* revealed that more family historians were using PCs than BBC machines and there were already 18 genealogy software programs available in the UK. These varied from *Progen* – 'a single family database' for Spectrum computers, costing £7.50 – to *Roots II* – 'a comprehensive database with family links...[that] produces charts', on the new PCs and costing £193.¹²⁷

By no means all family historians used computers in this period, however. Many found them baffling and an unnecessary expense at a time when the sharing of genealogical

¹²⁶ Ian Templeton, *Biographics: Publish Family History, Inexpensive Ways to Do It Yourself* (Canterbury, 1982), p. 79, p. 82.

¹²⁷ L. Race, 'Computers in Genealogy 1988 Survey Results', *Computers in Genealogy*, 3 (2) (December 1988), p. 37. Moreover, such data entry programs – in producing family trees charts did not initially provide scope for the addition of biographical detail, facilitating what I call in Chapter 5 a more 'genealogical' approach to ancestry.



Figure 8.
Members of Suffolk Family History Society are shown
the use of computers for family history, 1984.¹²⁸

information and the offering of advice was conducted mostly through family history society networks and print media. With the arrival of internet newsgroups, however, the creation of broader, international genealogical networks at the click of a mouse became possible for the first time. As Kylie Veale has written: 'with the advent of the internet, an opportunity for genealogists to broaden their community involvement occurred, allowing them to instantly conduct their enquiries and research far beyond their immediate localities', in so doing moving beyond pre-existing forums which were, as Veale puts it, 'often time-consuming and slow'.¹²⁹ There was to be no overnight revolution, however, in such international mutual assistance. In 1988, the *Computers in Genealogy* survey reported that 'on the subject of

¹²⁸ 'Guest Society: The Ipswich Branch of the Suffolk Family History Society', *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(2) (January-February 1985), p. 20

¹²⁹ Kylie Veale, 'Discussing our Family Trees: A Longitudinal Analysis of Online, Community-Based Communication in Genealogical Newsgroups', *Interface: The Journal for Education, Community and Values*, 4 (2004).

communications and a possible bulletin board service to be operated by the Society, surprisingly not all modern owners were interested. The greatest drawback is naturally concerned with the cost of connect time'.¹³⁰ Thus, as with the growth of microfilm-based practices, supply side changes and their affordability again permitted and interacted with the demands of the newly democratised family history.

In the mid-1990s, before internet access became more affordable, obtaining genealogical information was not family historians' main computer use. A survey revealed that just under 40% of *Family Tree Computing Magazine* readers had computers, and their use of them was principally for data entry.¹³¹ 'I use my computer for everything' remarked Brian Hollin of Gwent: 'Correspondence, all sorts of lists including action lists, analyses of bulk records, biographical notes; everything goes onto the computer. It's so easy to keep track of things, to alter, amend, delete, to print etc'.¹³² Not, however, to research. Some users still considered the software packages available in 1994 to be limited. Margaret Sharon wrote to *Family Tree* stressing that 'I don't use any of the popular "fill in the names and dates" genealogical packages as I find these programs to be too limited and inflexible... They have few features for systematically noting unusual events (such as a family legend about running away to sea at age 14)... They cannot directly link each and every item of information with its source'.¹³³ More biographical approaches to family history, as we shall see in Chapter 5, would lead to very different end products. Many family historians still preferred to obtain their information from older technology and record it manually, however. In 1994 Mrs K Dunnill of West Sussex, for example, invested in a second-hand microfiche reader rather than a computer and 'found it to be both useful and a pleasure to use. Most of

¹³⁰ Race, 'Computers in Genealogy 1988 Survey Results', p. 37.

¹³¹ *Family Tree Magazine*, 10(7) (May 1994), p. 30.

¹³² *Family Tree Magazine*, 10(8) (June 1994), p. 30.

¹³³ *Family Tree Magazine*, 10(8) (June 1994), p. 30.

the fiche have been purchased from the I.G.I. at 15p each (very good value) or are family history society material at 50p or £1 each (again good value).¹³⁴ Clearly, then, technological developments have not been 'uniform' in terms of practice, and a striking diversity persisted, demonstrating how essential it is to rethink the family history 'phenomenon'.

Only at the turn of the twenty-first century did genealogical computer use begin to change. Primary records began to become available online, providing another major supply side change to the ease of accessing records, as demand continued to increase. The *Good Web Guide: Genealogy*, first published in 2000, proved to be the most popular guidebook amongst many for helping family historians evaluate the proliferation of records that became available. *GENUKI*, 'a virtual reference library of genealogical data,' was deemed 'the most important website of general use to UK researchers' by the guide in 2002, and became popular because it provided primary material rather than the GEDCOM files of genealogical data assembled by family historians on their computers before the coming of the internet. *RootsWeb*, the oldest and largest free genealogy site (funded by its commercial brother *Ancestry.com*), also proved incredibly popular, especially in light of the newsgroup communities it offered to the ever greater numbers of genealogists who embraced the internet.¹³⁵

As we have seen in Chapter 1, the quantitative growth of internet genealogy has been (and is) as striking as the growth of record office use since the late 1970s and is even leading to a decline of users at the Family Records Centre. What should by now be clear, however, is that to focus on quantitative growth alone limits our understanding of the diversity of practices hidden by such statistical representations of the family history 'phenomenon'. The 'internet age', rather, emerged from pre-existing activities which had inspired some practitioners to acquire computers. The casual beginner today can thus navigate onto the

¹³⁴ *Family Tree Magazine*, 10(6) (April 1994), p. 19.

¹³⁵ Caroline Peacock, *The Good Web Guide: Genealogy* (London, 2002, second edition), p. 29-30.

Genes ReUnited website without requiring any previous experience of, for instance, using census microfiches or films. 'Enter your immediate family names to begin your family tree,' suggests the homepage of the site, requiring only the surfer's and his or her parent's surnames to begin a search to see if any other users of the site 'match' those names.¹³⁶ This is all a long way from trawling through microfilms in the mid-1980s, consulting original documents in the 1960s, or examining court rolls in the 1920s.

Furthermore, the motivations of those using popular sites such as *Genes ReUnited* can differ considerably from those identified as characteristic of earlier eras, and from other users of different genealogical websites for that matter. 'Wow. I registered with *Genes ReUnited* and in two weeks, found a great-cousin who had already pieced together my grandfather's side dating back to the 1500's! She also had details of ancestors dating back to the 1740s. Absolutely amazing – thank you *Genes ReUnited*, if it wasn't for you [sic] I'd hate to think how long it would have taken me to find my ties. I'll be organising a family reunion very soon. I'm just so blown away with the information I found!' wrote Michelle Morris in July 2006.¹³⁷ Such instantaneous uncovering of family history by making contact with other researchers has more in common with a Peerage enthusiast of the nineteenth century who searched through pre-existing pedigrees at the College of Arms than with the efforts of the 'great-cousin' who had spent the time researching the lineage. Other practitioners, however, use the website to add to pre-existing research by making contacts with other researchers. Margaret Davies, for instance, had taken up the research begun by her father, and in July 2006 wrote: 'Since joining *Genes ReUnited* a couple of years ago I have added to my family tree so many people too numerous to name.... Now after so much success – which I am sad

¹³⁶ *Genes ReUnited*, 'Build Your Family Tree FREE and Find Lost Relatives from 74 million Listed', *Genes ReUnited*, (2006), <<http://www.genesreunited.co.uk>> (accessed 17 July 2006).

¹³⁷ *Genes ReUnited*, 'Success Board', *Genes ReUnited*, (15 July 2006), <http://www.genesreunited.co.uk/genesreunited.asp?WCI=MembersBook&bb_type=S> (accessed 17 July 2006).

to say my Dad is no longer with us to share – just try and stop me finding more!’¹³⁸ Whilst the formation of family history societies could, as they grew, lead to greater likelihood of meeting up with others researching similar ancestry, nothing on this sort of scale would have been conceivable.

And insofar as this is true, it must be stated again that it makes more sense to view the ‘irresistible rise’ of family history and genealogy as a series of different steps and blocks – both cultural and technological - which themselves, upon closer inspection, both overlap and contain a further diversity of motivations and practices. Nonetheless, developments in both technology and institutions emerged from, and built upon, different attitudes and activities that pre-dated them. For instance, through the 1990s, *Family Tree Magazine* (itself yet another means of access for a newcomer to family history) increasingly strived to become a mouthpiece not only for the interests of its readership, but for family historians as a whole. In May 1998, editor Michael Armstrong’s regular ‘This May Interest You’ column began a campaign for easier and cheaper access to older civil registration records of England and Wales, complaining that a 1990 parliamentary White Paper had not yet been fully implemented in its promise to make data over 75 years old into public records. It encouraged readers to write to their MPs to demand that they become available free of charge, probably in microfilm, to family historians, rather than the existing system of indexes and expensive photocopies.¹³⁹ The momentum that began in local record offices was thus clearly discernable on a national level. ‘On behalf of future generations of family historians please pick up your pens and write to your MP,’ Armstrong enthused.¹⁴⁰ By the following month so

¹³⁸ Genes ReUnited, ‘Success Board’, *Genes ReUnited*, (15 July 2006), <http://www.genesreunited.co.uk/genesreunited.asp?WCI=MembersBook&bb_type=S> (accessed 17 July 2006). Research motivated by the death of parents and grandparents has been, as is shown in Chapter 6, surprisingly common since the late-1970s.

¹³⁹ *Family Tree Magazine*, 14(5) (May 1998), p. 58. For the articles by Anthony Camp and Michael Armstrong which provided the stimulus for the lobbying, see: *Family Tree Magazine*, 14(4) (April 1998).

¹⁴⁰ *Family Tree Magazine*, 14(8) (August 1998), p. 5.

many readers had written to their MPs, received responses, and sent them to the magazine, that Armstrong could not write to thank them all individually.

Having grown to the status of principal users of most archives and local studies libraries, and now becoming increasingly well organised – through magazines and family history societies alike – dismissive attitudes like those evidenced in some of the remarks made by archivists in the late-1970s were no longer feasible. In any case, where twenty years earlier the emerging ‘family history’ user group had become impossible to ignore, by 1998 the chorus of organised family historians had become deafening. Then Economic Secretary to the Treasury, with responsibility for the Office for National Statistics, Patricia Hewitt asked the Registrar General’s office to report to her with suggestions for improving the system, and invited users to put forward their own suggestions, leading to a three month consultation on the matter, concluding upon a drive towards the full computerisation of records.¹⁴¹ This governmental shift away from the aging and expensive system of supplying civil registration certificates suggests that the death knoll now being sounded for the Family Records Centre may in fact have been audible within a year of its opening.

In Hewitt’s approach, however, there is a terminological and cultural move from the 1970s and early 1980s language of ‘the user’ and ‘educational users’ to an ‘archive evangelism’ linked to information sharing and public access which seized on technologies and made a deft use of the languages of ‘inclusivity’ and ‘access’ which came to do political work in the 1990s. In other words, by the late-1990s the quantities of family historians had become so great, and their activities in indexing and transcribing had become so vital, dominating local record office and local study library practice, that the ‘user-led’ approach developed a new Blairite language of inclusivity. Such language was, ironically, equally apparent in the creation of the first archive devoted entirely to family historians, the F.R.C. Although records concerning these changing attitudes are hard to come by (files currently

¹⁴¹ *Family Tree Magazine*, 15(5) (March 1999), p. 3.

remaining under the 30 year closure period), it seems that by the early 1990s the P.R.O. could no longer cope with the volume of family historians using its London sites.¹⁴² In the official write-up of the birth of the F.R.C., for instance, Iain Watt demonstrates the huge shift in the way family historians were discussed, subtitling his article – ‘government joins-up to serve the family researcher’ – again parroting the ‘joined-up’ government-speak of the late-1990s. The F.R.C. is described as a ‘success story’ because ‘it has achieved a very positive response from users, the family history press, professional peers, management experts and the UK government’. A ‘key benefit’ of the centre, meanwhile, was ‘to ‘increase the turnover of copies and certificate copies on individual visits’ and thus ‘develop the business’ and ‘increase the attractiveness of family history, and therefore generate both more repeated visits and new entrants into the activity’.¹⁴³

This could not provide a more striking contrast with Ashcroft’s concern over whether family history constituted educational use. The ‘direction’ of the Family Records Centre came to be defined primarily in terms of efficiency in ‘providing for’ users that already existed, whilst actively promoting and marketing the ‘attractiveness’ of family history to drum up more ‘business’. ‘We will check our users’ satisfaction with our services, and we will respond positively to feedback from users,’ state the aims of the centre.¹⁴⁴ How ironic then that when this same calculation of efficiency pointed to the closure of the F.R.C., no consultation with users was carried out.¹⁴⁵ As noted above, however, at this point in the late-1990s, regular surveys began to be conducted on archive use throughout Britain and of use of the F.R.C. to ascertain statistical information on users’ age, sex, reason for visiting, sections

¹⁴² Incidentally, this also proved to be the case at North Yorkshire, which finally upgraded to a new archive building in 1991.

¹⁴³ Iain Watt, ‘The Family Records Centre: Government Joins-Up to Serve the Family History Researcher’, *Archivum*, 45 (2000), p. 233, p. 243.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

¹⁴⁵ ‘A New Vision for the Future’, *The Family Record: The Newsletter of the Family Records Centre*, 35 (July 2006), p. 3.

used, satisfaction with the service, disabilities, and ethnic origin.¹⁴⁶ The key shift in this new approach is thus from usage figures to the *type* of user, in terms of age, ethnic group, various disabilities and gender. In other words, demonstrating the diversity of users (a tendency also seen with regard to art galleries) has become paramount. Thus, despite the fact that the majority of users in early 2006 were female (55.1%) and aged over 55 (67.7%), that only 1.5% were black, and only 3.7% were aged under 24 years,¹⁴⁷ the heading photograph for the centre's website depicts only one woman to four men, two of whom are teenagers and another of whom is a young black man (see Figure 9 below).



Figure 9. 'Inclusive' Representation of Users of the Family Records Centre.¹⁴⁸

As I have shown in Chapter 1, there is some evidence to suggest that amongst those principally researching their ancestry online in the early twenty-first century, a greater proportion are in their twenties and thirties, although they still remain a minority,

¹⁴⁶ The Family Records Centre – Your FRC, 'Family Records Centre (FRC) Customer Survey - February/March 2006', *The Family Records Centre*, (March 2006), <http://www.familyrecords.gov.uk/frc/your_frc/survey_03_06.htm> (accessed 17 July 2006). Three years worth of survey are maintained at present, on the Family Records Centre website. See The Family Records Centre – Your FRC, 'Customer Surveys', *The Family Records Centre*, (2006), <http://www.familyrecords.gov.uk/frc/your_frc/survey_main.htm> (accessed 17 July 2006).

¹⁴⁷ The Family Records Centre – Your FRC, 'Family Records Centre (FRC) Customer Survey - February/March 2006', *The Family Records Centre*, (March 2006), <http://www.familyrecords.gov.uk/frc/your_frc/survey_03_06.htm> (accessed 17 July 2006).

¹⁴⁸ The Family Records Centre, 'Welcome to the Family Records Centre Website', *The Family Records Centre*, (2006), <<http://www.familyrecords.gov.uk/frc/default.htm>> (accessed 17 July 2006).

constituting at most one third of internet searchers.¹⁴⁹ However, the difficulties outlined above of assembling statistics relating to the age and ethnic groups of those using archives before the rise of discourses (and surveys) of 'inclusivity' prevent any quantitative comparison. Indeed, even where more extensive statistics exist as in the P.S.Q.G. surveys of visitors to British archives, the presentation of such data was again related to inclusivity. 'Younger people, women and ethnic minorities are underrepresented in the archive user population. Archives must address this through finding new methods of service delivery and new ways of delivering content', the report for 1998 concluded.¹⁵⁰ As such, it is important to point out that data regarding the demographics of family historians must themselves be historically contextualised.

Nevertheless, there was the huge shift by which, in the twenty years from *Roots* to the opening of the Family Records Centre, from the humble beginnings of family history societies meeting locally for coffee around newly available local records, British archives came to orientate themselves towards them. Driven by the endeavours of family historians to help archivists in the 1970s, the processes of transcription and indexing that they began have led to major changes in the ease of practices, the proliferation of access routes and have been taken to what would at the time have been completely unforeseen digitisation. With the creation of the F.R.C., we see again that supply and demand interact in that use by family historians demanded greater, more efficient, centralised supply by the P.R.O., and when this

¹⁴⁹ Nielsen//NetRatings, 'Surfing the Family Tree: More than 1.5 million UK surfers research their family history online, 24 May 2005', *Nielsen//NetRatings*, (2005) <http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/pr/pr_050524_uk.pdf> (12 December 2005).

¹⁵⁰ Public Services Quality Group, *Survey of Visitors to British Archives: June 1998* (London, 1998), p. 4. A further example of this in a commercial context is provided by the research conducted by the U.S. market research firm Maritz Research. Their attempts to present statistics in a particularly 'representative' light render them meaningless: 'The hobby holds appeal for both younger and middle-aged Americans with 48 per cent of those aged 25-64 having at least some interest' the research findings concluded, adding that 'surprisingly, Americans over age 65 claim less involvement with genealogy with only 39 per cent participating'. In this case, it seems that attempts for commercial reasons to present genealogy as an activity for all ages and ethnic groups lie behind this survey. Maritz Research, 'Genealogy Business Takes Root', *Maritz Research*, (March 1996), <<http://www.maritzresearch.com/release.asp?rc=92&p=3&T=P>> (accessed 18 December 2003). For a more recent, and equally unhelpful survey stemming from U.S. market research, see also: Maritz Research, 'Sixty Percent of Americans Intrigued by their Family Roots' (May 2000), *Maritz Research*, <<http://www.maritzresearch.com/release.asp?rc=195&p=3&T=P>> (accessed 18 December 2003).

was provided, use figures initially shot up again, permitted by the supply-side change which was itself a response to earlier demand and practice.

As the annual capacity of 200,000 visits to the F.R.C. was approached in its year of peak use in January 2002, a further surge of interest was expected due to the release of the 1901 census, leading the National Archives 'to seek digitisation of the 1901 census and distribution via the internet' both at the F.R.C. and in the growing number of homes with internet access.¹⁵¹ The ensuing debacle showed, however, that even internet access could not provide a panacea for genealogical demand. Sarah Minney of Twickenham remarked in *Family Tree* that: 'Whilst I think that putting the 1901 Census online is a great idea, what I didn't realise when it was announced was that this was going to be almost the only way to see it. As more and more information was published, in the run-up to the launch, on what was being done, it started to dawn on me that we were not going to get the usual set of microfilms with all the other census returns at the F.R.C. At the F.R.C. it's online or nothing!'¹⁵² Clearly for this practitioner, technological developments such as the internet have not been deterministic in their enthusiasm for family history, and demonstrate that the epic proportion of people attempting to access it should not be casually conceptualised as uniform.

Rather, this account has made clear that to refer to the 'irresistible rise' of family history is an over-simplification, based on a purely quantitative approach. It has shown that, since the nineteenth century, changing practices, conceptualisations and motivations make the activities of 'genealogists' look, more exactly, like a series of different steps and blocks, albeit with certain elements of continuity as different practices have developed in often quite unexpected ways from those which preceded them. Who was to know that the rush to enter

¹⁵¹ Watt, 'The Family Records Centre', p. 242.

¹⁵² Michael Armstrong, '1901 Census Online Fiasco: Mixed Reaction From Readers', *Family Tree Magazine*, 18(5) (March 2002), p. 65.

Burke's *Peerage* would lead to a critical school of genealogy that, in time, would give rise to the possibility of 'genealogy for all'? This in turn led to a gradual shift away from the language of pedigrees and gave rise to some quite unique research practices in the 1950s and 1960s which have long since ceased to be the norm. Encounters with parish registers in quiet church vestries came to be replaced by the whirring of microfilm readers but not without an astonishing re-conceptualisation and organisation of labours in the new 'family history' societies. The implications of a 'genealogy for the common man', of ever more leisure time, mobility and disposable income in retirement were profound for both local and national record offices, leading to a courtship of the newly perceived 'family history' user-group in the late-1970s in a striking few years which saw Alex Haley's *Roots* mesmerising television viewers and grabbing newspaper headlines whilst family history societies were taking off in every corner of Britain.

At this statistically and culturally vital point in the development of the thirst for discovering ancestry, family historians became invaluable to the archive profession in dealing with the emergence of family history as a mass pursuit, and as such further diversities in practice emerged, and persist to the present day. In helping one another and archive services to cope with the new influx of interest, it is vitally important, however, to note that technological developments such as microfilm, personal computers and the internet constituted as much a response to demand as an increasing supply. Such technologies came to allow much basic genealogical research to become easier, as routes into these practices proliferated, whilst family historians nonetheless developed a thirst for 'knowing' their ancestors in ever greater detail which took them further and further away from births, marriages and deaths.

In the next two chapters, then, building on the insights of this more in-depth account of the history of genealogy, it is pertinent to focus more closely on two key aspects of the important years in the late 1970s that this chapter has explored. Firstly, in Chapter 3, I shall

examine in more depth how distinctions between practitioners emerged in terms of the actual practices undertaken. What, for instance, was the status of family historians in terms of 'professional' and 'amateur'? How was the difference between the president of a family history society and a beginner articulated by practitioners? What implications did the democratisation of genealogy have for descent from 'blue blood'? Meanwhile, the discursive changes relating to a 'genealogy for all' demand further exploration, as they allow our understanding to progress to the level of the *meanings* encountered in enthusiasm for ancestry. As such in Chapter 4, to reach a greater understanding of just *why* family historians came to deluge records offices, libraries and websites from the late-1970s, a close reading of Alex Haley's *Roots* is extremely helpful, heralding as it did the arrival of family history on television screens and providing a spark to the beginnings of mass, democratic family history activity by announcing so loudly and emotively the cultural changes of the previous decades to a mass audience.

**Professional, Amateur and “Professional Amateur”:
A Distinguished Genealogy?**

In April 1925, Lord Farrer introduced the work of the Society of Genealogists to the readers of the *Genealogists' Magazine* in terms that placed genealogy on a level footing with professional history. 'A permanent record publication of pure genealogy will aid the sister crafts of History and Heraldry,' he wrote.¹ This provides a striking contrast to the notion expressed by most professional historians over the past few decades that family history and genealogy are 'popular', 'public' and 'amateur' pursuits to be at once encouraged and educated.² The sigh of recognition uttered by professional historians at talk of 'chattering genealogists' is all too familiar, at times invoking an even 'hostile reception',³ and historians have often referred to practitioners as 'amateurs' or 'hobbyists'. David Hey, for instance, described family historians as 'amateur historians [that] have begun to trace their forebears

¹ Lord Farrer, 'Preface', *Genealogists' Magazine*, 1(1) (April 1925), p. 1.

² See, for instance: David Bates, 'Historians and the Public', *History Today*, 56(7) (July 2006), p. 70; David Hey, *Family History and Local History in England* (London and New York, 1987), p. 2.

³ Julie Hirst, 'Where Myth and Reality Merge: An Unexpected Encounter Between My Genealogical and Doctoral Research'. Paper given at the Women's History Network Annual Conference, London Guildhall University, 8 September 2001, p. 1. Ruth Finnegan and Michael Drake, for instance, have also noted how 'mainstream university circles... have sometimes given the impression of despising the offerings of "amateur researchers"'. Ruth Finnegan and Michael Drake (eds.), *From Family Tree to Family History* (Cambridge, 1994), p. ix.

with such fervour and delight',⁴ whilst David Lowenthal described interest in the family history as 'second only to stamp and coin collecting as a hobby'.⁵

In this chapter, I show firstly, that, upon closer inspection, professionalizing techniques have not disappeared, and (relatively unsuccessful) attempts have been made to constitute family history and genealogy as a profession in the later twentieth century.⁶ Secondly, I show that practices themselves are much more diverse than such references to family historians suggest, and that a wide range of variegation exists in terms of both competences and perceptions of such competences. Where some family historians are characterised as 'mere name gatherers', for example, others use advanced sources, document handling skills and conduct public-spirited indexing. Where some send questions to a genealogical magazine or newsgroup, others answer them and direct their future research. This variegation of competences has become particularly apparent in the context of the family history society movement, leading to what I have termed the rise of the 'professional-amateur'. Thirdly, I show that such variation is matched by further diversity in the social uses of family history and genealogy. As we have seen in Chapter 2, social climbing in the nineteenth century gave way to a more democratic family history by the late-1970s. However, the ways that family history and genealogical practices have provided practitioners with cultural capital require further examination.⁷ How far back does one's genealogy go,

⁴ David Hey, *The Oxford Guide to Family History* (Oxford, 2002), p. 1. For a further example, see: John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History* (Harlow, 2000, third edition), p. 8.

⁵ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 38. When Roy Rosenzweig, David Thelen and a group of other North American historians set out to discuss their concerns about professional history at a retreat in Indianapolis in 1989, they similarly became noted that 'as we talked, it became clear that we shared the conviction that professional historians were painfully unaware of how people outside their own circles understood and used the past'. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York, 1998), p. 2.

⁶ Indeed, in this regard it is important to point out that the historiography of the establishment of history as a profession is itself substantially developed. See, for instance: Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886* (Cambridge, 1986); Michael Bentley, *Modern Historiography: An Introduction* (London and New York, 1999).

⁷ The term 'cultural capital' is used here in the Weberian sense developed by Pierre Bourdieu and sometimes also termed 'symbolic capital' to distinguish it from 'economic capital'. For Bourdieu 'struggles for

for example, and how has the democratisation of family history affected the ways in which humble or aristocratic ancestry have been emphasised since the 1970s?

Professionalizing Genealogy

Despite the existence of the Society of Genealogists and the efforts of a heavyweight professional historian such as Horace Round,⁸ no formal qualifications or bodies attempted to affirm the professional status of genealogy; nor did any university department in genealogy emerge. For all Farrer's enthusiasm, the S.O.G. remained, as we have seen in Chapter 2, a quiet and somewhat parochial sort of club, albeit one that produced a periodical and whose membership retained a sense of scholarship. In 1961, however, the Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies (I.H.G.S.) was founded at Canterbury at the invitation of Canon Julian Bickersteth of Canterbury Cathedral, 'with the purpose of placing family history on an academic level with other historical studies'.⁹ It is important to analyse such professionalizing techniques if we are to reach a greater understanding of family history and genealogical practices because they demonstrate that family history is more than the purely 'amateur' activity depicted by some professional historians. Indeed Bickersteth, having been largely responsible for raising funds for the restoration of the fabric of Canterbury Cathedral after the Second World War, set about promoting education as a means of assuring post-war

recognition are a fundamental dimension of social life and... what is at stake in them is an accumulation of a particular form of capital, honour in the sense of reputation and prestige. There is, therefore, a specific logic behind the accumulation of symbolic capital'. For Bourdieu, cultural distinctions thus arise out of the accumulation of symbolic capital (and its interaction with economic capital), and these may be located in all manner of spheres (e.g. lifestyle, dress, bodily dispositions) alongside the more explicit status of political entitlement and legal location within civil society. Once family history and genealogy are analysed as a set of cultural practices, Bourdieu's ideas about the nature of distinction become invaluable. For example, in striving to get 'as far back' as possible, family historians struggle for the associated 'cultural capital' of a lengthy lineage and the skills required to establish it. Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 22.

⁸ Horace Round (1854-1928), as discussed in Chapter 2, was a medieval historian and genealogist whose study of the records of English medieval government involved pioneering work on Anglo-Norman history and the Domesday Book. This proceeded hand in hand with the construction of genealogies, leading to the creation of a 'critical school' of genealogy in the late nineteenth century.

⁹ *Family History: The Journal of the Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies*, New Series, 10/12 (October 1971), p. 274; *Genealogists' Magazine*, 16 (1971), p. 400.

peace in impoverished areas of London and the North. He did this particularly by becoming a pioneering promoter of a new university for Kent, as well as developing his vision for the I.H.G.S. as a component of such an education system. Bickersteth wished 'to see the structure and history of family life studied at an academic level with a view to discovering the causes and understanding of disruption, and in the hope that such study might encourage greater unity among families and family groups'.¹⁰

This led to the drafting of a syllabus of a three-year course of study in genealogy by the I.H.G.S. (founded and henceforth run by Bickersteth's godson, Cecil Humphrey-Smith) in 1971. It resembled a university degree with lectures, private study, field work, research under an approved tutor and seminars. It also emphasised the purpose as well as the theoretical and practical applications of family history, especially in relation to other disciplines such as social anthropology, sociology, genetics, medicine and intestacy law. The proposed course of study thus laid great emphasis upon the equivalence of genealogy to other university disciplines. The level of practical genealogical skills developed was seen as just as vital, and included instruction in the handling of wills, inventories and other testamentary records, the use of diverse sources, record offices, libraries and public and private collections. It culminated in a third year of practical experience of the 'early records of genealogy' as well as 'a course training in palaeography for the genealogist and in heraldry'. This led to various certificated qualifications and diplomas, depending on how far one were to take such studies. These culminated in the Licentiate of the Institute, requiring at least five years of training, and the completion of a 15-50,000 word 'approved thesis or research dissertation'. The course remains in operation in the early twenty-first century, continuing to emphasise the 'academic' nature of such study, its recognition 'for several purposes' by

¹⁰ 'The Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies: The Julian Bickersteth Memorial Medal', *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(1) (November-December 1984), p. 15.

various governmental bodies and universities, and the accreditation of its distance learning course by the Open and Distance Learning Quality Council.¹¹

This attempt to professionalize genealogy and family history coincided with the establishment of the Association of Genealogists and Record Agents (A.G.R.A.) in 1968,¹² which aimed to work with the I.H.G.S. and S.O.G. to 'promote and maintain high standards of professional conduct and expertise within the spheres of genealogy, heraldry and record searching'.¹³ The A.G.R.A.'s code of practice – formulated in 1972 – indeed referred to 'the profession of genealogy', 'calls for scholarly and personal accuracy and integrity' and obliges members not to 'engage in exaggerated, misleading or false publicity', to 'seek, when appropriate, to examine original sources', to 'strive at all times to uphold the integrity and reputation of the profession' and so on.¹⁴ Such a code in many ways embodies the attitudes of Round and the critical school; however, it has not succeeded as much as might have been hoped. Indeed, the status of professional history has always appeared out of the grasp of genealogists ever since the days of Round.¹⁵ As we have seen in Chapter 2, the peerage

¹¹ *Family History: The Journal of the Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies*, New Series, 10/12 (October 1971), p. 274; The Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies, 'I.H.G.S. - Qualifications', *The Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies*, (20 March 2005), <<http://www.ihgs.ac.uk/courses/qualifications.php>> (accessed 15 August 2006); The Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies, 'I.H.G.S. - Qualifications – Licentiatehip of The Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies (L.H.G.)', *The Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies*, (6 March 2003), <http://www.ihgs.ac.uk/courses/qualifications_details_6.php> (accessed 15 August 2006).

¹² In July 2001 this was renamed as the Association of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives 'to reflect more accurately the nature and scope of member's work, experience and knowledge'. See: A.G.R.A., 'A.G.R.A. - Homepage', *A.G.R.A.: The Association of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives*, (2006), <<http://www.agra.org.uk/page2.html>> (accessed 15 August 2006).

¹³ *York Family History Society Newsletter*, 14 (Autumn 1986), p. 6; A.G.R.A., 'A.G.R.A. - President, Vice Presidents, Council and Officers', *A.G.R.A.: The Association of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives* (2006), <<http://www.agra.org.uk/page11.html>> (accessed 15 August 2006). The Licentiatehip of The Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies, for instance, qualifies one for membership of A.G.R.A.

¹⁴ A.G.R.A., 'A.G.R.A. - Code of Practice', *A.G.R.A.: The Association of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives*, (2006), <<http://www.agra.org.uk/page8.html>> (accessed 15 August 2006). Minor revisions to the code were made in July 1993, April 1994 and September 1997.

¹⁵ The link between history in universities and the 'nation', or to grand categories such as 'society' and 'economy' is perhaps important in this regard. It is interesting to note, for instance, that the object of analysis has to be generalised or generalisable to make it into the academy, and that ethnography thereby becomes professionalized. Furthermore, the parallel with local history is also suggestive as 'county' and 'town' jurisdictions have not generally been viewed as serious enough to merit academic departments. Only in

lawyer Leslie Pine was a key proponent of the emergent discourse of 'genealogy for all' and as a more demotic interest was beginning to emerge noticed this lack of university status more acutely. He remarked, for instance, that: 'Today the greatest modern writers of history in the English language employ the resources and techniques of genealogy. [However] the endowment of a chair of genealogy at an English university is still awaited'.¹⁶ Almost forty years later, genealogists are still waiting, and seemingly will be for a long time. In 1998, J. N. Thompson, for instance – writing in the *Genealogists' Magazine* that Farrer had hoped would become a periodical on a par with university-based history journals – was still lamenting that 'genealogists, record agents and students of heraldry...are not treated seriously as professionals' and argued that the secondary school history syllabus should contain a definition of the 'profession' and encourage students to pursue genealogical research.¹⁷

Even the professionalizing attempts of A.G.R.A. and the I.H.G.S. did not prove very successful amidst the rising tide of the family history movement. For instance, of the twenty advertisements for 'professional' researches in *Family Tree Magazine* in January-February 1985 – some fifteen years after the organisations had begun operating – only two displayed A.G.R.A. credentials.¹⁸ By June 1996, when 152 adverts were placed offering to conduct such research, only ten (an even lower percentage) displayed such credentials.¹⁹ Indeed, throughout the 1970s scepticism appeared on both sides of this divide between 'professional' and 'amateur' genealogists. Those finding a full-time employment from their genealogical endeavours remained few and became proportionally fewer and fewer, at times seemingly

Leicester is a department of local history established. Both of these parallels merit further research which is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of the present thesis.

¹⁶ Leslie G. Pine, *The Genealogist's Encyclopaedia* (Newton Abbot, 1969), p. 11.

¹⁷ J.N. Thompson, 'Genealogy Counts', *Genealogists' Magazine*, 26(4) (December 1998), p. 138, p. 140.

¹⁸ *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(2) (January-February 1985), p. 31.

¹⁹ *Family Tree Magazine*, 12(8) (June 1996), p. 44-45.

eager to assert their difference from the activities of those just beginning their research. Anthony Camp, director of the S.O.G. and vice president of A.G.R.A.,²⁰ for instance, made some telling remarks in his 'diary of a genealogist' (for which, read 'professional' genealogist) in *Family Tree Magazine*. Following the publication of the first issue he was happy to endorse the magazine – and write a column in it. However, at the same time remained somewhat aloof, remarking that 'everyone wonders if the quality can be kept up'. He also seemed to have been keen to assert the professional status of the S.O.G. in comparison to *Family Tree*, remarking on 'the need for a popular journal of this kind'. He also complained that the photographs of the S.O.G.'s strong-rooms made them appear too cluttered and pointed out that 'Prince Michael of Kent paid a private visit to the Society with Colonel Farmer his private secretary... taking a close interest in everything that had been done'. Camp's presence at the Queen's visit to the College of Arms' 500th anniversary on 15 November 1984 was also duly noted.²¹

Camp at times appeared to be quite frustrated with beginners' lack of skills and understanding in ancestral research. 'I groaned about the man who is tracing his descendents (and presumably thinks his children are his ancestors), and at the other who has traced the Queen to Adam,' he wrote, reflecting on contributions to the second issue of *Family Tree*. Meanwhile responses to an article on family history published in the *Sunday Express* supplement of 27 January 1985 'produced many enquiries this week from people who want to trace "existing pedigrees" and think we just look in a drawer; if only they had read *Family Tree Magazine* instead,' he noted. Seemingly irritated by such excessive, unwelcome and uninformed interest, Camp thus seemed happy to let its tide break upon the 'popular'

²⁰ Cecil Humphrey-Smith, founder of the I.H.G.S. and editor of the *Family History* periodical, also became a vice-president of A.G.R.A.

²¹ Anthony Camp, 'Diary of a Genealogist', *Family Tree Magazine*, January-February 1985, p. 4-5; Anthony Camp, 'Diary of a Genealogist', *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(3) March-April 1985, p. 22-23. Indeed, references to the *Genealogists' Magazine* were occasionally given in early copies of *Family Tree*, thus emphasising the more 'professional' periodical's authority. See for instance: 'Book Reviews', *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(2) (January-February 1985), p. 13.

magazine rather than upon his own professional desk, thus both engaging with the new interest and yet also retaining the firm distinction between professional and amateur research.²²

Nevertheless, for those to whom it did not apply, the category of 'professional' genealogist remained contested in the last three decades of the twentieth century. Not only did few practitioners advertising to conduct absentee searches belong to A.G.R.A. or obtain qualifications from the I.H.G.S., but they also chose rather to emphasise their status in other ways. Of the same sample of adverts in June 1996, for instance, more than twice as many searchers referred to their 'professional service' with reference to a bachelors degree or some other academic qualification than with a genealogical certificate. 25 of 152 had such degrees, but the vast majority listed no such qualification and asserted their 'professional' status without reference to anything other than the fact that they charged for the service and conducted their research for others.²³

The implications of this variegated field of practice, this complex of professionalizing techniques, and competition were certainly not lost on those who might employ them. Debates thus continued in the pages of *Family Tree* and elsewhere as to what might constitute a 'professional'. Michael Gandy, for instance, who was later to distinguish himself in a series of books for the Federation of Family History Societies and the Public Records Office on tracing Catholic ancestry,²⁴ attempted to help beginners in a series of articles on the subject that were published in the *Genealogists' Magazine* and later reprinted in *Family Tree*.

²² Anthony Camp, 'Diary of a Genealogist', *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(3) March-April 1985, p. 23. A similar occurrence involved the printing of the S.O.G.'s address in the *Sunday Post*, which led to even more exasperated remarks from Camp, who complained that the Society thus found itself 'sandwiched between queries as to where to find a pitch pipe and how to exchange green bowls'. Those beginners who wrote to him were similarly mocked, comprising 'a torrent of letters, mostly without sae, and many expecting an eight-generation pedigree for the price of a stamp'. Anthony Camp, 'Diary of a Genealogist', *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(2) (January-February 1985), p. 5.

²³ *Family Tree Magazine*, 12(8) (June 1996), p. 44-45.

²⁴ See, for instance: Michael Gandy, *Catholic Missions and Registers* (London, 1993, 6 vols.); *Catholic Parishes in England, Scotland and Wales: An Atlas* (London, 1993); *Catholic Family History* (London, 1996); *Tracing your Catholic Ancestry in England* (Bury, 1998); *Tracing Catholic Ancestors* (Richmond, 2001).

For Gandy, the sheer increase in research had led to ‘an expansion in the number of people offering to trace ancestry for payment. ‘Undoubtedly these include,’ he continued, ‘the usual percentage of newcomers who have a good head for business and a little knowledge of the subject, and are eager to jump on any bandwagon to make a fast buck’. In Gandy’s view, then, simply to charge money was not sufficient to warrant the label of being ‘professional’. Rather, he emphasised the four characteristics of experience, lack of personal connection, advanced skills (e.g. Latin, understanding legal terms, reading old handwriting, but equally being able to face ‘the suffocating crush of St Catherine’s House) and geographical proximity to records. This approach thus not only admitted those with A.G.R.A. affiliation to the category of ‘professional’, but also allowed the more experienced members of the new local family history societies to come under the same banner. Indeed, in noting that such ‘professionals’ may charge anything from £3 to £12 an hour, Gandy explained that ‘it is necessary to bear in mind the two very different categories of people who are “professional” genealogists. The first are those who earn their whole living from their work... The second category are those who do not have to live on their income. Usually they are either retired people on a pension or wives who actually live on their husband’s income... They don’t need to charge much because they view their charges as almost wholly profit. They are honest and charge only what they feel they need to’.²⁵

In this latter case, a whole new class of ‘professional’ opens up that is based, paradoxically, upon the altruistic ‘amateur’ ethos of the family history societies. They were markedly different from the ‘professionals’ permitted to advertise in the *Genealogists’ Magazine*. The latter, in contrast, had to have been a member of the S.O.G. for more than five years,²⁶ or else belong to A.G.R.A.²⁷ With the emergence of a more democratic interest

²⁵ Michael Gandy, ‘Employing a Professional Researcher – A Useful Guide. Part 1’, *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(3) March-April 1985, p. 7.

²⁶ It has been even rarer for those advertising in *Family Tree Magazine* to emphasise membership of the Society of Genealogists. For an exception, see, for instance, entry under ‘Rutland, Leics, Cambs’ for Mrs A M Buxton in *Family Tree Magazine*, 12(8) (June 1996), p. 45.

in 'family history', then, a divergence opened up between those who perhaps still held quiet aspirations for the development of 'genealogy' as an academic discipline and those who were relative newcomers to family history research, had no affiliation to national genealogical societies and institutes, and yet were developing more advanced research skills, and could perform such research.

In terms of both competences and the perception of competences, then, considerable variation emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Those 'family historians' who were coming to distinguish themselves as 'professional' or 'expert' were not always eager to join the ranks of those committed to establishing an institute of professional genealogy. However on the other hand, the distinction of any 'family historians' from others could lead to tension and suspicion. Beginners such as S. Matthews, for instance, demonstrated concern that employing another to do one's research on their behalf would go against his 'do-it-yourself' ethos. 'I wonder whether I can overcome my feeling of cheating for even considering it,' Matthews wrote in a letter to *Family Tree* in 1985. The respondent to his letter – probably Michael Armstrong, who himself occupied a somewhat ambiguous position because he was running an amateur magazine which was rapidly becoming a huge commercial success – sympathised with this dilemma: 'We all get stuck at times; some sooner than later. I see no reason why you should not employ a professional to give a little help when it's needed. You don't have to have them do the whole lot for you'. In other words, it was acceptable for a family historian to get paid help, as long as it was only as a last resort and that it did not exceed their own research. 'Are you a member of a Family History Society? Joining one in the area of your research often proves helpful,' the respondent continued.²⁸

²⁷ Michael Gandy, 'Employing a Professional Researcher – A Useful Guide. Part 2', *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(4) May-June 1985, p. 6.

²⁸ *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(3) March-April 1985, p. 27. For an earlier example of this attitude, see: John P. Abbott, *Family Patterns: A Personal Experience of Genealogy* (London, 1971), p. 94.

In this example, a further tension arises between the mutual help of a family history society and a paid searcher who has developed greater skills. Where exactly does this leave the status of a family history society member that has developed source-related competences and is able to assist those who are less experienced and struggling? Without 'professional' regulation, how does one know who is worthy of such status and what 'status' do they possess? At this point any straight-forward dichotomy of 'professional' and 'amateur' begins to become even more problematic, and further explorations of the variegation and distinctions of family historians and genealogists become essential. Gandy himself, in his suggestions about those worthy of paying, for instance, distinguished between those 'part-timers that are intelligent and energetic people with many years experience' and those 'scatter-brained women and dodderly old men who are full of goodwill but think any reference to a surname "may be of interest" and send you long lists of Smiths from the other end of the country'.²⁹

Variegated Competences and the 'Professional-Amateur'

Genealogy has never become an academic discipline, so the activities of a diverse range of practitioners have come to occupy a hinterland in between a potential university discipline and a new 'amateur' enthusiasm that expanded dramatically in the last three decades of the twentieth century. Some family historians, such as G. Beale in 1981, have made an idiosyncratic case for the professionalization of family history, hoping to redirect the efforts of the emergent family history societies towards a genetic science of past generations, conceived of in terms of 'the three pillars of familial history: the health, the wealth, and the intelligence of each person'.³⁰ Such proposals were the exception, however.

²⁹ Gandy, 'Employing a Professional Researcher – Part 2', p. 6.

³⁰ G. A. Beale, *The Uses of Genealogy and the Familial Historian together with The Beales of Blandford* (London, 1981), p. vii-x, p. 27.

For the most part family historians have not sought to establish themselves as a quasi-profession, but rather to develop their 'amateur' expertise within and beyond the structure of the family history movement.

The transcription of records in local record offices explored in Chapter 2, for instance demonstrates how family historians could come to occupy an interstitial role in between those classified as using the record offices for 'educational' and 'personal' purposes. Such situations continued to emerge throughout the subsequent decades. For instance, as the P.R.O. came to be overwhelmed by family historians wishing to access census returns during the mid-1980s, opportunities emerged for 'amateur' family historians to work together with the P.R.O. in its organisation of censuses street-by-street in conjunction with the indexing of family history societies on a local level.³¹ In the twenty-first century this remains the case, as the enthusiasm of family historians to find details of their ancestors leads them into dark and surprising corners of the National Archives. In her 2002 guide to *Tracing your Ancestors in the Public Record Office*, for instance, Amanda Bevan pointed out that the arrival of the PROCAT computerised catalogue further facilitated this, having 'shone a spotlight into the many forgotten corners of our historic records due to its release into the public domain'. 'We expect underused series to become more popular, and old favourites to gain a new readership' she added.³²

³¹ 'Making Best Use of the Census Room', *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(2) (January-February 1985), p. 6.

³² Amanda Bevan, *Tracing your Ancestors in the Public Records Office* (Richmond, 2002, sixth edition), p. 1. Indeed, the guidebook already included the following extensive categories of records: censuses, civil registration, the I.G.I., pre-1837 marriage indexes, parish registers, non-conformist, Catholic and Quaker registers, foreign churches in England, pre-1753 Fleet marriage registers, marriage licenses, overseas BMDs, deaths of seamen, Commonwealth war graves, BMDs of overseas Britons, medieval and early-modern family history sources, wills, death duties, grants of administration, probate litigation and appeals, records relating to Wales, Scotland, Ireland, the Isle of Man and Channel Islands, immigration records, alien registration, post-1844 naturalisation records, records of renouncing British citizenship, records relating to British lands abroad, British subjects interned by enemies, lists of the Colonial Office and Dominions Office, government gazettes and newspapers from the colonies and dominions, emigrant passenger lists (to South Africa, Australia, new Zealand, North America, West Indies, and Welsh to Patagonia), oath rolls, loyal addresses, electoral registers, poll books, name change records, army registers of BMDs, 1761-1987, military wills, army officer's letters of attorney, pensions to officer's widows, other ranks records relating to widows, orphans and schools for orphans, Army lists, war dead records, records of discharge to Chelsea pension, 1760-1913, military medal lists, records relating to American War of Independence, 1776-86, wars with France, 1793-1815, Crimean War, 1854-56, Boer War, 1899-1902, World War I records of war dead, medal rolls, service records, gallantry medals, courts

In such a dynamic situation, the levels of competences of family historians have become astonishingly diverse. Some have come to occupy what may be termed a ‘professional amateur’ status within the family history movement. A key element of such a status – as we have seen with those deemed to be ‘professional’ on account of being paid³³ – is when an amateur family historian moves beyond researching his or her own family. In the second edition of his guidebook (published in 1969), for example, Arthur Willis wrote that ‘I can be of more use in transcribing and publishing records which will be of value to others... than to run around the country doing further research on my own family’.³⁴ This trend was, as we have seen in Chapter 2, elaborated considerably in the activities of the family history societies. Another analogous example is provided by the numerous ‘Friends of Archives’ groups that have been established since the Friends of the P.R.O. in 1988.³⁵ These professional-amateur groups also undertake record indexing (as in the case of the wills for 1750-1800), transcription projects and data input tasks, thereby demonstrating the ability to read, say, eighteenth-century handwriting as well as expanding their research skills, whilst not doing so in a professional capacity. For example, the ‘Place in the Sun’ project at the

martial, war diaries, WWII soldiers records, army support services records (e.g. army chaplains, Yeomen of the Guard, Royal Army Medical Corps, army nursing services, Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps), Indian Army and British Army in India, naval records, Royal Marines, R.A.F. records, prisoners of war, preventive services and coastguard, police forces, civil servants, customs-excise and inland revenue records, royal household records, Coronation and Jubilee medals, 1935-1977, Women’s Land Army records, 1939-50, merchant seaman records, railway workers, apprentices, lawyers, medicine and education, the Poor law, lunacy, clergymen, excommunicates, 1280-1840, sacrament certificates, Orthodox and Jews, coroners inquests, criminal trials, remand and convict prisoners, convicted prisoners transported abroad, land ownership and tenancy, land surveys, house ownership and tenancy, taxation records (e.g. lay subsidies, 1290-1332, poll taxes, hearth tax), tontines and annuities, business records, debtors and bankruptcy records, and civil litigation records. Between 1999 and 2002, Bevan pointed out that the real growth at the P.R.O. was in interest regarding the opening of the service records of the First World War. Amanda Bevan, *Tracing your Ancestors in the Public Records Office* (Richmond, 2002, sixth edition), p. 1.

³³ That the term ‘professional’ is used by practitioners themselves does not, however, render the designation of a ‘professional-amateur’ for analytical purposes invalid. Indeed, as we have seen, the professionalization of family history has not been successful and thus such an ambiguous term is quite appropriate to shed light on such an ambiguous situation.

³⁴ Arthur J. Willis, *Genealogy for Beginners* (London and Chichester, 1969, second edition), p. 9.

³⁵ This group was renamed the ‘Friends of the National Archives’ in 2003 and continues to engage in such work ‘to raise the profile of public records and to support the work of The National Archives’. The National Archives, ‘About Us: Friends of the National Archives’, *The National Archives*, (2006), <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/friends/?source=ddmenu_about6> (accessed 1 September 2006).

Guildhall Library has, since 2003, been indexing the Sun Fire Office Policy Registers for 1816-33 as part of the National Archives' 'Access to Archives' online initiative.³⁶

The advanced guides published by the Federation of Family History Societies constitute another excellent example of the professional-amateur category. Jeremy Gibson and Don Steel have probably been the most prolific publishers of such books, which clearly distinguish the author's abilities from the 'amateur' or 'beginner'.³⁷ They use advanced document handling skills (characteristic of professional historians) to highlight records not always immediately obvious in their usefulness to family historians, give detailed listings of

³⁶ Guildhall Library Manuscripts Section, 'The "Place in the Sun" Project', *Guildhall Library*, (May 2006), <<http://www.history.ac.uk/gh/sun.htm>> (accessed 1 September 2006). Access to Archives allows users to search and browse for information about archives in England and Wales online. See: The National Archives, 'About A2A', *A2A – Access to Archives*, (2006), <<http://www.a2a.org.uk/about/index.asp>> (accessed 1 September 2006).

³⁷ Don J. Steel, *Sources of Births, Marriages and Deaths before 1837* (London and Chichester, 1970, 2 volumes); Don J. Steel, *Sources for Scottish Genealogy and Family History* (London and Chichester, 1970); Don J. Steel, *Sources for Nonconformist Genealogy and Family History* (London and Chichester, 1973); Don J. Steel and E.R. Samuel, *Sources for Roman Catholic and Jewish Genealogy and Family History* (London and Chichester, 1974); Jeremy S. W. Gibson, *Census Returns, 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, on Microfilm: A Directory to Local Holdings* (Banbury, 1979); Michael Walcot and Jeremy S. W. Gibson (eds.), *Marriage Indexes: How to Find Them, How to Use Them, How to Compile One* (Plymouth, 1979); Jeremy S. W. Gibson, *A Simplified Guide to Probate Jurisdictions: Where to Look for Wills* (Banbury, 1980); Jeremy S. W. Gibson, *Bishops Transcripts and Marriage Licences: Bonds and Allegations. A Guide to their Location and Indexes* (Banbury, 1981); Jeremy S. W. Gibson and Colin Chapman (eds.), *Census Indexes and Indexing* (Plymouth, 1981); Jeremy S. W. Gibson and Pamela Peskett, *Record Offices: How to Find Them* (Plymouth, 1981); Jeremy S.W. Gibson, *Quarter Sessions Records for Family Historians: A Select List* (Plymouth, 1982); Jeremy S. W. Gibson (ed.), *Marriage, Census and other Indexes for Family Historians* (Plymouth, 1984); Jeremy S.W. Gibson, *The Hearth Tax, Other later Stuart Tax Lists and the Association Oath Rolls* (Plymouth, 1985); Jeremy S.W. Gibson, *Unpublished Personal Name Indexes in Record Offices and Libraries: An Interim List* (Plymouth, 1985); Jeremy S. W. Gibson, *General Register Office and International Genealogical Indexes: Where to Find Them* (Birmingham, 1987); Jeremy S. W. Gibson, *Local Newspapers 1750-1920, England and Wales, Channel Islands; Isle of Man: A Select Location List* (Birmingham, 1987); Jeremy S. W. Gibson and Colin Rogers, *Coroners' Records in England and Wales* (Birmingham, 1988); Jeremy S. W. Gibson and Alan Dell, *Tudor and Stuart Muster Rolls: A Directory of Holdings in the British Isles* (Birmingham, 1989); Jeremy S. W. Gibson and Mervyn Medlycott, *Militia Lists and Musters 1757-1876: A Directory of Holdings in the British Isles* (Birmingham, 1989); Jeremy S. W. Gibson and Colin Rogers, *Electoral Registers since 1832 and Burgess Rolls* (Birmingham, 1989); Jeremy S. W. Gibson and Colin Rogers, *Poll Books c1692-1872: A Directory to Holdings in Great Britain* (Birmingham, 1989); Jeremy S. W. Gibson and Heather Creaton, *Lists of Londoners* (Birmingham, 1992); Jeremy S. W. Gibson and Mervyn Medlycott, *Local Census Listings, 1522-1930: Holdings in the British Isles* (Birmingham, 1992); Jeremy S. W. Gibson, Mervyn Medlycott and Dennis Mills, *Land and Window Tax Assessments* (Birmingham, 1993); Jeremy S. W. Gibson, Colin Rogers and Cliff Webb (eds.), *Poor Law Union Records* (Birmingham, 1993-97, 4 volumes); Jeremy S. W. Gibson and Judith Hunter, *Victuallers' Licences: Records for Family and Local Historians* (Birmingham, 1994). Jeremy S. W. Gibson, *The Protestation Returns 1641-1642 and Other Contemporary Listings* (Birmingham, 1995). Many of these guides have run to several editions.

their location, introduce them to beginners and sell the books through the Federation.³⁸ Such skills and practices are thus not shared by the majority of family historians. For instance, Gibson's guide to the hearth tax list and other Stuart tax lists, first published in 1985 and updated in 1996, was primarily designed to tell family and local historians of the existence and location of such records of the period 1600-1715, which contain lists of names, mostly the names of tax payers, but also sometimes of those who did not pay their taxes. "Why is this useful to me" the beginner might ask? Clearly, the guide was not aimed principally at the beginner. Gibson explained that 'researching family and local history, one seeks the names of individuals. Knowledge of them is usually scanty. Their appearance in some of these lists will add to that knowledge'.³⁹ In other words, these records are not obviously useful to a practitioner that is merely gathering names and dates, but to the family historian who has already established a basic family tree, taken a lineage further back and now wants to uncover some of the details of his ancestors' lives, the sources could be very useful.

In another advanced guide (this time on Quarter Session records), Gibson revealed how such deeper knowledge of ancestors demonstrates the skills of the professional historian: Quarter Sessions records 'are little consulted... hardly at all by family historians. There are problems of language and palaeography (in Latin until 1732); their sheer bulk is intimidating...and, of course, they are rarely likely to provide direct genealogical evidence. However, for those prepared to spend time on them, they are a potentially rich source for the

³⁸ Interestingly, Michael MacDonald and Terence Murphy, having conducted a survey of coroner's records in their work on suicide in early modern England found that there was at least twice as much material when a Gibson guide came out when they were finishing. See: Michael MacDonald and Terence R. Murphy, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England* (Oxford and New York, 1990), p. 338-53; Jeremy S. W. Gibson and Colin Rogers, *Coroners Records in England and Wales* (Birmingham, 1988). Indeed, another suggestive parallel with family history, worthy of further attention is ornithology. Bird watching is a practice in which thousands can see things of particular remark, but can also have a knowledge of a habitat. The links between this as an amateur practice and as a science are complex, however, as there is the move from ticking a list to observing, or describing an ecology or a bird population with professional-amateur groups who talk to amateur groups and go on trips. In terms of skills, many bird-watchers are excellent at craft or field skills and can see things which require many hours of field time which even university field biologists may struggle to see. Similarly, family historians may be excellent researchers – with better palaeography and more time on their hands than university historians – and yet the frame into which they are often put is not so valued.

³⁹ Gibson, *The Hearth Tax*, p. 4.

family historian, with a wealth of “flesh” to cover the bare bones of genealogical research’.⁴⁰

The distinction from what some family historians have termed the ‘mere name gatherer’ – assembling names and dates, without much broader historical understanding, awareness of more biographical source material, or inclination to uncover it – could not be greater. This is especially the case when a lack of critical skill in establishing descent from records (relying instead upon assumptions about surnames) is in evidence.⁴¹

The ‘professional-amateur’, then, possesses a wide range of sources and documentary skills and engages in the public-spirited transcribing and indexing of records to aid the research of others. Some provide guides to help the beginner – thereby at once distinguishing themselves from the ‘beginner’ or ‘amateur’, and yet also encouraging such readers to develop their skills and range of source-based experience and thereby similarly distinguish themselves from such ‘amateurs’. At times this may involve paying such a ‘professional-amateur’ at a distance, although the ideal of family history societies is to ‘do-it-yourself’. Thus throughout the 1970s such family historians remained somewhat in tension with the professionalizing techniques of the various national genealogical institutions. In fact, as we have seen in Chapter 2, amongst the early family history societies an ethos emerged that was explicitly ‘amateur’. ‘We have been keen to keep it as simple as possible’ was how the first regional society, the Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and

⁴⁰ Jeremy S. W. Gibson, *Quarter Sessions Records for Family Historians: A Select List* (Birmingham, 1983, second edition), p. 4. The language of ‘putting flesh on the bones’ continues to distinguish between practitioners. Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire Family History Society, for example, used this as the title for a conference, sponsored by *Ancestry.com* and held at the University of Northampton in September 2006. See: Bedfordshire & Northamptonshire Family History Societies, in association with the Federation of Family History Societies, ‘International Conference September 2006 - Putting Flesh on the Bones: A Study of the Common Man, Conference 2006, (22 August 2006) <www.conference2006.org.uk> (accessed 22 August 2006).

⁴¹ For examples of this point in a diverse range of guidebooks, see: Dan Waddell, *Who Do You Think You Are? The Essential Guide to Tracing your Family History* (London, 2004), p. 12; Don Steel, *Discovering your Family History* (London, 1980), p. 7; Ruth Finnegan and Michael Drake, *From Family Tree to Family History* (Cambridge, 1994), p. ix; C. M. Field, *Trace your Ancestors* (London, 1982), p. 4; D. Harland, *A Basic Course in Genealogy. Volume II: Research Procedure and Evaluation of Evidence* (Salt Lake City, Utah, 1958), p. 19.

Heraldry, introduced their introductory guidebook – then already reaching its eighth edition and tenth printing – in 1983. ‘It has been written by amateurs for amateurs,’ they asserted.⁴²

A sense of solidarity between ‘amateurs’ was perhaps easier to maintain in the context of a group of family historians from a local society working together on transcribing and indexing projects than with the more individualistic forms of practice using ‘professional-amateur’ guides or magazines and websites.⁴³ Even amongst family history societies, however, a certain upper stratum soon became clear, not least in the call for speakers to give informative and provocative talks to other society members and to travel to other family history societies for the same purpose. This is undoubtedly how the careers of Gibson and others progressed. In 1985, for instance, the Ipswich branch of the Suffolk Family History Society held a one-day meeting at which speakers led talks on the history of education (by the vice president of the F.F.H.S., Colin Chapman – who had at this point himself also just published a ‘professional-amateur’ guide), the use of computers in family history, and the Victorian slums of Ipswich.⁴⁴

Some of the resistance to the distinctions that thus began to arise between family historians made itself heard in the pages of *Family Tree Magazine*. Much of this revolved around the extent to which ‘professional-amateurs’ sought to distinguish themselves from those with less knowledge and competence. For example, in 1989 an argument raged in the

⁴² Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *This Ancestry Business: A Beginner's Guide to Genealogy* (Solihull, 1983, eighth edition), p. 5.

⁴³ For further excellent examples of the numerous occasions on which ‘professional-amateurs’ situate themselves as a pedagogical go-between, see: Margaret Audin, ‘Vive la Différence’, *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(3) (March-April, 1985), p. 14; Elizabeth Halford, ‘How I Wrote a Family History’, *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(3) (March-April, 1985), p. 16.

⁴⁴ ‘Guest Society: The Ipswich Branch of the Suffolk Family History Society’, *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(2) (January-February 1985), p. 20-21. Indeed, multiple membership of family history societies and the S.O.G. provides another means of asserting one’s ‘professional-amateur’ status. See, for instance: Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking ~ About This Ancestry Business. Members of the Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry Recount Their Genealogical Adventures* (Birmingham, 1974), 85.



Figure 10. Guest-speaker, Colin Chapman (left) talking to the Chairman of the Ipswich branch of Suffolk Family History Society David Knightly at a one-day meeting, October 1984.⁴⁵

letters pages after Mr G. D. Clarke vented his irritation at the remarks of a 'professional genealogist' that 'a dabbler in the I.G.I. and a few parish registers with the occasional will thrown in is not a genealogist,' and argued that this 'raised a question that needs answering – when does dabbling end and research begin?'⁴⁶ From the other side of this argument, it has not been uncommon in the later twentieth century for the 'professional-amateurs' to be somewhat dismissive of the beginners and to refer to them as 'amateurs'. 'Many amateurs never know whether the information has survived or not, but give up far too easily when it is not where they expect it to be,' remarked Colin Rogers (who had also collaborated with various 'Gibson guides') in his guidebook.⁴⁷ Geoffrey Barrow, meanwhile, remarked in his

⁴⁵ *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(2) (January-February 1985), p. 20.

⁴⁶ G.D. Clarke, 'Viewpoints', *Family Tree Magazine*, 5(3) (January 1989), p. 3.

⁴⁷ Colin D. Rogers, *The Family Tree Detective: A Manual for Analysing and Solving Genealogical Problems in England and Wales, 1538 to the Present Day*, (Manchester, 1983), p. ix. This early publication demonstrates the speed with which Manchester University Press realised the scope for such guidebooks. Rogers himself had

guidebook published in 1977 that ‘the amateur genealogist will usually lack the knowledge and experience of the professional researcher, yet precisely the same records are available to both’.⁴⁸

Much, then, hinges on the contested categories of ‘professional’ and ‘amateur’. Rather than attempting to enter into such debates over the extent to which ‘amateurs are professional’ and vice versa, however, the intention here, by introducing the category of the ‘professional-amateur’, is simply to aid our understanding of the real variation that exists in this field. Such terms are not fixed, but are contested. Conceptualisations of competences can be as important in such debates as the competences themselves, and the intentions of ‘professional-amateurs’ are often to develop the skills of those that they see as a few steps behind them in their ancestral research. This perspective certainly sheds light upon the comments of some dismissive archivists about what to do with these ‘recreational historians’.⁴⁹ Indeed, librarians have been quicker than historians to note such diversity – chiefly due to their proximity to family historians on a daily basis. Richard Harvey, for instance, has pointed out to his fellow librarians that ‘many who take up genealogy as a hobby have no previous research experience,... are unfamiliar with the most basic techniques of acquiring information from source materials, such as the use of indexes, and a few may be barely literate’. Nonetheless after a library career spent largely in dealing with enquiries

also published some pieces of academic work, as well as teaching in adult education and local history. See, for instance: Colin D. Rogers, *The Lancashire Population Crisis of 1623* (Manchester, 1975); Colin D. Rogers and John H. Smith, *Local Family History in England, 1538-1914* (Manchester, 1991).

⁴⁸ Geoffrey B. Barrow, *The Genealogist's Guide* (London and Chicago, 1977), p. viii.

⁴⁹ I. Mortimer, ‘Discriminating Between Readers: The Case for a Policy of Flexibility’, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 23(1) (April 2002), p. 59. For a critique of Mortimer’s position, see: J. Moran and M. Taylor, ‘Lowering the Drawbridge: Further Thoughts on Discriminating Between Readers’, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 24(1) (April 2003); S. Gee, ‘A Standard Service for All? The Case for a Flexible Attitude’, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 23(2) (October 2002); R. Boyns, ‘Archivists and Family Historians: Local Authority Record Repositories and the Family History User Group’, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 20(1) (April 1999).

from family historians, Harvey was keen to point out that practitioners nonetheless vary considerably and may 'require access to a very wide range of sources'.⁵⁰

Such variation between practitioners and their contestation of competences has continued to be in evidence in online newsgroups. Providing a key means for helping fellow practitioners who are at a distance from the records concerned, the newsgroups provide a hub of helpful co-operation between searchers, much like family history societies and magazines. Nevertheless, in the process the tone of some messages also make clear the importance of acknowledging a diversity of skills, knowledge and competences and their conceptualisation. Peter Mayberry, an Australian family historian, for instance, was keen to assert his difference from other practitioners in their un-critical discussion of the I.G.I. as a source material, and from those who relied upon internet genealogy alone. Developing a culinary metaphor, Mayberry wrote that 'the expert replies to the posting [on the integrity of the I.G.I.] have enforced my opinion on the "spoon fed intake" of the fast food net genealogist... All too often on this newsgroup, I've also seen replies dished up without any ingredients of the source disclosed... Any data that has been interpreted from the "old style running writing" must be checked without fail by the serious genealogist'.⁵¹ These references to the "expert" and "serious" practitioner show that Mayberry thus sought to distinguish himself from those with less source critical awareness. He was thus making essentially the same points

⁵⁰ Richard Harvey, *Genealogy for Librarians* (London, 1992 [1983], second edition), p. 3, p. 1. For a similar American perspective, see: R. E. Bidlack, 'Librarians and Genealogical Research' in *Ethnic Genealogy: A Research Guide* (ed. J. Carney Smith), (Westport and London, 1983). Bidlack notes, for instance, that 'if there were several genealogists in the reading room at one time, they tended to be noisy – they talked out loud as they shared with each other their discoveries and their frustrations'. Nonetheless, Bidlack also points out that 'for the most part these people are intelligent, patient and a pleasure to work with'. Bidlack, 'Librarians and Genealogical Research', p. 6, p. 18.

⁵¹ P. Mayberry, (26 January 2004), 'Cooking Sauces For Fast Food Genealogists on the Net' in *soc.genealogy.australia+nz* [UseNet], (accessed 3 February 2004). Respondents such as Lynnette Fiddick were in agreement. She posted that: 'Fast food often leads to obesity and ill health. Fast genealogy often leads to the equivalent: the wrong family line... There is no quick way to "get" your family history easily. There is ALWAYS old fashioned, footslogging, time consuming work involved. NEVER accept as gospel any information that doesn't have its source and reference supplied allowing you to verify it, not even if Aunt Mary gives you a completely sourced and referenced published book on a family surname. The information in it still needs to be confirmed by you!' Lynnette Fiddick, (28 January 2004), 'Re: Cooking Sauces For Fast Food Genealogists on the Net' in *soc.genealogy.australia+nz* [UseNet], (accessed 3 February 2004).

regarding the internet and I.G.I. that were made by Horace Round about the College of Arms in the late nineteenth century. Crucially, however, in contrast to the view of those discussing how best to educate a 'public interest in the past', this 'professional-amateur' is doing so outside an academic context.

The expertises of the professional-amateurs that have emerged from the British family history society movement have also taken on a new dimension in online newsgroups. Eve McLaughlin, who published the 'McLaughlin guides' through the Federation of Family History Societies during the late 1970s and 1980s has, with others, come to devote quite a considerable amount of time to helping beginners through the newsgroups in the twenty-first century.⁵² After an enquiry for Carl Brown for help finding information about a divorced chaff-cutter who died in 1965 in Southwark or Bermondsey, McLaughlin replied: 'A chaff-cutter in 1965 in Southwark is beyond belief. But, on the other hand, if this should have been 1865, a chaff-cutter in Southwark is just about possible... But a divorced chaff-cutter – no! Divorce was for the filthy rich then'. Interestingly, not only did she try to help a struggling fellow family historian through her broader historical knowledge and experience, McLaughlin also wore her 'professional-amateur' credentials on her sleeve, signing off: 'Eve McLaughlin. Author of the McLaughlin Guides for family historians. Secretary of Bucks Genealogical Society'.⁵³

⁵² Eve McLaughlin, *Simple Latin for Family Historians* (Birmingham, 1986); Eve McLaughlin, *Reading Old Handwriting* (Birmingham, 1987, second edition); Eve McLaughlin, *Family History from Newspapers* (Birmingham, 1989, second edition). Other 'McLaughlin Guides', published through the Federation of Family History Societies include: Eve McLaughlin, *Wills before 1858* (Solihull, 1979); Eve McLaughlin, *The Censuses 1841-1881: Use and Interpretation* (Solihull, 1983); Eve McLaughlin, *Interviewing Elderly Relatives* (Plymouth, 1985); Eve McLaughlin, *Somerset House Wills from 1858* (Plymouth, 1985, third edition); Eve McLaughlin, *St Catherine's House* (Plymouth, 1985, sixth edition); Eve McLaughlin, *Annals of the Poor* (Solihull, 1986); Eve McLaughlin, *Parish Registers* (Solihull, 1986); Eve McLaughlin, *Laying Out a Pedigree* (Birmingham, 1988); Eve McLaughlin, *Illegitimacy* (Birmingham, 1989, fourth edition); Eve McLaughlin, *No Time For Family History?* (Birmingham, 1989). For more extensive guidebooks, published outside the F.F.H.S. see: Eve McLaughlin, *First Steps in Family History* (Newbury, 1989); Eve McLaughlin, *Further Steps in Family History* (Newbury, 1990); Eve McLaughlin, *Are We Related? How to Find your Famous Ancestors* (Newbury, 2002).

⁵³ Eve McLaughlin, (2 February 2004), 'Re: Herbert Henry Brown' in *soc.genealogy.britain* [UseNet], (accessed 5 February 2004).

At times, as we have seen with the exchanges in *Family Tree*, such status assertions could come to be resented if pushed too far. ‘Professional-amateur’ status continues to be contested. Roy Stockdill – the author of a popular online guide for beginners and editor of the *Journal of One-Name Studies* – became frustrated at the ‘name gathering’ of certain other online genealogists, complaining at the apparent assumption made by other newsgroup members that all those possessing the same surname might be related. ‘I do not suffer fools gladly,’ wrote Stockdill, and ‘I have little patience with, or time for, people who really cannot be bothered to put themselves out a bit to find the vast resources of information that are available out there’.⁵⁴ This turn of phrase provoked outrage from other practitioners. ‘You really are a condescending little man... I deal in FACT only and not what Granny tells me,’ responded one of those accused of foolish generalisation and apathy, pointing out that he had been speaking ‘in general’ only in pointing out that ‘the Lord family seems to come from just about every conceivable county in England... One of them had something to do with Lords cricket ground, and another had something to do with Churchill during WWII’. He went on: ‘I in no way expected such a condescending post... telling me how to research my family history. Especially since I have been doing this for years’.⁵⁵

This was far from the end of the matter, however. Stockdill again critiqued the assumption of relatedness based solely on surname: ‘The vague and imprecise wording of a section of your post indicated to me that you did not know what the “something” – if anything – was that one of your Lords had to do with the famous cricket ground. Thinking, therefore, to be helpful, I went to the trouble of looking up some information on Thomas Lord, his antecedents and possible marriage, and posting it... This is certainly a mistake – trying to be helpful’. Clearly frustrated at the lack of respect shown to his expertise,

⁵⁴ Roy Stockdill, (2 February 2004), ‘Re: LORDS in Manchester 1871’ in *soc.genealogy.britain* [UseNet], (accessed 5 February 2004).

⁵⁵ genie, (2 February 2004), ‘Re: LORDS in Manchester 1871’ in *soc.genealogy.britain* [UseNet], (accessed 5 February 2004); genie, (2 February 2004), ‘ATTN Roy Stockdill was Re: LORDS in Manchester 1871’ in *soc.genealogy.britain* [UseNet], (accessed 5 February 2004).

Stockdill thus went further to again emphasise his ‘professional-amateur’ credentials: ‘English is a beautiful language, you know, in the right hands and when used with a degree of craftsmanship carefully nurtured over many years of practice. I believe in using the language with clarity and precision of meaning, leaving no room for unfortunate misinterpretation by others. I commend this principle to you. I propose we now terminate this thread, since I have better things to do, such as completing the notes for my lecture to York FHS on Wednesday’.⁵⁶ In bringing together those with degrees and a pride in linguistic skills or grammar school education and those with little formal education, family history can thus provide a site for clashes surrounding wider issues of class and education, becoming a terrain for unexpected conflict. The conventions of citation thus become as important as source skills, as do issues of generation, whereby some older practitioners may have been raised before the era of comprehensive schooling. In any case, with this reference to his position in the family history society community, no further comeback to Stockdill was made and indeed other professional-amateurs rallied to his defence. Eve McLaughlin posted that ‘anyone who makes a generalisation about a common surname as being part of a “family” is showing serious lack of knowledge and/or common sense... Instead of being grateful not to need to waste time any more on fruitless searches, you seem intent on holding to the bit of imaginative thinking done by Auntie Netty or Uncle Fred. And having the nerve to criticise Roy Stockdill for offering the truth – here is another one for the “don’t touch with a bargepole” basket’. The reference to this ‘basket’ highlights how such spats are not isolated incidents, but constitute an important part of the contestation of genealogical ‘expertise’.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Roy Stockdill, (2 February 2004), ‘ATTN Roy Stockdill was Re: LORDS in Manchester 1871’ in *soc.genealogy.britain* [UseNet], (accessed 5 February 2004).

⁵⁷ The designation of ‘expertise’ amongst a group of F.F.H.S. ‘professional-amateurs is apparent, for example, in the reference in *Family Tree Magazine* to ‘specialist writers this issue’ and the heading of *Ancestors* magazine as ‘Family History from the Experts’ as well as question and answer section entitled ‘Ask the Experts’. *Ancestors*, 20 (April 2004), p. 1, p. 13; *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(3) (March-April 1985), p. 3. Such language thus deals with knowledge and competence hierarchies without the question of self-regulation which is associated with the language and sociology of professions. It also resonates with wider ‘ask the expert’ panel jury mode of contemporaneous magazine and television programmes, as, for example, in *Who Do You Think*

Despite the failure of attempts at the professionalization of family history and genealogy, then, discourses of a critical approach have continued, albeit in a hinterland between the professional and the amateur where expertise is at once desired and contested. Understanding this variegation rather than simply referring to the activities of ‘amateur’ historians is thus essential in light of the construction of guidebooks and for answering the numerous requests for help made of librarians, archivists, family history society members, online communities and magazines. Furthermore, despite this vast amount of co-operative activity amongst family historians, competences still remain so diverse that distinctions have frequently been drawn throughout the later twentieth century as to what constitutes acceptable, respectable practice and what does not. It is not only in the realm of competences and status that variegation exists, however. Style and education also matter in the field of family history, and ‘academic’ or ‘scholarly skills’ are thus not easily separable from class and reveal the non-scholarly uses that can be made of family history. Indeed, such variation also reflects further diversity in the social and cultural *uses* that family history and genealogical practices are put to in terms of cultural capital.

Aristocrats or Paupers? The Negotiation of Genealogical Cultural Capital

Closely related to ‘professional’ and ‘amateur’ status is the wider question of the cultural capital to be gained from genealogical research. The critical school of genealogy, after all, made its name by puncturing fanciful claims to lofty ancestry. However, as we have seen in Chapter 2, in the later twentieth century much family history research has defined itself in opposition to such social climbing. However, an exchange from the same newsgroups frequented by McLaughlin and Stockdill reveals that social differentiation is not absent from family history. Graeme Wall rebuked a previous posting requesting information on William Hurley and Julia Griffiths, married at St Pancras in 1891, for its inept

You Are? The rise of life as a reflexive ‘individualised planning project’ guided by ‘experts’ is vitally important in this regard, as shown in Chapter 5.

punctuation, writing that ‘proper use of capital letters makes your message easier to read and more likely to get a helpful response’.⁵⁸ This remark provoked a flurry of class-based insults. ‘If you are so bored that you need to pick holes in people’s posts, I suggest you get a life Steve... Middle class snobbery is typical of too many genealogists,’ replied Hugh Watkins.⁵⁹ ‘As for stupid accusations of middle class snobbery,’ retorted Wall, ‘I suppose that implies you are another “working-class hero” with a chip on your shoulder. I am not impressed. If you want to play the class card I am a fully paid-up Trade Union member, not white collar either. You?’⁶⁰

Such assertions of working-class credentials constitute, for Stan Newens, the *raison d’être* of the family history society movement. For Newens, a Labour historian writing in the early 1980s, British family history societies could provide a means by which those of working class descent might gain greater respect for their humble origins so as to reignite the class struggle. ‘Family history may be a more powerful factor in shaping political behaviour than class relationships’, Newens enthused, as ‘family tradition, not class loyalty is the determinant of political allegiance’.⁶¹ Jacqueline Stone, for instance, complained to *Family Tree Magazine* in January 1985, that too much emphasis had been placed in the previous issue regarding whether readers had famous or aristocratic ancestors: ‘Please don’t forget the Labourers (Ag Labs) as I am not “well connected”’.⁶² However, a continued interest in ‘blue blood’ has thus also persisted alongside spats like that between Wall and Watkins. In a Public Record Office introductory guide published in 2000, a strong reaction against ‘blue

⁵⁸ Graeme Wall, (3 February 2004), ‘Re: William hurley @ Julia Griffiths of Middlesex and glasgow’ in *soc.genealogy.britain* [UseNet], (accessed 9 February 2004).

⁵⁹ Hugh Watkins, (4 February 2004), ‘Re: William hurley @ Julia Griffiths of Middlesex and glasgow’ in *soc.genealogy.britain* [UseNet], (accessed 9 February 2004).

⁶⁰ Graeme Wall, (5 February 2004), ‘Re: William hurley @ Julia Griffiths of Middlesex and glasgow’ in *soc.genealogy.britain* [UseNet], (accessed 9 February 2004).

⁶¹ Stan Newens, ‘Family History Societies’, *History Workshop Journal*, 11 (Spring 1981), p. 155-59.

⁶² *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(2) (January-February 1985), p. 23.

blood' coincided with a certain aspiration to it: 'Genealogy used to be the preserve of the very wealthy... Now the records and facilities exist for everyone to have a go at tracing their family tree, and nearly everyone who tries will have a measure of success, following their line back into the nineteenth century and perhaps earlier... Who knows, you might find you come from a noble line after all!'⁶³ Indeed, articles have continued to appear in family history magazines asserting the possibilities of noble descent – whether it be Don Steel pointing out that the five daughters of Edward I were married off to barons, before daughters and grand-daughters married lesser barons and 'were soon lost in the population at large', or Charles Mosley, arguing in *Your Family Tree* that 'the British Isles have had so many kingdoms, let alone kings, that almost everybody here is likely to have ancestral connections with one of them'.⁶⁴ To hear Mosely, the editor of Burke's *Peerage*, arguing that 'pride in blue blood must be largely its own reward,' and that to 'brag about it and you'll be thought a bore at best' constitutes a staggering contrast to mid-nineteenth-century attitudes.

Nevertheless in such articles aristocratic descent remains a concern of family historians inasmuch as it may be demonstrated that 'ordinary people' share such descent.⁶⁵

This certainly presents a degree of complexity that seems to contradict Stan Newens's thesis that the family history movement would lead to greater class consciousness in a straightforward manner. What, then, were the attitudes to 'blue blood' in the earliest family

⁶³ Public Records Office Guides to Family History, *Getting Started in Family History* (Richmond, 2000), p. 7. See also, for instance, J. P. Abbott, *Family Patterns: A Personal Experience of Genealogy* (London, 1971), p. 9. As well as noble descent, connections to famous ancestors can also be emphasised. For example, *Family Tree Magazine* has often run competitions such as the 'my most interesting ancestor' series, or articles such as: 'Well connected? Many researchers find famous people in their family history'. In the latter it was reported that sisters Phyllis Nam and Sheila Williams found that the famous writer D.H. Lawrence had a place on their family tree through their father. Thus we find a competitive element, the aim of which is to derive direct prestige from a connection to interesting or famous ancestors in the past. See: 'My Most Interesting Ancestor', *Family Tree Magazine*, 5(12) (October 1989), p. 25; 'Well Connected? Many Researchers Find Famous People in their Family History', *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(1) (November-December 1984), p. 16. This theme is explored in Chapter 5.

⁶⁴ Don Steel, 'Your Royal Descent', *Family Tree Magazine*, 14(3) (January 1998), p. 11; Charles Mosley, 'Do You Have Blue Blood?', *Your Family Tree*, 10 (April 2004), p. 27.

⁶⁵ Mosley, 'Do You Have Blue Blood?', p. 32.

history societies of the 1970s, a time when a discourse of 'genealogy for all' was beginning to form a new conceptualisation of ancestral research? The accounts of members of the Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry collected in 1974 shed a great deal of light on this question. Some members were indeed keen to emphasise their humble origins. Arthur Hadley, for instance, was proud to emphasise the occupations of his West Midlands ancestry, who comprised nailers, brass makers, labourers, a glass cutter and packer, a roll turner at a tube works, a butcher and a bone boiler. Regarding the focus of his ongoing ancestral interests, Hadley commented that 'the only thing I know of [my great-grandfather] Launcelot Thomas Cook is that he died a drunkard in the workhouse'.⁶⁶ This was stated without any need for justification. Others, such as Nellie Haines, were more explicit in explaining their motivations as not being in search of any aristocratic cultural capital: 'A tree I have certainly made,' Haines remarked. 'No grand dukes, or earls, but humble folk such as a cordwainer who made shoes for the gentry in my grandmother's day. Butchers, many by number, one with wives three, a hard drinker the tale goes. A brick maker of humble degree. I wonder if this city of ours is pulling down the work of his hard labour! ... A journalist of little renown, but of whom it was written in a tribute on his death ... "He valued money only to the extent that it was useful to him and could give help to others"'.⁶⁷

However, in 1974 a number of Hadley and Haines' fellow members were happy to tie themselves in with a distinguished connection which could be both directly lineal, as well as by speculative and non-ancestral associations with an illustrious 'historical' figure. To take two examples, Ethel Waddelow, then aged 54, boasted that 'with a Waddelow Hall in Bristol and a Waddelow Road in Waterbeach, Cambs, the family seem to have left their mark. It is said that Cromwell's scribe was a Waddelow'. Such assumptions would not wash with those in the Birmingham Society also belonging to the S.O.G., I.H.G.S. or A.G.R.A.

⁶⁶ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 11.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

However, Waddelow was seemingly free to indulge her speculations: ‘My Truss ancestry goes back to John, bap. 1711, son of John and Frances of Yarwell, Northants,’ she went on. ‘Could we be descended from King John? He often visited Northants and a picture I have seen of His Majesty bore a striking resemblance to a cousin of mine. Coincidence?’⁶⁸ James Cartland, meanwhile, required less imagination in laying out his noble ancestry: ‘There appear to be several distinct branches mostly stemming from Ireland where they were country squires in the eighteenth century... My great-great-grandfather James made a fortune from his foundry and his only son John became a city councillor and lived at The Priory, King’s Heath, which included 150 acres of land... Several of my cousins – descendents of the Cartlands – still have their estates (a remarkable thing in the 1970s!) Cousin Kenneth, grandson of Katie Reid-Walker is just selling a Scottish one for £1,000,000 (it includes 5,000 acres of desolate moor). On my mother’s side I am descended from Robert, Earl of Gloucester, bastard son of Henry I’.⁶⁹

It is quite striking to find this admixture of emphases in the same society,⁷⁰ although such diversity did not stop here, as many British family history societies drew upon the language of both common and distinguished origins. Indeed, in many of the Birmingham Society accounts in the mid-1970s, blue blood and of humble origins intriguingly sat alongside one another, for the most part requiring a deft negotiation. Lawrence Osbourne, for instance, inspired to begin his searches by Leslie Pine’s guidebook and eager to display his research skills, commented without irony that ‘the nobility of my family may be judged from the fact that at each of the nineteenth-century censuses they were in different parishes’.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 26. For similar examples, see: 21, 23, 35 etc. In the mid-1970s, this also suggests a more diverse social composition of the B.M.S.G.H. as the group began a transition into a ‘family history’ society, as shown in Chapter 2.

⁷⁰ The intention here, however, is not to attempt to explore the typicality of any particular descent in relation to the current class status of family history societies members from the 1970s to the end of the twentieth century, however. This would entail an extensive sociological examination of post codes to reach conclusions based upon class categories for which there is an absence of source material and which is nonetheless beyond the scope of this thesis.

This assumption suggests that Osbourne was keen to assert such status, even on the flimsiest of evidence, but no sooner had he asserted it than he contradicted it: ‘However, I have no ambitions to discover a titled ancestor or even an armigerous one. I could not care less how lowly my ancestors are... As I see it the only advantage in having propertied forebears is that tracing them is likely to be easier’.⁷¹ In this case, then, noble ancestry holds cultural capital for Osbourne, but only inasmuch as it is not sought in a strategy of upward mobility. In a society that in printing this volume emphasised the opportunities of ‘family history’ for the ‘ordinary’, one had to be careful not to appear too snobbish.

Such negotiations thus related as much to contemporary discourses of ‘family history for all’ within the emerging societies as to the past being explored, and were even in evidence between a husband and wife. Ethel Blore drew cultural capital from both ends of the social scale: ‘on my mother’s side, I vividly remember being told that we were “the poor end of a wealthy family”... The Darralls were an illustrious (or should I say notorious?) family from the time of William the Conqueror. Just where we come, in relation to the main line, would be difficult to say with lost registers and poor manorial records.’ This aristocratic cultural capital was perfectly complemented by her paternal ancestry, however, although again a distinct flavour of searching for distinguished ancestry remained. ‘Since nothing spectacular is known about the Sirets, apart from the earliest reference to one Sired, a thegn of King Harold, it is not difficult to understand why I regard my Sirett line as consisting of ordinary folk – “Full many a flower... born to blush unseen”’ Blore wrote.⁷² Ethel’s husband, Charles, however, was wary of any such hint of pretension, heading his account of his own family history as ‘Blore – Not of Blore Hall’. ‘Father was born “on the land” only a few miles from where the family had been for centuries... Great-grandfather Blore was a

⁷¹ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 27.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 58. The slightly formal literary character of Blore’s language is also interesting in being suggestive of the school learning of the 1930s and 1940s. The reference to Thomas Gray’s ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’ (1751) and Harold’s thegns also displays a sense of the range of her reading and hints that the social and cultural milieu from which the ‘family history’ of the B.M.S.G.H. emerged.

“peeler” at Bilston, described as a “wild lad,”” wrote Charles. Yet just as Ethel had introduced a hint of ‘ordinariness’ to her assumed links to aristocratic descent, so Charles concluded his celebration of humble roots with the intriguing comment that ‘my mother’s mother was a Bollen and they considered themselves to be descended from Ann Boleyn (any comments?)’,⁷³

A remarkable diversity thus exists in the social and cultural uses to which ancestry has been put in terms of social and cultural capital since the mid-1970s disjuncture surrounding ‘family history’, as has also been shown with regard to the ‘professional-amateur’ divide. The social capital of old ancestry and the cultural capital of being so good at family history that one can establish it were both emphasised, and yet need not necessarily coincide. The importance placed upon ‘how far back’ ancestors can be traced thus could not be greater. Indeed a frequent emphasis was placed by practitioners upon their ‘earliest reference so far’.⁷⁴ Popular genealogical manuals consistently make reference to the difficulties and possibilities of getting back as far as possible with a family line. Anthony Camp, for instance, wrote that ‘an authentic pedigree of a family of the poorer classes which goes back earlier than 400 years is a great rarity and it is well to remember that only two English families can, with certainty, trace their pedigrees in the male line to a Saxon ancestor before 1066 (Arden and Berkeley)’.⁷⁵ Prior to the recording of parish registers (in 1538), manorial records become the principal evidence with which to trace descent, such that the upper classes stand in a unique and privileged position to ‘get further back’. As such, some

⁷³ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 59.

⁷⁴ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Journal*, 28 (February 1973), p. 5. See also: M. Throup, *Across Throup’s Bridge: A Family History Through Six Centuries* (Morley, 1986), p. iii; D. K. Chadwick, *Looking for your Family History: A Brief Guide for the Absolute Beginner* (S.I., 1981), p. 3; Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 7, 122 etc.; Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *This Ancestry Business: A Beginner’s Guide to Genealogy* (Solihull, 1983, eighth edition), p. 24; Eve McLaughlin, *First Steps in Family History* (Newbury, 1989), p. 6.

⁷⁵ Anthony J. Camp, *Tracing your Ancestors* (London, 1964), p. 11.

practitioners – like John Abbott – acknowledged that, rather than making it back to 1066, ‘I should have to be content with much less’.⁷⁶

What significance is there, then, in tracing an ‘ordinary’ family into the more distant past? By the early 1990s, some family history society members had begun to do just this, demonstrating not only their professional-amateur techniques but also gaining cultural capital in terms of a juxtaposition of a long line akin to the ‘aristocratic’ and ‘humble’ content. Ian McAlpine, for instance, introduced his family history by declaring: ‘It is still widely maintained that it is virtually impossible to trace an “ordinary” family beyond about 1550. The aim of this book is to prove otherwise’. McAlpine then proceeded to explain how, once he had successfully traced his mother’s ancestors back to the late sixteenth century, he found a brief history of the Ravald family published in the *Victoria County History* for Lancashire. This provided references to the Ravald deeds from 1454 and 1464 preserved at Manchester Central Library. Research on these documents enabled him to trace the family’s development between 1381 and 1483 and establish the relationships between some of its members. McAlpine gloried at locating ‘a 17 x gts-grandparent’ and particularly at the fact that he located a tax assessment signed by this distant relative. He continued: ‘I have the added satisfaction of actually being able to handle a manuscript which Thomas had seen more than 600 years ago’. Why should the satisfaction be so great? As well as his communion with his 17x great-grandfather Thomas over a mutually embraced tax assessment and the eagerness of following a detective trail, the cultural capital associated with this amazing depth of non-aristocratic family history is also vitally important. As McAlpine remarks at the conclusion of his book, ‘Will it be possible to go beyond the 1380s? I hope to go even further’.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Abbott, *Family Patterns*, p. 71.

⁷⁷ Ian McAlpine, *A Case Study in Early Genealogy: The Ravalds of Manchester and Kersal, 1381-1600* (Manchester, 1993), p. 57-58.

The fact that this family history was published by the Manchester and Lancashire Family History Society is also telling. Virtually no other family histories have been published by local societies, and generally speaking, those that are professionally published are done so at the expense of the author. Here we find something different, however. McAlpine's achievement was held up by his peers for societal publication, not least because they knew how hard such a feat was to achieve. Fellow family historians thus received it with enthusiasm, keen to imitate McAlpine's success and thereby to potentially receive the same prestige. There are, therefore, connotations of cultural capital beyond simply the depth of time achieved. Glorifying in the '17x gts' and emphasising 1381 (the year of the Peasant's Revolt and Poll Tax) with such pride is one thing – the historical skills necessary to achieve it are another. Linguistic and palaeographical skills were necessary to understand earlier documents, and to get 'further back', hence the prestige received for his advanced practices. His researches have thus not only distinguished him by showing that an 'ordinary' family history can be extraordinary in terms of cultural capital, but, furthermore, that the 'amateur' can research using the skills of the professional.

The simplistic labelling of family historians and genealogists as 'amateur' by some professional historians is thus shown to be inadequate. Rather than considering their activities in such terms, this chapter has demonstrated that upon closer inspection considerable complexity is in evidence. Despite the failure of genealogy to become established as a university discipline, professionalising impulses have remained, not least in recourse to language of genealogical 'expertise' and various self-ascriptions of both 'professional' and 'amateur' status. To this end, the wide variety of competences that are revealed by such analysis have led to my assertion that the term 'professional-amateur' is useful as an analytical tool to reach a greater understanding of this diversity. Certain family historians have, in a wide variety of contexts, become pedagogical go-betweens who both

distinguish themselves from and express solidarities with those seeking to research their ancestral past, but requiring help in getting started. This is not to say that a unified practice exists, however, and as we have seen in Chapter 2, throughout the second half of the twentieth century, practices have continued to change and develop. Indeed, this chapter has further demonstrated that we must distinguish between those who pursue family history solely as a casual hobby using magazines and the internet for their primary contact to the family history community, and those who enter family history societies and other bodies with the intention of developing their competences and skills. The family history community contains different categories of expertise, and simultaneously constitutes and differentiates itself. Furthermore, not only do the competences and perception of competences explored here demonstrate fields of contestation, but the social and cultural uses to which these practices are put in terms of cultural capital also involve significant variegation and negotiation. Interestingly, discourses of family history for all have not negated references to 'blue blood', but have allowed them to persist in an altered form, whereby 'ordinary' ancestry can be shown to be extraordinary in many ways.

The diverse ways in which family history can construct and act as cultural capital beg the further question, however, of how and why 'family history' appealed on a mass level in the 1970s. Why should 'ordinary' family histories have come to hold such cultural capital and weight so that family historians deluged record offices, libraries and websites from the late-1970s. To this end, we turn now to a close reading of Alex Haley's *Roots* and the furore surrounding its release in 1977. As we shall see, it heralded the arrival of family history on television screens and sounded the drum for a 'family history' that uncovered the untold stories and showed how 'amateurs' could take to the domain of historical research like 'professionals'.

**Roots: Alex Haley's Epic
as Ur-Text of Late-1970s Family History**

“And the crossroads kept unfolding like a picture, until finally there was the huge old shell of a *baobab* that the young men from Barra had described. It must have been hundreds of rains old to be dying at last, he thought, and he told Lamin what one of the young men had told him: ‘A *griot*¹ rests inside there,’ adding from his own knowledge that *griots* were always buried not as other people were but within the shells of ancient *baobabs*, since both the trees and the histories in the heads of the *griots* were timeless” (Alex Haley, *Roots*)

Over Easter 1977, a ratings war of epic proportions was fought upon Britain's television screens. Palm Sunday saw the transmission of the first part of Franco Zeffirelli's two-part epic *Jesus of Nazareth* on ITV. It was watched by at least half of the British population and the conclusion was scheduled for Easter Sunday. However, the BBC planned to dampen its success by screening the first three episodes of its marathon six-part, twelve-hour American import – Alex Haley's genealogical slave-saga *Roots* – on consecutive nights over the same Easter weekend on BBC1.² The BBC's plans were based upon the unprecedented success of *Roots* in the United States, where Haley's multi-generational, epic tale of the lives of his ancestors (from pre-slavery West Africa to 1970s Tennessee and New York) was estimated to have been viewed by between 85 and 135 million people three months earlier (by far the largest audience in the history of television at that time), as well as upon the presence of Haley's million-selling novel at the top of the American bestsellers' list.³ In Britain, *Roots* was serialised in the *Daily Express* alongside the broadcasts

¹ A 'griot' is a West African poet, praise singer and wandering musician, considered a repository of oral tradition, often including extensive genealogical and historical information. See, for instance, Thomas A. Hale, *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1998).

² Hilary Kingsley and Geoff Tibballs, *Box of Delights: the Golden Years of Television* (London, 1989), p. 162; *The Times*, 7 April 1977; *The Times*, 9 April 1977.

³ David A. Gerber, 'Haley's *Roots* and Our Own: An Inquiry into the Nature of a Popular Phenomenon', *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 5(3) (1977), p. 87; Alex Haley, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (New York,

throughout Easter Week. The paper trumpeted that ‘there’s never been a real life story like it before – five generations of joy, suffering, love and despair’, and the eagerly anticipated full British publication was set to coincide with the screening of the fourth episode on the BBC.⁴ On Maundy Thursday the BBC screened Alex Haley’s promotional interview with Michael Parkinson ahead of the ratings showdown. This further heightened anticipation of *Roots*,⁵ and exposed viewers to Haley’s orations and captivating storytelling, describing, for instance, his re-enactment of his ancestor, Kunta Kinte’s horrific ‘Middle Passage’ from the Gambia to Maryland by himself spending three nights communing with his ancestor whilst stripped to his underpants in the hold of a Liberia to Florida cargo vessel.⁶ Meanwhile the arrival of Haley in London was met with the hum of controversy provided by front page headlines and a fiercely critical article by Mark Ottoway published in the paschal *Sunday Times*. This decried Haley’s genealogical claims to have proven his descent from an identifiable African individual, lineage and village prior to Kunta Kinte’s capture and enslavement.⁷ The BBC scheduled the third instalment of *Roots* to clash directly with Zeffirelli’s conclusion to the

1976). *Roots* sold 1.5 million copies in hardback and 4 million since, topping the U.S. best-seller list for five months, beginning November 1976. In Britain *Roots* (in hardback) spent ten weeks in the *Sunday Times* best-sellers’ list between 1 May 1977 and 26 June 1977, being the eighth bestselling hardback that year. As a paperback, it spent a further eight weeks in the *Sunday Times* list between 23 April 1978 and 11 June 1978. John Sutherland has pointed out that, unlike the U.S., the British book trade in the 1970s remained ambiguous about the publication of sales figures and best-sellers lists on a week-by-week basis, as at this time it was still, largely founded on a ‘resistance to spotlighting the bestseller on the grounds that it diverts attention from the whole range of books available at any time’. The increasing commodification of the book trade in Britain was in evidence throughout the 1970s, however, and *Roots* is certainly an early example of the ‘international bestseller machine’. See: John Sutherland, *Bestsellers: Popular Fiction of the 1970s* (London, Boston and Henley, 1981), p. 1-37; *Reading the Decades: Fifty Years of the Nation’s Bestselling Books* (London, 2002), p. 111-12.

⁴ *The Daily Express*, 10 April 1977; *The Sunday Times*, 10 April 1977; *The Times*, 18 April 1977; Alex Haley, *Roots*, (London, 1977).

⁵ Indeed, Michael Church, a contemporary commentator, saw such promotional interviews as that with Michael Parkinson to be ‘as significant as last night’s initial episode in the series’. *The Times*, 9 April 1977.

⁶ ‘Alex Haley on the Long Search for his African Ancestors’, *The Listener*, 7 April 1977, p. 441. This is a transcription of Haley’s interview on the *Parkinson* chat-show.

⁷ Mark Ottoway, ‘Tangled Roots’, *The Sunday Times*, 10 April 1977, p. 1, 17, 21; See also: Robert D. McFaden, ‘Some Points of “Roots” Questioned: Haley Stands By Book As Symbol’, *New York Times*, 10 April 1977, p. 1. McFaden reports Haley’s brief faltering engagement with Ottoway’s criticism, although Haley subsequently reverted to simply denying and ignoring its claims.

gospel drama and the scene was set for an Easter Sunday showdown between Christ and Kunta Kinte.

In the words of social historians of television, Kingsley and Tibballs: 'The tactic worked'. Around 19 million British viewers tuned in to watch the first episode of *Roots* and audience figures grew thereafter as the series reached its climax.⁸ The R.A.C. reported the quietest Easter on the roads for ten years, remarking that 'most people stayed at home', whilst the BBC received numerous 'congratulatory telephone calls'.⁹ Reviewers applauded and the mini-series enjoyed further huge success in countries as diverse as Australia, Japan, Canada, and Belgium, before a successful – if not phenomenal – televisual sequel exploring later generations' lives in further detail followed a year later, and the novel was translated into as many as 40 different languages.¹⁰ Incidentally, whilst the television series is an adaptation of the novel and certain minor differences and simplifications can, and have, been noted, for the purposes of this chapter, I simply underline John Sutherland's point that 'in their search for the maximum sale, supersellers of the 1970s...[came] to depend more than ever before on the...reciprocal tie-in arrangement [in which] alternative media versions of the original work support each other in creating a publicity bandwagon and universal sales [and viewing] mania'.¹¹ Indeed, Alex Haley – who was born in Ithaca, New York in 1921,

⁸ Kingsley and Tibballs, *Box of Delights*, p. 162; Information Unit of the British Film Institute, personal communication. It must be pointed out that the figure of 19 million viewers is an estimated figure based upon the number of viewing households, the method of recording used by the BBC in 1977, prior to the inception of the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board (B.A.R.B.) in 1981. See B.A.R.B. Ltd, *About B.A.R.B.: Questions and Answers*, (2004), <<http://www.barb.co.uk/about.cfm?report=qanda&flag=about>> (accessed 10 September 2004).

⁹ *Daily Express*, 12 April 1977; *The Times*, 12 April 1977.

¹⁰ David Chioni Moore, 'Routes', *Transition*, 64 (1994), p. 7; Alex Shoumatoff, *The Mountain of Names: A History of the Human Family*, (New York, Tokyo and London, 1995, second edition), p. 220; Helen Taylor, "'The Griot from Tennessee": The Saga of Alex Haley's *Roots*', *Critical Quarterly*, 37(2), p. 48; Jacob Young and Meggan Dissly, 'Europe's Genealogy Craze: Do you Know your Great-Grandmother's Name?', *Newsweek*, March 7 1988, p. 58.

¹¹ John Sutherland, *Bestsellers: Popular Fiction of the 1970s* (London, Boston and Henley, 1981), p. 32. Indeed, Sutherland points out that this 'bestseller machine' has its very own history, as retail outlets developed accordingly – such as 'W.H. SMITH'S TOP TEN PAPERBACKS' retail section – as an Americanization' of the British book trade occurred in the 1970s, and bestsellers were increasingly tailored by the negotiations and commercial interferences of publishers. It is also noteworthy that newspaper bestseller's lists in the British

left school aged 15 and worked as a cook in the US Coastguard during WW2 before he began to scrape a living working as a freelance writer in the 1960s - became a millionaire as a result of this 'sales mania'.¹² He also won a Pulitzer Prize, and founded the Kunta Kinte-Alex Haley charitable foundation to encourage Americans to embark upon their own quest for family 'roots'.¹³

Certainly many commentators and scholars have claimed that, in Britain as in America, *Roots* provided a remarkable 'spark factor' to the growth of popular interest in genealogical research outlined in Chapters 1.¹⁴ As we have seen, data from archivist's reports suggest that the numbers of those searching for their ancestors in the late 1960s and early 1970s did indeed accelerate in the post-*Roots* era, although it is also important to note that this increase has been mythologized somewhat. There was an acceleration in the already increasing numbers – for instance, the Northumberland Record Office received 212 genealogical visitors in 1972, doubling to 560 in the year before *Roots*, and this in turn tripling to 1533 the year after *Roots*. 51% of the office's users were now genealogists

press develop contemporaneously with the success of *Roots*. For discontinuities between shelf and screen versions of *Roots*, see: Linda Williams, 'Home Sweet Africa', in *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Sam to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton and Oxford), 2001, 238-51; Lauren R. Tucker and Hemant Shah, 'Race and the Transformation of Culture: The Making of the Television Miniseries *Roots*', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 9 (1992), 325-336. The television mini-series is 'based on the book by Alex Haley', and Haley worked as consultant on the production. Although such scholars have argued that the mini-series saw the suffering of slaves toned down to appease white viewers and that the ideology of race is altered in accordance with the 'manufactured content' of 'white producers and network executives', for my purposes such differences are not of the utmost concern. The conflation of characters, the simplification of plot, and the softening of cruelty do not alter the themes discussed here. Indeed, the condensing of, say, the issues surrounding naming practices in the scene of the scourging of Kunta serve simply to coalesce many of the associated issues into one symbolically pregnant screen moment, resonating with the viewer in a fashion analogous to that of the reader.

¹² *The Times*, 11 February 1992.

¹³ See Figures 14 and 15 below for more on the Kunta Kinte-Alex Haley Foundation.

¹⁴ Anthony Camp, 'Family History', in David Hey (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History* (Oxford, 1996), p. 171; Stan Newens, 'Family History Societies', *History Workshop Journal*, 11 (Spring 1981), p. 155-56; Young and Dissly, 'Europe's Genealogy Craze', p. 58; 'So You Want To Learn...Family History', *Guardian Unlimited*, (9 October 2001), <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/guardianeducation/story/0,3605,565483,00.html>> (accessed 16 September 2004).

compared to only 17% in 1974 (see Figure 4 above).¹⁵ However, we must be careful not to characterise this simplistically as ‘determined by’ *Roots*. Supply-side changes such as the increasing availability of the I.G.I. and of locally held census records on microfilm throughout the decade were contributing factors. Still, with the screening and publication of *Roots*, a more dramatic increase in record office use by genealogists began to become apparent – it is fair to say that genealogical enthusiasm was beginning to hit top gear. Furthermore, as we have seen in Chapter 2, in the late-1970s the archive profession changed its conceptions of genealogical research and a ‘family history’ user group emerged for the first time. A closer focus upon *Roots* and its reception, then, provides a means for us to analyse this transitional period when ‘family history’ came to crystallise on a national level. Without advancing any particularly determinist view of *Roots* as ‘producing’ the greater growth of the 1970s, therefore, it nevertheless allows us to advance our understanding and to shift our focus to the *meanings* contained and expressed in these growing desires for, and conceptions of, ‘family history’.

In any case, in light of the oft-remarked impact of *Roots*, and the frequency with which it is cited as producing an interest in family history, it is strange to note the marked absence of academic engagement with *Roots*. Some historical scholarship has been directed towards discrediting the book’s empirical basis, and has criticised it as being too subjective, relying too much on Haley’s vivid imagination, and not enough on historical evidence. For instance, David Donald noted that Kunta Kinte’s slave sale price was at least three times higher than that paid by Virginian planters for field hands in 1768, not to mention that it would have been paid in pounds, shillings, and pence or Spanish dollars, and certainly not American dollars as Haley has it.¹⁶ Similarly, Africanist historian Donald Wright points out

¹⁵ Northumberland County Council, *The Northumberland Record Office annual report 1974*, p. 5. Subsequent reports: 1975, p. 7; 1976, p. 6; 1977, p. 7; 1978, p. 6; 1979, p. 6; 1980, p. 4.

¹⁶ David Herbert Donald, ‘Family Chronicle’, *Commentary*, 62(6) (December 1976), p. 71-72. Donald makes a number of other empirical criticisms in his review. One is to point out that when Haley’s ancestor ‘Chicken George’ is lost to an Englishman in a cockfighting bet and taken to be a slave to the English Lord for five years

that Kunta's capture was wholly unrealistic as by the eighteenth century the slave trade in the lower Gambia no longer operated through kidnapping,¹⁷ whilst Robin Law dismissed *Roots* as 'fiction' and a 'historical novel'.¹⁸

Nevertheless, there has also been very little discussion of *Roots* amongst literary critics, especially when one considers that it has sold far more copies than any other African-American narrative ever written.¹⁹ Perhaps the out-of-court plagiarism settlements made by Haley have deterred scholars, or perhaps the confusion over Haley's designating of the book as 'faction' has prevented engagement with the text.²⁰ In any case, clearly *Roots* straddles the disciplines of history and literature, and it is at the conjunction of these two silences that my analysis is offered. The dismissal of *Roots* gives little insight into the enthusiastic reception of the text, and of its socio-cultural motivational effects. Thus, in this chapter, Haley's saga is explored by a close reading of *Roots* as a historically symptomatic *ur-text*²¹

in the 1850s, in reality George would have been set free immediately once he set foot on English soil following Lord Mansfield's 1772 ruling in the *Somerset* case.

¹⁷ Wright also questioned Haley's oral history methodology in the Gambia, collecting contradictory data relating to Haley's genealogical claims by re-interviewing and discrediting his key Gambian informant, a local *griot* named Kebba Kanji Fofana. This led Wright totally to reject the empirical basis of Haley's claims, concluding that Kunta Kinte was either a wholly fictitious figure or a person about whom details of a story were simply made up or significantly embellished to meet the needs of a visitor from America in search of his origins. Wright teases that this is 'just what any good *griot* might have done for an African ruler several centuries before his time'. Donald R. Wright, 'Uprooting Kunta Kinte: On the Perils of Relying on Encyclopaedic Informants', *History in Africa*, 8 (1981), p. 206-14. Or as Philip Nobile remarked, 'his feat in writing *Roots* was the genealogical equivalent of uncovering the lost city of Troy'. Philip Nobile, 'Death of a Black Dream – *Roots* by Alex Haley', *The Sunday Times*, 21 February 1993. For a summary and discussion of other empirical criticisms, see Gerber, 'Haley's Roots and Our Own', p. 96-98.

¹⁸ Robin Law, 'Alex Haley, "Roots"', *Oral History*, 6(1) (Spring 1978), p. 128.

¹⁹ Moore, 'Routes', p. 8. A notable exception is provided by a small body of literary work exploring *Roots* in relation to the plantation epic, although the small flow of publications dried up entirely by the mid-1980s. See, for instance, Leslie Fiedler, *The Inadvertent Epic: From Uncle Tom's Cabin to Roots*, (New York, 1979).

²⁰ Alex Haley faced a number of plagiarism cases. The first, in 1977, saw Margaret Walker's challenge that Haley had copied from her novel *Jubilee* dismissed by the courts. However, a second court case saw Haley pay a reputed \$650,000 to Harold Courlander, author of 1967 novel, *The Slave* on the night before the judge was to return his verdict. For further discussion of these and other rumoured plagiarisms, see Taylor, "The Griot from Tennessee", p. 52-55. In addition to the plagiarism debates, the significant input of *Roots*' editor Murray Fisher is openly acknowledged by Haley in his acknowledgements. Haley, *Roots* (New York, 1976), p. vii. All of the quotations made here are taken from this first American publication.

²¹ To clarify, the term '*ur-text*' is used here in two inter-related senses. It relates, on the one hand, to a culturally symptomatic text to explore particular themes, strands, qualities and characteristics which lend the text to appropriation and recognition by readers and viewers, whilst on the other, it reflects a text that provides a

to draw out the key themes and strands of this spark to the acceleration of genealogical enthusiasm in the late-1970s.

For the 'Roots effect' in motivating family history interest in the late-1970s can be heard clearly from the mouths of genealogists themselves. In a *Family Tree Magazine* survey in 1986, almost ten years after its broadcast, *Roots* was still recorded as one of the most popular reasons for sparking an enthusiasm in family history.²² When I requested opinions of *Roots* and its effect on practitioners in a genealogical newsgroup thirty years after its broadcast, it was still remembered as a 'spark factor'. 'Yes, *Roots* did get me started in genealogy' replied one practitioner, 'I joined my local genealogy society in September 1979, but had been doing it on my own awhile before that'.²³ This is not just hindsight. In 1982, reflecting upon the startling growth of the York and District Family History Society membership since its inception in 1975, one practitioner noted that a significant influx of new members to the society had occurred in the immediate aftermath of the screening and publication of *Roots*, concluding, 'Alex Haley probably started it'.²⁴ Indeed, amongst British family historians, Haley sometimes occupies the status of a popular icon. His remark that 'In every conceivable manner, the family is link to the past, bridge to the future,' for instance, is used as the header to the genealogical homepage of a Welsh retired head teacher, John Fletcher, for whom it epitomises the nature of his family history research. In this usage, Haley provides the archetype, the cultural cornerstone upon which genealogical research or a

starting point of a particular boom of genealogical interest, in that *Roots* motivated these readers and viewers to search for their own roots. Furthermore, the irony of using this term in the latter sense is intentional. Etymologically, the origins of the term are undoubtedly Biblical, in that Abraham's geographical and genealogical "roots" lay in 'Ur of the Chaldeans', which his father Terah left for the land of Canaan, just before God called Abraham to 'go from your country and your kindred' (Genesis 11:27-12:2). Family history is discussed in light of religious culture in Chapter 6 below.

²² 'Our Questions... Your Answers', *Family Tree Magazine*, 2(5) (July-August 1986), p. 5.

²³ Jane Watt, (4 September 2004), 'Re: Did Alex Haley's *Roots* inspire you?' in *soc.genealogy.britain* [Usenet], (accessed 6 September 2004).

²⁴ K. Farnsworth, 'Solving a family mystery', *York Family History Society Newsletter*, 5 (Spring 1982), p. 8.

website is built, and sure enough John Fletcher's homepage proceeds to explore the lives of a variety of coal mining and agricultural labouring ancestors.²⁵

As the then Director of Research at the Society of Genealogists, Anthony Camp, noted, the *Roots*-phenomenon coincided with the creation of many family history societies in the later 1970s and the swelling of the ranks of those already founded.²⁶ It is surely no coincidence that in 1978 the Fellows of the Society of Genealogists decided to create an annual prize for the best amateur genealogical work.²⁷ However, the motivational impact of *Roots* lasted longer than the late-1970s. One British genealogist remarked: 'I sat and watched it with my Gran when I was about ten. It left me with a deep hatred of what happened, and also my first understanding that my ancestors had been people. I was a little white English girl, but although it was very alien to my experience and my imagination of my own history, it seemed profoundly personal... It made enough of an impact on me that it has always been at the back of my mind ever since. I started researching my family tree a couple of years later'.²⁸

What are we to make of this motivational effect beyond the context of North American slavery and oral history? That *Roots* was written in a specifically African-American cultural context is obvious.²⁹ The American Civil Rights Movement undoubtedly provided the background to *Roots*, for Haley was the ghost-writer of the influential *Autobiography of Malcolm X* in 1965. But how should we understand the paradox that although rooted in an explicitly Afro-American context and cultural location, *Roots* managed

²⁵ John Fletcher, 'Introduction: Welcome to our Fletcher Family Website', *Fletcher Family Website*, (2004), <www.fletcher-family.co.uk>, (accessed 11 October 2004). See also: The Japps of Scotland, 'The Jaap Family Tree', (2004), <www.jaap.fsnet.co.uk/Webnew/Treelinks.html> (accessed 11 October 2004).

²⁶ Camp, 'Family History', p. 171.

²⁷ *The Genealogist's Magazine*, 19(8) (December 1978), p. 265.

²⁸ Mandy Walker, *Roots*. Personal e-mail, 6 September 2004

²⁹ See Williams, 'Home Sweet Africa'. Williams explores the dynamics of this text of the post-civil rights era as the 'most significant media event of its age' in this context.

(and continues) to inspire and motivate genealogical interest in people from a diversity of backgrounds, and to tap into an interest in family history that crosses national and ethnic boundaries? After all, there are only two or three references to American genealogies and British genealogies in the entire book.³⁰ The central theme (and title) of *Roots* provide the beginnings of an answer.

At the core of the book is an undeniable and irresistibly strong metaphor of rootedness, origins and primordialised belonging. This is conveyed both geographically, with reference to the ancestral African village of Juffure, and genealogically, whereby the connections of familial blood provide a firm identity, even when the various generations are far from the Gambian soil. The opening sentences of *Roots* show clearly the manner in which these two types of rootedness are intertwined: 'Early in the spring of 1750, in the village of Juffure, four days upriver from the coast of The Gambia, West Africa, a manchild was born to Omoro and Binta Kinte...and there was the prideful knowledge that the name of Kinte would thus be both distinguished and perpetuated'.³¹ This Edenic village setting provides a quintessential origin in terms of place and a particular group of people who are embedded there by a web of kinship ties and clan terminology. Kunta refers to it as 'their very sourceplace'. People and place are presented as inseparable, and as such are assumed to carry a potent primordialism which, in Haley's words, allows 'all of us today to know who we are'.³² When Kunta realises on the Virginian slave plantation that he will never return to his family and native land, he still resolves that 'he could never pay the price of giving up who and what *he had been born* in order to live out his years without another beating' and

³⁰ For instance, Kunta's soon-to-be-wife Bell tells him about the genealogy of his second slave-owners: "All dem Wallers is very close" Bell continued. "Dey's 'mongst de oldes' families in Virginia. Fact, dey was ol' family in dat England even fo' dey come crost de water to here. Was all kinds of 'Sirs' an' stuff, all b'longin' to de Church of England. Was one of dem what writ poems, name Mass Edmund Waller. His younger brother Massa John Waller was de one what comes here first". Haley, *Roots*, p. 269. See also p. 523 for the only reference to a British genealogy, as George recounts details of the 'long purebred lineage' of his former British slave-owner.

³¹ Haley, *Roots*, p. 1.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 289, p. viii.

resolves that 'it might be good to get his mind off himself and his hands in the soil again – even if it wasn't *his own*'.³³ The genealogical identity is one of fixed and primordialised origins – of who one is born, of the name one possesses as a result of that genealogical descent, and of the associated land – not, for example, of what one may become.

Naming practice is vital here, and the significance of the family name is similarly a central preoccupation of the family historian. Many genealogies are, after all, principally lengthy lists of names. Shortly after his birth, Kunta is given a variant of the name of his grandfather, 'a name rich with history and with promise', which is uttered first only by whispering into the infant's ear so that 'each human being should be the first to know who he was', and demonstrating that the familial name is fundamental to personhood.³⁴ Thus, when Kunta is sold into slavery and renamed 'Toby' by his slave master, his reaction reveals the utter impossibility of giving up something so intrinsic to genealogical personhood as, what Haley calls, a 'real name', a 'true name': 'He moved his jabbing finger again to Kunta. "You To-by! Toby. Massa say you name Toby!" When what he meant began to sink in, it took all of Kunta's self-control to grip his flooding rage without any facial sign of the slightest understanding. He wanted to shout "I am Kunta Kinte, first son of Omoro, who is the son of the holy man Kairaba Kunta Kinte"³⁵ With geographical rootedness so brutally denied him, Kunta cannot endure his name to be changed, as his genealogical identity is the only element of his essence-in-origin that he has left. A model of rootedness of coterminous geographical origins and genealogical descent located in solid, unalterable and naturalised name labels is

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 217. My italics.

³⁴ Haley, *Roots*, p. 2. Kunta undertakes the same naming ceremony for his daughter, Kizzy, on his Virginian slave plantation, naming her 'as it had been done with all of the Kinte ancestors' such that Kizzy was 'the first person to know who she was'. *Ibid.*, p. 290.

³⁵ Haley, *Roots*, p. 365, p. 288, p. 180-81. Similarly, Kizzy finds it intolerable that her own son George, fathered by the slave master that raped her, is named by him after another slave, as is George's wife Matilda and Grandma Kizzy when George's son Tom is similarly named after this slave master. Haley, *Roots*, p. 369-70, p. 440-42.

thus forcefully asserted as a bedrock of belonging to the reader, even if he or she is neither Gambian, a Mandinka, or a Kinte.

Indeed the title of a popular British genealogical guidebook published hot on the heels of *Roots* in 1978 – *Everyone has Roots* – suggests that such a message of belonging may well have led some readers and viewers to search for their own family history. Its author, Anthony Camp, provided an introduction to source material and genealogical practice in Britain that was unashamedly marketed at those inspired by *Roots* whilst simultaneously dismissing Haley’s work for being unconventional by the standards of the Society of Genealogists in its reliance on oral history. The sales pitch for Camp’s guide that ‘anybody can trace their ancestors’ and that ‘everyone has roots’ was undoubtedly aimed at the rise of democratic genealogy: ‘In your search you may discover lofty connections or humble beginnings; descent from a lord or a tanner, a marshal or a brickmaker’. Camp remarked that ‘increasingly the ordinary person has come to know that there is almost as much to be discovered about his background, if he has the time to put into it, as there is about the background of any other person’.³⁶ Camp’s emphasis is revealing, particularly in light of Alex Haley’s hope that *Roots* ‘can help to alleviate the legacies of the fact that predominantly the histories have been written by the winners’.³⁷ In both books we thus find the intended audience to be those omitted from ‘history’ – be it slaves or the British ‘ordinary man’, perhaps descended from a tanner or brickmaker. The message of *Roots* thus had relevance beyond Alex Haley and beyond the black American community precisely because it stated loudly and clearly that everyone - no matter how marginalised or repressed - had ancestors who could be identified. This was certainly evident in the media frenzy surrounding the release of *Roots*. In the *Daily Express* coverage, we encounter Haley’s evangelisation of the

³⁶ Anthony Camp, *Everyone has Roots: An Introduction to Genealogy*, (London, 1978), front-cover, back-cover, p. 15.

³⁷ Haley, *Roots*, p. 587.

possibilities for family history to act as a great social leveller in reviewer Peter Grosvenor's characterisation of Haley as a man who 'shakes the hand of President Carter with same warmth that he grasps the outstretched hands of doormen and bellboys'.³⁸ Privilege does not stand up to the universality of family history. The newspaper's cartoon later that week reflected this further (Figure 11) as the 'blue-blooded' aristocratic ancestry so conspicuously displayed in the framed portrait is dismissed by the wife's jibe that 'we all know a dam' sight too much about your roots already!' The pompous display of lofty pedigree seems to be in the process of losing cultural capital amongst readers of the right-wing tabloid press. This was a point touched upon by Stan Newens, who argued in 1981 (as family history society membership began to boom) that historians of the Labour Movement should cease to view genealogy with suspicion because those swelling the fledgling family history societies were predominantly people whose family origins were working class or plebeian. Within a few



Figure 11. A cartoon printed alongside the media frenzy surrounding the release of *Roots* illustrates the shift to a more democratic genealogical interest.³⁹

³⁸ *Daily Express*, 6 April 1977.

³⁹ *Daily Express*, 13 April 1977.

months of the screening of *Roots* the Australian Institute of Genealogical Studies similarly opened its arms to all comers and asserted in its journal that 'anybody without any skills at all is welcome to join us...for even the lowliest of commoners has a genealogy and a family history of equal interest to all'.⁴⁰ Of the British family history society movement, Newens wrote: 'The realisation that everyone has ancestors, whose toils and tribulations, whose achievements and failures helped to shape and form the local, national and world environment in which we live today, and that this is not the exclusive privilege of kings, nobles, generals, and other eminent personalities, goes hand in hand with the recognition that all are entitled to esteem and equal *rights*'.⁴¹

Newens' focus on a *right to our history* highlights, it seems to me, one key factor in the ways by which *Roots*'s model of essence-in-origin could motivate so many people across so many national boundaries. In the United States, after the Civil Rights Movement and the publication of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* had helped to establish a positive black-American identity, it became possible for Alex Haley to follow this up with a newly legitimated search for roots, to find a value for Malcolm's "X".⁴² In the British context, this discourse of rights had a similar genealogical manifestation, through the celebration of 'humble' and 'ordinary' family history, as shown in Chapter 2. Where 'genealogy' and 'heraldry' had been key to the 'the maintenance and elevation of one's station' John Rayment remarked at the inaugural meeting of five London family history societies in 1978, 'if one was above the salt, and the maintenance and depression of one's place, if below it'. The family history' movement thus provided, he argued, an 'instrument in breaking down all

⁴⁰ Graeme Davison, 'The Broken Lineage of Australian Family History', in Donna Merwick (ed.), *Dangerous Liaisons: Essays in Honour of Greg Denning* (Parkville, Victoria, 1994), p. 337.

⁴¹ Newens, 'Family History Societies', p. 155. My italics.

⁴² Tamara K. Harevan, 'The Search for Generational Memory: Tribal Rites in Industrial Society', *Dædalus*, 107(4) (1978), p. 139-40.

kinds of barriers' in terms of the histories it permitted.⁴³ Indeed, the links between the History Workshop and family history movement are plainly in evidence in Newens suggestion at the end of his article that 'anyone willing to make contact with one of the growing number of family history societies covering different areas could write to the Secretary of the Federation of Family History Societies, Mr Colin Chapman' at his Gloucestershire address.⁴⁴

A nagging imperative that forgotten ancestors *must* be hunted down and recorded seemed to kick in for many practitioners after the realisation that 'everybody has roots' and that the records to find them were available. Consider the following excerpt from the introduction to a home-made family history compiled in England in the late 1970s:

'This is a personal voyage of discovery... More people than ever have become interested in tracing their roots. We know all about the kings and the statesmen, but what about the ordinary men and women who have helped to make Britain great, the men and women who have toiled and suffered, faced sacrifice and death'.⁴⁵

The message here is equally clear: "what about us?" "What about those whose lives were a perpetual struggle and whom the history of high culture disregards?" "They must not be forgotten". Indeed, for both the British descendent of 'ordinary men and women' seeking to remember the toil of his labouring ancestors and for the Afro-American slave descendent seeking to remember the horrors of a life of bondage –family history was intimately entwined with the memorialisation (and commodification) of suffering.

'No matter how bad anything was, Nyo Boto would always remember a time when it was worse,' Haley writes, as Kunta's aged grandmother Nyo Boto tells of her memories of

⁴³ John Rayment, 'The Functions of a Family History Society', *Family Tree Magazine*, 5(3) (January 1989), p. 11.

⁴⁴ Newens, 'Family History Societies', p. 159. Other kinds of 'popular' history practice of the 1970s, such as early women's and black history groups, oral and local history groups are also important to note in sharing the rhetoric of 'history from below'. The predominantly 'white' ethnicity of family historians is also relevant in this regard, suggesting the complexity the identifications among and between such groups at this time.

⁴⁵ J. R. Scarr, *A History of the Scarr Family (circa 1581-1977)*, (S.I., 1977), p. 1.

those extremely hard times which provide perspective and, in a sense, prepare the young Kunta for the horrific slave crossing that he has no idea lies ahead.⁴⁶ But although the Juffure villager's storehouses are empty of rice and couscous, the hungry season has begun and toasted insects are providing the only sustenance, the elderly grandmother remembers when times were harder still. The message to Kunta is that if his ancestors struggled and came through, so he too will manage when his time comes. This means to cope with present circumstances is also in evidence amongst twenty-first century British family historians, who are often fascinated by the struggles and toil of their manual labouring ancestors or the difficult migrations associated with industrialisation.⁴⁷ One practitioner, a retired nurse from York, after explaining that she intensely wanted her urban grandchildren to understand the relentless toil of her agricultural labouring forebears, remarked that 'with Yorkshire ancestors... I am very careful... not wasting anything, not wasting, and I think it probably is, maybe something in me - they lived on very little and they lived a very frugal life. You know, I wouldn't, sort of, waste money, or waste food'.⁴⁸ Time and again, *Roots* proves to be culturally paradigmatic of the tendencies displayed by such family historians. To forget suffering is to let those who have suffered die; the practitioner's grandchildren must know of it to appreciate their own ease of living; the sufferings of ancestors also place present suffering in context. As Nyo Boto's wisdom teaches Kunta, there have always been those who have suffered more, and therefore one can theoretically cope with anything. Later, as he grows into adolescence, 'Kunta remembered the stories he had heard so many times when he

⁴⁶ Haley, *Roots*, p. 9. Kunta ponders this point again, later, in the years prior to his slave capture: 'Kunta heard the old men recalling times when the sun had killed plants and burned crops; how it had made the well go stale, or dry, of times when the heat had dried the people out like husks. This hot season was bad, they said, but not as bad as many they could remember. It seemed to Kunta that older people always could remember something worse'. And, later, 'Wiping the sweat from his brow, it seemed to Kunta that his people were always enduring one hardship or another - something uncomfortable or difficult, or frightening, or threatening to life itself'. Haley, *Roots*, p. 38-9.

⁴⁷ See, for instance, David Hey, 'Sons of Toil', *Ancestors*, 23 (July 2004).

⁴⁸ Interview with Mrs Patricia Walker, retired nurse, 28/6/03, Yorkshire Family History Fair 2003, Knavesmire Stand, York Racecourse.

was as young as Lamin,⁴⁹ about how the forefathers had always lived through great fears and dangers. As far back as time went, Kunta guessed, the lives of people had been hard.

Perhaps they always would be'.⁵⁰

This was certainly true and turned out to be particularly pertinent in Kunta's case, because his suffering during the slave crossing and thereafter was so severe. Haley holds back nothing of the gruesome detail:

Kunta wondered if he had gone mad. Naked, chained, shackled, he awoke on his back between two other men in a pitch darkness full of steamy heat and sickening stink and a nightmarish bedlam of shrieking, weeping, praying and vomiting. He could feel and smell his own vomit on his chest and belly. His whole body was one spasm of pain from the beatings he had received in the four days since his capture. But the place where the hot iron had been put between his shoulders hurt the worst. A rat's thick, furry body brushed his cheek, its whiskered nose sniffing at his mouth... As Kunta lay listening, he slowly began to realise that he was trying to push from his mind the impulse to relieve the demands of his bowels, which he had been forcing back for days. But he could hold it no longer, and finally the faeces curled out between his buttocks. Revolted at himself, smelling his own addition to the stench, Kunta began sobbing, and again his belly spasmed, producing this time only a little spittle.⁵¹

Awakening in the chains of hellish slave transport amidst this degradation demonstrates an extreme level of human suffering. However Haley feels an imperative not to hold back on the sickening details. Indeed, there is an imperative that they *must* be recorded by the family historian to set the historical record straight, to seek cultural redress by remembering (and in a sense, celebrating) the suffering. A letter written by a family historian to the *Daily Express* after the screening of Kunta's suffering clearly illustrates a similar keen desire amongst British genealogists to do the same, and even competitively to make claims for greater misery than Kunta's: 'It is easy to claim that one's ancestors were enslaved. The mud of Birmingham squelching between the toes of bare feet was colder than the mud of the deep South of America,' wrote W.S. Loxton of Mablethorpe.⁵² And whether it be 'industrial

⁴⁹ Kunta's cherished younger brother.

⁵⁰ Haley, *Roots*, p. 39.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁵² *Daily Express*, 16 April 1977.

slavery' or plantation slavery, the celebration of suffering is central. In *Roots*, it is telling, for instance, that after a man is whipped unconscious to intimidate the others in the slave vessel hold, Haley imagines an elder calling out 'Share his pain!'⁵³ The historical victim must not be left alone in his suffering. It must be shared, and crucially, remembered. Later in the crossing Kunta concludes that it will be impossible to forget this suffering,⁵⁴ and once in America 'he vowed that all of The Gambia would learn what the land of the *toubob*⁵⁵ was really like'.⁵⁶ However, this is, of course, Haley's imagination of Kunta's thoughts, and what Haley is doing is simply to read his own memorialisation and celebration of victimhood back into the mind of his eighteenth-century Gambian protagonist. Consequently his own search for meaning and rootedness in the 1960s and 1970s is what is chiefly in evidence here.

As David Lowenthal has noted, *Roots* is an 'anachronistic invention, a search for roots so *engagé* as to include very little of the actual past'.⁵⁷ However, if we move beyond simply pointing to this anachronism to explore the cultural understandings underlying the anachronism, the memorialisation of suffering we encounter in *Roots* provides an interesting parallel to Peter Novick's thesis that Jewish conceptions of the Holocaust shifted markedly in the 1960s and 1970s towards a broader language of victimhood at the forefront of an emergent ethnic politics.⁵⁸ For Novick, the Holocaust became an abstract eternal truth outside the specific historical context of fascism – an insistence upon the inexplicability and

⁵³ Haley, *Roots*, p. 134.

⁵⁴ For instance, 'he thought he would have to live to be very old if he was ever to forget, even a little bit, what the *toubob* [the Mandinka term for 'white people'] had done to him'. Later, he considers forgetting to be totally impossible: 'The faces of the *toubob* had a kind of paleness without features that he knew would never leave his mind any more than the filth in which he lay'. Haley, *Roots*, p. 149, p. 155.

⁵⁵ The Mandinka term for 'white people'.

⁵⁶ Haley, *Roots*, p. 173.

⁵⁷ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 231.

⁵⁸ Indeed, James Hijiya finds continuities between Haley's ethnic rootedness and politics, and Glazer and Moynihan's contemporary observation of the increasing significance of ethnic group distinctiveness and identity on an international scale. James A. Hijiya, 'Roots: Family and Ethnicity in the 1970s', *American Quarterly*, 30(4) (Autumn 1978), p. 552. See also Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience: Politics and Culture in the Seventies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975); Michael Novak, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in the Seventies*, (New York, 1972).

incomprehensibility of the Holocaust, while at the same time presenting it as a symbolic rallying point for the Jewish community.⁵⁹ Interestingly, in response to the criticism of the factual content of *Roots*, Haley responded to Mark Ottaway's article in the 1977 Easter *Sunday Times* by calling it 'a cheap shot' and remarking that 'it's like saying Anne Frank never existed or that the whole Nazi thing was a hoax'.⁶⁰ It is thus in a very particular cultural arena that Haley circumvents the criticism of the truth of his claims. He circumvents a specific response by likening his family's and his ethnic group's injustices to the Holocaust, and by likening criticism of *Roots* to Holocaust denial. Furthermore, as Haley's ethnic memorialisation takes the form of his specific *family history*, he thereby makes the victim status and suffering something for the family historian (of any ethnicity) to uncover and highlight. Thus the reader is moved by the horrors suffered generally by enslaved Africans, but specifically by the Kintes – by Kunta's capture and slave passage, his

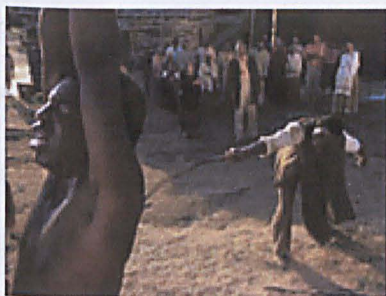


Figure 12. Kunta Kinte (LeVar Burton) is scourged until he answers to his slave-name 'Toby'.⁶¹



Figure 13. Kunta Kinte is humiliated at his slave sale in Annapolis, Maryland.

⁵⁹ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston, 1999), p. 188. A. Kurzweil has provided further intriguing perspective on this, pointing out that: 'Genealogy did not begin with Alex Haley's *Roots*... In fact, it is fair to say that genealogy itself has its "roots" firmly planted in ancient Jewish tradition. It is known, for example, that the Temple in Jerusalem had a special room devoted exclusively to the storing and maintaining of family genealogies... Modern liturgy also reflects the Jewish interest in genealogy. When the phrase "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" appears in Jewish prayer, a genealogy is being recited: father, son, grandson'. Furthermore, Kurzweil adds: 'A deeply disturbing but vital aspect of Jewish genealogy is Holocaust research... Since there are no graves for the victims, the family trees become their personal memorial'. A. Kurzweil, 'Digging Up Jewish Roots', in David S. Zubatsky and Irwin M. Berent (eds.), *Jewish Genealogy: A Sourcebook of Family Histories and Genealogies* (New York and London, 1984), p. xix, p. xxi.

⁶⁰ Philip Nobile, 'Death of a Black Dream – *Roots* by Alex Haley', *The Sunday Times*, 21 February 1993.

⁶¹ Figures 12 and 13 are screenshots from the TV mini-series of *Roots*. Figures 12, 13 and 16 are all sourced from Omar Taal, 'Searching for Roots', *Every Generation Online*, (2004), <http://www.everygeneration.co.uk/Roots/searching_for_roots.htm>, (accessed 11 October 2004).

foot amputation and scourging, or his daughter Kizzy suffers multiple rapes at the hands of her slave-master.⁶²

We similarly see familial and group memorialisation coinciding in a discourse of celebrated suffering, among Australian family historians who, since the 1970s, have been keen to celebrate their ancestors' 'convict' credentials, and also to explore the pain and conflict associated with their harrowing convict ship journeys.⁶³ Locating particular historical records of individual relative's suffering is difficult, but, as with *Roots*, this does not prevent the imagination filling in the blanks. One Australian genealogist wrote of her ancestor, transported from Wexford on 7 October 1848 for stealing two geese: 'Their poverty was so great, in some instances they were even incapable of burying their dead...compelled to steal in order to survive. The English were unrepentant in their dealing with the "lower class". They were able, by transportation, to expel a number of their patriots and surplus population... *What hardships and heartache Elizabeth must have endured* in the five years since her husband was transported! Her daughter, Ann was transported in 1847, and after her own sentencing, she had to leave her young son, John behind in Ireland... *After what had probably been a horrendous voyage*, Elizabeth served six months below decks on the HMS Anson, a floating Female Convict and Probationary Establishment, anchored in the Derwent River'.⁶⁴ As is the case in *Roots*, the details of the suffering stem more from the genealogist's imagination of what 'must have' and 'probably' happened than from documentary evidence. More importantly, however, the enthusiasm to record the injustice

⁶² In the case of *Roots* the role of the family historian and of the broader ethnic memorialisation are not in opposition, but are manifestations of the same discourse of celebrated suffering, albeit with reference to differing identities. The family identity is not emphasised *at the expense of* the ethnic identity and vice versa. This is discussed further in Chapter 5 below. In *Roots*, for instance, Haley's own imaginings of slave suffering relates simultaneously to familial and ethnic identities. Haley, *Roots*, p. 580.

⁶³ Graeme Davison, 'The Broken Lineage of Australian Family History', p. 335. Brian Fletcher, however, dates the earliest pride in convict ancestors to the 1960s. See: Brian Fletcher, 'Australia's Convict Origins: Myth and History', *History Today*, 42 (October 1992), p. 40.

⁶⁴ Gail Dodd, 'Convict Ancestors', *Home Page of Gail Dodd*, (February 2001), <<http://members.iinet.net.au/~dodd/gail/convicts.html>> (accessed 17 September 2004). My italics.

motivates this family historian, whilst it is – most precisely – the suffering derived from the rending apart of families which motivates this genealogist's labours, as it does Haley's.

In *Roots*, we encounter something of an archetype, or exemplar, of the particularly acute suffering of the family torn asunder. Rather than just one painful family separation, the Haley-Kintes suffer four, which pile up successively and sickeningly, generation after generation. Kunta's slave capture tears him away from the Gambia, his daughter Kizzy is sold away to another plantation for forging a travel pass for her young suitor, Kizzy's son George spends years away from his wife and children after being lost in a cockfighting bet to an English Lord, and the family is further split when George's sons and their families are sold away from their elders to yet another plantation during their father's absence. To understand the motivational effect of reading about these familial separations upon family historians, a focus upon generational continuity and universality in *Roots* is helpful.

Crucially, in *Roots*, we encounter a consistent rhythm of life cycles and *rites de passage*. The novel opens with the birth of Kunta, and thereafter the unending cycle of maturity, parenting, old age and death drives the narrative on and on, generation after generation. As soon as the events surrounding Kunta's birth have passed, the narrative quickly skips forward three years to the toddler noticing that his mother Binta's 'belly was very big and heavy', and – within a few paragraphs – he is called to his mother's hut: 'Kunta stood for a moment studying the little wrinkly black thing... Going back outside without a word, Kunta stood for a long moment and then, instead of rejoining his friends, went off to sit by himself behind his father's hut and think about what he had seen'. Kunta (and the reader) have only just registered and begun to contemplate the birth of Lamin, when we learn that Kunta's grandmother is very ill, and it is only moments before 'Kunta suddenly heard the howling of a familiar voice from the direction of his grandma's hut'.⁶⁵ The young protagonist is quickly confronted with both life and death, the stock in trade of the

⁶⁵ Haley, *Roots*, p. 14, p. 15.

genealogist. From his solitary pondering of the miraculous new arrival of his brother, now ‘a chill shot through him... Numb with shock Kunta stood watching blankly as the young, unmarried women of the village beat up dust from the ground with wide fans of plaited grass’ before the inevitable tears came.⁶⁶ With life, comes death. The text is structured by this genealogical universalism of births, marriages and deaths for the ensuing six-hundred pages. Kunta and Bell begat Kizzy, Kizzy and George Lea begat ‘Chicken’ George, ‘Chicken’ George and Matilda begat Tom, Tom and Irene begat Cynthia, Cynthia and Will Palmer begat Bertha, and so on. *Roots*’s ‘multi-generational saga’ and, indeed, ‘plantation epic’ genre undoubtedly aid recognition amongst viewers, chiming with *Forsythe Saga* and *Gone With the Wind* alike. As Helen Taylor argues, ‘it has adopted and adapted the rules of the genre so that it may legitimately be read as ‘a black *Gone With the Wind*’: a family saga, a success and survival epic’, and a redemption narrative.⁶⁷

From Kunta’s slave capture, the multi-generational, life-cycle-driven narrative of *Roots* is perpetually interrupted by the splitting of the family. The geographical uprooting is unquestionable, as Haley describes how captured slaves ‘fall onto their bellies, clawing and eating the sand, as if to get one last hold and bite of their own home’,⁶⁸ but the interruption of the genealogical cycle of life is underlined just as much, indeed more so, by Haley. It is no coincidence that in the period prior to his capture, Kunta bought a *saphie* charm ready to give to his own first son, completed the manhood training that has taught him of his responsibilities to ‘those whose blood and lives he shared’, and moved into his own hut as a man.⁶⁹ Indeed, in the weeks immediately before his capture, Kunta began to tend his own crops, trade with other men, made his first fortune-seeking journey away from the village,

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶⁷ Helen Taylor, “‘The Griot from Tennessee’”, p. 51.

⁶⁸ Haley, *Roots*, p. 50.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68-69, p. 84, p. 94.

and – significantly - had heavily sexualised dreams, as he fantasised about his marriage to ‘the loveliest, longest-necked, sootiest-black maiden’ at a harvest-festival *seoruba* who ‘chose to fling down her headwrap for him to pick up’.⁷⁰ Nor is it fantasy alone in which the ‘sap is risin’ – on his gold-panning trip Kunta encountered a group of ten young women of marriageable age, who expressed their interest with fluttering eyes.⁷¹

Thus, when the slave capture interrupts this life cycle, the bloodied, sweating, crying Kunta flailed, roared and fought in the realisation that ‘he was fighting for more than his life now’.⁷² Forced separation from family goes hand-in-hand with the disruption of the universal genealogical cycle of reproduction that propagates that family. As such, throughout the misery and suffering of the following years, Kunta is given little or no opportunity to even think of restoring the genealogical cycle. Over and above the physical suffering, this is perhaps the deepest level of horror that Haley attempted to convey. Instead of the tall wife of his dreams, Kunta’s first sight of a naked woman is amongst those chained up and humiliated by the slave masters who examine the genitals of the wailing girls that they leer over and later rape. Instead of fathering his own child, Kunta stared in despair at the girl he saw, bitterly weeping, who ‘rocked back and forth cooing endearments to an imaginary infant in her cradled arms’.⁷³ As the severing of both geographical and genealogical rootedness began to sink in, Kunta realised that ‘dying held no fear for him any more. Once he had decided that he would never see his family and home again, he felt the same as dead already’.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 98-99, p. 108-13, p. 99.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 120-21.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

In a sense, familial separation simply *is* death, in *Roots*. Is it any wonder then that *Roots* appeared at a time when critics decrying the decline of family values were making themselves heard in England, and when some have seen a backlash against sexual permissiveness, liberal legislation on divorce and abortion, and when family historians became eager to organise family reunions so that relatives young and old could reaffirm weakened kinship ties?⁷⁵ Newly perceived changes in the family and claims for the potential death of the nuclear family gave rise to reports by ‘neo-traditionalists’⁷⁶ on both sides of the Atlantic arguing that the abandonment of the model of the family which they saw as current in the 1950s was the root of all social problems. This culminated in the early Thatcherite doctrine of the Family Policy Group to strengthen the family from impending doom. Who better than the family historian to search back to and rediscover their lost roots, re-establish meaning, and reunite the family? In his inaugural address at the London family history societies in 1978, for instance, John Rayment argued that the social flattening that had been beneficial in democratising genealogy also ‘led to the increasing deterioration of family unity, and that it is at the bottom of a great many of the evils of modern life’. ‘A study of the history of our families,’ was vital, he went on, as ‘the family is the nursery of behaviour and respect, and thus it could be said to be the cradle of civilisation’.⁷⁷ Such concerns have continued to be in evidence amongst English family historians in subsequent decades. In a Family Records Centre survey of users in February-March 2006, 92.6% of respondents felt that their research served to ‘strengthen family and community identity’.⁷⁸ In his homily at

⁷⁵ L. Fox Harding, “‘Family Values’ and Conservative Government Policy: 1979-97”, in G. Jagger and C. Wright (eds.), *Changing Family Values* (London and New York, 1999), p. 119-20; David Cooper, *The Death of the Family*, (London, 1971). For further discussion of family reunions, and the family history phenomenon in relation to the perceived death of the family, see Chapter 5 below.

⁷⁶ Fox Harding, “‘Family Values’”, p. 119.

⁷⁷ Rayment, ‘The Functions of a Family History Society’, p. 11.

⁷⁸ Family Records Centre, ‘Family Records Centre (F.R.C.) Customer Survey – February/March 2006’, *The Family Records Centre*, (2006), <http://www.familyrecords.gov.uk/frc/your_frc/survey_03_06.htm> (accessed 2 September 2006).

the end of *Roots: The Next Generation*, Haley evangelised on the behalf of the family in a way that echoed both Rayment's and white, conservative discourse, seeing it as the uniting factor of all humanity: "After the miracle of life itself, our greatest human common denominator is families. I feel that's why *Roots* touched a universal human pulse... What's recommended to us by this global response to *Roots*... [are] simple acts... [that] can help strengthen families. We should interview our families' oldest members,... make a written



Figures 14 and 15. The Kunta Kinte-Alex Haley memorial at Annapolis, Maryland commemorating the place of the arrival of Alex's ancestor to the New World presents Alex Haley as a teacher of children of all ethnic backgrounds in the "human common denominator" of families.⁷⁹

record of our families' history and next, periodically, we should hold family reunions. Their message is powerful to all who attend them, especially the family's younger members...

Roots couldn't serve a greater purpose than to increase our awareness as individuals, as societies, as nations, that our first source of strength is our families'.⁸⁰

Indeed, back on the plantation, after numerous failed escape attempts, Kunta's lack of this source of strength began to become apparent when it struck him that 'he was the same age as his father when he had seen him last, yet he had no sons of his own, no wife, no

⁷⁹ The Memorial, designed and built by a team of various artists and architects working collaboratively was unveiled and dedicated on 9 December 1999 and completed in Spring 2002. The Kunta Kinte-Alex Haley foundation states that: 'It is envisioned that the Kunta Kinte-Alex Haley Memorial will be the catalyst and focal point for renewed interest in genealogy, history, and the arts' and is 'in an area currently visited by nearly a million people a year'. For further details see: Kunta Kinte-Alex Haley Foundation, Inc., *The Kunta Kinte-Alex Haley Memorial*, <www.kintehaley.org/memorial.html> (9 May 2005).

⁸⁰ *Roots: The Next Generations*, Volume 2, Episode 7, 1978 (Warner Bros. Television. Executive Producer: David L. Wolper, Episode 7 Director: John Erman).

family'.⁸¹ Before long, a new Ghanaian friend has advised Kunta that "'You's young. Seeds you's got a-plenty, you 'jes needs de wife to plant 'em in,'" and he is a changed man as *Roots* returns to the life-cycles of this genealogically structured narrative.⁸² Things may be hopeless for Kunta, but the time is approaching for him to pass on the struggle to the next generation. Now, light-hearted romance floods in where the crack of a whip and scream of pain have dominated for over a hundred pages. Kunta lovingly carves a pestle and mortar as a gift for Bell, the master's cook on his current plantation, and inevitably, before long, 'for the first time in...his life, he held a woman in his arms'.⁸³ Kunta and Bell marry, consummate, and 'then one night, just after they'd blown out the candle and climbed into bed, she grasped Kunta's hand and placed it tenderly on her stomach. Something inside her moved beneath his hand. Kunta sprang up fit to split with joy'.⁸⁴

After being denied rootedness in the geographical sense, and after the attempts to erase his genealogical identity with a slave name, Kunta now knows joy again for the first time since Africa, as 'he felt a deep pride and serenity in the knowledge that the blood of the Kintes, which had coursed for centuries like a mighty river, would continue to flow for still another generation'.⁸⁵ He has done the only thing to remedy and resist the uprooting that his horrific circumstances and barbaric treatment have permitted – he has passed on the torch to the next generation. And, crucially, this event does not go unrecorded. 'Back in the big house...Massa Waller opened the large black Bible that he kept locked in a case in the drawing-room, turned to a page devoted to plantation records, dipped his pen in the ink-well,

⁸¹ Haley, *Roots*, p. 239.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 258.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 287-88.

and wrote in fine black script: “Kizzy Waller, born 12 September 1790”.⁸⁶ These genealogical ‘vital statistics’ of births (and, of course, marriages and deaths) provide the universal facts, the genealogical bedrock, recorded by documentary evidence, for the family historian to uncover. And if the descendent of a slave can do it, “why can’t we?” respond those whose numbers and enthusiasm stunned Stan Newens in 1981 (not least those who possess family Bibles inscribed with raw genealogical data).

From this point onwards, the reader is bombarded with more and more such genealogical vital statistics, as – slowly at first – the narrative now accelerates with each passing generation as it advances towards 1976. However, the horrors of family separation continue to puncture the genealogical narrative and disrupt the life-cycle again and again. No sooner is Bell pregnant with Kizzy than she awakens in tears after dreaming that ‘at a white folks’ party game, they announced that the first prize would be the next black baby to be born on that mass’s plantation’.⁸⁷ Such tears are realised in the fullness of time. After a relatively impoverished account of her childhood period (in comparison to Kunta’s), Kizzy is soon in trouble with her mother, Bell, for ‘fannin’ yo’ tail roun’ dat Noah’, a young male field hand.⁸⁸ As the genealogical life-cycle again structures and drives the narrative in the direction of another new generation, however, Kizzy is sold away to a different plantation for forging a travel pass for her young love. Amidst screaming and wailing, the family is torn asunder yet again. Kunta is knocked unconscious in his attempts to stop his daughter’s forced departure, and she is sold away, never to see her parents, or the man who would have become her husband again. It is no coincidence that, like Kunta, Kizzy is separated just before the moment of genealogical transition. Kunta loses his genealogical rootedness for the second time, and Kizzy is repeatedly raped by her master upon arrival at her new

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 350.

plantation. The arrival of her son George, however, again provides the new life into such a desperate situation with songs, mimicry and joy, and when George is soon interested in girls on neighbouring plantations, he marries Matilda, before George is sold away to England. However, in his absence, his son Tom steps to the fore, raises a family, gets sold away in George's absence, and the narrative sweeps off again, accelerating through three more generations of births, marriages and deaths.

Whilst the family separations gall the reader, perhaps echoing post-modern cultural concerns over a lack of belonging and what Marilyn Strathern terms the decline of the family as a natural consociation in the post-war period,⁸⁹ *Roots* provides an exemplar of familial suffering through enforced severance precisely because genealogical continuity is interrupted generation after generation. Indeed, the serialisation of *Roots* in the *Daily Express* to coincide with the British screening in April 1977 focused upon these familial splittings in its framing and emphasis, with centre-page spreads headlined 'Please don't split us up, Massa' alongside screenshots of the character's associated anguish taken from the TV adaptation.⁹⁰ The family is under perpetual attack throughout *Roots* and a key point is that no one individual can remedy the situation – Kunta loses his home and his family twice, Kizzy loses her home and her family three times, Chicken George loses his home three times and his family twice, and so on. All each can do is to remember 'who they are' through genealogical and geographical narratives of essence-in-origin, and pass on this canonical narrative of descent to the next generation before they too are torn asunder. Thus, when Kizzy, the absent George's sons and their families are confronted again with sale to other plantations, the strong, composed, thoughtful Tom (family head in George's enforced absence) responded plainly that things

⁸⁹ Marilyn Strathern, *After Nature: English Kinship in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 147. For Strathern this shift is a consequence of the promotion of family-living as experience, as life-style. Throughout what Strathern terms 'the modern epoch', the family has seemed to stand on the edge of a precipice, with the notion that in the past there was always 'more' family, precisely because the political or legal argument for the family as a natural institution to be preserved removes its once taken-for granted position. For Strathern, this state of perpetual rendering the implicit explicit is integral to the relationship between modern and post-modern culture. This view is further discussed in Chapter 5.

⁹⁰ *Daily Express*, 9 April 1977; 11 April 1977.

will be sufferable 'long's we all stays together'. But, with no guarantees of this, and sale imminent, the chaos of a family on the Strathernian brink reigns deep into the night: 'they all became seized in the contagion of grabbing and hugging whomever was nearest, screaming that they would never see each other again'.⁹¹ The following morning, when it is announced that the younger families will stay together, but that Kizzy, now in the role of grandmother, Uncle Pompey, Sister Sarah and Miss Malizy are to be left behind due to their low value as elderly slaves, Kizzy's response, through the tears of yet another separation, response, is telling: "'Any y'all gits mo' chilluns...don't forgit to tell 'em 'bout my folks, my mammy Bell, an' my African pappy name Kunta Kinte, what be yo' chillun's great-great gran'pappy! Hear me, now! Tell 'em 'bout me, 'bout my George, 'bout yo'selves, too! An' 'bout what we been through 'midst differen' massas. Tell de chilluns all de res' about who we is'".⁹² Genealogy is the fitting response to family splitting because the dual rootedness of genealogy and geography provide the certainty of origins. Kizzy's cries thus imply to the reader that he or she must not forget their genealogies and families, because to forget and be separated from them (physically and through forgetting) is metaphorical death. Indeed, as the wagons roll away, Uncle Pompey, who has also been left behind, dies in his chair.⁹³

Occasions of, and responses to, physical death shed further light on the way that of *Roots* articulated this message to the reader. When confronted with the death of Uncle Mingo, the cock trainer who apprentices George and brings him up like a son of his own (after the slave master that repeatedly raped Kizzy refuses to treat him as a son), 'George sat down and stared at nothing, his mind tumbling with scenes from the past fifteen years,

⁹¹ Haley, *Roots*, p. 490-92. Haley's reuniting and 'laying on of hands' with his re-discovered Gambian relatives, discussed below, provides an interesting parallel to this contagious grabbing, this last communion and closeness of a family's generations that are never to see one another again thereafter. Perhaps Haley's own experience again colours his imagination of his ancestor's unrecorded behaviour, in his construction of the narrative.

⁹² Haley, *Roots*, p. 494-95.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 495.

listening to echoes of his teacher, his friend, his nearest to a father he ever had known...

Questions came to him: Where was Uncle Mingo from before Massa Lea bought him? Who had been his family?⁹⁴ Staring mortality in the face, Haley imagines George provoked to genealogical interest, just as many family historians are provoked into their endeavours by occasions such as funerals and baptisms, those *rites de passage* which structure genealogical narratives, as I argue in Chapter 6.⁹⁵

Furthermore, when confronted with mortality, marriage, and birth, the genealogist's vital statistics, the moments at which the passing of generations touches the lives of George, Kizzy and the rest, Haley's ancestors undergo a fascinating shift in perspective. After Kunta's Grandma Yaisa has told him for the first time of his grandfather's life as a wandering holy man, of his marriage to her, and that "It was from my belly that he begot your papa Omoro", Kunta reaches a new level of *understanding* and *knowing* of the world that he is growing up in: 'That night, back in his mother's hut, Kunta lay awake for a long time, thinking of the things that Grandma Yaisa had told him. Many times, Kunta had heard about the grandfather holy man whose prayers had saved the village, and whom Allah had taken back. But Kunta had never truly understood until now that this man was his father's father, that Omoro had known him as he knew Omoro, that Grandma Yaisa was Omoro's mother as Binta was his own. Some day, he too would find a woman such as Binta to bear him a son of his own. And that son, in turn... Turning over and closing his eyes, Kunta followed these deep thoughts slowly into sleep'.⁹⁶ This genealogical continuity, and Kunta's place in its transitory order is nothing short of a revelation to him, as meaning, rootedness, and belonging flood in, and he *understands* his place in his family (and the world). His new

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 449.

⁹⁵ It is interesting to note that historian John Gillis's plea that 'we must recognise that families are worlds of our own making and accept responsibility for our own creations' by 'remaking our worlds' and 'taking a hand in creating new family cultures' is stimulated by the death of his son, Ben. John R. Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: A History of Myth and Ritual in Family Life*, (Oxford, 1997), p. v, p. ix-xi, p. 240.

⁹⁶ Haley, *Roots*, p. 13.

genealogical perspective is what might be termed 'time transcendent', as he wonders at the unison of past, present and future in ancestry, and at the change and continuity that he now understands are present together in the passing of generations.

On another occasion, when Kunta learns of the birth of another new brother, Madi, his thoughts again shift and step outside of his life into the transcendent realm of the genealogy: 'Four of us now, thought Kunta, lying awake later that night. Four brothers – four sons for his mother and father. He thought how that would sound in the Kinte family history when it was told by *griots* for hundreds of rains in the future... And some day, Kunta thought as he drifted off to sleep, when he was as old as Omoro, he would have sons of his own, and it would all begin again'.⁹⁷ Here Haley imagines Kunta thinking forward two-hundred 'rains' (meaning 'years' – a literary device to demonstrate the cultural otherness of his ancestors) to Haley's own genealogical pursuits. The 'Kinte family history' is effectively taken outside of the temporal, and imbued with a transcendent, timeless quality by its memorialisation.

The genealogist, family historian, or Gambian '*griot*' meanwhile, is guardian to the omniscience of this transcendental perspective by being the one who remembers or records. Elsewhere, the *griot* is told to have 'buried in his mind the records of the ancestors' and that this knowledge would be passed from father to son 'to whom he would tell those stories, so that the events of the distant past would forever live'.⁹⁸ Writing in the third person, describing lives and tribulations, keeping the dead alive by remembering their sufferings and familial separations, this is precisely what Haley – the '*griot from Tennessee*'⁹⁹ – is doing himself, of course. Until, that is, the narrative of life cycles culminates in a huge revelation, a plot twist to end all plot twists, at the end of the one-hundred-and-seventeenth chapter. As

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁹⁹ Taylor, "'The Griot from Tennessee'", p. 55.

the genealogical narrative accelerates, we have just learned of Kunta's great-great-granddaughter Bertha's marriage to Simon, and their new life in New York, when the letters regularly written home by Bertha to her mother Cynthia and father Will dry up. Then, after much parental concern, comes a knock at the door at midnight. There stands Bertha: "Sorry we didn't write. We wanted to bring you a surprise present—" She handed to Cynthia the blanketed bundle in her arms. Her heart pounding, and with Will gazing incredulously over her shoulder, Cynthia pulled back the blanket's top fold – revealing a round brown face... The baby boy, six weeks old, was me'.¹⁰⁰ The register now shifts, the third person narrative is succeeded by a first person autobiographical register, 'Simon' becomes 'Dad', 'Will' becomes 'Grandpa' and so on. The unmasking is staggering, particularly so in the television mini-series version of *Roots* in which the final scene with actors cuts to black and white photographs of Cynthia, Will, Bertha and Simon in turn, before a photograph of a naked baby appears. These photographs are described by an anonymous narrator, who, after describing each photograph in turn, continues: 'In 1921, the Haleys welcomed a son – the seventh generation descendent of Kunta Kinte. That boy was me, Alex Haley... And in 1963, after I retired from a career in the U.S. Coastguard, I became obsessed with a desire to know more about our family, more about its history. It was a search that would take me finally twelve years to complete, and those things that I learned I wrote in a book called *Roots*'.¹⁰¹

Walking along a dusty road on screen or embodied in a remarkable textual shift to first person on the page, the appearance of Haley provides genealogical motivation to the reader in spades. The message conveyed is that if the descendant of a slave can do it, then so can anybody. It is thus quite plausible that much of the obsession with roots evidenced in increased record office use and the references to the impact of *Roots* in sparking their interest

¹⁰⁰ Haley, *Roots*, p. 564.

¹⁰¹ *Roots*, Warner Bros., 1977. Produced by David L. Wolper. Directed by Marvin Chomsky, John Erman, David Greene and Gilbert Moses. See note 11 above on relationship between the novel and its screen adaptation.

responded to this *ur*-text of late-1970s family history. The seventh generation descendent of Kunta Kinte, has put right the second death of his forgetting, and now stands outside time, as the holder of the keys to the eternal life of genealogical knowledge and memorialisation.

And you can do it too.

In the British context, it is clear that a degree of mediation was necessary due to the differences between African-American and British genealogy. Hence Anthony Camp's assertion that 'everyone has roots'. Many other genealogical guidebooks proliferated in the wake of *Roots*. So too did their televisual equivalents, such as the five-part BBC series in March 1979 in which former news reader, Gordon Honeycombe, traced his own ancestors. Nevertheless, *Roots* laid the cultural groundwork for these guides. That Haley was dismissed in the process for his lack of empiricism serves only to shed light on the British context in which *Roots* was received. For instance, the BBC guidebook accompanying Honeycombe's series, defined itself against Haley by stating that 'unlike *Roots*, the series was not just the story of one family, but sought to use Gordon's researches to demonstrate general principles of family history research which could be applied to the viewer's own family'.¹⁰² *Roots* was emblematic – it had sounded the fanfare for the possibility of uncovering familial rootedness and belonging in the most impossible and unlikely of circumstances with the words 'that baby was me'.

It is also noteworthy that Haley introduced himself as 'the seventh-generation descendent of Kunta Kinte'. In *Roots*, Kunta is Haley's 'apical ancestor', the forebear in whom Haley finds his own identity. Haley is the seventh generation descendent of Kunta, not the ninth generation descendent of the Mandinka wandering holyman, Kairaba Kunta Kinte, not the fifth generation descendent of cockfighter, 'Chicken' George, not even the first generation descendent of Bertha and Simon Haley. Kunta is the ancestor that captivated the young Alex – the one his grandma Cynthia spoke of as 'the African' – the one who made the

¹⁰² Don Steel, *Discovering Your Family History*, (London, 1980), p. 7.

migration that marks the starting point of this exemplar of genealogies. Given the choice of losing his genitals or his foot after being caught attempting to escape, Grandma Cynthia told the young Alex “‘thanks to Jesus, or we wouldn’t be here tellin’ it – the African chose his foot’.”¹⁰³ With this joke, Kunta is installed at the head of the genealogy – the forefather of the Kinte/Haley genealogical canon. Some scholars have criticised the fact that Haley over-emphasises one branch of his genealogy, calculating that Kunta’s grandfather Kairaba is one of 256 potential ancestors that Haley could have narrativised, and Kunta is only one of 64 of Haley’s great-great-great-great-grandparents.¹⁰⁴ But this is to miss the point: in the construction of any sort of lineal family history, the selection of and over-emphasis upon particular ancestors is unavoidable.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, even the most rigorously-minded genealogists still emphasise particular familial traits and relatives, as discussed in Chapter 5. More significantly, Haley’s over-emphasis upon Kunta as his *apical* ancestor sheds further light on the motivational impact and culturally paradigmatic nature of *Roots*.

For instance, it is clear that a genealogical model of essence-in-origin confers the prestige of former generations upon those that follow. Thus, when Kunta and his childhood friends learned of Kairaba’s prayers saving the village of Juffure from a drought, ‘the other children looked with a new respect at Kunta, who bore the name of that distinguished grandfather’.¹⁰⁶ Bearing this in mind, it is important to note that Kunta’s virtues, and indeed those of Alex’s other ancestors, are on show consistently throughout the book. Haley imagines Kunta turning the other cheek and walking away from confrontations, working

¹⁰³ Haley, *Roots*, p. 566.

¹⁰⁴ Moore, ‘Routes,’ p. 15-17; Williams, ‘Home Sweet Africa’, p. 237.

¹⁰⁵ For instance, the selection of Tom over his brothers in the narrative is another classic example of the over-emphasis of one ancestor over another, for the sake of both genealogical narrative structure, and due to the virtues and ‘symbolic resources’ they provide. Thus, Tom’s strength, entrepreneurialism and responsibility makes his stand above his brothers, who are dismissed as a mere field hand in the case of Virgil, as an ‘uppity nigger’ in the case of Ashford, and as ‘just plain fat’ and lazy in the case of L’il George. Haley, *Roots*, p. 488-89. For further discussion of the emphasis placed on particular ancestors, see Chapters 3 and 5.

¹⁰⁶ Haley, *Roots*, p. 10.

skilfully, diligently and successfully, suffering in silence when his feet bleed, showing a 'worshipful regard' for deceased ancestors, being unthinkably charitable towards the elderly and the needy, deciding to wait until he has cemented his independence before marrying, avoiding self-pity, adapting to the most extreme of circumstances, and generally embodying an ideal type of a strong, silent, family man, thoughtful and direct in his few well-chosen words and acts, retaining self-respect and an unbroken spirit despite the horrors he endures.¹⁰⁷ Thus, Bell begins to eulogise Kunta's qualities as 'a man of calibre and strength, and of character that she had never known the equal of' as he lay in a coma from which he was later to recover.¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, these virtues become familial ideal types, with such virtues reappearing throughout the ensuing generations (and by implication in Alex Haley himself).¹⁰⁹ Thus we are told of Tom's 'lifelong *innate* reserve', a primordialised familial characteristic, thematic throughout the family, and casting the family historian in a similar light.¹¹⁰ A key here is that these models of and for action in the world are portrayed as transmitted through the cultural unit of the family. Thus, for instance, Haley imagines Kunta thinking that 'No son of Omoro Kinte would ever entertain the thought of giving up', and we are told of Haley being 'well raised', taught by his Grandpa Will 'to look anyone right in

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17-18, p. 240, p. 61, p. 91, p. 110, p. 183, p. 194, p. 121, p. 242, p. 349-50. Interestingly in this regard, Leslie Fielder argued that Kunta is modelled on Malcolm X, as witnessed in Kunta's black Moslem-like sexual abstinence modelled on Malcolm's twelve-year self-imposed celibacy. For further exploration of Kunta's place in the plantation epic genre and in post-Civil Rights context, see Leslie Fielder, *The Inadvertent Epic* (New York, 1979); Williams, 'Home Sweet Africa', p. 352, n. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Haley, *Roots*, p. 343.

¹⁰⁹ Examples are numerous. For instance, Kizzy is a caring mother, just as Kunta was a caring father; George excels at cockfighting, Tom at blacksmithing, Will as a businessman, Simon as an academic (and Haley as an author) where Kunta was as successful as possible in light of his circumstances, being promoted from field hand to driver; Tom's sexual restraint prior to marriage and both Tom's and Will's slow, controlled, considered speech mirror Kunta intimately; whilst Matilda's humility and wisdom might be seen as an extension of Kunta's quiet thoughtfulness. Indeed, the women in the novel also provide strong Geertzian models of and for action. Binta cares for her sick mother-in-law, Yaisa, just as Bell cares for the sick Kunta, and thoughtfully affects her slave-master's decision making by her well timed remarks. This latter behaviour is echoed by Tom's wife Irene in securing her release from her plantation to live with her husband by concocting stories of sexual scandal. Kunta's gift of a pestle and mortar to Bell at marriage is also echoed in George's gift of a grandfather clock to Matilda, and Tom's fashioning of an iron rose for Irene as a gift on their wedding day.

¹¹⁰ Haley, *Roots*, p. 502.

their eyes, to speak to them clearly and politely'.¹¹¹ However, the communion and oneness between Kunta and Alex Haley is particularly startling, and goes far deeper than shared family likenesses and traits.

As contemporary observers of Haley's talks promoting *Roots* noted: 'Through his lecturing, Haley has created an oral tradition of his own. The story of his ancestry is so intimately Haley's own story that Kunta Kinte seems almost his contemporary; bits of the narrative are threaded through his conversation'.¹¹² This closeness certainly resonates in the final section of the book, in which we learn of Haley's commemoration of Kunta's arrival in Annapolis, Maryland: 'On 29 September 1967 I felt I should be nowhere else in the world except standing on a pier in Annapolis – and I was... Staring out to seaward across those waters over which my great-great-great-great-grandfather had been brought... I found myself weeping'.¹¹³ Haley's re-enactment of Kunta's intercontinental slave-crossing, aboard a Florida bound freighter named *African Star* is even more striking: 'After each late evening's dinner, I climbed down successive metal ladders into her deep, dark, cold cargo hold. Stripping to my underwear, I lay on my back on a wide rough bare dunnage plank and forced myself to stay there through all ten nights of the crossing, trying to imagine what did he see, hear, feel, smell, taste – and above all, in knowing Kunta, what things did he think?... Finally I wrote of the ocean crossing – from the perspective of the human cargo'.¹¹⁴ 'In *knowing* Kunta'? Writing '*from the perspective of the human cargo*'? By his re-enactments, Haley clearly establishes some connection with his ancestor. Whether this actor is fictive or

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 182, p. 565.

¹¹² Michael Kirkhorn, 'A Saga of Slavery That Made Actors Weep', *New York Times*, 29 June 1976, quoted in Taylor, "The Griot from Tennessee", p. 58.

¹¹³ Haley, *Roots*, p. 583.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 584.

imaginary is not important;¹¹⁵ Kunta is real for Alex, and he now *knows* him, and can write from *his* perspective. The distinction between family historian and ancestor is subtly beginning to blur.

Crucially, in *Kunta*, Alex Haley finds himself. In Paul Ricoeur's terms, it is a case of 'oneself as another', whereby Haley's identity of selfhood – his '*ipse*-identity' – involves a dialectical complementarity of 'self' and 'other than self'. Ricoeur writes that 'the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other, as we might say in Hegelian terms'.¹¹⁶ This is particularly interesting, when considered in light of the post-war secularisation described by social historians such as Edward Royle as 'one of the most significant social trends of our time,...one of the greatest cultural breaks with the past'.¹¹⁷ Ironically, as Zeffirelli's Christ was scourged and crucified on ITV, Kunta Kinte was stealing viewers as he was whipped and stripped of his deepest dignity – his very name and identity – on BBC1. It is precisely this crucial element of selfhood as another, this Ricoeurian *ipse*-identity, that is at stake in both Kunta's whipping and in Haley's memorialisation of his suffering, and subsequent communing with his ancestor.

When the genealogical link back to Kunta is finally made upon Haley's return to the Gambia (by comparing oral genealogies with the *griots* there) Alex's response is that 'his

¹¹⁵ Perhaps Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson's notion of a 'myth we live by' is more relevant here. Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (eds.), *The Myths We Live By* (London and New York, 1990). Haley himself used this phrase in defence of *Roots* lack of empirical verifiability. 'I was just trying to give my people a myth to live by' he is alleged to have said to historian Willie Lee Rose after she attacked him in the *New York Review of Books*. See: Nobile, 'Death of a Black Dream'.

¹¹⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago and London, 1992, translated by K. Blamey), p. 3.

¹¹⁷ Edward Royle, 'Trends in Post-War British Social History', in James Obelkevich and Peter Catterall (eds.), *Understanding Post-War British Society*, (London and New York, 1994), p. 15. A. D. Gilbert proposes the term 'de-Christianisation' as more helpful than 'secularisation'. See: A. D. Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain: A History of the Secularisation of Modern Society*, (Harlow, 1980). Some historians, such as Callum Brown, however, retain the notion of secularisation, but understanding this post-war "cultural break with the past" as a discursive collapse – of the evangelical and predominantly female conversion narratives of a post-Enlightenment, rationalistic and modern 'salvation economy' – in the 1960s, not a social trend of slowly decreasing church attendance. See: Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000*, (London and New York, 2001).

blood congeals' and he 'feels like stone', before the inevitable communing with the newly reunited family. He writes that the villagers formed a ring around him, the long lost relative, before some women broke the circle to thrust their babies into Haley's arms: 'She thrust it at me almost roughly, the gesture saying "Take it!"...and I did, clasping the baby to me. Then she snatched away her baby; and another woman was thrusting her baby, then another, and another'. The significance of the new life of the villager's babies, thrust into Haley arms is described as 'the laying on of hands', as them telling him that 'through this flesh, which is us, we are you, and you are us!'"¹¹⁸ And so, Alex is vicariously reunited with, and communes with, Kunta Kinte.



Figure 16. Alex Haley, with his newly discovered Mandinka ancestors

Later that day, as the significance of finding himself in another hits home, it is hearing himself referred to with the primordialised ancestral name that hits Alex most dramatically: 'I guess we had moved a third of the way through the village when it suddenly registered in my brain what they were all crying out... their expressions buoyant, beaming, all were crying out together, "*Meester Kinte! Meester Kinte!*"' 'Let me tell you something' Haley continues, 'I am a man. A sob hit me somewhere around my ankles; it came surging upwards, and flinging my hands over my face, I was just bawling, as I hadn't since I was a

¹¹⁸ Haley, *Roots*, p. 579.

baby. “*Meester Kinte!*” I just felt like I was weeping for all of history’s incredible atrocities against fellowmen’.¹¹⁹ Alex is not dying for the sins of the world, but he certainly is sobbing for them, and remembering them so that we might save the sufferings of men from the second death of forgetting. And he now hears his ‘true’ genealogical name spoken aloud. Kunta is not Toby; Haley is now Kinte.

Haley was convinced that throughout his genealogical research his ancestors were willing him on, fully behind him, even guiding him at times, providing the ultimate imperative to compile a family history. Haley is stunned, for instance, that his eighty-year-old Cousin Georgia – the only one of his relatives left to pass on the genealogy to him – died at the precise moment that he entered the village of Juffure. On another occasion, Haley refers to the ‘uncanny’ meeting with a Gambian student in New York, which through serendipity, led Haley to the realisation that the term ‘*Kamby Bolongo*’ was Mandinka for the Gambia River, giving rise to Alex’s subsequent journey to the Gambia. Haley writes that this incident, along with many others ‘would build my feeling...that, yes, they were up there watchin’’, as his cousin Georgia had insisted to him before her death.¹²⁰ This sense of the agency of deceased ancestors is certainly not present amongst all family historians, but it is present in some, however, as we shall see in Chapter 6. This is true on an international scale – from what Wade Roof calls America’s post-war generation of baby boomer spiritual ‘seekers’,¹²¹ to the multifarious New Age that Steven Sutcliffe points out similarly began to expand dramatically in Britain in the 1970s with the ‘popular hermeneutical shift’ towards

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 580.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 581, p. 584.

¹²¹ Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco, 1993); Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton, 1999).

‘spirituality’ viewed as a ‘humanistic idiom of self-realisation in the here-and-now’, of ‘mind, body and spirit’.¹²²

That the otherness of Mandinkan culture provides symbolic grist to the eclecticism of the New Age ‘hodgepodge of beliefs, practices and ways of life’ becoming increasingly prevalent by the late-1970s is beyond doubt.¹²³ Grandma Yaisa’s death leads to her ‘journeying to spend eternity with Allah and her ancestors’, Kunta prays ‘asking his ancestors to help him endure’ his sufferings, and Omoro teaches the young Kunta that three groups of people live in every village – those that can be seen, the ancestors themselves, and the spirits of those waiting to be born.¹²⁴ Scholars have noted also that pre-slavery Juffure is turned into a Garden of Eden by Haley, who was explicit about this in interviews, leading David Lowenthal to point out that ‘the primordial still promises transcendent understanding’.¹²⁵ Indeed, theologians have noted that ‘Haley’s own quest assumed for him a religious quality’.¹²⁶ Nor was this theme lost on journalists in 1977. Nancy Banks-Smith wrote in *The Guardian* that, stood next to Zeffirelli’s *Jesus of Nazareth*, ‘*Roots*...is the Old Testament story. The great primitive parable in it: the loss of Eden, the sale into bondage,

¹²² Steven Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age: A History of Spiritual Practices* (London and New York, 2003), p. 5, p. 223. The extent of these cultural shifts in the later twentieth century are only now beginning to be understood. Grace Davie has characterised the New Age as ‘a phenomenon that affirms the continuing significance of the sacred in contemporary [British] society but in far from conventional terms’, whilst others have begun to refer to a ‘spiritual revolution’ in cultural terms. Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing Without Belonging*, (Oxford, 1994), p. 41; Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, with Benjamin Seel, Bronislaw Szerszynski and Karin Tusting, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford, 2005) A closer focus upon the language used by Haley can thus shed light on the cultural processes of secularisation, the continuities and subtle shifts in meanings which have occurred, rather than viewing secularisation as a social trend in terms of bottoms on pews. These themes are discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

¹²³ Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity*, (Oxford, 1996), p. 1.

¹²⁴ Haley, *Roots*, p. 15, p. 183, p. 16.

¹²⁵ David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (London, 1997), p. 178.

¹²⁶ Albert J. Raboteau, ‘Review Section. *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* by Alex Haley’, *Theology Today*, 34 (October 1977), p. 319.

the redemption from captivity, make it the story of man rather than one man's story'.¹²⁷ On Parkinson, Haley told of how, whilst struggling to complete the book and contemplating suicide, he had heard his ancestor's voices: 'They were not strident, not crying out or anything; just conversational. They said things like: "No, don't do that; you can't do that. You must finish and go on." I knew that they were Kunta Kinte and his daughter and his wife: and Chicken George; and my grandmother and all my ancestors'.¹²⁸ All this is not to say, of course, that genealogy is a form of ancestor worship, merely that the sense of ancestral closeness (which a number of genealogists refer to)¹²⁹ is strongly propounded by Haley, and that the intersection between familial culture and religious culture is as intimate as 'Kairaba Kunta Kinte begot two sons' and 'life everlasting will spring from your loins'.¹³⁰

Nevertheless, when 'Chicken' George – Haley's lovable family black sheep¹³¹ – leads the family, Moses-like, into 'the promised land' of Tennessee, away from bondage, *Roots* is far from over.¹³² The reuniting of genealogical rootedness and geographical rootedness, initially torn asunder by Kunta's slavery, does not occur until Haley makes the equivalent return trip to the Gambia. Although the Kintes own land and earn their own way again after attaining freedom from slavery, the return to source, the essence-in-origin is still to be accomplished. Indeed, as a number of scholars have remarked, the protagonist of *Roots* is

¹²⁷ *The Guardian*, 11 April 1977, p. 7.

¹²⁸ 'Alex Haley on the long search for his African ancestors', *The Listener*, 7 April 1977, p. 441.

¹²⁹ See, for instance: Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 13; Jean Christie, 'Viewpoint', *Family Tree Magazine*, 6(4) (February 1990), p. 3; John P. Abbott, *Family Patterns: A Personal Experience of Genealogy* (London, 1971), p. 51-52; Elizabeth Halford, 'How I Wrote a Family History', *Family Tree Magazine*, 1 (3) (March-April 1985), p. 16-17; D. Lindsay, 'Triumphs and Tribulations of a Family Historian', *Family Tree Magazine*, 16 (2) (December 1999), p. 16. These, and other examples, are discussed in Chapter 6.

¹³⁰ Haley, *Roots*, p. 13, p. 90.

¹³¹ The significance of 'black sheep' to family historians is discussed further in Chapter 5 below. In passing, it worth noting that, again, here Haley exemplifies the trends of family historians more generally. George is a loveable rogue, turning up late and drunk for his own wedding, upsetting his bride and guests before redeeming himself with his gift of a grandfather clock to Matilda, not to mention his unceasing efforts to win the family's freedom through his cockfighting and gambling.

¹³² Haley, *Roots*, p. 551.

not Kunta, it is Alex and his search for wholeness, particularly after his unmasking in the seventh generation since Kunta.¹³³ Thus, Haley's return trip to the Gambia provides an archetype and exemplar for what has come to be known as 'roots tourism'. As anthropologist of the Scottish Highland diaspora, Paul Basu, has noted, this has become a common practice for many genealogists returning to their 'British ancestry' since the 1970s, collecting material objects such as stones from ancestral graveyards, churches or homes in the process. He quotes one practitioner who writes, 'I am not a salmon but like a salmon long at sea, I am drawn...from whence my kind come'.¹³⁴ Basu remarks that sites of roots tourism become 'originary places from which the identity of the self is perceived to derive, and to which the self, thirsting for identity, may resort for sustenance'.¹³⁵ In the light of the post-modern 'lack' of fixed meanings, the late-modern insistent questioning of 'What to do? How to act? What to *be*?'¹³⁶, the pull of the genealogical and geographical solidity of roots-tourism provides an antidote to the alternative, by which 'to be rootless or uprooted is to be unanchored in time and space, to have no purchase on the ground, no way of drawing sustenance from the place in which one finds oneself' for Basu, as we shall see in Chapter 5.¹³⁷ And the exemplar of this, the 'root' of the term 'roots-tourism' is provided by Haley, whose crowning genealogical endeavour is his return to his 'very sourceplace'. Haley writes: 'There is an expression called "the peak experience" – that which, emotionally, nothing in your life ever transcends. I've had mine, that first day in the back country of black West

¹³³ Howard F. Stein, 'In Search of "Roots": An Epic of Origins and Destiny', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 11 (Summer 1977), p. 15; H.C. Othow, 'Roots and the Heroic Search for Identity', *CLA Journal (Baltimore)*, 26 (March 1983), p. 313-14.

¹³⁴ Nor is this limited to those returning to Britain, as some British practitioners themselves make trips to ancestral farms, villages and churches, as discussed in Chapter 5 below.

¹³⁵ Paul Basu, 'Homecomings: Genealogy, Heritage-Tourism and Identity in the Scottish Highland Diaspora' (Unpublished PhD thesis. University College, London, 2002), p. 11, p. 156.

¹³⁶ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late-Modern Age* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 75, quoted in Basu, 'Homecomings', p. 160. Basu's italics.

¹³⁷ Basu, 'Homecomings', p. 13.

Africa'. He describes Juffure as 'still very much as it was two hundred years ago', he takes his pilgrimage souvenir of material culture – a chunk of mortar and a brick from a derelict eighteenth-century slave trading outpost, he gazes upon the Gambia River, (the *Kamby Bolongo* Haley claims was passed down to his grandmother from Kunta through oral tradition) for the first time since Kunta was torn from this soil.¹³⁸ He returns to the source, in the process communing with his ancestors, transcending time by the revelation of the genealogical perspective, and finding himself in the sufferings and remembrance of Kunta Kinte.

What *Roots* conveyed so strongly, however, is that, whilst everyone has roots, to not know them is, literally, a fate worse than death. Haley imagines Kunta's annoyance at the many of his contemporary black slaves who 'unlike himself...had no knowledge whatsoever of who they were and where they'd come from'.¹³⁹ Then, when Kunta's friend, known only as 'the old gardener' dies, Kunta is again stunned by the fact that he did not know 'who he was': 'Through his sorrow, Kunta...wondered what the gardener's true name had been – the name of his African forefathers – and to what tribe they had belonged. He wondered if the gardener himself had known. More likely he had died as he had lived – without ever learning who he really was. Through misted eyes, Kunta and the others watched as Cato and his helper lowered the old man into the earth'.¹⁴⁰ The message to the reader is clear – if one does not trace their family history, they do not know 'who they are', and will die a meaningless death, not knowing oneself, never having found oneself in another, just like the old gardener. The imperative to research could not be greater. As Bill Oddie admitted in the recent BBC celebrity genealogical series, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, "This isn't curiosity, this

¹³⁸ Haley, *Roots*, p. 576.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

journey – it’s self help”¹⁴¹ And if that were not enough to send newly enthused family historians scurrying to the archives, then the threats to the future generations, the ‘new life’ of their own families, of forgetting or of never knowing themselves by knowing their ancestors points them just as strongly in that direction

This is exemplified in the character of Uriah, one of Chicken George’s grandsons. Upon George’s return from years abroad in England, he encounters this grandson for the first time. Uriah, however, behaves very strangely. George notices that he appears somehow sickly, and decides that Uriah is ‘maybe a l’il quare in de head’, as he stares blankly at other people and at the world around him. Now, with Uriah’s peculiar and vague gaze fixed upon him, George ‘perceived the earnest, curious face of only a small boy... Critically he studied Uriah, thinking that there must be something appropriate to say to him. And finally, “Yo’ mammy or anybody tol’ you where you comes from?” “Suh? Comes from where?” He had not been told... “C’mon, ‘long wid me here, boy”¹⁴² George suddenly realised why his grandson was so lost in the world – he is lost without a genealogical narrative in which to make sense of it. Without genealogy, he stares in confusion, lost in a deracinated, meaningless void. To lack a family history is to be sick – and, worse still, it is for the future to be sick. Uriah thus embodies the lost, disconnected youth, the millions of grandsons and grand-daughters that Haley hopes genealogists will labour for, if not for themselves, as they strive to put right a sense of ‘lack’ that is often projected onto contemporary kin, as we shall see in Chapter 5. To this terrible cultural sickness, for Haley, family history provides a remedy. Sure enough, no sooner has Uriah learnt of his ancestry than ‘nearly an hour later, when Matilda came hurrying nervously into the cabin, wondering what on earth had happened to Uriah, she found him dutifully repeating such sounds as “Kunta Kinte”...and “*Kamby Bolongo*”’. Uriah is now ‘their rapt grandson’, no longer lost, but found, as again,

¹⁴¹ Quoted in Jonathan Freedland, ‘Through the Past Darkly’, *The Guardian*, 13 October 2004, p. 23.

¹⁴² Haley, *Roots*, p. 526.

time transcendent genealogical meaning floods in to shift the young boy's perspective, as it did do for Kunta. Indeed, the same later proved to be the case for Alex Haley himself, as describes his sitting as a 'rapt grandson', enthralled at the realisation that his elderly grandmother was once his age, and becoming aware of his place in the genealogies and family histories that Cynthia and his aunties would recite for him.¹⁴³

The consistent reference to historical documents throughout *Roots* serves to highlight the ready availability of the resources to put right these cultural wrongs. Kunta sees a man filling in the slave vessel's logbook, later he sees coats of arms, prayer books and other genealogical material culture inside a master's house, births are written in the covers of family Bibles, newspaper details of events relating to family members' lives are pointed out, rates of pay derived from business records are quoted, details of the family's contributions to church furnishings and stained glass windows are recorded, as are the family's involvements in raising funds for stationary for a newly opened school.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, once Haley has entered the narrative, he is explicit about the family history resources that he has used, telling of the helpfulness of librarians, and the joy of finding his ancestors' names in microfilmed census returns, in the slave ship's records that he concludes must have contained Kunta Kinte, the 1 October 1767 copy of the *Maryland Gazette* advertising the ship's slave cargo, and even the name 'Toby', included as property in land transfer records.¹⁴⁵ In describing his movements from the Gambia to London to Maryland in pursuit of this source material, again Haley provides an archetype of family history research – it involves both travel to consult relevant documents and also involves the thrill of locating particular small details amid page after page and reel after reel of records. This is described as 'a moment of purest gold' by one British genealogist in the late 1970s, articulating a feeling strived for by so many of his

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 568.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 131, p. 243, p. 369, p. 442, p. 473, p. 498, p. 555-56.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 561-62, p. 582-83.

fellow practitioners.¹⁴⁶ It cannot be underlined enough, however, that the unlikelihood of Haley's discoveries, the extremity of the sufferings, the significance of the return to source, elevate *Roots* to the status of a cultural archetype, an exemplar amongst family histories that frustrated contemporary observers yet also produced unprecedented viewing figures and motivated many to seek to uncover their own family histories.

As mentioned at the outset, the unlikelihood of Haley's claims, the oral nature of some of his key genealogical connections, the disputed *griot* informants, the over-active imagination, the anachronisms, the inaccuracies and so forth have led to heavy criticism of *Roots* and give rise to a intangible sense of uneasiness when discussing it.¹⁴⁷ This uneasiness increases at Haley's remarks that 'most of the incidents are of necessity a novelised amalgam of what I know took place together with what my research led me to plausibly feel took place'.¹⁴⁸ When gut feelings replace evidence, the empirically-minded historian's skin begins to crawl, whilst such anachronisms and ethnocentrism as Haley's assumption that Kunta played 'hide-and-seek' as a child, or that he constructed a family tree out of twigs on the Gambian earth have the same effect upon the cultural historian.¹⁴⁹ However, frequent references to 'historical' events pepper the text, providing an aura of historicity to the narrative and thus another touchstone of broader genealogical practice. Both the American Civil War and War of Independence rage in the background, whilst Haley imagines his ancestors discussing Napoleon and the Haitian uprising, the election of Jefferson and so on, thus adding colour, and context, to the genealogical narrative. Such additions echo through numerous other family history narratives, as they attempt to swing the balance away from the

¹⁴⁶ Scarr, *A History of the Scarr Family*, p. 2.

¹⁴⁷ This is seen for example in Robin Law's recent work on an individual slave, in which he simultaneously invokes Haley's work, before dismissing it in a footnote. Robin Law, 'Individualising the Atlantic Slave Trade: The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua of Djougou (1854)', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 12 (2002), p. 123.

¹⁴⁸ Haley, *Roots*, p. 584.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7, p. 51

fictional towards the factual. However, as argued above, *Roots* straddles both history and literature. Indeed, it seems to me that it is precisely because of this ambiguity that *Roots* appeals on such a wide level, tapping into something deeper. As David Lowenthal has written, 'that myths are batty and irrational does not spoil their worth. Camelot and the Grail lack historical credibility but convey psychological authority', before quoting the 'flagrantly anachronistic' Haley's remark that 'there you have it, some of it true, and some of it fiction, but all of it true, in the true meaning of the word'.¹⁵⁰

In the British context, it is important to remember that *Roots* was received into an atmosphere of scholarly hostility, whereby Haley's claims to have successfully traced his way back to Juffure were fiercely contested. Still, as Tamara Hareven has remarked, Haley's search *had* to be successful to have such cultural significance.¹⁵¹ It chimed with cultural uncertainties about the family as well as an emergent discourse of family history for all, both in evidence in the early family history society movement which swelled in the aftermath of *Roots*. In providing an exemplar of genealogical and geographical rootedness, of the primordial nature of names, of the communion of finding oneself as another in an apical ancestor, in memorialising the most extreme of sufferings and familial separations, in articulating notions of ancestors as watching and standing behind the genealogical practitioner, in epitomising roots-tourism, in promoting the time transcendent omniscience of the genealogical perspective, in providing models of virtue, in sounding the drum of the a 'right' to 'history', in researching for the benefit of future generations, in speaking to the concerns of human mortality, and even in exemplifying the familial black-sheep, *Roots* stands as an *ur*-text, a culturally symptomatic text of the late-1970s, condensing and expressing many of the key issues to reaching an understanding of the boom years of the family history 'phenomenon'. It allows us to see some of the ways in which these *meanings*

¹⁵⁰ Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade*, p. 146-47; Haley quoted in: Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing* (Chapel Hill, 1989), p. xxiii.

¹⁵¹ Hareven, 'The Search for Generational Memory', p. 139.

are central to understanding the diverse and changing practices identified in Chapter 2, and particularly to the staggering growth of family history research in and since the period of disjuncture when ‘family history’ came to crystallise as a coherent category of enterprise. Haley’s revelatory shift from third to first person indeed ‘becomes the paradigm of an individual with knowledge of his or her roots’ for Stephanie Athey, as ‘once those roots have been unearthed one is unquestionably nurtured from that source’.¹⁵²

In all of these ways, Haley moved beyond the Afro-American cultural context to motivate family historians across national frontiers. This ‘*Reader’s Digest* middlebrow amalgam that moved a hundred million simultaneously to tears’¹⁵³ did so – in the process enthusing some readers and listeners to become genealogical practitioners – precisely by merging fact and fiction, history and the imagination. Only one contemporary observer realised this, amidst the cacophony of criticism and praise. In *The Sunday Times* of 10 April 1977, headlined “Doubts Raised Over Story of the Big TV Slave Saga”, none other than Dennis Potter perceptively wrote:

The show is, indeed, well beyond the reach of effective criticism or the kind of pooh-pooh, investigative journalism which flies an “Exclusive” flag like a Jolly Roger on a bathtub sailing boat. These “*Roots*” have reached down into the prodigal fertility of the popular imagination, the soil which feeds all the great successes, no matter how flawed, how stilted, how exaggerated the “bestseller” may have been at any one stage of its manufacture... If “*Roots*” had been more sophisticated, more complex, or less stuffed with ludicrous little homilies of the kind which suggest the most widely circulated journal in the eighteenth century was none other than *Reader’s Digest*, then it would not have achieved the marvellously potent success it undoubtedly deserves.¹⁵⁴

Whether it deserved it or not, that is what it got, and that the prodigal fertility of popular imagination was stirred by the search for identity and roots is still in evidence today. As such, we must now turn to examine just how family historians and genealogists who may or may not have been enthused by *Roots* have addressed the questions of identity and meaning

¹⁵² Stephanie Athey, ‘Poisonous Roots and the New World Blues: Rereading Seventies Narration and Nation in Alex Haley and Gayl Jones’, *Narrative*, 7(2) (1999), p. 175.

¹⁵³ Moore, ‘Routes’, p. 20.

¹⁵⁴ *The Sunday Times*, 10 April 1977, p. 38.

that it so vividly raised, through their pursuits in the last three decades of the twentieth century.

**“Blood is Thicker Than Water”:
Family Historians, Genealogists
and the Search for Identity**

Roots stated very clearly that, without knowing his ancestry, Alex Haley did not know who he was, and that in discovering his family history, this lack of identity was redressed, in the process leaving an example ‘for all of us today to know who we are’ through genealogical research.¹ Haley’s search for his roots thus constituted, as we have seen, a thirst for belonging which was not really quenched until his selfhood passed into another – particularly Kunta Kinte – but also into the unity of his newly discovered ancestral family and the contemporary relatives with whom he shared descent from them. Without this return to his primordial roots, Haley *lacked* identity, and in *Roots* this state was exemplified by Chicken George’s confused grandson, Uriah, who was (culturally and physically) sick up until the point when he was told of his family history.

In the first section, this chapter explores this sense of lack further, to understand why such a lack should lead people to research their family history in search of meaning, identity and belonging. What exactly is this lack and how have family historians articulated it? In section two, I argue that it may be in part understood through the work of Marilyn Strathern and John Gillis on the broader cultural history of the family. However I shall also show that their analysis does not establish why it should be the family (and, particularly, family history)

¹ Alex Haley, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (New York, 1976), p. viii.

that provides such a popular site for redressing a lack of identity. To this end, in section three, fruitful and theoretically informed comparisons are drawn with the history of adoption discourses and the rise of family values. In particular I argue that a new value has become attached to primordial blood ties which is all the more profound for not being made explicit. Furthermore, such unquestioned lineal identity, constructed principally through family trees, has in the later twentieth century coincided with a reflexively 'free' search for identity through family history. This allows practitioners to choose the ancestral lines and specific ancestors with whom to identify, a kind of identification which, seemingly paradoxically, rejects identities ascribed from without, as shown in section four.

This is done by exploring the complexities of practice encountered in Chapter 2 and examining the construction of identities at both the 'genealogical' and 'family historical' poles of research. A number of examples are examined closely to demonstrate, in section five, that the various 'flashpoints' of such a search for identity (ranging from self-published family histories to family reunions and roots tourism) constitute the sites at which the primordialism of blood ties coincides with the reflexivity of the casual search through records in accordance with whatever interests the practitioner. As such it is no paradox that the diversity of the research practices outlined thus far have proved so compelling, for, in cultural terms, they allow family historians both to have their cake and eat it. They can both reflexively construct their family history 'freely' by emphasising particular ancestors (as Haley did with Kunta), and yet at the same time work with a primordialist view of genealogical relations, rooted in the past, as shown in section six.

Who Do You Think You Are? Family Historians and a 'Lack' of Identity

Alex Haley is not the only person who has asserted a sense of not knowing who he was without knowing his family history. This deracinated state made a striking reappearance on the small screen in Britain almost thirty years after Haley's epic when the TV series *Who*

Do You Think You Are? brought family history back to prime time television in 2004.² The very title presupposed the question of meaning, belonging and identity. This time, however, Haley's endeavours 'down' the generations from Gambia to Tennessee were turned on their head. Viewers did not journey from ancestors and primordial belonging through to the present day and the revelatory appearance of the family historian, but now followed the inquisitive, rootless, curious genealogical beginner exploring his or her ancestry back through the generations. Each programme ended with the protagonist finding a suitable end point and rootedness which would satisfy their lack of identity. As we have seen in Chapters 2 and 4, from the late-1970s a sense that anybody could 'know' their ancestry had indeed developed which was in tension with a late nineteenth and early- to mid-twentieth-century sense of a 'known' pedigree that was the property of the upper echelons. This was a key point of motivation for the formation of the family history societies and the spread of a more democratic family history. The corollary of such motivation, however, is that to *not* know one's ancestry is to somehow 'lack' rootedness and identity.

This sense of deracination is often in evidence amongst practitioners. George Pelling's *Beginning your Family History* (one of the first general guides produced through the Federation of Family History Societies in 1980), for example, is typical. 'Many people live away from their places of origin and some find it difficult to relate to their present environment', Pelling mused. 'Man has an inherent curiosity about himself and his origins...and by studying our ancestors we find out more about ourselves'.³ Without

² *Who Do You Think You Are?* was broadcast at 9.00pm on BBC2 from 12 October – 14 December 2004 and was produced by Wall to Wall Media. It constituted a significant project for the BBC, with ten broadcasts on successive Tuesday nights throughout that autumn that culminated in a nationwide family history weekend on local radio in mid-December. Special resource packs were supplied with the *Radio Times*, a major research kit was provided on the BBC website and a flurry of leaflets made available in libraries and archives nationwide. As Jonathan Freedland remarked: 'After the *Big Read* and *Great Britons* comes *Roots: The DIY version*'. *Who Do You Think You Are?* presented genealogical research in twenty-first century style, as ten 'TV personalities' (including newsreader Moira Stewart, comedian Vic Reeves and editor of *Private Eye* Ian Hislop) embarked upon what was, according to the book published to accompany the series, 'an emotional journey to trace family history'. See: Jonathan Freedland, 'Through the Past Darkly', *The Guardian*, 13 October 2004, p. 23; Dan Waddell, *Who Do You Think You Are? The Essential Guide to Tracing your Family History* (London, 2004).

³ George Pelling, *Beginning your Family History* (Plymouth, 1980), p. 1.

knowing origins and ancestors, then, one, like Haley, ‘lacks’ something vital in terms of self-knowledge and self-identity, leading to a deracinated and disorientating contemporary existence. Nor was Pelling alone. He wrote that in his thirst to learn ‘When? What? Where? How?’ he ‘met many people, of all ages and from all walks of life, engaged on a similar quest’.⁴

Numerous other family historians present this sense, expressing it both in terms of a negative lack of identity, and a positive fulfilment of their yearnings. The following examples from later twentieth-century British practitioners are typical: ‘It is simply a matter of interest for most people to know how they came to be who they are’;⁵ ‘I was seeking identity and my own full place in the family’⁶; ‘I have a deep interest... and understand the curiosity one has for knowing about origins’;⁷ ‘This is a personal voyage of discovery... A sense of insecurity and impermanence... [led me to] become interested in tracing roots’.⁸ G. G. Vandagriff, an American ‘baby boomer’ writing in her 1993 guidebook *Voices in your Blood: Discovering Identity through Family History*, emphasised this lack by introducing her guidebook by discussing ‘your missing heritage’. Vandagriff noted that, prior to researching her family history, she ‘didn’t have much identity’.⁹ These words echoed in the first episode of *Who Do You Think You Are?* as the 63 year-old comedian and TV bird-watcher Bill Oddie described himself as ‘a man with no family’. ‘I’ve always whinged a bit that I don’t have

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1-2.

⁵ D. M. Field, *Tracing your Ancestors* (London, 1982), p. 4.

⁶ E. M. Barraud, *Barraud: The Story of A Family* (London, 1967), p. 143.

⁷ L.E. Caver Jr., *The History of the Tyus Family* (S.I., 1993), p. vii.

⁸ J. R. Scarr, *A History of the Scarr Family (circa 1581-1977)* (S.I., 1977), p. 1. An example of such ‘lack’ is developed more fully in the case of Frances Pym below.

⁹ G. G. Vandagriff, *Voices in your Blood: Discovering Identity through Family History* (Kansas City, 1993), p. 1-2, back cover.

much family,' Oddie continued, 'I didn't know the truth, even about the people that I did remember... Who the Dickens were the rest of my family?'¹⁰

In her work on the mass search for ancestry amongst those with Irish descent, Catherine Nash has noted that 'the genealogical quest to know with certainty "who you are" and "where you come from" by knowing your ancestors suggests a primordial and predetermined identity that can be simply uncovered'.¹¹ It is, I would argue, therefore entirely reasonable to generalise that a sense of 'lack' lies underneath much family history research, even if it is not always stated explicitly, and to discuss it in terms of identities, rootedness and belonging. Reflecting upon the immense number of family historians' enquiries that he had dealt with in libraries and record offices in the 1980s and 1990s, Richard Harvey, for instance, pointed out that 'many attempting to undertake genealogical research do so with little or no personal knowledge of the family to be researched. Indeed it may be this very lack of knowledge that has led to the interest in genealogy'.¹² In 1992 Eve McLaughlin of the Federation of Family History Societies, like Pelling similarly implied that finding out about ancestors of whom one lacks knowledge provides most practitioners with redress for their own lack of understanding, offering 'a greater knowledge of yourself and your capabilities', for one's family history constituted the very 'fabric from which you are built'.¹³

Theorising the Late Modern 'Lack' of Family Identity

How, then, do we interpret these various statements about fabric, substance, origins, roots, self-knowledge, truth, discovery, fullness, insecurity, impermanence and identity?

¹⁰ *Who Do You Think You Are?* Episode broadcast at 9.00pm on BBC2 on 12 October 2004.

¹¹ Catherine Nash, 'Genealogical Identities', in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 20 (2002), p. 28.

¹² Richard Harvey, *Genealogy for Librarians* (London, 1992, second edition), p. 3.

¹³ Eve McLaughlin, *First Steps in Family History* (Newbury, 1992), p. 4.

How are we to explain this explicit and implicit sense of 'lack' and its corollary, the desire to redress it by finding one's own identity and self in previously undiscovered ancestry? One good way to begin to make these processes understandable is to relate them to ideas about the family, by developing John Gillis's and Marilyn Strathern's broader work on the cultural history and anthropology of the family, for their work has addressed similar questions of 'lack'.

The deracination and rootlessness often animating genealogical research frequently coincides with an idealised sense of family togetherness that is very characteristic of later twentieth- and twenty-first-century culture. As Gillis has argued, in the symbolic representation of the family a conceptual gulf has opened between the family lived *with* and the family lived *by*. 'We would like the two to be the same, but they are not,' he writes. 'Too often the families we live *with* exhibit the kind of self-interested, competitive, divisive behaviour that we have come to associate with the market economy and the public sphere. Often fragmented and impermanent, they are much less reliable than the imagined families we live *by*. The latter are never allowed to let us down'.¹⁴ The rootlessness and 'lack' which underlie much family history practice certainly imply a distinction in contemporary familial life that requires redress. By being conceptualised as the source at which one can discover roots and a consequent knowing of both one's self- and familial-identity, the unknown past that lies hidden in the census returns and parish registers provides a site at which to address a 'lack' in the present. The ancestral past thereby becomes a fecund wellspring of comforting self-representation to uncertain lives.¹⁵ For example, in his early guidebook, *Trace your*

¹⁴ John R. Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: A History of Myth and Ritual in Family Life* (Oxford, 1997), p. xv.

¹⁵ Much as the plethora of birthday videotaping, holiday photographing, mini-museums, family portrait and souvenir galleries that have accompanied and enframed much late twentieth and early twenty-first century family life and domestic space. On such representations and activity, see: Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making*, pp. 109-29, 225-40; Gillian Rose, 'Family Photographs and Domestic Spacings: A Case Study', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, NS, 28 (2003), 5-18; Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (New edition, London and New York, 2002); Marianne Hirsch (ed.), *The Familial*

Ancestors, Anthony Camp, pointed out that the ‘uncertainty of the times’ was leading many people to come to the S.O.G. to ‘look for “roots” in the more settled age of their ancestors’, both deliberately and on what he called a ‘subconscious’ level.¹⁶

As such, the family has become a site of great cultural significance for mediating the tensions that have come to be perceived in everyday life. For Gillis, these tensions are ‘built into a political and economic system based on values of competition, instant gratification, and amoral calculations about persons as well as things’.¹⁷ In the archives, then, lie a plethora of resources possessing *symbolic* value. Once discovered, they provide a certainty that seemed (and still seems) somehow lacking in the late twentieth and early twenty-first-century culture. Thus, Dianna O’Loughlin of Cheltenham (who had moved there from Suffolk) was delighted in 1981 when she learnt from the census that her great-great-great grandfather had himself lived in the same county of Gloucestershire. ‘Did I unknowingly return to the “Land of my Fathers” when I came to live in Gloucestershire?’ she excitedly asked.¹⁸ The symbolic importance that the ancestral past has – in terms of both geographical and genealogical rootedness – certainly seems to redress a lack of certainty in a present family context (where a move from, for instance, Suffolk to Gloucestershire is quite unremarkable) by reference to a seemingly more static past and, crucially, by establishing a personal connection to that past.

Such connections also seem to bode well for the future for many genealogists and family historians. In Gillis’s terms, in late modern Western culture, the imagined family lived *by* has come to shoulder a cultural burden of virtue and romanticism that is otherwise difficult to sustain. Indeed, numerous practitioners depict their efforts as being for the good

Gaze (Hanover and London, 1999); Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (London, 1986); Virginia Tuftes and Barbara Myerhoff (eds.), *Changing Images of the Family* (New Haven and London, 1979).

¹⁶ Anthony J. Camp, *Tracing Your Ancestors* (London, 1964), p. 9.

¹⁷ Gillis, *A World of their Own Making*, p. xvi-xvii.

¹⁸ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking ~ Again (About this Ancestry Business)* (Birmingham, 1981), 54.

of their grandchildren and posterity, and embark upon them upon being freed from the work pressures which they perceive to have impinged upon strained contemporary family life. They thus turn to genealogical material to (re)construct the family lived *by*. In the Public Service Quality Group's survey of British archive users in June 1998, for instance, by far the most frequent stated reasons for conducting research were related to only now having time to do so (34%) and to pass it onto the next generations (22%).¹⁹ 'For my children's sake it only seemed fair' commented Patricia Beard of the B.M.S.G.H. in 1974, betraying a sense that without such grounding future generations would have the 'lack' that she possessed.²⁰

A staggering 42% of respondents to the same survey, however, could not answer the question and went about their endeavours apparently without having really reflected on why they were doing them. This is worth noting, particularly in light of the present discussion about the search for meaning and identity. It indicates the important point that family historians are not always keen to be contextualised, and often conduct their research without reflecting on why they are doing so because they envision it as a natural thing to do. It is, therefore, vitally important to further probe the ways in which identifications are constructed as well as to reflect theoretically on the assumptions about redressing a disjuncture or 'lack' in the family. This allows us to ascertain how family history has come to seem such a normative activity, such a widely appealing and active site of identity construction for so many. Two poles of practice emerge, as we shall see below. Firstly, an important element in the construction of identities through more biographical 'family history' approaches is that they allow different ancestral lines to be chosen and particular 'apical' ancestors prioritised in narrating a familial past. Crucially, at the same time a second mode of identity construction – at a more 'genealogical' pole of practice – consists of establishing connections in family trees. This persists alongside the 'free' search and renders the whole enterprise

¹⁹ Public Services Quality Group, *Survey of Visitors to British Archives, June 1998* (London, 1998), p. 10.

²⁰ Birmingham and Midland Society for Heraldry and Genealogy, *Personally Speaking ~ Again*, 32.

compellingly natural, so that practitioners need not necessarily reflect on why they are doing it.

The disjuncture of ideas surrounding the family lived *with* and *by* is central to this argument in terms of a sense of 'lack', and have been taken in another intriguingly relevant direction by Marilyn Strathern. She has argued that the status of the 'family' as a naturalised entity was rendered uncertain by the pluralistic knowledge construction of the 'modern epoch' that she dates from the 1860s to 1960s. For Strathern, the modernist mode of knowledge construction consisted of making explicit what had previously been implicit to produce a 'sense of complexity and diversity' and a sense that there was 'less' content to various categories than in the past. In this increasingly complex view of the world, tradition or continuity came to imply homogeneity, whilst change implied the introduction of heterogeneity and diversity. With regards to the family, then, a disjuncture emerged as reflection on social forms made them seem all the more plural and changeable, thus creating a divergence in *ideas* about the family similar to that identified by Gillis.²¹ Whereas Gillis saw the extension of the economic into the domestic sphere as responsible for a growing of a sense of lack, Strathern argues that it derived from the excavation of modernist knowledge construction, which rendered concepts such as the 'family' pluralist and thus less culturally certain than they once were.

Whilst this helps to understand why family historians might want to (re)construct familial identities, bringing the lives of ancestors into the present as symbolic resources with which to construct the family lived *by*, it does not shed much light on why the genealogical form of family history, and its primordialist assumptions, should persist. Why should the 'certainty' of genealogical connections be so compelling at a time when the very concept of

²¹ Marilyn Strathern, *After Nature: English Kinship in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 7. For Strathern, furthermore, this leads to a new phenomenon, namely 'valuing one's already established values' as the concept itself became something to either explicitly defend or attack, whilst at the same time seeming ever less 'traditional'.

'family' has become pluralized? Strathern does not address this question, although she does argue that one consequence of this pluralisation of the concept of 'the family' is that there is seemingly 'less' of it than in the past, 'before' it became subject to change.²² Like Gillis, then, Strathern is more helpful in theorising how there is a generalised sense of 'lack' in the present than with explaining why the family should provide such a popular site at which to redress it.²³ To put it bluntly – why should the family provide such a compelling site for asserting firmly rooted identities if the very concept of family has become less culturally certain than it once was? To answer this question, it is essential to explore how family historians and genealogists have constructed identities since the 1970s. In addition, the next section will explore the relationship of family historians to the family values and adoption rights movements. Such comparisons allow us to avoid simply reading theoretical insights such as those of Strathern and Gillis into the material.

The Persistence of Blood: Family Values, the A.R.M. and Genealogical Truth

While Strathern asserts that there is 'less' family today and that this lack can be redressed by turning to the past, nonetheless during the decades of most dramatic growth of

²² However, this is not a reason to explore the construction of identities through family history and genealogy by establishing an empirical account of 'something that happened' in the development of family forms since the 1960s as directly determining it, as some would argue. Anthony Wagner, for instance, in 1961 argued that: 'industrial society has weakened family ties and reduced the importance of descent and kinship... Concern with descent and kinship is a basic human drive which nothing can kill... The very rootlessness, mobility and fragmentation of much modern life have produced reactions. Cut off from his roots by profound changes in ways of living, by migration far from home and by loss of contact with his kindred, modern man seeks more or less consciously to reconstitute human links which may restore to his life lost dignity and meaning'. Anthony R. Wagner, *English Ancestry* (Oxford, 1961), p. 5-6. For the opposing perspective, which views a generalised sense of modernity more positively, in connection with family history and genealogy, Simon Fowler, for instance, has argued that the work of today's genealogists is infused with a more democratic ethos than that of the Victorian and Edwardians pioneers. Fowler writes that 'the surge of interest in genealogy since the 1960s has turned the study into a democratic hobby'. Simon Fowler, 'Our Genealogical Forebears', *History Today*, 51(3) (March 2001), p. 42-43.

²³ None of this, however is to say that statistically less people live and spend time with contemporary family, or that the domain of the family has seen greater encroachment of the influence of the market, as Gillis suggests. The insight of Strathern's approach is rather to point out that to make cultural sense of a 'lack' that has been in evidence since the 1960s, it is more helpful to 'point to something that has been "happening" all the time, namely the way people put value on their value. When this takes the form of making the implicit explicit, then what was once taken for granted becomes an object of promotion, and less the cultural certainty it was'. Strathern, *After Nature*, p. 35.

genealogical and family history practices, a newly invigorated cultural value became attached to blood ties. This occurred at a time when a call for rejuvenated family values became something of a catch all, cure all phrase in social life, emerging from both sides of the political spectrum.²⁴ As Ludmilla Jordanova has noted, in late twentieth-century culture ‘lip-service is paid to cultural [and familial] diversity, whether across time or space, but it is generally no more than this’. For Jordanova, ‘however we use terms such as “family” and “the family”, the implication of universality is present’.²⁵ In other words, as regards the family, universality and diversity sit as uneasily together as do families lived *with* and *by*. In the culture wars over the family, the naturalness of the family is both assumed and rejected, and scholars have struggled with questions such as: is the family just another lifestyle choice?²⁶ Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim has argued that ‘the new confusion about the family’ has developed since the late-1960s, describing the contours of ‘the post-familial family’ which, she suggested has been produced through the normalisation of divorce, the complex relations of divorced families and the variety of other ‘family’ forms. The concept of

²⁴ Gill Jagger and Caroline Wright, ‘Introduction: Changing Family Values’, in G. Jagger and C. Wright (eds.), *Changing Family Values* (London and New York, 1999), p. 1-2. The Right’s ‘back to basics’ campaigning, as discussed in Chapter 4, had its origins in both the US and Thatcherite neo-traditionalist backlash to the perceived permissiveness of the late-1960s and early-1970s and was beginning to establish itself by the late-1970s – as such coinciding intriguingly with Haley’s *Roots*. The Left has also developed family values in its ‘ethical socialism’. See also: P. Berger and B. Berger, *The War over the Family* (London, 1983); Martin Durham, *Sex and Politics: The Family and Morality in the Thatcher Years* (Basingstoke, 1991); P. Abbott and C. Wallace, *The Family and the New Right* (London, 1992); Ruth Lister, ‘Back to the Family: Family Policies and Politics Under the Major Government’, in Helen Jones and Jane Millar (eds.), *The Politics of the Family* (Aldershot, 1996); Martin Durham, ‘Major and Morals: Back to Basics and the Crisis of Conservatism’, *Talking Politics*, 7(1) (Autumn 1994), 12-16; Martin Durham, ‘The Conservative Party and the Family’, *Talking Politics*, 6(2) (Winter 1994), 66-70; Lorraine Fox Harding, ‘“Family Values” and Conservative Government Policy: 1979-97’, in G. Jagger and C. Wright (eds.), *Changing Family Values* (London and New York, 1999).

²⁵ Ludmilla Jordanova, ‘Families Past and Present: Values and Morals’, in Stewart Asquith and Anne Stafford (eds.), *Families and the Future* (Edinburgh, 1995), p. 104.

²⁶ The Institute of Economic Affairs, a ‘free-market think-tank’ founded in 1955, for instance, addressed this issue in a 1993 collection of essays made by contributions from sociologists, historians and religious studies scholars which stated that ‘The decline of the traditional family over the last forty years has been unmistakable. Life long loyalty of marriage partners is no longer the norm... The traditional family of ‘mum, dad and the kids’ has become just another lifestyle choice... Is there a minimum stock of values which we ignore at our peril? The chattering classes tend to dismiss concern about family breakdown with over-used stock responses. The most popular is...“You can’t put the clock back”’. See Jon Davies (ed.), *The Family: Is it Just Another Lifestyle Choice?* (London, 1993). John Gillis, for his part, argues that ‘we must strive toward new family cultures that will not unduly burden or privilege either sex or any age group... I would insist that we keep our family cultures diverse, fluid, and unresolved’. Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making*, p. 239-40.

'marriage' and 'nuclear family' have thus in many cases ceased to apply. She also notes that a search for new models of generational contract and gender relations is under way, as is the rise of life as an 'individualised planning project', characterised by specialists, experts and advisers, regardless of whether one is part of a (traditional family) or not.²⁷ And yet, nonetheless, such discussions are still couched in terms of 'reinventing the family' – and even among those most keenly aware of the problematic nature of the term, it has not been disregarded. Being 'after nature' or 'post-modern' does not, after all, abandon the concepts of 'nature' and 'modernism'.

On one hand, then, the very 'lack' of certainty over the family sits alongside a universalism that persists in the very concept of 'family' on the other. This is particularly important when considering why the family should have come to provide such a popular site for identity construction in these years – it was both the site and solution of the problem. In the search for roots and construction of genealogical identities, one may reflexively pursue an 'individual' project – a 'reflexive' or 'self-constructed' search for ancestry – and yet also work with the unspoken assumption of primordial blood ties. As such, the search of the ancestral record is at once 'free' and unconstrained by external definitions of the particular branch or ancestor at which one should find one's identity, and yet structured by the biological universalism of genealogical descent.

The guidebook accompanying the *Who Do You Think You Are?* series articulated the 'free' or 'reflexive' element of the search strikingly (in the process providing 'expert' advice): 'This is a journey that you can take as far as you wish, depending on your goals and the appetite for the chase'. However, at the same time, the 'chase' that one can follow as much as one wants, in whatever direction one wants is also assumed to provide a means of attaining a firm identity. The same guide points out, for instance, that: 'You may discover that your Great-great-uncle Alfred was involved in the Charge of the Light Brigade; or that

²⁷ Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Reinventing the Family: In Search of New Lifestyles* (Cambridge, 2002).

Great-aunt Gertie was at the forefront of the suffragette movement. It may turn out you are descended from honest working folk... But what you will discover is that your ancestors were human beings... you will find answers about who you are and what informs your passions, prejudices and convictions'.²⁸ In this case, ancestors are not only 'real' but also constitutive of the searcher through biological and genealogical links, redressing their present lack of self-knowledge by providing resources by which to know 'who they are'.

Rather than being a manifestation of a concern for family values, then, what has made the search so compelling in the late twentieth century is not that family history has provided a site for explicitly defending a universalist definition of the family, but that the conceptual uncertainties that gave rise to a sense of 'lack' of rootedness may be addressed *without* making the primordialist assumptions explicit and thereby less of a cultural certainty. Numerous other guidebooks by 'expert' practitioners confirm this: 'Our family background offers a choice of surnames' asserted C.M. Matthews in 1976, whilst also showing practitioners how to 'assemble all the genealogical facts'.²⁹ The crucial point is that the activities of family historians avoid addressing the uncertainties of a pluralist definition of family by recourse to biological descent, to 'knowing' one's lineage, whilst at the same time perpetuating the post-plural 'freedom' of one's identity not being defined by anybody other than oneself.

This is not to say that family historians do not appeal to family values or advocate the strengthening of families. Haley, for instance, became a forthright evangelist for family values and Rayment saw 'the family' as a site of decay that family history could redress. However, such remarks have certainly not been made by all practitioners or family history societies over the last three decades of the twentieth century. An article published in *Family*

²⁸ Waddell, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p. 10.

²⁹ C. M. Matthews, *Your Family History and How to Discover It* (Guildford 1982 [1976]), p. 11, p. 20. See also: Don Steel, *Discovering your Family History* (London, 1980);

Tree Magazine in 1985 illustrates how practitioners have engaged with the confusion over the family without deciding to come to the defence of the family. In 'More Branches than Twigs', Michael Armstrong (the publisher and founder of the magazine) addressed the sensitive question of surrogacy, which in the mid-1980s was legally controversial.³⁰

Armstrong discussed the dilemmas faced by genealogists regarding surrogate ancestors who do not fit conventionally or simply into family trees. He was careful to point out to the readers of *Family Tree* that he was raising 'many questions but few answers' and referred to the decline of marriage thus: 'Properly-controlled surrogacy could help stamp out hereditary ailments. Seldom can young people who fall in love be persuaded not to marry or not to form one of the now-prevalent semi-permanent relationships, even if both happen to come from families carrying the same hereditary problems'. The 'now-prevalent semi-permanent relationships' of many family historians' children and grandchildren are thus described but not moralised about. As to the dilemma of surrogacy itself, Armstrong wrote:

Let's consider how all this could affect future generations of family historians. What would we see on birth certificates? The name of the natural father must, of course, be recorded and to be correct there should surely be the name of his legal wife. But what of the woman who gives birth to the child? No one can deny that she is the baby's mother, so she should surely merit a mention. This...will complicate, however, the task of future generations trying to trace family trees. Instead of having four grandparents, the grandchild of a surrogate birth could find that five or even in extreme conditions, six, would have to be traced. How different from a normal family tree things would then look... Even if the Government outlaws surrogacy, the problem, so far as family trees are concerned, will certainly not go away'.³¹

As such, the legal and moral dilemmas then being debated mattered less to Armstrong than the practices of family history and the expression of those labours in birth certificates and the family trees produced by the genealogist. Indeed, Armstrong suggested that as 'we use the

³⁰ Under the Surrogacy Arrangement Act 1985, British law asserted that surrogacy was legal, although it stated that it was illegal to advertise either for or to be a surrogate. From 1985-2006 approximately 600 surrogate births have taken place in the UK. Methods vary from the 'Traditional Surrogacy' undertaken by artificial insemination at home (in which the 'host' mother is also the 'biological' mother) to 'Gestational Surrogacy' conducted in an IVF clinic (by which method the 'host' mother is not the biological mother).

³¹ Michael Armstrong, 'More Branches and Twigs: Many Questions But Few Answers', *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(3) (March-April 1985, p. 25).

symbol = to indicate married to; perhaps it could be appropriate to use the division symbol ÷ to indicate that a child has two legal mothers... The mind boggles'.³²

The conventions of family history practice are bending in light of pluralist definitions of the family, and yet family historians such as Armstrong were not taking the opportunity to argue the case for family values.³³ 'The mind boggles' because of the symbols that attempt to represent diversity, not cultural uncertainty over that same diversity, and the underlying assumption remains that of a 'normal' family tree, defined in terms of biological parentage. Armstrong continued: 'It is only natural for young people to want children, and, if a woman who is barren wants a child badly, she is going to be happy to find that another will bear one for her. The fact that it was conceived by her partner must surely create a stronger bond between the two than if a normal adoption took place'.³⁴ Here we encounter the sense that if the 'biological' and 'social' father coincide in fathering,³⁵ there will be a 'stronger bond' than, say, adoption. Biological kinship is thus privileged over social and adoptive kinship in the genealogical discourse of blood, genes and nature that is equally unsure of how adoption would fit into a family tree.

The history of adoption in the post-1960s period and its relationship to family historians' search for identity provides an important parallel in this respect. Indeed, continuities emerge with these contours of genealogical identity construction when the

³² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³³ For another example of this, see: Barbara Marlow, 'Concealment of Birth', *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(4) (May-June 1985), p. 10. Here Marlow expresses the dilemmas of the 'mixed opinions about the ethics of legalised abortion'. Her cause to reflect on this was encountering newspaper account of children 'exposed' to certain death in the mid-nineteenth century. In this respect, as with Armstrong's discussion of surrogacy, family history practice is again better understood as a sphere of cultural activity in which such ethical dilemmas are actively addressed – where contesting definitions and divisive issues are explored – even when, on one level, it seems that the concern is solely with the familial past rather than contemporary issues. In fact family history practice is not a determinant as to the position taken on such issues. Marlow concludes of abortion only that 'it is better than infanticide'.

³⁴ Armstrong, 'More Branches and Twigs', p. 25.

³⁵ What modernist anthropologists of kinship term 'genitor' and 'pater' respectively. See, for instance, Robert Parkin, *Kinship: An Introduction to Basic Concepts* (Oxford, 1997), p. 14.

Adoption Rights Movement (A.R.M.) is considered alongside the contemporary rise of family history enthusiasm. As E. Wayne Carp has argued, secrecy and disclosure of adoption became the focus of increased debate as the A.R.M. emerged in the 1970s, after the loss of stigma surrounding illegitimacy that began in the previous decade. In the early 1970s, social scientists began to medicalise the sealed adoption records issue. Carp explains: 'They made adoptees' identity conflicts central to the A.R.M. by using the discourse of social science to demonstrate the therapeutic value of adoptees' genealogical searches and reunions'.³⁶ Crucially, through the A.R.M. and high profile cases of adoptees denied knowledge of their biological parents in the early 1970s, in popular culture a certain legitimacy came to be attached to knowledge of civil registration documents and the 'genealogical facts' that they contained. Indeed, the combination of emotional drama, therapeutic self-help and demand for individual rights in adoptee autobiographies and search and reunion news stories were tailor-made for the mass circulation magazines that were quick to exploit the melodrama just as they were to do (in the late-1970s) with Haley's 'incredible journey'. As the sexual revolution removed the stigma attached to illegitimacy, the secrecy of such documents came to be perceived as unbearably hypocritical, 'genealogical bewilderment' became utterly unacceptable, and the focus of the revelation of identity and truth fell squarely upon those same documents that were to provide the site of ever more feverish genealogical activity as the final quarter of the twentieth century drew on. As Carp puts it, 'Crucial to legitimizing the adoption rights movement was the popularisation of the psychological argument that knowledge of one's birth parents were crucial to the

³⁶ E. Wayne Carp, *Family Matters: Secrecy and Disclosure in the History of Adoption* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1998), p. 138-39. Arthur D. Sorosky, a Professor of Child Psychiatry, and Annete Baran and Reuben Pannor (both social workers) were instrumental to this end, concluding from their studies that in their sample of 50 adoptees, only 4% conformed to 'the standard psychiatric assumption that the search for the natural parent was a search for love and affection'. Instead, their evidence demonstrated that for most adopted persons searching for one's birth parents stemmed from an 'innate curiosity about their genealogical past'. H. J. Sants even coined the term 'genealogical bewilderment' in this regard. See Carp, *Family Matters*, p. 150, p. 154.

adopted persons' self-identity'.³⁷ The desires of family historians to put right a 'lack' of familial identity are thus cast in a new light. In *Who Do You Think You Are?*, for example, Bill Oddie's relationship with his parents constituted for him a lack that was presented as continuous with his lack of genealogical information about his ancestors. It seems that a very intimate connection between the discourses evident in the history of adoption and in the subsequent history of genealogical enthusiasm is in evidence. Where adoptees were denied their right to identity through genealogy due to the unacceptable secrecy of documents, however, family historians had been denied by a sense that genealogy was the exclusive domain of the aristocratic, as we have seen in Chapters 2 and 4.³⁸

Absolutely central to this link between attitudes to adoption and those to the genealogical truth 'embodied' in genealogical documents was the rise of a popular psychological understanding of self-identity constituted through biological parenthood. Carp points out that central to this were the narratives in the pages of magazines and in television dramatisations of the plight of adopted persons in the early 1970s. *Readers' Digest* and *Good Housekeeping* for instance 'bombarded its readership with articles entitled "Who Are My Real Parents?" "The Adopted Child Has A Right To Know EVERYTHING", "Search

³⁷ Carp, *Family Matters*, p. 147.

³⁸ Indeed, along with the de-stigmatisation of illegitimacy and the sense of genealogy as a solely aristocratic preserve came the celebration of ancestral 'black sheep'. This is true particularly in the case of changes in attitude of the descendants of 'convicts' deported to Australia. See: Graeme Davison, 'The Broken Lineage of Australian Family History' in *Dangerous Liaisons: Essays in Honour of Greg Denning* (ed. D. Merwick), (Parkville, Victoria, 1994); Ronald D. Lambert, 'Reclaiming the Ancestral Past: Narrative, Rhetoric and the "Convict Stain"', *Journal of Sociology*, 38:2 (2002), 111-127. This is not just the case in Australia, however. British genealogists have also come to see black sheep as apical ancestors. Leslie Collins remarked, as early as 1974: 'Skeletons in the cupboard? One ancestor took his bride to the altar seven months pregnant,... my earliest known forebear is stated in Llangar parish register to have fathered a base born child Dinah in 1800... [but] he "did right" by the child. Good for him!'. Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking ~ About This Ancestry Business. Members of the Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry Recount their Genealogical Adventures* (Birmingham, 1974), 60. Nonetheless, taboos remain as to black sheep. A genealogist identifying himself as kat >^.<, for example, argued against 'Jerry Springerism' in a posting on a *RootsWeb* newsgroup in which he wrote: 'There is a big difference in "Grandpa was hanged for horsethievinn" and finding that your grandmother was raped by her father and had a child, which she tried to drown'. kat >^.<, (9 December 2003), 'The perils of research' in *alt.genealogy* [Usenet], (accessed 16 December 2003).

For A Stranger” and “We’re Family Again””.³⁹ Significantly, through the showcasing of such search and reunion stories, an exceptionally potent message was unintentionally conveyed, one that undermined the legitimacy of adoptive kinship and reinforced a cultural preference for biological kinship. Paradoxically, at a time when familial diversity and heterogeneity was increasing, nonetheless a biological definition of family was being affirmed as somehow ‘truer’ than alternative arrangements. The place of rootedness, then, was not just the family – but ‘the family’ defined biologically and thus revealed through genealogical documents. As Judith Modell has pointed out, the process of adoptees searching for ‘real parents’ presents those not engaged in such a search with the necessity of acknowledging the biological in *every* parent-child relationship.⁴⁰ In a time of cultural uncertainty brought about by the making explicit of diversity, the traditional, homogenous sense of family gained an even greater force as a domain of truth to which people have a right. The family genealogically defined became a place of rootedness, of rest, of truth. Perhaps it is in this regard that it thus acquired the extra layer of idealisation in symbolic constructions of the family lived *by*. Indeed, as we have seen above, in *Roots* Kunta Kinte’s ‘true name’ was genealogically defined. He was never ‘Toby’ and could never rest as long as he was. Identity for Haley was not just familial in a heterogeneous, post-modern sense, but was of lineage, of descent, of blood (he imagined Kunta telling other slaves to search for their ‘real names’ rather than developing any sense of slaves as a family in exploitation or through shared faith). Kunta’s freedom did not come through his worship of Allah, nor when his grandson Chicken George obtained his freedom from slavery, it came when Haley was reunited with him through the lineage, through reunion with his living descendents and

³⁹ Carp, *Family Matters*, p. 159. See also: David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (London, 1996), p. 35.

⁴⁰ Judith Modell, ‘In Search: The Purported Biological Basis of Parenthood’, *American Ethnologist*, 13(4) (November 1986), p. 659. The whole process and its retelling, by the same token, simultaneously assert the social aspect, as Modell notes, albeit casting it in a far more uncertain light.

through the oral and textual documents that had ‘proved’ the bloodline. Only biologically defined family could set Kunta, Haley and the adoptees free and give them roots.

Indeed, from the 1970s, as genealogical practice began to grow at the astonishing rate outlined in Chapter 1, desires for the biological family (over the social) were similarly in evidence among mostly un-adopted family historians. Consider the following instance, in which Malcolm Partridge – an early member of the B.M.S.G.H. described his searches for details of his great-grandfather in the mid-1970s: ‘From his birth certificate I discovered he was illegitimate, but he named his father as Thomas Willis on his marriage certificate. One wonders whether he did this to save embarrassment, or did his mother marry a Thomas Willis after he was born? A cousin maybe, I have yet to discover this’.⁴¹ Partridge showed no concern over his great-grandfather’s status as a bastard. Rather, the problem is who the ‘true’ father is, to fill in the relevant names and dates on the (implicitly biological) family tree, and until this is known we are left with the distinct impression that, until such biological links are made certain by genealogical data, Mr Partridge will not fully rest and will continue to scour the archives. How frustrating for the practitioner when those civil registration documents that have ascended to a new cultural status as a repository of particularly rooting identity serve only to demonstrate a previous generation’s embarrassment and attempts to disguise whatever the truth was.

To consider adoption discourses alongside those of genealogical practice sheds even more light on identity construction in the later twentieth century in an intriguing blurring of the boundaries between the two. For example, Ian Swinnerton, the Founder Secretary of the B.M.S.G.H., in his account of his own family history endeavours remarked that ‘For many years my main interest was, naturally my “name” family, but of recent years I have been also researching my other ancestral families and have had the pleasure of discovering close relatives of whose existence I had not previously been aware – and of meeting some of them,

⁴¹ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 1.

a very rewarding experience... Genealogy, I find, breaks down all barriers... and I have, in the great majority of cases, found a wealth of friendliness and co-operation that have proved again and again that blood is thicker than water'.⁴² Such genealogical reunions resemble those eagerly dramatised in magazines and chat-shows for adoptees in that 'blood symbolises the natural' as Modell has noted,⁴³ in being 'thicker than water' for practitioners such as Swinnerton.⁴⁴

An even more striking blurring of adoption disclosure and genealogical practice is to be encountered in the ambiguous internet newsgroup enquiries made by some of those standing at the beginning of their quest in the early twenty-first century. For instance, a user identifying herself only as '4Space' wrote: 'Hello, could someone help me? I have very little understanding of this subject area. Where would I go to find centralised information regarding births, deaths and marriages in the '70s? Is it available to the public? Is it free?'⁴⁵ In searching for genealogical information dating from only thirty years previously (when early family history society members such as Swinnerton and Partridge were beginning their researches), 4Space's query confused those family historians unaware of how younger enthusiasts might not have access to relatively recent genealogical information regarding mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers (due to adoption, divorce, separation or loss of contact between generations). One replied: "'1970s England?" That's genealogy? Don't you think you might be better off trying *Friends Reunited* or some such site?'⁴⁶ To this misunderstanding, 4Space responded sharply: 'As a group of people, I was under the impression that the inhabitants of this group were proficient in acquisition of such

⁴² *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴³ Modell, 'In Search: The Purported Biological Basis of Parenthood', p. 656.

⁴⁴ See also: *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(2) (January-February 1985), p. 17.

⁴⁵ 4Space, (5 February 2004), 'Public records, births deaths and marriages' in *soc.genealogy.britain* [Usenet], (accessed 11 February 2004).

⁴⁶ Paul Collins, (6 February 2004), 'Re: Public records, births deaths and marriages' in *soc.genealogy.britain* [Usenet], (accessed 11 February 2004).

knowledge. Person in question is dead, and as such doesn't spend a whole lot of time online.

:) Cheers.'⁴⁷

In rebuffing the insensitivity of the response, 4Space leaves much unanswered about the nature of her query. Is this questioning that of an adoptee learning that a biological parent died in the 1970s? Is a grandchild searching for details of a grandparent encountered only at a recent funeral and who had not been known personally to them due to a family rift or generational conflict? Is a son or daughter looking for details of a biological parent who was divorced and may have died in the 1970s? That any of these scenarios could be true demonstrates the significant blurring of the research practice needed to rediscover a familial past obscured by adoption or to address a more general lack of rootedness and self-identity originating in not knowing one's genealogical truth. Furthermore, the striking temporal shallowness of genealogical interest encountered in 4Space's quest demonstrates that, despite early-1970s accounts of adoptee reunions that 'make whole again', there is no reason to assume, when one considers broader genealogical practice and the post-1970s roots boom, that a parental reunion should be the endpoint of a search for identity. It may well do – or, rather, it may provide the most emotionally intense and marketable narrative of discovering rootedness genealogically and biologically – but for both the adoptee and the genealogist there is no need to stop there. Whilst many adoptees ended their journey with the reunion with living blood, plenty did not and continued their researches into their family history to discover even more 'who they are'. A list of new member's interests in the B.M.S.G.C.'s *Journal* of 1973, for instance, pointed out that Mr J. D. Young of Birmingham 'has made good progress already' although 'his main difficulty is on his mother's side, for she was brought up in a convent since the age of 3 and consequently knew little of her family'.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ 4Space, (6 February 2004), 'Re: Public records, births deaths and marriages' in *soc.genealogy.britain* [Usenet], (accessed 11 February 2004).

⁴⁸ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Journal*, 28 (February 1973), p. 3.

Indeed, from its inception in 1984, *Family Tree Magazine*'s 'Missing Ancestors' section sat happily alongside the 'Missing Live Persons' column in the classified section. A classified seeking 'HUNTER, James, parish Clerk at Swinford, Leics from 1823. Had daughters Ann and Sarah' is printed with no contradiction opposite one for 'MAIR, George (Norman), born Larkhall 13.9.1920. Last known address in London 1951. Son enquires'.⁴⁹

Reflexive Projects of Self-Identity Construction: Three Examples

Such blurring of practices and endpoints emphasise that an adoptee may continue his or her search further and deeper into ancestral generations. However, this is even more pertinent to un-adopted genealogical identity-seekers. Often never embracing a previously unknown close living relative, the huge diversity of possibilities open through researching into a family history that proliferates with each generation further back can in fact give rise to the exact opposite – a search with an ever less obvious 'endpoint' of identification. As noted in Chapter 4, Haley's reunion with his distant Gambian kin (and identification of his apical ancestor, Kunta Kinte) did provide for him a suitable endpoint. Other family historians may encounter this 'moment' in their own reunion events (discussed below), yet, as we have seen in Swinnerton's case, the blood cousins encountered through family history practice may serve not as an endpoint, but as a helpful source of further information in the ongoing search back through ever more complex generations.

As such, the identities constructed through genealogical practice are astonishingly diverse and demand further exploration particularly because the freedom to follow whichever line or ancestor that interests a practitioner coincides with the genealogical universalism of the structure of a family tree. The latter certainly results in a sometimes explicit sense of a family tree as something to obtain and possess, as something conferring self-identity of knowledge upon a genealogist. 'My husband and I set out from Solihull in search of Peter's

⁴⁹ *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(1) (November-December 1984), p. 30.

family tree, stopping for two days in Beverley to visit the County Record Office before going in search of the family home,' wrote V. Tonks in the 1980s.⁵⁰ This narrative provides quite a reified sense of identity and rootedness – a conjunction of a geographical sense (tied to a particular house and village in East Yorkshire) and a genealogical sense (in the records held at the county office). Just how the historical information that they discovered regarding the lives of specific ancestors in the county record office would give rise to a coherent identity, which coincided with the majority of the ancestors, say, five generations prior to their own is not so straightforward, however. Why choose Peter's ancestors? Is the maternal or the paternal side preferable? What of diverse occupations? What of different branches living in different locales? If, as Linda Colley remarks, 'identities are not like hats' and 'human beings can and do put on several at a time', then setting out in search of Peter's family tree is to apply the same principle to a hydra let loose in a hat shop.⁵¹

Catherine Nash, for instance, considers genealogy 'a practice through which ideas of personal, familial, collective, ethnic, and sometimes national senses of culture, location, and identity are shaped, imagined, articulated, and enacted'.⁵² Such 'senses' are structured and constructed through occupational, gendered, urban, rural, class-based, racial, regional and local identities. However, rather than attempting to build up a representative account by listing such forms, a closer focus on a number of specific examples of *how* such identities are constructed is more helpful in shedding light on questions surrounding the 'lack' that underlies and motivates such diverse identity construction – on how particular ancestors and traits are emphasised (and, of course, played down or ignored). Three examples, dating from across the later twentieth century and the period of increasing record office use, will be explored to this end, so as to examine closely the more 'biographical' or 'family historical'

⁵⁰ V. Tonks, *The Andersons: The History of a Kilham family, 1772-1880* (S.I., n.d.), p. 9.

⁵¹ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London, 1992), p. 6.

⁵² Catherine Nash, 'Genealogical Identities', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 20 (2002), p. 28.

pole of identity construction, before turning our attention to the more 'genealogical' pole of family trees. Whilst the former makes use of the freedom to construct one's identity reflexively, the latter, as we have seen, involves the persistence of a primordialist view of blood-ties. The relationship between the two is crucial in accounting for the appeal of family history as a site for redressing the 'lack' and disjuncture articulated by family historians in late modern culture.

Frances Pym, firstly, in his privately published family history of 1998, did not draw attention to any relatives since World War II, pointing out that 'the family members born after 1945...fall beyond the scope of this work, but they could in time become the source of another story'.⁵³ In Pym's view, post-war relatives were thus entitled to omission from providing symbolic resources for an identity-seeking family historian, quite unlike an adoptee's biological parents. Nevertheless, as they too will pass 'in time' to become 'historical', they nonetheless possess a symbolic potentiality for an ongoing 'family story' which future family historians may 'choose' to emphasise. In the meantime, that hat is left on the shelf. Pym explained that he drew a line at 1945 as 'since the Second World War, the changes in the way of life for everyone have meant that such interaction within the family, as I had in my childhood, tend to be restricted to a limited circle. This is a real loss and has been a contributory incentive to the writing of this record'. The extended family retreating into an ever dimmer Strathernian distance, constituting 'less' family and a concurrent 'lack' in the present thus spurred Pym into action. In the process, however, he reinforces this distinction by excluding those ancestors living in the period of decreased extended family interactions (the family lived *with* in Gillis' terms) from his account. Cultural uncertainties about the family are addressed, whilst their primordial nature remains implicit and thus all the more powerful. The family therefore provides both the site and the solution of the perceived lack.

⁵³ Frances Pym, *Sentimental Journey: Tracing an Outline of Family History* (Sandy, 1998), p. 2.

The reason why the movable horizon dividing past and present should be located in 1945 (as opposed to, say, the permissiveness of the 1960s), however, soon becomes apparent in Pym's narrative. Pym sets his own experiences at the battle of El Alamein, alongside those of John Pym, who fought and died at Waterloo: 'When John set off for the campaign that April [1815], the course of events that led to Waterloo had not yet been set in train. By the same token, when John's great-great-great-nephew – also aged twenty – set off for the campaign in the Western Desert, 127 years later...the future course of the campaign was [also] in the lap of the gods. When they set off, neither Pym had any idea what was going to happen, beyond the fact that there would be some hard fighting to do'.⁵⁴ Much as Kunta Kinte proved to be remarkably Alex Haley-like in Haley's imagination, so too does John to Frances Pym. In struggling to understand the post-war changes that had made extended family interaction an increasingly distant childhood memory for Frances Pym, and to understand the wartime developments that had so taken him by surprise, Pym homed in on an 'apical ancestor' in his great-great-great-uncle. This is indeed, as we have seen, a major appeal of family history – one is free to pursue whichever branch or ancestor into the past that one desires. Through Pym's research into witness accounts in military and biographical notices of the fallen heroes of Waterloo, the reader learns that John Pym of the 13th Light Dragoons was 'wounded in the upper part of the thigh' and was 'doomed to suffer an accumulation of misery'. However, the notice also tells that 'they heard tidings of Waterloo' and 'unequaled victory' such that even in his death agonies, Pym had joyous 'knowledge of their country's glory'. After Frances Pym's patriotic eulogy, the self-sacrifice of John Pym is followed by Frances' pointing out that 'medical services in the army at that time were scant and of poor quality', thus making John's sacrifice all the more impressive.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54-55.

It is only after the apex of John's death and self-sacrifice that Frances Pym introduces himself into the family history narrative by comparing it to John's departure from the family home for war: 'There was no cedar tree or white gate to feature in my departure in late June 1942. The equivalent lacked all colour: a telephone call from me at Warminster Barracks to Penpergwn on a beautiful summer evening. My father Leslie answered. I told him: "I'm away now"... He said as he had so often – "Good luck, dear boy". I weep as I write this because in the agony of accepting his death three years later I was overwhelmed to realise that those had been the last words we were ever to have together'.⁵⁶ One does not have to be an adoptee to experience the pain of separation from a biological parent.⁵⁷ This is a crucial moment in Frances' 'emotional journey,' it seems. He represents the rupture of family through war and the death of a father with whom died the old pre-war ways of extended familial closeness. The family lived *with* and *by* as such were ruptured in Pym's understanding of the world, just as they were by industrialisation and mental illness for Oddie,⁵⁸ by slavery and bondage for Haley. Furthermore, in departing for war, Frances equates himself with his distant ancestor John, the one in whom such turmoil and 'lack' have come to some sort of resolution through family history and identification with an apical ancestor.

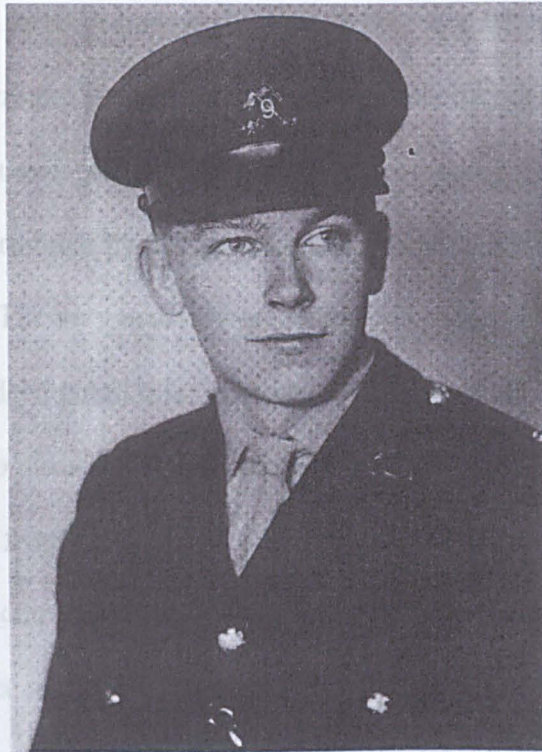
Frances' own wartime experiences between 1939 and 1945 are thus the only exception to which family are appropriate to be mentioned from the perceived malaise of the

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁵⁷ In focusing upon the deaths of his Waterloo ancestor, John, and his father, Frances stares mortality in the face and explores it through family history. This is a theme encountered in much genealogical activity, and as such explorations of mortality through family history are examined in Chapter 6 below.

⁵⁸ For Oddie, this had manifested itself in bouts of clinical depression in later life, as he revealed himself to be the only surviving child of a mentally ill mother, who was committed to a mental institution leaving Bill with a lifelong sense of abandonment from the sick mother who failed to recognise him as a young boy when he had visited her. He was brought up instead by his 'domineering grandmother', who he blamed for preventing him from becoming close to his father and thereby further precipitating his mental problems in later life; a grandmother who represented an urban life from which the young Bill had always desired to escape to the freedom of the fields and watching the birds, the love of which he would later share in making his career as a TV naturalist. As such, the rootless birdwatcher embarked on his search for an antidote – for answers to his nagging questions, cleansing from his mental illness, understanding of who he was and why.

post-1945 generations lived *with*. We learn of his own 'miraculous' escaping of death from a burning tank, his self-sacrifice in pushing on with an exhausting, seemingly hopeless campaign, and the many sufferings endured to that end. Through this autobiographical chapter, Frances and John Pym merge into a conceptual oneness, much like Haley and Kunta. 'Both battles [Waterloo and El Alamein] were absolutely crucial in their respective times and will be forever a part of history. As for the two Pym's involved, I was the lucky one,' wrote



Figures 17 and 18. 'John Pym (1795-1815), Lieutenant, 13th Light Dragoons', and 'Francis Leslie Pym, Lieutenant, 9th Queen's Royal Lancers (1942)'.⁵⁹

Frances Pym.⁶⁰ The images included of the two family heroes, are as such metonymically and metaphorically connected, standing in both temporal sequence (as in a hall of fame of

⁵⁹ Pym, *Sentimental Journey*, p. 50, p. 58.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

successive events) yet also a-temporally connected and simultaneous.⁶¹ They pass into each other, at once different and the same, such that Pym can remark: 'I see a continuous change in conditions, styles and circumstances, but family life remains the same'.⁶²

In constructing his narrative in this way, Frances is essentially doing two things. Firstly, he is drawing a firm line between the family lived *with* and the family lived *by* through family history, located in 1945. Secondly, and more interestingly, however, he is offering himself as the principal mediator across that chasm. His family history searches (and particularly the ancestors who shed light on it for him) make sense of his own life experiences of war and of an increasingly restricted world. His genealogical identity is constructed as much to answer Frances Pym's own questions about contemporary circumstances using the symbolic resources provided by the genealogical record as it is an 'objective' account of all possible identities. The very necessity of a subjective quest for identity and the construction of a narrative indeed entail this. As such – whilst one can see that a genealogical ideology giving primacy to blood kinship is implicit in Pym's family history – the rootedness does not come solely from a coinciding of geography and genealogy as it did with Haley. Rather, in Pym's case it comes from the continuities drawn and sense of a familial trait of self-sacrifice, national service and soldiery derived from the apical ancestor singled out to do the symbolic work.

In searching for their own identity, other family historians single out and emphasise other qualities and traits of ancestors, demonstrating how important the freedom to pursue any line of ancestral research is. It is, indeed, the combination of the genealogical certainty of blood-ties and freedom to follow one's interests in a way that reflects upon one's own identity and problems in the present that makes such searching for identity so compelling.

⁶¹ For a clear discussion of the relationship between the metaphorical and metonymic relation of symbols in structuralist analysis, see: Edmund Leach, *Culture and Communication: The Logic By Which Symbols Are Connected. An Introduction to the Use of Structuralist Analysis in Social Anthropology* (Cambridge and New York, 1976).

⁶² Pym, *Sentimental Journey*, p. 2.

This coinciding of both biographical and genealogical forms of identity construction are equally apparent in family histories from the beginnings of the growing record office use in the late-1970s and early-1980s. Peter Bowman, our second example, in a family history dating from fifteen years earlier, for instance, focused most closely upon his great-grandfather, James Bowman. James eloped to London from the area sixteen miles west of Norwich where 'the Bowmans originated', with his young wife in the mid-nineteenth century. Before this 'for one hundred and fifty years, from 1700 to about 1850, the family never moved much further than the adjacent parishes'. 'James must have been a man of considerable vigour' wrote Peter. 'Having married away from his birthplace, he went further afield to the booming Lancashire town of Liverpool... [One year later] James was still employed as a warehouseman... Eager to better himself, James took over somehow in the early 1850s, the "Angel Inn", 15 Shaw's Brow, Liverpool, on a Corporation lease'.⁶³ Interestingly, whilst geographical and genealogical stability provide a source-place which he terms the family's 'Norfolk Origins,' for Peter Bowman it is James' migrations and adventures that drew his attentions and provided the focus of much of his research. It is thus clear that family history practices do not redress a late modern sense of lack solely by tracing a line back to a time when it seems that life was less changeable. Rather, the primordialism of blood-ties that coincides with a freedom to choose whichever symbolic ancestral resources one desires provides a more profound understanding of genealogical identity and rootedness.

Photographs of James Bowman adorn his great-grandson's pages, and James is characterised as an enterprising and hard-working: 'The "Angel" was a free house, catering for all classes. Running such a place meant hard work, as the opening hours of public houses were not restricted until later licensing legislation... Besides looking after the inn, which dealt in cigars as well as a variety of liquors, he also found time for invention'.⁶⁴ Through

⁶³ Peter Bowman, *The Bowmans: A Liverpool Family History* (S.I., 1983), p. 5, p. 11-12.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

such celebratory biography, Peter's intention is seemingly to provide a message to those present and future generations of the Bowman family that provide his intended readership. James Bowman is resuscitated to do symbolic work in the present, providing a source of identity and inspiration both for the family historian and the family for which he is 'kin keeper'.

In raising James to the status of a family 'culture hero' or an apical ancestor, however, his enterprise and graft are only the beginning. 'Despite his success in the business,' Peter continued, 'James suffered a setback; his wife Elizabeth died on 29 August 1875, at the early age of 44... She died at the "Angel Inn" with James at her bedside'. Caring to the last, James would not allow his efforts to crumble in grief, however. Within two years he had married Elizabeth's sister, Ellen, who herself died at the inn in 1880, again



Figure 19. 'The "Angel Inn" about 1860. The man standing in the left doorway is probably James Bowman'.⁶⁵

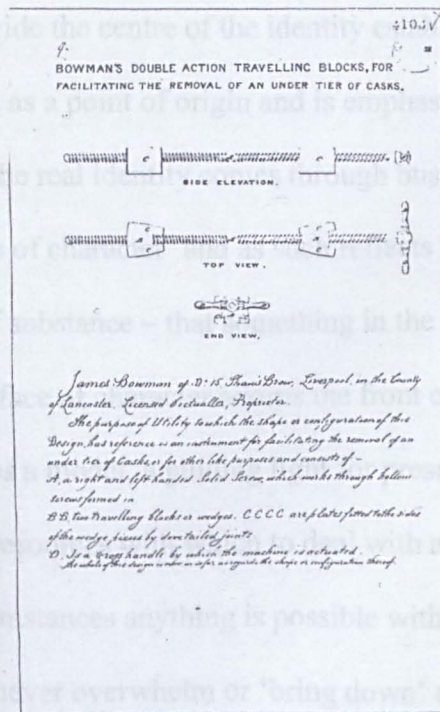


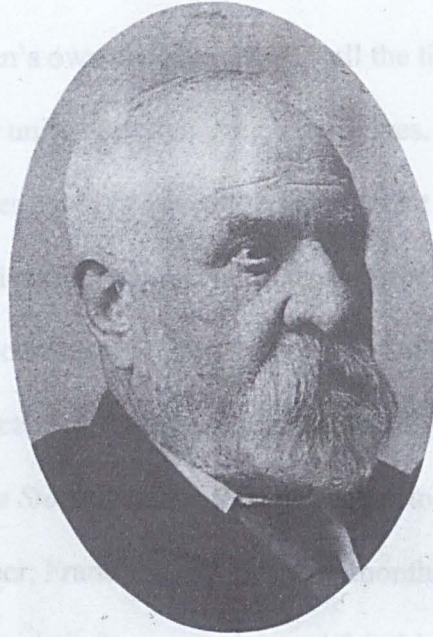
Figure 20. James Bowman's invention for facilitating the removal of an under tier of casks.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Plate 7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Plate 9.

‘with James at her bedside’. The following year the eligible James married again, to Leticia Heath of Putney, who was to outlive him. After these hard times, however, James’ tireless graft and entrepreneurial spirit began to be rewarded as ‘on 1 July 1886 James was made a trade member of the Liverpool Licensed Victuallers Association’. He finally retired, ‘towards the end of a fruitful and eventful life...to the tranquillity of Stoneycroft, to live at Norfolk House (named after his county of birth) with his third wife’. Peter concludes the story thus: ‘James died on 15 January 1902, aged 77... James Bowman was undoubtedly a man of integrity and business acumen; from humble beginnings in Norfolk he had built up a business in Liverpool and was much respected by all who knew him... His son, John Charles, was to take over and carry on the family business’.⁶⁷ Having overcome the sharpness of the death of a loved one twice, James came through. He is presented as having prowess with women and business alike, yet interestingly, the coinciding of geographical and genealogical rootedness at Norfolk does not provide the centre of the identity established through this family history. Whilst it is recorded as a point of origin and is emphasised through James’ naming of his retirement home, the real identity comes through business success. James’ photograph is labelled as ‘a face of character’ and as such reflects that the family (and perhaps Peter, the author) is made of substance – that something in the blood is to be celebrated and ever-remembered. James’s face of character adorns the front cover of Peter’s self-produced family history – he provides a model, a guiding light for present and future generations alike – he provides symbolic resources with which to deal with an uncertain world – he shows that in difficult circumstances anything is possible with hard work, guts and innovation, and that death ought never overwhelm or ‘bring down’ a family – he comes to provide the apex of the family lived *by* (at least in Peter’s mind) as the family’s ‘apical ancestor’.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15, p. 19-22, p. 26, p. 29.



James Bowman, a face of character.

Figure 21. James Bowman, with Peter Bowman's caption.⁶⁸

The significance here lies, as with Pym, undoubtedly in an attempt to establish continuity with the past, and hope for the continuation of such 'family traits' into the present and future, even if they are reinforced or created in being based upon the 'past' uncovered in the archives.⁶⁹ As such the past is dragged into an active service in which James Bowman still toils and labours for his family in his Liverpoolian Inn. Undoubtedly this family history that the author circulated amongst his relatives is part of a cultural reproduction, in a sense. It is a means of asserting a particular identity, and defining a kinship and what it means to 'be a Bowman'. It provides a model for living, to use Geertz's term, and is far more than a historicist obsession with the past.⁷⁰ Furthermore, this model for present living is constructed by excavating the life of such an apical ancestor in a more biographical mode of 'family

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32 and cover.

⁶⁹ For a further example of this point see: Tonks, *The Andersons*, p. 11-40 as discussed in Simon Titley-Bayes, *Perspectives on the Family History Phenomenon, 1925-2003: Identity, Cultural Capital and the Cultural Reproduction of Kinship* (York, 2003), p. 56-59.

⁷⁰ Clifford Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System', in M. Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London, 1966), p. 3-4, p. 7-8.

history' practice. As such, a familial identity is (re)discovered and (re)constructed in a manner of the family historian's own choosing, whilst all the time retaining the importance of the implicit blood-ties and unity underlying such narratives.

Many further examples could be given to illustrate that this is a major element in the cultural practices of family historians. Enid Barraud, our third example, dating from the late 1960s is interesting in that it constitutes the temporal limits of such identity construction as one of the earliest self-produced family histories in the era of 'genealogy for all' explored in Chapter 2.⁷¹ In *Barraud: The Story of a Family*, Enid chose to emphasise a particular relative, her great-grandmother, Frances, who in twelve months lost her husband and two babies, leaving her to bring up their four sons alone. After this difficult start to her time as 'head of the family', Barraud drew inspiration from the fact that all of Frances' children were, nevertheless, named in her will, which, she argued, showed that the family was a happily united one. Enid wrote of her ancestor: 'what her financial position was we do not know' and 'how the boys were educated, we do not know', yet the single-handed upbringing of the four children inspired the twentieth-century family historian to fill in the blanks. 'Strolling through various art galleries, giving particular attention to ladies of her time,' Enid concluded that 'I see her as a slightly *grande dame*, even in her old age still very much head of the family, with her finger on the family pulse...with a strong sense of the fitness of things and a shrewd yet kindly commonsense'.⁷² Strong headship and family unity are traits emphasised in this choice of relative (and the associated imaginings). Barraud, like Peter Bowman and Frances Pym, raised her ancestor to the status of cultural hero, in which Enid both affirmed a personal identity, and, equally importantly, attempted to transmit this to her own children.

⁷¹ Barraud's family history is, indeed, contemporaneous with the years in which Haley was conducting his researches, and when the genealogical societies that were in existence at the time (e.g. the S.O.G., the B.M.S.G.H.) were beginning to demonstrate the first signs of a turn towards more demotic practice. Willis' and Pine's enthusiasm to 'do-it-yourself' was, as we have seen in Chapter 2, marking the beginnings of increased ancestral research which was to become far more widespread in the following decade.

⁷² Enid M. Barraud, *Barraud: The Story of a Family*, (London, 1967), p. 143-44; p. 23-26.

It is worth clarifying at this point, however, the ambiguity experienced by Enid Barraud with regard to these two elements – namely her own personal identity quest, and that of attempting to pass on her endeavours to her children in book form (and presumably through conversation at family occasions). Barraud pondered, at the end of the writing-up phase: ‘I think the book will remain very much part of my life. However, unconsciously, I was perhaps seeking identity and my own full place in the family. To the extent that I have in some measure achieved this, I am selfishly satisfied’. In regard to her own ‘selfish’ identity quest, her great-grandmother proved to be the endpoint of Barraud’s reflection on her own familial dilemmas, providing a model of headship and guidance to redress her sense of ‘lack’. As such, Enid affirmed: ‘With whom of them all would I most like to spend an hour? There is no question about that: our very great-grandmother Frances. I think she would be strong-minded enough not to throw a fit of the vapours at first sight of my cropped hair and my jeans, but how should I stand up to the elegant etiquette of her Greenwich and Soho foreparlours?’ Enid imagines Frances to be colourful and other, yet her virtues (and this exotic otherness) pass seamlessly into her self: ‘Our whole outlook and mental attitudes must be very, very different, but in our different ways, and against different difficulties, we both did our best to bring and keep the family together... Her reassuring “*Ne contoyez-vous*” would set me at my ease in her recognition that I do belong’.⁷³ In this imagined encounter with her inspiring forebear, all makes sense to Enid – the searching has led ultimately to this point of rest. Her reflexive identity quest has led to an imaginary encounter in which to see her ancestor is to see her deepest self as in a mirror.

However, after her endeavours in archives and record offices in search of facts that led up to that ‘selfish’ point of finding belonging, as well as providing a model for action in the contemporary world and symbolic resources to elaborate the family lived *by*, Enid was left concerned as to how she would relate all this to the family lived *with*: ‘I can only hope I

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

have not failed too broadly in my altruistic objective, which was to put the family on record for the family, and for those others who might be interested in at least certain parts and certain people'. In other words, others experiencing a similar sense of deracination might embark on a similar reflexive quest for identity, taking it in their own directions whilst all the time doing so within the primordialism of blood-ties. Indeed, Enid predicts that this will be the case perceiving in the world around her an 'inevitable failure of communication between generations' whereby 'the young have their lives before them, and too many interests and responsibilities to bother' as 'I too have not bothered until now'.⁷⁴

Whilst the examples of Frances and John Pym, Peter and James Bowman, Enid and Frances Barraud in no way encompass all the ways in which identities can be constructed through genealogical practice, they do nonetheless have commonalities in the ways in which they are put together. All published by the author, or at the author's expense in the later twentieth century, Pym's, Bowman's and Barraud's family histories suggest that we can certainly view these commonalities in construction in more general terms as part of a particular historically situated search for identity that is evident throughout the post-sexual revolution decades. Without being unitary in the sense of emphasising the same types of identities, nonetheless by focusing in upon various important ancestors by which to redress a sense of lack, a form of rootedness is in evidence that is all the more powerful for its implicit assumptions of primordial blood-ties. In all three, we encounter a sense of 'lack' of family, community, belonging, and identity, which is redressed in quite different ways as these three practitioners followed their interests which is all the more powerful and profound for not attempting to defend the biological definition of family they contain. They have been free to address a 'lack', or an urge to know oneself and thus to answer questions about who they are, who their children and grandchildren will (or should) be, in the silence of the archives, without anybody telling them which ancestors should provide their principle focus.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

Indeed, as Anthony Giddens has argued, the focal questions for anyone living in this period are: 'What to do? How to act? Who to be?' The period of 'high' or 'late' modernity (which Strathern calls the 'post-plural') is thus one of an institutional and individual 'reflexivity' whereby the modernist mode of making the implicit explicit has led to a constant reflexive monitoring of our circumstances and activities. The examples of Pym, Bowman and Barraud (as well as the statistics of the P.S.Q.G. cited above) have certainly demonstrated that many family historians have had an eye on their uneasy relationship with the world around them and often understood their labours as constituting an aid for those younger generations growing up in uncertainty without knowing 'who they are' genealogically. They have also shown that at the more biographical pole of family history practice, identity construction involves a fundamental freedom to follow one's own interests. For Giddens, in light of the cultural uncertainty and 'disembedding mechanisms' of the post-traditional order of modernity, the search for self-identity emerges as just such a reflexively organised endeavour. This 'reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems,' he writes.⁷⁵

Like Gillis, Giddens presents capitalistic production and distribution as core components in English modernity's institutions, providing much of the context for such 'disembedding mechanisms' and for the reflexive narrative construction of the self through consumer purchases and life-styles. However, when we consider the identity search of family historians, it is not difficult to see that such a reflexive project of self-identity construction is similarly 'filtered' through the genealogical record, particularly when seen in light of mediating a disjuncture in ideas about the family. That such a reflexive search for

⁷⁵ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 70, p. 2, p. 35, p. 5. As discussed above, for Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim the 'new confusion of the family' is characterised by the rise of a sense of 'life as a planning project'. See Beck-Gernsheim, *Reinventing the Family*, p. 42-63.

self-identity is, according to Giddens, ‘not something that is just given’, but is perennially unfinished and continuously revised’ suits family historians down to the ground. As Giddens explains, ‘a person’s identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to *keep a particular narrative going*... the ongoing ‘story’ of the self’.⁷⁶ Or, as Charles Taylor puts it, ‘In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going’.⁷⁷ This is a very common assertion amongst family historians engaged in this more biographical mode of identity construction. ‘Once you find a few clues you may get so bitten by the bug that you can never stop. For however much you find out you will always want more,’ noted C.M. Matthews in 1976.⁷⁸

Identity construction in late modern family history practices certainly operate largely to this end, providing a more complete sense of self by bringing the past into the present and future to redress a seeming disjuncture of ideas as hidden beneath the universalising term of ‘family’. Enid Barraud’s concern at family history as a ‘selfish’ enterprise is interesting in this regard as on some level it seems to have struck her that she had been spending a lot of time in archives and libraries (excavating the family lived *by*) rather than spending time with the often frustrating family lived *with*. In bringing the family of the past alive and kicking into the present and future, however, all made sense to Enid Barraud (as it did for Pym and Bowman) as they were opening the door for present and future generations to do the same. That different relatives may take a highly individualised reflexive search for self-identity in completely different directions is often left unremarked, however, perhaps because the construction of a ‘family history book’ and the role of a family archivist or kin keeper gives

⁷⁶ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 52, p. 54.

⁷⁷ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, 1989), quoted in Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 54.

⁷⁸ Matthews, *Your Family History*, p. 11.

the impression that the individual family historian's search for self-identity somehow stands for that of the rest of the family, as embodied in the family tree.

The possibilities for identity construction contained in the genealogical record are so numerous and diverse that reaching an established, 'fixed identity' through genealogy (let alone attempting to cast it in stone for other family members) verges on the miraculous. Nonetheless, as we have seen, this proves to be the case in a number of narratives and 'family history books'. Whether such a narrative ever completely ends is questionable, although a point is reached for many practitioners at which the compilation of a family history book becomes necessary. 'There is always the temptation to postpone the finality of the printed word, enticed by new clues,' commented R. Hesselgrave in 1979.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, as we have seen in this section, the unremarked primordialism that coincides with biographical family historical identity construction is vital in making such endeavours flashpoints of identity to nourish dilemmas in the present.

This coincidence of these two aspects can occur at other moments, however. J. Scarr, for instance, commented in 1977 that searching for genealogical information in parish registers and other documents 'is, in short, like panning for gold'. He continued to explain that 'long hours of fruitless labour pass by in the scrutiny of thousands of names in ill-written documents until finally even the most persistent of readers begins to weary and then, suddenly before his disbelieving eyes, he sees the name he has been searching for. It is a moment of purest gold'.⁸⁰ We must clearly distinguish such a golden moment from the biographical identity construction contained in completed family history books, although the two need not be seen as incommensurable. In his very articulation of the moment of purest gold, for instance, Scarr contextualised his own labour to compile the family history within a broader construction of a family trait of toil. Indeed, the ancestors emphasised in his account

⁷⁹ R. A. Hesselgrave and P. Upson Kahler, *Hesselgrave Families in America* (Baltimore, 1979), p. vii.

⁸⁰ Scarr, *A History of the Scarr Family*, p. 2.

of his chosen 'branch of the Scarrs' were summarised as 'a decent and hard-working stock who have lived peaceful and useful lives'. A broader narrated sense of a family's identity, then, is constructed through a series of many other moments at which the genealogical record nourishes a contemporary sense of lack, and urges the researcher on. The practices of family history thus provide an appealing site for this at once reflexive, individualistic, provisional and unfinished self-identity project and yet, at the same time, provide moments of identification, connection and the promise of more. This is also in evidence in other flashpoints of identification, ranging from emphasising family surnames, to holding family reunions and conducting roots tourism. A focus on these flashpoints will enable us to further explore the interplay between the two poles of identity construction that have begun to emerge in the foregoing discussion.

Flashpoints of an Identity Quest: Roots Tourism, Surnames and Family Reunions

The practice of roots tourism, as encountered in Haley's trip to Kunta Kinte's Gambian village was also apparent in Bill Oddie's 'emotional journey' in *Who Do You Think You Are?* After visiting his childhood home, Bill visited the site of his mother's mental institution and a nineteenth-century mill like those that employed his ancestors. His roots tourism culminated in a Haley-like return to his roots in the 'family village' – Gringleton, Lancashire. However, where Haley had wept and communed with those left behind, Oddie did not shed so much as a tear in Gringleton's pub as he met a distant relative who was descended from a branch of Oddies that had stayed put and sold milk to the swelling cities. Bill in fact openly coveted 'Oddie Country'. 'He fidgeted and tugged at his beard; the twitcher twitched'⁸¹ and remarked: 'This is Oddie Country... It's ours! I'm having the nice bit! I'm having the river! ... Frankly it looks more like my kind of habitat... Going from the family tree it seems that the family started here in 1710, but then moved out of the country

⁸¹ Freedland, 'Through the Past Darkly', p. 23.

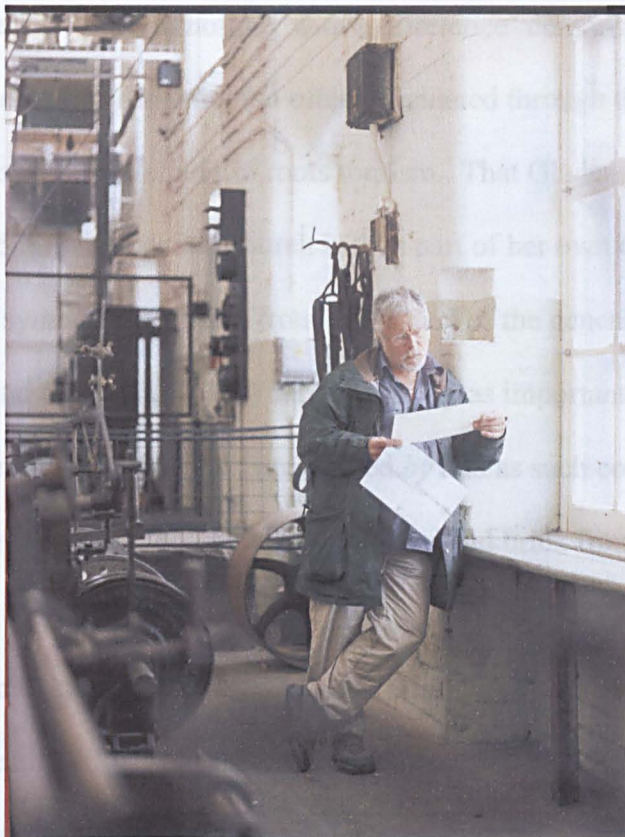


Figure 22. Bill Oddie ponders a birth certificate whilst on 'roots tourism' visit to a nineteenth-century mill like those that employed his ancestors.⁸²

into the towns as the hand mills closed... Why the flipping heck did you ever move from here?'

Such roots tourism has been the quiet travelling companion of much genealogical practice throughout the period under discussion here. In 1973, Peter Morrell, an early member of the fledgling B.M.S.G.H. remarked: 'I have a fascination visiting places where ancestors were born and lived'.⁸³ Another early member of the Birmingham Society, Gladys Woodgate, similarly wrote: 'A holiday with a difference in Suffolk began with a visit to the parish church of Stoke-by-Nayland, and an attempt to find Pear Tree Farm which I thought was the name of the farm my grandfather left about 1872 at the age of 17 when three years

⁸² Waddell, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p. 23.

⁸³ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 80.

running the crops failed'.⁸⁴ Such a 'holiday with a difference' demonstrates that the late modern reflexive project of self-identity (so often articulated through the consumer's choice of holiday destinations) easily stretches to roots tourism. That Gladys should choose her grandfather's boyhood farm and parish church is thus part of her own continuous narrative of self by selecting such symbolic resources from the 'filter' of the genealogical record. The souvenirs that she found there could easily have ended up as important parts of her domestic space upon return home, buttressing the family lived *by* and as such contributing continually to her self-identity, just as Haley took a chunk of mortar and brick from a derelict slave trading outpost.

At the same time, however, roots tourism as a reflexive project can provide a flashpoint point of identification in itself. Whilst passing remarks such as those by Morrell, Woodgate and others suggest that casual outings amongst British practitioners seem to have become fairly common, thereby nourishing an ongoing reflexive project of the self, the explicit 'homecoming' has far more resonance with those 'returning to British roots'.⁸⁵ As one American practitioner remarked upon visiting Cawdor, Scotland: 'Walking through Cawdor village and castle knowing that my ancestors also walked there I felt like I came home after several generations' journey'.⁸⁶ Amongst practitioners from North America (and

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁸⁵ The work of Paul Basu and Catherine Nash has demonstrated this in the case of those with Scottish and Irish ancestry respectively. Paul Basu, *Homecomings: Genealogy, Heritage-Tourism in the Scottish Highland Diaspora* (London, 2006); Paul Basu, 'Pilgrims to the Far Country: North American Roots-Tourists in the Scottish Highlands and Islands', in C. Ray (ed.), *Transatlantic Scots* (Tuscaloosa, 2005); Paul Basu, 'Roots-Tourism as Return Movement: Semantics and the Scottish Diaspora', in M. Harper (ed.), *Emigrant Homecomings: The Return Movement of Emigrants, 1600-2000* (Manchester, 2005); Paul Basu, 'Macpherson Country: Genealogical Identities, Spatial Histories and the Scottish Diasporic Clanscape', *Cultural Geographies* 12(2) (2005), 123-150; Paul Basu, 'Route Metaphors of Roots-Tourism in the Scottish Diaspora', in S. Coleman and J. Eade (eds.), *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion* (London, 2004); Paul Basu, 'My Own Island Home: The Orkney Homecoming', *Journal of Material Culture* 9(1) (2004), 27-42; Catherine Nash, '"They're Family!": Cultural Geographies of Relatedness in Popular Genealogy', in Sara Armed, Anne-Marie Fortier and Mimi Sheller (eds.), *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* (Oxford and New York, 2003); Nash, 'Genealogical Identities'.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Basu, 'Homecomings: Genealogy, Heritage Tourism and Identity in the Scottish Highland Diaspora' (Unpublished PhD thesis. University of London, 2002), p. 20. See forthcoming: Paul Basu, *Homecomings: Genealogy and Heritage Tourism in the Scottish Highland Diaspora* (London, 2006). See also:

for that matter, those from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa), roots tourism can provide a flashpoint of establishing identity which is articulated as ‘a sense of belonging, a sense of peace’, as ‘extremely profound, life-changing’, a ‘life defining experience’, and so on.⁸⁷ Roots tourism has indeed become so popular as the later twentieth century has progressed that in 1999 the newly reconstituted Scottish parliament identified it as one of three key niche markets to be targeted in its New Strategy for Scottish Tourism.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, this is not solely a preoccupation of those overseas genealogists with ‘British ancestry’, and nor is it always successful. In the case of those practitioners that reside in Britain, as opposed to returning from overseas to British ancestry, roots tourism constitutes a more casual activity mentioned only in passing by practitioners. Diana Parsons of Leeds, for instance, remarked in 1981: ‘Mostly my ancestors beckon intriguingly round corners but when I run up and peer round, I find the church where they worshipped has been demolished or the street where they lived is a motorway’.⁸⁹ That roots tourism amongst British residents continues, sometimes on a very local level, is evidenced, however by the photographs of churches and various family sites included in family history books and websites. In Sue Bishop’s website of *Picknett Family History*, for example, digital photographs of her fishing ancestor John Potts Picknett’s home in Redcar are displayed alongside a nineteenth-century postcard (see Figures 23 and 24). A further visit to the remains of St Germain parish church, Marske, where John Potts Picknett had married Margaret Hood on 5 May 1825 (Figure 25) and the other photographs on the site indicate that such British-based roots tourism can

Gary McCain and Nina M. Ray, ‘Legacy Tourism: The Search for Personal Meaning in Heritage Travel’, *Tourism Management*, 24 (2003), 713-717.

⁸⁷ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking ~ Again (About This Ancestry Business)* (Birmingham, 1981), 34; Basu, ‘Homecomings’, p. 64.

⁸⁸ Basu, ‘Homecomings’, p. 15-16.

⁸⁹ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking ~ Again*, 30.



Figure 23. 'South Terrace, Redcar with the "Zetland" lifeboat, about 1870'.⁹¹



Figure 24. 'South Terrace, Redcar 2001'.⁹⁰



Figure 25. 'The remaining tower of the church at St. Germain, Marske. 2001'.⁹²

become habitual. Mrs Bishop, a divorced mother from North Essex must certainly have gone to some trouble to obtain the photographs, although it is impossible to deduce whether her trip to the north-east was purely or primarily genealogical.⁹³ It certainly did not lead to obtaining any further genealogical information, however, constituting rather an occasion for

⁹⁰ Sue Bishop, 'Our Common Ancestor: John Potts Picknett (1796-1870)', *Picknett Family History*, (18 October 2005), <<http://picknett.co.uk/id16.html>> (accessed 25 July 2006).

⁹¹ Bishop, 'Our Common Ancestor'.

⁹² Bishop, 'Our Common Ancestor'. Caption as on website.

⁹³ Sue Bishop, 'About Me', *Picknett Family History*, (18 October 2005), <<http://picknett.co.uk/id1.html>> (accessed 25 July 2006).

standing in the same geographical location of deceased ancestors, even if only to take a photograph.

Regardless of whether the roots tourist finds a building has been demolished, is on holiday overseas or within their own national frontiers, the important point is, however, that roots tourism provides a site for the intersection of a reflexive project of self-identity and a primordial connection to the locale through blood-ties. The same unspoken assumptions of familial descent that link a practitioner to the place and make the visit appropriate underlie the visit, making it an appropriate thing to do, whether remarkable or unremarkable, and whether a sense of ontological completeness as at a 'homecoming' is experienced, or one simply gazes upon a part of 'my history'. In other words, one does not have to travel halfway around the globe and burst into tears like Haley for the same processes of identity construction to be involved. Charlie Clark of Edinburgh (a keen cricketer and Deep Purple fan), for instance, posted photographs of his roots tourism on his website, relating to a wide variety of ancestors. His great-uncle William Hamilton's page shows photographs of William's name on war memorials at both Airdrie and Chatham, and in a book of remembrance at Brompton Garrison Church, Chatham. Finding and photographing the name provided the relevance of that geographical location to Charlie, giving the trip cultural coherence as a relevant site for the reflexive construction of self-identity precisely because of the genealogical link it embodied (See Figure 26). Whether a church, a house or farm, a business premises, war memorial or graveyard, the same assumption underlie the roots tourism and constitute their power and appeal. As Basu notes: 'the modern individual wants it both ways ...celebrating the freedom and creativity of self-determination on the one hand, whilst, on the other, craving a "return" to the security of an externally determined "collective" identity'.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Basu, 'Homecomings', p. 20.

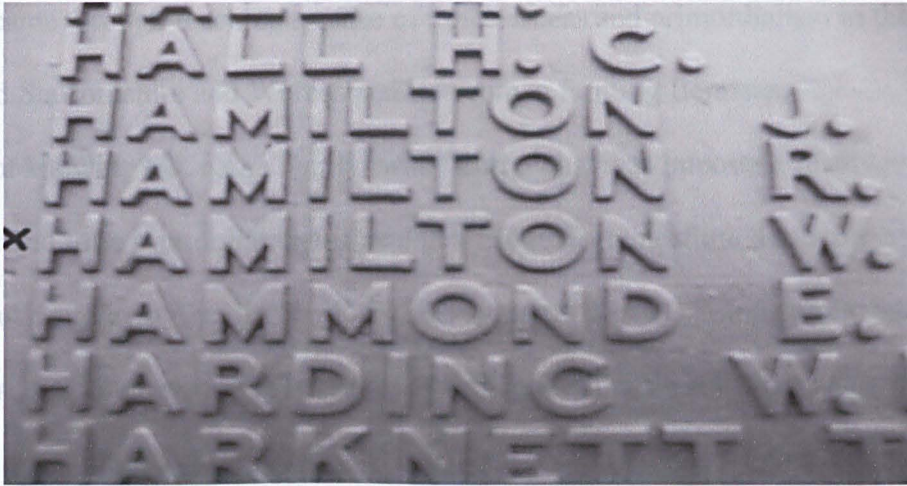


Figure 26. 'William's name on the memorial'.⁹⁵

Whilst this is certainly true in many cases, roots tourism does not provide the only site for such, seemingly paradoxical, identity processes, as is made clear in the case of an emphasis upon familial surnames demonstrates. For example, writing in 1974 Roger Bennett, a then 36-year old genealogist, explained that he had begun by researching his paternal family history. He wrote: 'My branch of the Bennetts have been yeoman farmers in Staffordshire and Worcestershire as far back as I can trace, until my father broke the sequence'. Moving then onto his maternal lineage, he wrote: 'My mother's side has been easier. My maternal ancestors have lived in my home village, Wyre Piddle, since the mid-eighteenth century'.⁹⁶ In this case a Haley-like coinciding of geography and genealogy hidden only by his father's migration was all that was necessary to reach geographical rootedness on the paternal side, whilst on the maternal side, the family history was 'easier' in that he was a permanent roots tourist, with a 'total rootedness' of still residing in Wyre Piddle. Nonetheless, it was the paternal side that really fired Roger's genealogical

⁹⁵ Charlie Clark, 'William Hamilton', *Charlie and Sue's Place*, (6 March 2006), <http://www.charlie-clark.co.uk/william_hamilton.htm> (accessed 25 July 2006). Caption as on website. This photograph is of the Chatham memorial.

⁹⁶ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 20.

enthusiasm, because such rootedness was not known to him before his searches, and his endpoint came through reaching a sense of timelessness and primordialism in the newly discovered Staffordshire and Worcestershire yeoman farming Bennetts.

Not knowing his 'name family' was clearly what was important for Roger Bennett: it was shorthand for a primordial, patrilineal genealogical connection. He explained how he 'carried out a survey of the distribution of the surname Bennett, using current telephone directories, and found strong concentrations throughout the West Country and the West Midlands as far north as Staffordshire'.⁹⁷ As such, the importance of locating his surname in generations of sêdimentary farmers provided the source of identity for Roger's reflexive quest and choice of lineal branch. Indeed, the search for origins is often seen particularly in terms of the 'origins of a surname', which provides the initial discussion in many family historian's books and pamphlets. For instance, L.W. and W.R. Norfolk began their family history by stating that 'ours, more common than one would think, is probably a place name'. After a lengthy discussion of whether 'Norfolk' is literally those who moved out of the county of Norfolk, or whether it is those 'folk that came from the north' or those who worked in the household of the Duke of Norfolk, the identity that the name provides for the authors was made clear when they wrote: 'I have met or corresponded with several Norfolks who are engaged upon genealogical research... R.W.S. (Bill) Norfolk of Hornsea has developed his own East Riding tree... and John H. Norfolk of Northwood, Middlesex has researched his own West Riding lot... There is of course the possibility that we do, in fact, all share a common ancestor'.⁹⁸ It seems that not only is a sense of rootedness derived from exploring the possibilities for the genesis of the family surname (perfect material for the 'cherished myths and legends' of a family lived *by*)⁹⁹ but also that the surname provides such a strong

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹⁸ L. W. and W. R. Norfolk, *The East Drayton Norfolks: A Family History* (S.I., 1980), p. 2.

⁹⁹ See also: Daniel Bertaux and Paul Thompson (eds.), *Between Generations: Family Models, Myths, and Memories* (Oxford, 1992).

sense of identity that it binds the family history researcher with others sharing the same name (both contemporaries and ancestors), leading them to create a 'pretended family relationship' of sorts.¹⁰⁰ The inception of the Guild of One Name Studies in 1979, as discussed in Chapter 1, has provided the focal point of such surname-based research activity in the late twentieth century.

The important point is that the surname is often seen by family historians as coterminous with primordial familial identity, and is a symbolic boundary marker of that identity.¹⁰¹ As James Scott, John Tehranian and Jeremy Mathias have noted, the development of the permanent family surname in terms of legal identities and property rights is bound up with the 'modernisation of identification proper to states'. They explain that permanent surnames 'play a vital role in determining identities, cultural affiliations, and histories: they can help fracture or unite groups of people. They represent an integral part of knowledge-power systems'.¹⁰² Thus when family historians such as M. Throup assert that 'the surname "Throup" is unique, and as far as we can judge, owned by one family only', leading to the assertion that 'every Throup is descended from a common medieval ancestor', more interesting than this assertion itself is the sense of continuity contained under the surname label assumed in the genealogist's understanding of kinship. An assumption of primordialism is hidden behind the boast that 'whereas most families' more prolific records have tended to fade away as the centuries passed, ours actually increased, so that the further

¹⁰⁰ Jeremy Weeks, 'Pretended Family Relationships', in D. Clark (ed.), *Marriage, Domestic Life and Social Change: Writings for Jacqueline Burgoyne (1944-88)* (London and New York, 1991), p. 215.

¹⁰¹ Anthony P. Cohen, 'Of Symbols and Boundaries, or, Does Ertie's Greatcoat Hold the Key?', in A. P. Cohen (ed.), *Symbolising Boundaries: Identity and Diversity in British Culture* (Manchester, 1986); 'Belonging: The Experience of Culture', in A. P. Cohen (ed.), *Belonging: Identity and Social Organisation in British Rural Cultures* (Manchester, 1982).

¹⁰² James C. Scott, John Tehranian and Jeremy Mathias, 'The Production of Legal Identities Proper to States: The Case of the Permanent Family Surname', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 44 (2002), p. 6.

back in time one went, the more intriguing it became' and that 'few families can relate to this early period, yet there we were, going strong at the time of King Henry V'.¹⁰³

The 'flashpoint' of identification provided by such primordial understanding of surnames can vary. For Muriel Mildenhall it came with the assertion that 'what particularly intrigues me is that my grandfather Charles Mildenhall was in fact born in Mildenhall in Wiltshire – as was his father before him'.¹⁰⁴ Meanwhile, for Eric R. Billington it was in his 'interest to note that of the twelve generations [discovered in the direct lineage], six have been Richards, including myself'. For Muriel, then, a surname is linked to a particular primordial village, whilst for Eric, a primordialism of coinciding Christian names and surnames sheds light on his own ontological insecurity, providing a sort of 'prologue to the self'. The primordial understanding of names is thus the most interesting commonality to these diverse practices, and – like roots tourism – sits happily alongside an individualistic, reflexive search that is absolutely unbound by a fixity of identity.¹⁰⁵ Nor does such primordialism need to be traced solely through the male line, or for that matter through the 'maternal' line that is then taken back through mother's father, mother's father's father and so on. A female genealogist, for instance, made the following posting on a *RootsWeb* newsgroup: 'How much success have people had researching their matrilineal (mother's mother's mother, etc.) line? ... For instance, mine goes: Mary Lydia → Elizabeth → Una

¹⁰³ M. Throup, *Across Throup's Bridge: A Family History through Six Centuries* (Morley, 1986), p. iii.

¹⁰⁴ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 47.

¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, such primordialism of names is encountered on a far more superficial level in the wider popular interest in surname origins that shares many of the themes discussed above. For instance, as a recent article in *The Dalesman* reported: 'Prof. Philip Stell is a man who can tell you when your Yorkshire surname first emerged from the mists of history. On his computer database are the names and details of more than half a million people who lived, worked and died in medieval Yorkshire some six centuries ago'. In 2002 alone, Stell received over 800 enquiries. J. Scott, 'How Our Surnames Reveal the Past', *The Dalesman*, (January 2002), p. 25-27. See Figure 27. For a similar service, see: M. Young, 'What's in a Name', *Family Tree Magazine*, 5(7) (May 1989), p. 26.



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Figure 27. An advertisement for a service to search for the existence of surnames in Yorkshire before 1550.¹⁰⁶

Leora → Myrtle Elizabeth → Mary Eunice Thelma → Sharon Gail → Jessica (me). This takes me seven... generations back to 1832'.¹⁰⁷ To this another responded, 'It seems that matrilineal genealogy is much harder to trace. I can only go back to my ggg-grandmother. I have my grandmother's line traced back 13 generations, but it's on her father's side. Our ancestors didn't think enough of women to keep many records of them'.¹⁰⁸ Not only do we see here further examples of how the genealogical record can provide a wide variety of identities (in this case gendered identities), but it also becomes clear that the reflexive project of the self can emphasise diverse means of tracing ancestral lines too. As such, the sense

¹⁰⁶ R. Blatchford (ed.), *Family and Local History Handbook* (York, 2001, fifth edition), p. 12. Receiving acknowledgement that a particular surname was present in medieval York is to make the assumption that the same family has always been in the locality (although only along patrilineal lines of descent). It serves to primordialise family origins such that to lack a surname can lead to family historians making statements such as 'I may have been living a lie for almost 60 years' upon discovering the possibility that 'I don't even know for sure that Stanhope was my paternal grandfather's real name'. P. Stanhope, 'Desperately Seeking Granddad', *The Journal of the City of York and District Family History Society*, 47 (January 1999), p. 19.

¹⁰⁷ .:Nichol.: (26 January 2004) 'Re: Matrilineal genealogy' in *soc.genealogy.methods* [Usenet], (accessed 11 February 2004).

¹⁰⁸ buckeyegal, (27 January 2004) 'Re: Matrilineal genealogy' in *soc.genealogy.methods* [Usenet], (accessed 11 February 2004).

discussed above by which, for James Scott *et al*, whereby permanent surnames can play a vital role in determining identities and histories by fracturing or uniting groups of people is certainly true. However, that they represent an integral part of knowledge-power systems is more relevant when we turn to consider matrilineal genealogy. In other words, whilst a feminist emphasis in tracing mother's mother and in bemoaning the poorly documented records of women in the genealogical record flies in the face of the patrilineal cultural assumptions of surname conventions, nonetheless the assumption that biological kinship constitutes lineal truth remains firmly in place. The post-1960s freedom to emphasise women's rights and historical injustices that, in these examples, manifests itself as the freedom to explore the genealogical record in 'unconventional ways' is nonetheless couched within a genealogical (and, as we shall see, genetic) discourse that provides a primordial identity that is purely defined by the bloodline.

The final instance in which the reflexive, individualised, 'free' search for identity sits alongside a fixed, blood identity in genealogical practice is the family reunion. As we have already seen, in comparison with adoption discourses, reunions vary in the extent that they provide an 'endpoint' of family history research, as a line can always be taken further back by subsequent research after a reunion. It thus makes more sense to consider them as a 'flashpoint' of identification. In this way, practitioners may see contact with newly discovered distant cousins merely as a means to trace further and further back along the direct lines from which it is imagined and understood that the self is constructed. This approach has become particularly evident in the 'success stories' that users post on the most popular internet genealogy site of the early twenty-first century, *Genes ReUnited* on a daily basis. 'My niece and I connected family trees through this site, we continue to look for more family' remarked Janet Bailey in April 2006, for instance.¹⁰⁹ Such a reunion with living kin

¹⁰⁹ Genes ReUnited, 'Success Board', *Genes ReUnited*, (23 April 2006), <http://www.genesreunited.co.uk/genesreunited.asp?WCI=MembersBook&bb_type=S&px=19> (accessed 26 July 2006), p. 20.

living kin did not, in the first instance, inspire them to meet in person, but provided a flashpoint of genealogical identification, a 'success story' remarkable enough to post on the site, in an ongoing reflexive search for ancestry. With another living link of family history created, the two can now continue to look for 'more' family in the past together, so that in face of a lack that both share, their ongoing lives now constitute a constant 'increase' of family.

Numerous other examples of this approach could be cited. 'After trying to find family on both my parents side [*sic*] for a couple of years now I have made contact with quite a few people that are related to my nan. It is fantastic to know that there are people that are also trying to trace the same family tree as me... I am now in contact with extended family members and can now swap family photos!!!' commented Bernice Miller in July 2006.¹¹⁰ The reunion in this case was purely virtual and the 'contact' that it entailed was principally for the exchange of documents to both adorn family histories and establish a relationship through exchange. Other users of *Genes ReUnited* have not even developed such a relationship with their newly reunited family 'contacts', however. 'Since joining recently I have managed to find out family relations on my Dad's side who I knew nothing about, my tree is getting bigger and bigger. I have gained a large family who I never knew existed' remarked Tammy Ratcliff for instance.¹¹¹ In this case, the reunion did not entail an ongoing sharing of information and photographs, but rather Tammy simply came to know that the 'large family' exists and as such she has 'gained' them simply by 'knowing' them (and, thus, more and more about himself). In all of these examples, however, those contemporary relatives that practitioners have encountered became 'contacts' for a shared reflexive search

¹¹⁰ Genes ReUnited, 'Success Board', *Genes ReUnited*, (1 July 2006), <http://www.genesreunited.co.uk/genesreunited.asp?WCI=MembersBook&bb_type=S&px=5> (accessed 26 July 2006), p. 6.

¹¹¹ Genes ReUnited, 'Success Board', *Genes.ReUnited*, (6 July 2006), <http://www.genesreunited.co.uk/genesreunited.asp?WCI=MembersBook&bb_type=S&px=5> (accessed 26 July 2006), p. 6.

for identity that were reunited only by their (unspoken) shared genealogical relations. And once they have been reunited, the reflexive search for ever 'more' family soon continued, nourished by the encounter and reunion, but not terminated by them.¹¹²

Nor did such practices begin with the advent of the internet, although it has certainly facilitated increasingly easy contact between relatives. In 1974, for instance, Frank Fell, a then 52-year old member of the B.M.S.G.H. wrote of his motivation to begin genealogy after the recent death of his parents, before turning to his recent activities: 'By the initial detective work I located a cousin whom I had no idea existed. He carries the same characteristics as my own father – skin freckled, shape of cranium, colour of eyes and the peculiar difference in colour of moustache as compared with that of his head and chest. These show three different colours entirely. No other Fell after this line has the same peculiarities'.¹¹³ In Frank's case, we return to the closeness between the revelations of adoption disclosure and genealogical practice noted at the outset. After the loss of parents without making the connection to the primordialised identity of ancestral generations, Frank managed this through inspecting the chest hair of a newly discovered cousin. In the sameness of appearance, his own ontological concerns were addressed – the peculiarities of his own branch of Fells (imagined in terms of surname) allowed Frank to redress those disembedding mechanisms that had left him with a sense of isolation and deracination, particularly after the death of his parents.

¹¹² Some of the reunions that are in evidence on *Genes ReUnited* can also be between strikingly close relations, although this is not especially frequent. 'After just two days of being a member I have found my children and grandchildren. Didn't even know that they were even looking for me' remarked Dave Miller in April 2006. 'Because my work took me all over the country, I was never in the same place for long, only a few months at a time. But now I have a home base from which I work, I started doing my family tree...and came across my daughter's name and place of birth in someone's link to a family tree. After a few questions of confirmation I found that I had indeed did have the right person and she has a family of her own' Dave explained. Again, in this instance the closeness of reunions facilitated by genealogical research has, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries come to blur with those discussed above in light of adoption discourses. *Genes ReUnited*, 'Success Board', *Genes ReUnited*, (23 April 2006), <http://www.genesreunited.co.uk/genesreunited.asp?WCI=MembersBook&bb_type=S&px=19> (accessed 26 July 2006), p. 20.

¹¹³ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 69.

As we have seen in Chapters 2, the ease with which family historians have been enabled to make such connections shifted over the course of the decades between Frank Fell and *Genes ReUnited* as practices changed. However, similar ideas about the family, and the crucial coinciding of an ongoing reflexive search for identity and a new cultural value attached to blood-ties united their diverse practices. Crucially, such research practice, in containing ever more encounters with living and deceased kin made for a continuing *state* of family reunion. The reunions were all the more powerful for not becoming explicit family gatherings because this would, after all, be a gathering of the diffuse and scattered family (not) lived *with*, as opposed to continuing to reunite the family lived *by*. Indeed, explicit family reunions have not been the norm, or a particularly common occurrence in British family history practice in the later twentieth century. When they have occurred, they have been something considered quite remarkable – worthy of mention in local newspapers and family history society newsletters – but even then, they do not seem to have been particularly frequent. *Family Tree Magazine*, for instance, has not contained many accounts of family reunions, and when it did, they were highlighted chiefly for their international nature and regularity.¹¹⁴

‘Clan’ gatherings and reunions based upon a particular surname registered with the Guild of One Name Studies, for example, were showcased in *Family Tree*, particularly during the mid-1980s when such events were deemed novel. Thus in January 1985, Sarah Neilan’s account of her trip to Ontario, Canada for a family reunion was given pages of magazine space which it simply would not have received had it occurred ten or fifteen years later. The reunion was organised annually to memorialise emigration from Scotland in 1837. Upon arrival at the school where the reunion was held, Sarah and her husband, John, were

¹¹⁴ This was particularly the case at the inception of the magazine in the mid-1980s. For instance, the Armstrong Clan Association was worthy of note in 1984 for holding an annual ‘clan’ gathering in Dumfries, Scotland uniting members ‘dispersed to’ England, Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and other parts of Scotland. Edward H. Armstrong, ‘The Armstrong Clan’, *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(1) (November-December 1984), p. 20. For another example of regular reunions based upon family surname, see: Bob Bliss, ‘The Bliss Family History Society (UK)’, *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(4) (May-June 1985), p. 19.

greeted at the gate with name labels reading ‘Hello! I’m...’ before being ‘greeted with a shriek, “It’s John! From England!” and a bunch of old ladies bore down on us and hugged us both... until I was dizzy with names and smiling faces and enquiries about our children’.¹¹⁵ This moment of reunion has shades of Alex Haley’s trip to West Africa, albeit with name badges. Whilst such badges establish the primordial blood-relationships, however, more reflexively constructed narratives of self- and familial- identity soon emerge in Sarah Neilan’s account as well. ‘I looked down over the tables and was struck with amusement and affection by one of the most extraordinary sights I have ever seen; the family resemblance, which in many of the people there – some of them only distantly related – was remarkable. The strong MacFarlane nose was much in evidence, and a glance at the old photograph on the wall behind me confirmed it’. This did not provide an ‘endpoint’ of family history research for them, however, nor was it the sole purpose of their trip to Canada, as they left to continue their reflexively-constructed holiday itinerary to, amongst other things, ‘spend the next few days on Lake Huron with a first-cousin-once removed’, quite possibly to compare genealogical notes.¹¹⁶

The international element in such explicit reunions has proved to be vital in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Whilst, as we have seen, there is a common tendency to continue pursuing research with newly discovered cousins, the need for a ‘reunion’ does not enter the equation – at least in a British context – unless overseas visitors are in attendance.¹¹⁷ Indeed, when such a reunion is occasionally held in Britain, the

¹¹⁵ Sarah Neilan, ‘Clan Picnic was a Day to Remember’, *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(2) (January-February 1985), p. 26.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹¹⁷ This is certainly not true in the United States however because, as discussed in Chapter 2, more local family reunions pre-dated the rise of demotic genealogy there and constituted a far more commonplace occurrence that can be quantified and studied quantitatively. R. M. Taylor, Jr., ‘Summoning the Wandering Tribes: Genealogy and Family Reunions in American History’, *Journal of Social History*, 16(1) (1982). The practice continues today, with American websites such as *FamilyReunion.com* (first established in 1999) full of suggestions for how to plan a reunion full of games and activities, from sack-races to family storytelling and ‘icebreakers’. RootsMagic, ‘Planning Activities for your Family Reunion’, *FamilyReunion.com* (2006), <[240](http://family-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

international flavour is vital,¹¹⁸ as was the case with the Farmery family reunion held at Bracebridge Heath Village Hall in Lincolnshire in September 2004. This gathering was worthy of mention in the local newspaper as ‘relatives flew in from all over the world to celebrate... and had travelled from as far afield as Australia and Canada’ (see Figure 28 below). We do not learn much as to the conversations that went on in such newspaper reports, however.¹¹⁹

When explicit family reunions based upon family history research are organised, the language of ‘lines’ and ‘branches’ of blood-ties is particularly in evidence, providing the structure of the event, much as John and Sarah Neilan were asked to wear name badges. For example, a taxonomic, family tree-based conception of the ‘reunited family’ was in evidence at the family reunion organised by D. Murfin of York in 1996 and remarkable enough to

reunion.com/activity.htm> (accessed 26 July 2006). When a reunion is driven by genealogical research, however, it is a different matter entirely, and the international nature of the reunion comes to the fore.

¹¹⁸ Importantly, this can be entirely continuous with the ongoing processes of making new ‘contacts’ and helping each other with the ongoing reflexive project of identity construction noted above. On *Genes ReUnited*, for instance, as new international links proliferate and become more established, a reunion as part of an overseas holiday begin to seem more and more appropriate. Kaye Storer, an Australian genealogist, for instance, remarked that she had ‘found connections through our Bell (Dunfermline) family [which] is just great. Doreen (in Scotland) who is also a member didn't know we existed here in “Aus”, [and we] hope to visit with her in the near future. Have also found Ron from the Bells in Victoria and Mary in England we're all helping each other out. I am trying to connect with all those other Bells, who have contacted me, knowing we're connected but can't quite put our families together just yet... We're still looking for the rest of the girls maybe in Ireland, maybe in America! But this week have found what we hope is a wonderful connection to my ggg grandmother Margaret Evans’. *Genes ReUnited*, ‘Success Board’, *Genes ReUnited*, (9 June 2006), <http://www.genesreunited.co.uk/genesreunited.asp?WCI=MembersBook&bb_type=S&px=10> (accessed 26 July 2006), p. 11.

¹¹⁹ Furthermore, family reunions do not have to be organised explicitly when such overseas trips occur, as they can constitute part of an ongoing genealogical holiday that demonstrates a real continuity with the roots tourism amongst those with British ancestry discussed by Basu and Nash. Ruby James from Melbourne, for instance, wrote on *Genes ReUnited* that ‘I have just come back from England. While I was there I went to see a cousin’s husband (she died last year) who found me on *Genes ReUnited*. He has been sending me info on my mother’s family. Also I went to see cousins on my Dad’s side from Tilbury who never knew I existed. My husband said it was worth the visit just to see my face as the cousins walked in and said how much I looked like someone in the family. We never knew anyone in the family at all, as they were Catholic and my mother wasn’t... Now I have all these relations I never knew I had. They were very pleased to know that they had a relation in Australia, and are all e-mailing me’. In this case, some reunions were planned and others were quite surprising to those previously unaware of their existence. Nonetheless, a chord was struck in both with regard to family resemblances which helped to provide a flashpoint of identification that was both primordial due to blood-ties and reflexively-constructed through searching to emphasise particular family traits and resemblances. *Genes ReUnited*, ‘Success Board’, *Genes ReUnited*, (2 July 2006), <http://www.genesreunited.co.uk/genesreunited.asp?WCI=MembersBook&bb_type=S&px=5> (accessed 26 July 2006), p. 11.



Figure 28. The Farmery Family Reunion at Bracebridge Heath Village Hall, 25 September 2004.¹²⁰

merit a mention in the *York and District Family History Society Newsletter*. Murfin was proud to report that after ‘a letter was sent out in April to all descendents.... of my grandparents... the response was tremendous’ and that she ‘circulated a chart showing who would be there’ which was ‘arranged to show where they *fitted in the family*’. Murfin continued to explain that ‘name badges were worn, as many people would not know each other... coded in colour and shape to show which line and generation each person belonged to’, with the distinction that ‘names underlined indicated the direct line of descent’. Meanwhile, on the wall, to settle matters of confusion, ‘a colour coded print out was displayed showing eleven generations’.¹²¹ In other words, if a bemused reunion attendee wanted to find out ‘who they are’, from the event organiser’s perspective they just need to look at their colour code and the family taxonomy.¹²²

¹²⁰ *Lincolnshire Echo*, 27 September 2004, p. 17.

¹²¹ D. Murfin, ‘A Family Tree Party’, *The City of York and District Family History Society Newsletter*, 35 (January 1995), p. 11-13. My italics.

¹²² Similarly, Beryl Renton, an Australian genealogist organising a two-day reunion through the internet to be held at Easter weekend 2004, for example, remarked: ‘We are asking for \$5 each to help defray cost of hiring the Hall. People are asked to bring any photos or Ancestry information... Some of the connecting surnames include LAWRENCE, ALFORD, BROWN, GOODHEW, ALLEN, ANDERSON, SALISBURY, SALWAY, STATHAM, HOCKEY,... THORNE, WOODLEY and many many more... Please let me know if you want any particular information emailed to you as I have over 15,800 names – and I would appreciate anything further you can add. We are hoping for a large roll up’. Beryl Renton, (24 January 2004),

Whether things always progress as planned, however, is another matter. In Stephen Poliakoff's dramatisation of such a family reunion, *Perfect Strangers*, for instance, the family reunion's event organiser Poppy presents Daniel, the aloof protagonist (who is quite unsure as to why he is even present), and his father with a printout of those who have requested to see him, whilst showing him the family tree into which a series of drawing-pins are stuck: 'The red drawing pins indicate those already here, the yellow ones those that are expected, the blue, cancellations or refusals – and no drawing pins means you're dead... So you'll need one of these (*She gives them each a copy of the family tree.*) They come in two sizes, you can choose – most people prefer the big one'.¹²³ What Daniel does not get to choose is whether or not to have a family tree. Whilst he and his newly discovered cousin embark on their own joint quest to find the patterns, traits and secrets 'hidden behind' the family tree, their reflexive projects of the self are carried out within Poppy's parameters and a sense of the biological family as primordially true. Interestingly, in Poliakoff's play when the family tree is presented as 'all there is to know', it seems insufficient to the characters – too much of an ascribed identity that has not been reflected on and *self*-constructed, following the lines and branches of the tree in the direction that interests a particular individual. Indeed, as we have seen in the case of family values, the very appeal of such identity processes is the coinciding of these two poles – the biographical 'family history' approach, and the primordial 'genealogical' approach of constructing a family tree.

As such, it is important, in concluding an analysis of genealogical identity construction to turn our attention towards the construction of family trees themselves, and particularly to the construction of such primordial identities. As we have seen in the case of roots tourism, the genealogical emphasis on 'family names' (or, more accurately, upon

'CHANT/WITHYMAN/LAWRENCE FAMILY REUNION – DALBY 10/11 APRIL' in *soc.genealogy.australia+nz* [Usenet], (accessed 3 February 2004). For further discussion of Australian family reunions, see: Davison, 'The Broken Lineage of Australian Family History', p. 336.

¹²³ Stephen Poliakoff, *Perfect Strangers: A Screenplay* (London, 2001), p. 14-15. *Perfect Strangers* was produced by Talkback Productions Ltd for BBC Television and was first screened in May 2001 by BBC2.

patrilineal and matrilineal descent) and family reunions, ‘flashpoints’ of identity are provided in a reflexive project of searching for self-identity through a, seemingly paradoxical, coinciding with the unremarked primordialism of genealogical truth alongside it. How, then, do the two ‘poles’ – which have, since the late-1970s, generally been termed ‘genealogy’ and the ‘family history’ by practitioners – of identity construction relate? Does this diversity of means of identity construction mean, as discussed in Chapter 2, that a unitary sense of a ‘phenomenon’ in terms of practice also becomes untenable in terms of identity construction? Having examined the relationship between the two in family reunions, surnames and roots tourism; it is important to reach an understanding of how the ‘genealogical’ primordialism encountered in all of the practices discussed thus far is itself constructed, how it provides its own mode of constructing genealogical identities and why it interacts with reflexivity in such a paradoxical manner.

‘Genealogy’ vs. ‘Family History’?: The Primordial and the Reflexive

As we have seen in Chapter 3, the ‘mere name gatherer’ is often mocked by other family historians. Simply to pile up a huge list of births, marriages and deaths is, to many practitioners, not a worthwhile endeavour and in Poliakoff’s teasing portrayal of Polly and the broader family’s mocking of her (‘Have you been “done” yet – processed by Poppy’; ‘I expect we get hit with a hefty fine if we don’t pin our family trees up’)¹²⁴ we encounter the same uncertainty about an overly rigid sense in which one’s ‘ascribed’ identity is determined by where one ‘fits into’ a family tree. Indeed, in the mid-1970s, the new category of ‘family history’ emerged as being ‘what genealogy is all about’ in the rhetoric of the new societies,¹²⁵ The sense of moving beyond names and dates to the social history and biography of the lives

¹²⁴ Poliakoff, *Perfect Strangers*, p. 19.

¹²⁵ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 1. See Chapter 2 above on this historical disjuncture of categorisations of ‘genealogical’ activity.

and colour behind them was indeed at the very heart of the 'family history movement'. After *Roots*, the BBC's follow-up series, *Discovering Your Family History* made the same point, stressing 'the importance of setting ancestors in their full social and historical context', as shown in Chapter 2.¹²⁶ As such the reflexive project of the self encountered in the thirst for biographical family history and for symbolic resources by which to construct an identity whereby, as one practitioner put it, 'we do what we do because we want to find out more about who we are' was, for the programme makers, envisaged as providing an avenue by which 'popular history' might transmute into increased interest in social history.¹²⁷

That the 'basic genealogical procedures' remained, however, is vital. They were still presented as such twenty-five years later when *Who Do You Think You Are?* brought family history back to British prime time television. The structure of the guidebook is telling: 'The initial chapters deal with the basics: tasks that anyone, whether or not they are serious about tracing their ancestors, should tick off. The later chapters describe some of the routes your search may go down and furnish you with the skills you need to add meat to bones'.¹²⁸ The 'basics', of course, have been the staple of all family history guidebooks since the 1970s era: a lesson in 'hatch, match and dispatch'.¹²⁹ If that were all that 'family history' were, however, the 'family history' societies would arguably not have grown at such an astonishing rate and 'genealogy' would have remained the domain of the culturally obscure 'name gatherer'.

An equally sharp line is drawn by guidebooks, however, if the biographical seeks to be grounded in genealogical facts. The bones demand to be fleshed out, but if a family

¹²⁶ Don Steel, *Discovering Your Family History* (London, 1980), p. 7.

¹²⁷ Peter Taylor, (8 January 2004), 'Re: the perils of family research' in *alt.genealogy* [Usenet], (accessed 13 January 2004).

¹²⁸ See, for instance: R. A. Lever, 'Putting Flesh on the Bones of One's Ancestors', *Family Tree Magazine*, 3(7) (May 1987), p. 10.

¹²⁹ Waddell, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, p. 10, p. 38.

history remains too fleshy, speculative and superficial, there will be no bone structure to hold it together, leaving the whole edifice in danger of collapse. Dale Cook, for instance, in responding to a beginner's newsgroup enquiry as to how to evaluate online source material made the following posting: 'Information without the means of verification is not genealogy. It might be called "family history" but it is definitely not genealogy'.¹³⁰ From this point of view, the biological truth provided by verified genealogical documents is seen as superior to subjectively lapsing into a search for biographical colour that does not check its sources.

For practitioners such as Cook, genealogical identities are constructed in a markedly different way from Pym, Bowman and Barraud. Roger Gomm, for instance, chose to structure his 'family book' not in terms of interesting ancestors, but by an attempt to utterly systematize and order his research. 'My plan is to put all of the Gomm family trees and information into a booklet which can be used as a reference document for Gommms and perhaps future generations. Each tree will form its own chapter' he wrote in a newsgroup posting encouraging any other Gommms to get in touch with either information or for a copy of Roger's family newsletter.¹³¹ Like Pym, Bowman and Barraud, therefore, Gomm still wanted to pass his labours on to future generations, presumably to help them know who they are and redress the lack of such knowledge.

This more systematic, 'genealogical' tendency was also very much in evidence amongst the early 'family historians' of the B.M.S.G.H., alongside those tending towards the more biographical mode of identity construction. 'Genealogy' could thus still provide an end in itself in terms of identity construction alongside the rise of 'family history'. As John Young wrote: 'I decided very early to trace all lines back to 1837, the beginning of the General Register Office. However, when I received the blank sheet of the Family Tree

¹³⁰ Dale H. Cook, (1 February 2004), 'Re: best sites for genealogy research?' in *alt.genealogy* [Usenet], (accessed 3 February 2004).

¹³¹ Roger Gomm, (24 January 2004), 'GOMM(E) FAMILY HISTORY' in *soc.genealogy.australia+nz* [Usenet], (accessed 3 February 2004).

Project this became a matter of tracing all lines to my 16 great-great-grandparents... This is now largely complete except for one line on my mother's side and death certificates'.¹³²

What such examples make clear is that the BBC's definitions of both 'family history' and 'genealogy' were not necessarily shared by practitioners. Nor did members of family history societies necessarily agree on them.

With John Young, we encounter the sense that to privilege any particular ancestor would be to somehow de-objectify the family tree. The symmetry and structure of the family tree diagram thereby operates in preventing John from exploring the life of, say, his colourful mother's father's mother as a 'flashpoint' of identity. Rather, in this case the aim is tracing back all lines to the mid-nineteenth-century beginnings of civil registration or 'completing' the family tree sheet supplied by the family history society or a genealogical guidebook. As

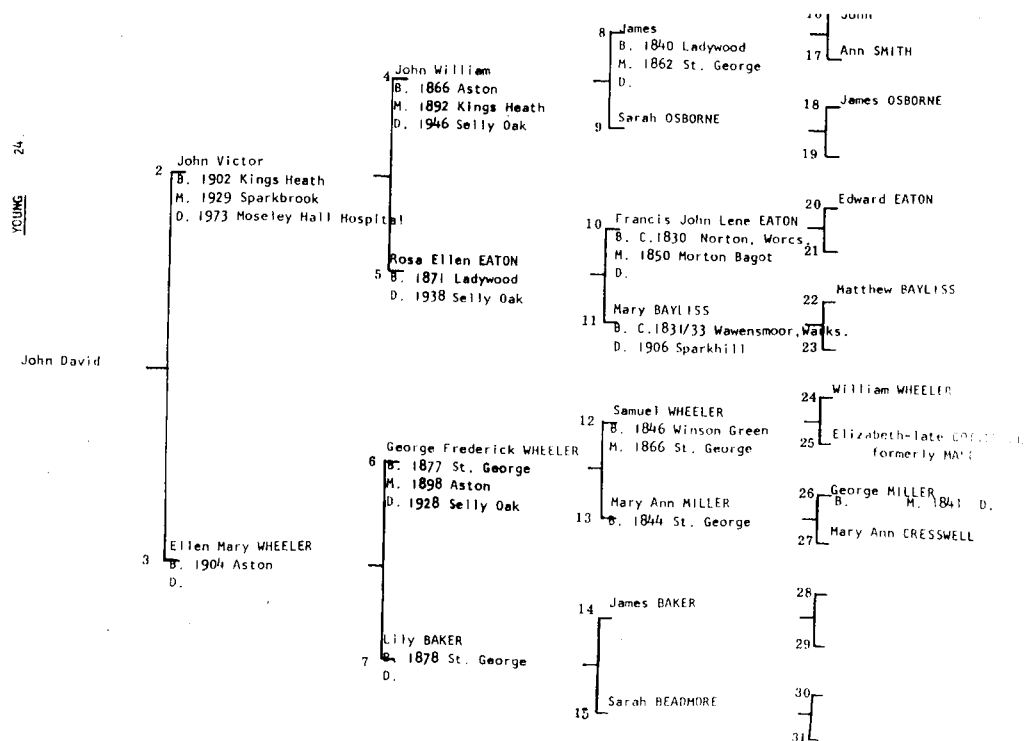


Figure 29. John Young's Family Tree, with missing maternal ancestry.¹³³

¹³² Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 24.

¹³³ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 24.

Norman Gardiner, a 56-year old genealogist explained in 1981, he intended to undertake his wife's genealogy 'in the event of completing my own ancestors to my satisfaction'.¹³⁴ How then does this sense of completion, as if completing a crossword puzzle, construct a genealogical identity? The work of Benedict Anderson on the construction of national identity is unexpectedly helpful in this regard.

Anderson suggests that a crucial element in the construction of identity is the 'imagination' of a community. He emphasises imagination 'because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'.¹³⁵ Anderson's thesis sheds light on the construction of identities by genealogists in that the deceased family members are also, in a fundamental sense, un-knowable, and yet are imagined to form a biologically-defined familial community through time, reified in a family tree. Furthermore, in both nationalist and family contexts, documents of the state such as censuses and civil registration documents provide a crucial site for the imagining of a shared identity. Anderson shows, with reference to British colonial censuses for the Straits settlements and peninsular Malaya between 1871 and 1991, that national identities may be constructed and imagined through this medium as 'the fiction of the census is clear in that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one – and only one – extremely clear place'. The structure of the census does not tolerate blurred or changing identifications and thus provides a totalising classificatory grid that designates that things belong in one category, not another.¹³⁶ It is evident that similar processes are at work in the construction and imagining of identities by those at the more 'genealogical' pole of identity construction. As relatives have long been deceased, a leap of imagination is necessary in some form, but, as a significant amount of

¹³⁴ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking ~ Again*, 28.

¹³⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York, 1991, second edition), p. 6.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6, p. 164-66, p. 184.

research is done through reference to census returns, parish registers and civil registration records, this imagination is facilitated by the de-limiting structure of these documents.

This is evidenced in the more 'genealogical' style of book produced by some practitioners and in the case of genealogical computer programs. Such family books are often heavily based upon the data obtained from such sources, and not upon an attempt to uncover further details about the lives of those family members concerned other than those details recorded in census, parish register and civil registration:

'John Robert (Bob) Raleigh was born 30 November 1893 in Owstwick, Yorkshire, England. He married Emily Cockerline. Bob died 7 April 1922 at Patrington. Emily then married his brother George. Children: Roya Raleigh'.¹³⁷

'Bartholomew Swales baptised at Withernwick, March 2, 1829 and buried at Withernwick on September 1, 1830'.¹³⁸

In both examples, no attempt is made to discuss the lives of those involved. The *rites de passage* provide the means of 'knowing' them.¹³⁹ The fact that Bartholomew Swales died in infancy is not remarked upon, nor are the circumstances surrounding the levirate marriage of Emily to John's brother George discussed. The names, dates, and places, the births, baptisms, marriages and deaths are dutifully recorded, straight from the civil registration certificates, census returns, parish registers and genealogical indexes, and then compiled systematically. Thus we find that the first example above is catalogued in the book as entry 2 in the 'Second generation of George William Raleigh and Martha Brown family', and the offspring of the second marriage, Roya Raleigh, is classified as 6 (i).¹⁴⁰ The rest of the book consists of further systematically compiled data. This is then related to genealogical diagrams at the front of the book, to see how it 'fits into' the family tree. Here we see what

¹³⁷ E. McCallum, *Brothers and Cousins: The Curtis and Swales Families in East Yorkshire and Canada and their Related Families*, (S.I., 1996), p. 281

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 385.

¹³⁹ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, (London, 1909).

¹⁴⁰ McCallum, *Brothers and Cousins*, p. 281.

V. Tonks meant when she wrote that she and her husband set out ‘in search of Peter’s family tree’, as a reified, finite object, or what those such as P. Moyser understand when they remark that ‘this completes Arthur’s family’ or ‘this completes Thomas’s (b. 1879) family’ after listing details of birth, marriage and death.¹⁴¹

Another example serves to demonstrate how these structuring mechanisms serve to delimit a family, showing that it facilitates a starkly drawn personal and familial boundary. The sample page shown below (Figure 30), uses a form-like structure with spaces for ‘husband’s name’, ‘where born’, ‘when’ and so on, such that the type of details recorded in registers and censuses may be directly transferred on to the page or, more recently, into the computer database software programs that have a similarly form-like tabulated structure.

88 HUSBAND'S NAME Thomas Wood #614-615
 When Born c. 1633 Where Prt. Yorkshire, England
Thomas Wood came to New England in 1638, settled in Rowley
 When Died 12 Sept 1687 Where Rowley, Mass
A carpenter, lived in Rowley all of his life.
 When Married 7 June 1654 Where Rowley, Mass.
 # Other Wives (if any) _____
 1228 His Father Edward His Mother's Maiden Name Ruth Mousall
 WIFE'S MAIDEN NAME Ann Hunt
 When Born 1635 Where _____
 When Died 20 Dec 1714 Where Rowley, Mass.
 # Other Husband (if any) _____
 1230 Her Father William Her Mother's Maiden Name Elizabeth Best
 Will: 21 July 1687 Rowley, Mass
 Proved: 23 Nov 1687, Boston, Mass
 Suffolk Co., Probate #1607
 NEHG Reg: 1969: #491 p.230
 Savage Genealogical Dictionary
 Boston Transcript 22 Nov. 1922

CHILDREN (Arrange in order of birth)	WHEN BORN			WHERE BORN			DIED	MARRIED
	Day	Mo.	Yr.	Town	County	State of Country		
#307 Mary	16	3	1655	Rowley		Mass	11-10-1673	To James Chute
John	2	11	1656	"	"	"	1680	To Isabel Hazen
Thomas	8	10	1658	"	"	"	6-6-1683	To Mary Hunt
Ann	8	8	1660	"	"	"	1679	To Benjamin Plummer
Ruth	21	7	1662	"	"	"	John Lunt (2nd)	To Capt. Joseph Jewett, Jr. (1st)
Josiah (Twin)	5	9	1664	"	"	"	Enfield, Ct 10-12-1728	To Mary Felt
Elizabeth "	5	9	1664	"	"	"	Burned 31-7-1675	To _____
Samuel	26	12	1666	"	"	"	1690	To Margaret Elithrop
Solomon	17	5	1669	"	"	"	1753	To Mary Hazeltine
Ebenezer	19	12	1671	"	"	"	c. 1737	To 2nd Joanna Gaze 1718 To 1st Rachel 1695
James	22	6	1674	"	"	"	1694	To _____
Thomas Wood was a soldier in King Phillip's War 1675-76. Service at Garrison at Groton, Mass. 1675; at Lancaster Garrison 1676.								

Figure 30. One of E. Eggleston Kempton and I. Eggleston Ward’s family data sheets.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ P.J. Moyser, *The Moyser Family of Haxby, Co. Yorks.*, (S.I., n.d.), p. 62, p. 71.

¹⁴² E. Eggleston Kempton and I. Eggleston Ward, *Our Eggleston and Allied Families* (S.I., n.d.), p.88.

The extraction of information from records into a tabulation (and a family tree for that matter) is thus a vernacularisation of the original form of information that is coded back into a new form. In the case of computer software, it can be made even simpler still, as one interviewee remarked 'I'm putting it on a computer database, one of these commercially available software things. I just type it into the family cards, and it produces the family tree automatically'.¹⁴³

Whether or not this 'completion' always provides a flashpoint of identity in the sense of finding a nugget of 'purest gold' and nourishing of a sense of lack experienced through, say, finding a missing link in a lineage, or in photographing a particular house or church during roots tourism or an imaginary encounter with an apical ancestor is another matter. When John Young 'completed' his own family history, he moved on to his wife's. When Arthur and Thomas's families were completed by P. Moyser, there was always another branch to move on to. The reflexive identity project of the self rolled on, despite the sense of an objective 'completion' of a bounded family. What, then, constitutes an endpoint to a family tree? Why should John Young draw the line at his 16 great-great grandparents?

For one thing, he was supplied with a blank tree of such proportions by the B.M.S.G.H. and this may have thus presented the perceived limits of possible research for a beginner 'setting out in search of the family tree'. However other remarks made by other genealogists further along their search for names and dates are revealing. Christine Hawker, for instance, remarked in passing of the branches as 'family treasures, each separate links of a chain to be put together [that] tantalise with the unanswered queries they produce'.¹⁴⁴ In this understanding genealogy is the very process of 'linking up' a chain of familial being, whereby ever new gaps in the puzzle present themselves, to which the family historian labours to build connections. Each finding of a missing piece as such presents, as we have

¹⁴³ Interview with Mr R. Bean, retired, conducted at the Borthwick Institute for Archives, York, 17 June 2003.

¹⁴⁴ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 84.

seen, a flashpoint of identification, a climactic discovery for a family detective (often leading to an exclamation of “yes” ringing out through an otherwise silent archive).¹⁴⁵ However, it also drives the genealogist to continue yet further and connect even more into the family that grows and grows (while, intriguingly, fertility rates in modern society fall and fall).¹⁴⁶

A genealogist may thus perceive him- or herself as the lynchpin in redressing the lack of family perceived in the present, through a very ‘genealogically’ structured family reunion, by producing a 600-page record of genealogical data, and by maintaining an online family tree alike. They thus exist in a state of continually reuniting a family perceived as divided in time and by the chasm of the grave and of a gradual forgetting of deceased relatives that has accompanied the passing of generations. This perpetually unfinished genealogical extreme of activity itself, then, inasmuch as it becomes the occupation of a family ‘kin-keeper’ is thus in a sense a perpetual flashpoint of identity.¹⁴⁷ Such a furious recorder of genealogical data is thus the one who facilitates the imagination of the familial community, and whose present frontiers bound such imaginings. They thereby negotiate the gulf between family lived *with* and *by* (much as Pym did in his biographical family history, albeit through selecting certain war stories and apical ancestors) through constructing and connecting biological and genealogical certainties. In this sense the genealogical kin keeper is the rock on which the family tree is built.

Beyond this, however, a genealogist may also find their identity through a sense of unity and wholeness conveyed by the family tree. As Anderson remarks, members of

¹⁴⁵ See for instance: Colin D. Rogers, *The Family Tree Detective: A Manual for Analysing and Solving Genealogical Problems in England and Wales, 1538 to the Present Day* (Manchester, 1983).

¹⁴⁶ This point indeed provides another area of John Gillis’ interest, whereby the decline of fertility throughout the modern period is often taken for granted by historians ‘as an unexamined feature of modern society, requiring no further explanation’. See: John R. Gillis, Louise A. Tilly and David Levine (eds.), *The European Experience of Declining Fertility, 1850-1970* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford, 1992).

¹⁴⁷ Limited only by the extent of records to be compiled, this can even give rise to intentions to connect all genealogical information of mankind, as we shall see in Chapter 6.

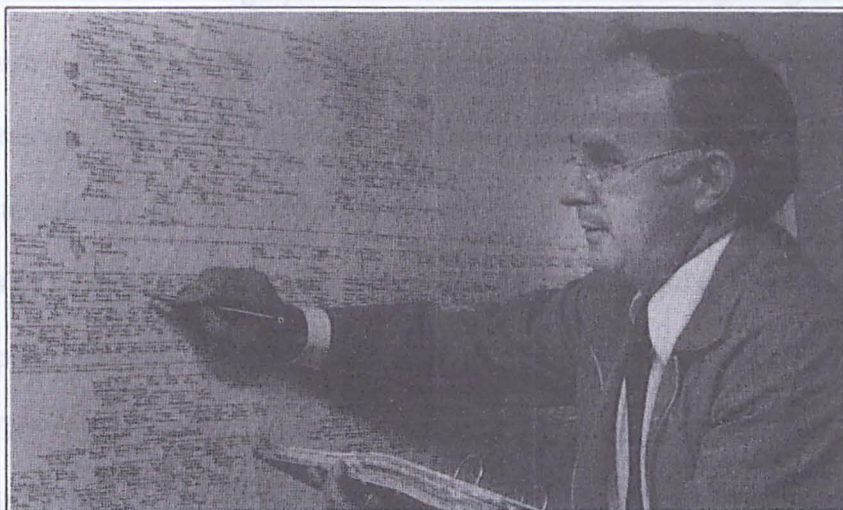


Figure 31. Hugh Cave, Founder and Secretary of the Cave Family History Society.¹⁴⁸

national communities imagine a unity and communion, however in family historians there is sometimes a sense that the imagined familial community somehow points to, and is constituted in *themselves*. 'I am now tracing all my family lines and have equal feelings about each' wrote David Hall, a then 30-year old genealogist from Coventry, in 1974.¹⁴⁹ These branches were something possessed – they were 'my family lines' – and they converged upon him, constituting equal parts of the self about which he had an equality of 'feelings', a prologue to himself that perhaps passed into and to a certain extent constituted that self. The whole family tree, after all, points to the present day and present generation, viewed as it is always from the perspective of the compiler, just, as Adam Kuper has noted, the Darwinian evolutionary taxonomic tree had firmly ensconced man at the top of the tree as the 'chosen primate'.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, in her study of the epistemological development of the family tree diagram, Mary Bouquet has traced the family tree from medieval Trees of Jesse through the secular, domestic aristocratic pedigrees that imitated them, and in the process

¹⁴⁸ Hugh Cave, 'The Cave Family History Society', *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(3) (March-April 1985), p. 19.

¹⁴⁹ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking ~ Again*, 20.

¹⁵⁰ Adam Kuper, *The Chosen Primate: Human Nature and Cultural Diversity* (Cambridge, MA, 1994).

provided a broad source of imagery for the scientific taxonomies in geological, philological and evolutionary modes that led to modernist anthropological use of the kin diagrams (and popular genealogical use) and evoked an enduring ‘European biological notion of substance’. Bouquet writes that: ‘Trees gloss over the nature of substance constituting the relations. If the identities of species, patriarchs and kin categories are assumed to be created by nature, by God, or simply given, then we would scarcely need trees to connect them. So could it be that the trees differentiate and create identities instead?’¹⁵¹ Indeed, genealogists most readily speak of their identity as constituted and bequeathed to them by, through and in a family tree that points to themselves in terms of shared substance. More interesting still is that this has come to be most explicitly the case with the rise of genetic discourses of substance.

In 1982, for instance, George Pelling introduced his guidebook not by asserting a sense of uncertainty in the contemporary world, as noted at the outset, but also by remarking that: ‘Each of us is a product of genetic and environmental factors and by studying our ancestors we find out more about ourselves’.¹⁵² As we have seen, other guidebooks appearing in the 1990s spoke of ‘genetic memory’ and of ‘voices in your blood’.¹⁵³ As Evelyn Fox Keller has argued, since the discovery of genes as ‘real molecules’ in 1953 and the growth of molecular genetics exploring DNA (and replacing classical Mendelian genetics) have led to ever more dramatic advances. For Fox Keller, in particular the advances of the last twenty-five years (publicised most widely in relation to the mid-1970s

¹⁵¹ Mary Bouquet, ‘Family Trees and Their Affinities: The Visual Imperative of the Genealogical Diagram’, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 2(1) (March 1996), p. 59-60. See also: Mary Bouquet, ‘Exhibiting Knowledge: The Trees of Dubois, Haeckel, Jesse and Rivers at the *Pithecanthropus* Centennial Exhibition’, in Marilyn Strathern (ed.), *Shifting Contexts: Transformations in Anthropological Knowledge* (London and New York, 1995); Gillian Beer, ‘“The Face of Nature”: Anthropomorphic Elements in the Language of *The Origin of Species*’, in L. J. Jordanova (ed.), *Languages of Nature: Critical Essays on Science and Literature* (London, 1986), 207-43; André Burguière, ‘La Généalogie’, in P. Nora, *Les Lieux de Memoire*, III, (Paris, 1984). For a critique of Bouquet’s ideas and her response to them, see: Robert Parkin; Mary Bouquet, ‘Kinship with Trees’, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 3:2 (June 1997), 374-376.

¹⁵² George Pelling, *Beginning your Family History*, (Plymouth, 1982, second edition), p. 1.

¹⁵³ G. G. Vandagriff, *Voices in your Blood: Discovering Identity through Family History* (Kansas City, 1993), p. x.

advent of recombinant DNA technology and the launching of the Human Genome Project in 1990) have provided the dramatic apotheosis of the ‘century of the gene’ and a popular ‘genetic determinism’ that is contemporaneous with the growth of family history practice identified in Chapter 1.¹⁵⁴

As such the increased emphasis given to the biologically defined family discussed above in light of the adoption right’s movement and its media portrayal has been deepened by the high genetic determinism of the late twentieth century. To ‘know’ those of the same genetic substance as oneself, to know one’s genetic precursors is to know one’s origin and primordialised identity, codified and imagined through the family tree which presents the ‘connections of substance’ by which such an inheritance is transmitted. This popular understanding of science has been in evidence amongst genealogists searching for identities in startling new ways since the 1990s apotheosis. The emergence of mitochondrial DNA tests that can be made simply and easily at home by giving a saliva sample for laboratory analysis and mapping of results onto a DNA ‘map of the world’ to establish roots has been striking. *Roots for Real* and *Relative Genetics* are such companies, and certainly add a new dimension to the primordialism Haley’s *Roots* envisaged in the 1970s when answering the question “where am I from?” As Catherine Nash has noted, in such searches and the rise of what she has termed ‘genetic kinship’, ‘the results are depicted through old and familiar but newly geneticised notions of human reproduction, ancestry and inheritance... It defines the most recent alliance of popular and scientific models of ancestry and descent in geneticised genealogy and characterises the cultural work of authorising genetic answers to questions of relatedness and identity, offering the security of the known and the excitement of the new Phylogenetic trees of human evolutionary history’.¹⁵⁵ As Bouquet pointed out above, the

¹⁵⁴ Evelyn Fox Keller, *The Century of the Gene* (Cambridge, MA and London, 2000), p. 3-5. For Fox Keller, however, this apotheosis and peak of genetic determinism has now passed in the shift from the initial assertions of the Human Genome Project that ‘Here is a human being; it’s me!’ to the twenty-first century functional genetics that seeks to uncover the biological meaning of the genome.

¹⁵⁵ Catherine Nash, ‘Genetic Kinship’, *Cultural Studies*, 18(1) (January 2004), p. 2.

family tree is ever adaptable to changing notions of the transmission of substance and identity.

As such we should not be surprised to find that the less ‘genealogical’ dimensions of family history practice have come similarly to be constructed through genetic discourse. For instance, an emphasis upon an occupational identity can easily come to be couched in genetic terms. Colin Parry, a professional family history researcher wrote the following in a column published in *Family Tree Magazine* in 1985: ‘It is not uncommon to find families in which intelligence and/or talents appear in successive generations; but one in which no fewer than 44 members, in only five generations, followed the same profession must surely be rare, if not unique. The profession here is Law’. Parry then explained that ‘the founding father of the family’ (i.e. the ancestor whose sons became the family’s first lawyers) gave rise to the 44 lawyers and that ‘many of them married the daughters of lawyers, which may have concentrated the talent in the genes passed to their descendants’.¹⁵⁶ As such, ‘family genes’ are assumed to be passing from generation to generation like hereditary diseases.¹⁵⁷

But once one enters the more subjective level of searching for familial patterns in occupations and resemblances, the genealogical mode of identity construction becomes less helpful and leads to the dissatisfaction noted above whereby ‘mere name gathering’ is seen as insufficient and too basic and restrictive by many. In 1981 for instance, a practitioner named G. A. Beale negotiated this contradiction by arguing in his guidebook that genetics may be viewed in such a way as to naturalise the boundary of a family, based upon family resemblances: ‘For the “familial” to be meaningful...it must be comprised of individuals who carry sufficient genes of the same kind to create vital similarities of inheritance and appearance. While relationships within the family are clear enough, once outside it the

¹⁵⁶ Colin J. Parry, ‘Believe it or Not’, *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(2) (January-February 1985), p. 14.

¹⁵⁷ On the constructions of family trees in medical genetics see: Paul Atkinson, Evelyn Parsons and Katie Featherstone, ‘Professional Constructions of Family and Kinship in Medical Genetics’, *New Genetics and Society*, 20 (2001), 5-24.

correspondences become rarer; they are fairly prominent in cousinships, but in the next step to second-cousinships, the similarities can be far from clear'.¹⁵⁸ This compromise between a 'genealogical' and 'family history' mode of identity construction as such privileges the direct bloodline, and encourages the family historian to pursue it primarily (leading them ever further away from the 'complete' family tree idealised by genealogists such as Cook).

It is not just family historians and genealogists that have to negotiate such dilemmas. Carlo Ginzburg has discussed family resemblances (after Wittgenstein) and family trees (after Darwin and Galton) as 'two cognitive metaphors', looking at their interaction with the 'empirical evidence' of various nineteenth-century images and representation of them.¹⁵⁹ Whilst the practices of identity construction in 'genealogical' and 'family historical' modes do in their extremes provide strikingly different modes of doing so, it is clear that rarely do such 'cognitive metaphors' exist in a 'pure' form. For instance, after compiling 600 pages of genealogical data in the format of births, marriages and deaths described above, E. McCallum remarked in his short introduction that 'many members of this family were engaged in the keeping of pubs and inns, and as I have done the family history and called at various members I have always been very hospitably welcomed'.¹⁶⁰ Even though the vast majority of the people catalogued throughout the pages contain no references to any occupation, the author glosses from a genealogical identity to an occupational identity and personality characteristics.

Not only are reflexive constructions of self-identity premised upon primordialist assumptions of blood ties, then, but constructions of 'genealogical' similarly contain a modicum of the 'reflexive'. Genealogies are not (at least in the period under discussion here, regardless of what may be attempted in the future) possible to 'complete' as such. As a

¹⁵⁸ G. A. Beale, *The Uses of Genealogy and the Family Historian together with The Beales of Blandford* (London, 1981), p. 19.

¹⁵⁹ Carlo Ginzburg, 'Family Resemblances and Family Trees: Two Cognitive Metaphors', *Critical Inquiry*, 30 (Spring 2004), 537-556.

¹⁶⁰ McCallum, *Brothers and Cousins*, p. 3.

result, they necessarily entail the choice of which branch to follow next, as a family tree continually widens and deepens. Furthermore, the tendency to look for particular family resemblances can never be completely removed, as any attempt to construct a narrative entails a certain filtering of characteristics. Furthermore, the continual 'increase' of family as a genealogy continues to grow and widen leads to a state of perpetual 'identity' which nourishes a reflexive project of self precisely in its voracious hunger for further links, each of which constitutes a further extension of oneself through the unity provided by a family tree. The perpetually unfinished genealogy thus both defines the current extent of the family and yet ever-increases it in its convergence on the present, and upon the practitioner, constituting and deepening ever more 'who they are' in substantial and genetic terms.

As such there is no paradox that the diversity of the research practices outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 have proved so compelling, in that they allow family historians to both have their cake and eat it in cultural terms – by both reflexively constructing their family history 'freely' by emphasising particular ancestors and forging new links in directions chosen by themselves, and yet at the same time working with a primordialist view of genealogical relations, rooted in the past. It is their *coinciding* that has proved so striking in the examples of identity construction through diverse family history practices considered here (see Figure 32 below). Whichever extreme of 'genealogical' and 'family history' practice a particular practitioner tends towards, there is always a productive element to their co-existence. This is encountered in the quiet assumptions of primordialism underlying roots tourism, the selection of an apical ancestor, emphasis on family names, both explicit and continual family reunions, but equally in the point at which family resemblances cease to be strong enough to provide a name gathering genealogist with a sense of coherence to the category of the 'family' as imagined through the structure of a family tree, causing them to begin to define 'who they think they are' more reflexively, even in the most casual way.

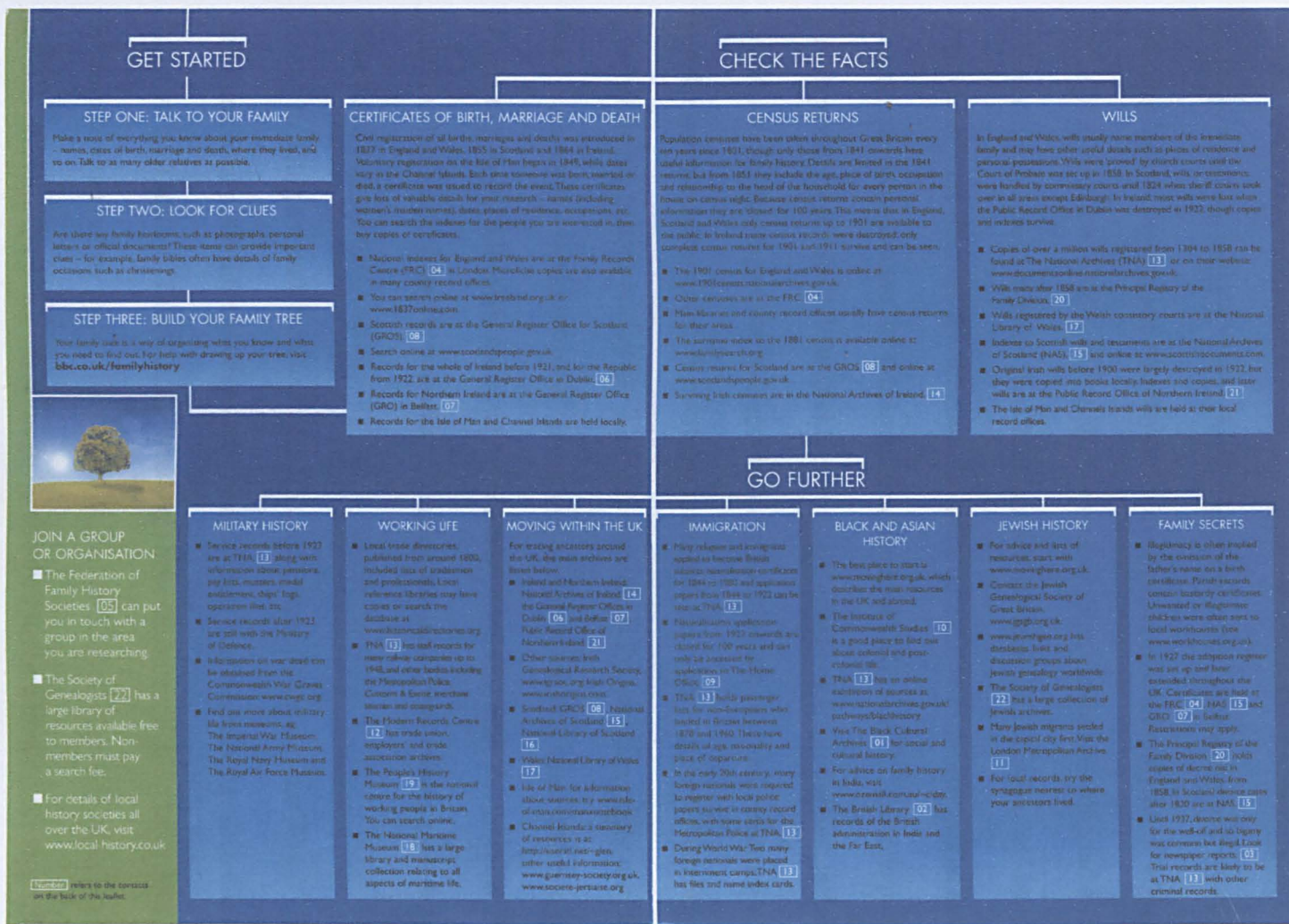


Figure 32. A BBC leaflet produced to promote family history research through *Who Do You Think You Are?* combines the 'genealogical' approach of 'Check The Facts' contained in civil registration records with the biographical, potentially reflexive, 'family history' approach to 'Go Further' with military history documents etc. Interestingly, the entire format of the leaflet of roots practice is taxonomic, indicating that identities are based ultimately upon the primordial, genealogical truth reified in the ideology of the family tree.

Thus no particular identity constructed through the diverse practices of genealogy and family history should be considered in any way 'representative'. Rather, what is so striking about the diverse practices is that in a period of ever-increasing genealogical activity that is characterised by a sense of 'lack' that is somehow 'after' the family and bears witness to a growing lack of ontological security and a divergence in the family lived *with* and *by*, family history has provided a compelling site for such ambiguities to be addressed and redressed. Primordialism breaks in upon the 'free' and self-determined reflexive self-identity quest and vice versa. One thus has the 'freedom' to trace descent matrilineally whilst at the same time finding out 'who you are' by taking a mitochondrial DNA test.¹⁶¹ That the particular development of primordial familial identities are constructed through a surprising post-sexual revolution privileging of the biological family and the late twentieth-century apotheosis of popular genetic determinism is itself fascinating to this end. As Paul Basu has remarked, the internet family history homepage is a perfect medium for the perpetually unfinished family tree,¹⁶² such that even in the most 'genealogical' mode an 'objective' genealogist can exist in a state of perpetual identity quest, with each day promising more minor revelations of a continually redrafted family narrative, plunging the individual into an ever deeper sense of rootedness and connectedness.

In doing so, both the more 'genealogical' practitioner and the likes of Pym, Bowman and Barraud can see themselves as providing a vital intermediary between the family that they live *with* and *by*. This can, but need not, become an explicit argument for family values, because predominantly lip service can be played to familial diversity without challenging the implicit primordialism that has come to be attached to the genealogical record in the later

¹⁶¹ .:Nichol:., (26 January 2004), 'Re: Matrilineal genealogy' in *soc.genealogy.methods* [Usenet], (accessed 11 February 2004).

¹⁶² Basu, 'Homecomings', p. 116. The family history homepage also provides a perfect site for the imagination of the 'new internationalist family' that often derives from the links established between genealogists of different nationalities but shared 'British ancestry', hold periodic reunions and maintain the imagined community via a family newsletter.

twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Thus ‘visualising kinship in the form of a genealogical diagram reflects the limits of a specific ideological consciousness, marking the conceptual points beyond which consciousness cannot go, and between which it is condemned to oscillate’.¹⁶³ When the competing post-plural definitions hidden beneath the contested term ‘family’ impinge on this primordialism, therefore, a dilemma is encountered (as witnessed in Michael Armstrong’s dilemmas over how to reconcile surrogacy and adoption to a family tree) whereby an awkward attempt is made to bend the rules. This is absolutely necessary as to assert the inadequacy of the family tree would remove the primordial site that permits the bursting in of ascribed identity and reflexive instrumentality upon each other.¹⁶⁴ The ‘oscillation’ between these two poles of roots practice outlined above would lose its magnetic appeal in offering the hope of answers to a postplural sense of ‘lack’.

As Strathern notes, however, the context of this sense of ‘lack’ is one in which increased cultural variation and differentiation are perceived to lie ahead, an ever more fragmented future as compared to the ever more communal (and distant) past. ‘To be new is to be different. Time increases complexity; complexity in turn implies a multiplicity or plurality of viewpoints’.¹⁶⁵ As such, it is crucial to point out that the site of family history is not just the (primordial) family – it is the locating of the primordial family as ever further into the domain of the dead (or dying) ancestors. In his or her attempt to resolve their dilemmas regarding the family lived *with* they can come to spend more time resuscitating the dead in the archives as family lived *by*. When Marjorie Leigh-Dugmore wrote in 1974 that genealogy ‘is a summer pursuit when visiting my daughter now resident in her great-great-grandparents County [of Suffolk]’, one wonders who Marjorie was really visiting and to what

¹⁶³ Bouquet, *Family Trees and their Affinities*, p. 44.

¹⁶⁴ Perhaps this is why Poliakov chose the title *Perfect Strangers* – genealogy as the meeting site for the certain/primordial/known and the diverse/instrumental/alooof.

¹⁶⁵ Strathern, *After Nature*, p. 21.

extent her daughter knew or cared that she had moved to an 'ancestral county'.¹⁶⁶ As John Gillis writes, 'it is not only the living but the dead who, in the absence of cosmic and communal icons, are pressed into service as families to live *by*'.¹⁶⁷ It is to an exploration of the resurrective practices peculiar to family history that we now turn.

¹⁶⁶ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 13.

¹⁶⁷ Gillis, *A World of their Own Making*, p. xix.

“Dead and All But Forgotten”:
Resurrective Practice, Family History
and (Im)mortality in Post-Christian Britain

“But avoid foolish speculations, and those genealogies... – they are useless and futile” (*Titus* 3: 9)

“Human beings look separate because you see them walking around separately. But then we are so made that we can only see the present moment. If we could see the past, then of course it would look different. For there was a time when every man was part of his mother and (earlier still) part of his father as well: and when they were part of his grandparents. If you could see humanity spread out in time, as God sees it, it would not look like a lot of separate things dotted about. It would look like one single growing thing – rather like a very complicated tree. Every individual would appear connected with every other” (C.S. Lewis, 1952)

‘Down with this post-modern cult of necromancy and ancestor worship’ spat Mick Hume in his column in *The Times* in December 2004.¹ ‘Every society in the world worships its ancestors to a degree, and there is something quasi-religious in the way that the modern DIY genealogist sifts through the archives for his ancestral bones,’ commented Ben MacIntyre in the same paper six months later.² Referring to family history as a form of ancestor worship has become commonplace amongst commentators in the early twenty-first century, yet it simplifies and condenses many intriguing questions relating to ‘the phenomenon’. Historians have been more nuanced in their consideration of how the majority of genealogical practice consists of a feverish fascination with the lives of the dead. The ‘resurrectionism’ that Raphael Samuel so vividly described as one of the most striking cultural shifts of the post-war era (and which other scholars have debated in terms of a ‘heritage crusade’) evokes a ‘historicist turn’ in British national life towards the preservation

¹ Mick Hume, ‘Root Around For Your Family Tree If You Must, But Then Get Your Own Life’, *The Times*, (17 December 2004), <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,1054-1405956,00.html>> (accessed 17 December 2004).

² Ben MacIntyre, ‘Myfamilyandotherweirdos.com’, *The Times*, (11 June 2005), <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,1068-1649516,00.html>> (accessed 11 June 2005).

of the dead and dying in a wide variety of forms.³ From Ironbridge to railway preservation mania, proliferating anniversary celebrations, the historicization of towns and the vast metaphorical extension of the notion of ‘heritage’, from pop memorabilia to the National Trust, New Ageism, the museums movement and Le Creuset kitchenware, Samuel paints a remarkably varied picture of a British nation furiously resurrecting and preserving, keeping alive as much of the past as it can.⁴ Importantly, the obsession of family historians with the intimacies of the lives of their ancestors sits happily alongside these activities and practices in Samuel’s understanding of resurrectionism – not so much ancestor worship as ancestor preservation.

Indeed, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, much genealogical practice in the late twentieth century has centred on recording the births, marriages and deaths of past generations in constructing present identities and addressing a sense of lack amongst those who believe that to know themselves, they must also know their deceased ancestors. These resurrective practices have reanimated these bygone worlds by bringing them into the present where ancestors may, symbolically at least, live again, furnishing and constructing identities in the present and projecting them into the future. However, when we focus more closely upon the resurrective *practices* of family historians, we encounter some intriguing and quite unexpected themes and issues relating to death, some explicit, but many frustratingly implicit. This chapter explores this shadowy territory as, because genealogists spend so much time with the dead in their genealogical undertakings, one might expect that studying their practices and their comments about this to shed some light on a wide range of questions.

³ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory. Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, (London and New York, 1994); David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (London, 1996). See also: John Arnold, K. Davies and Simon Ditchfield (eds.), *History and Heritage: Consuming the Past in Contemporary Culture* (Donhead St Mary, 1998); Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York, 1998); Michael Hunter (ed.), *Preserving the Past: The Rise of Heritage in Modern Britain* (Stroud, 1996); Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London, 1987); Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London, 1985).

⁴ Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, p. 139-168.

How have British people (and those with British ancestry) in the latter half of the twentieth century understood their position in time, and their relation to their newly resurrected familial past? And, especially, what significance do they have in relation to existential questions, concerns about mortality and one's stage in a 'life cycle'?

Whilst 'a very high proportion' of respondents to a *Family Tree Magazine* survey in 1986 answered that their interest in family history was sparked 'after the death of a relative',⁵ and other scholars have similarly noted the importance of such events,⁶ rarely does a family historian state that he or she is intending, through family history, to resurrect the dead (symbolically or otherwise), to address questions of their own looming mortality or fears of being soon forgotten. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century their remarks in this regard are far more ambiguous and indirect. Consider the following comment, made by John Abbott as he reflected on his feverish genealogical enthusiasm in the early 1970s: 'I wanted to know about the lives, however humble and uneventful, of those people to whose existence I owed my own... Three of my four grandparents I had known well, although they all died before I had begun my search and I shall regret to my dying day that I did not listen to them more attentively or ask more probing questions'.⁷ This is entirely typical, and is echoed in a remarkably large number of the accounts of family historians in the 1970s and 1980s that I have examined.

⁵ 'Our Questions... Your Answers', *Family Tree Magazine*, 2(5) (July-August 1986), p. 5. This provided the most common answer to the question of what sparked interest.

⁶ Paul Basu has noted in the responses to his questionnaires by roots tourists with British ancestry in the 1990s that interest in family history began mostly in maturity, provoked by factors such as caring for elderly parents, the death of parents or grandparents, and regret at taking family history knowledge for granted before older relatives died. Paul Basu, 'Homecomings: Genealogy, Heritage Tourism and Identity in the Scottish Highland Diaspora' (Unpublished PhD thesis. University of London, 2002), p. 49. Ronald Lambert similarly found that one quarter of his sample of Canadian genealogists admitted that they were first drawn to the pastime during periods of mourning. Interestingly, 'they routinely mentioned the experience of sorting through and disposing of deceased relatives' possessions, especially photographs and documents, as influential'. Ronald Lambert, 'Constructing Symbolic Ancestry: Befriending Time, Confronting Death', *Omega: A Journal of Death and Dying*, 46 (4) (2003), p. 314. See also: Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade*, p. 36.

⁷ John P. Abbott, *Family Patterns: A Personal Experience of Genealogy* (London, 1971), p. 11-13.

The two volumes of the Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry's *Personally Speaking ~ About This Ancestry Business*, printed by the Society in 1974 and 1981, provide a unique insight into this, as members reflected on their experiences of family history and on why they were participating in genealogical research. In 1974, one hundred and thirty-one (many of them foundational) members contributed such accounts, whilst the volume published in 1981 provided another fifty-six valuable reflections. Time and time again, deep regret is expressed at not having asked an older relative for genealogical information before he or she died, or annoyance at the forebear's lack of foresight in passing it on before they themselves passed on. 'I am filled with regret that when I was young I was so lacking in curiosity about my family history. There were many I could have asked – and now it is too late!' bemoaned Muriel Mildenhall, then in her seventies.⁸ Ian Swinnerton, of a similar age and Society President, was more fortunate because, whilst as yet uninterested in family history: 'my great-uncle, who was the head of the family, took me on one side and for nearly two hours regaled me with the history of our branch of the family. Six weeks later, very suddenly and unexpectedly, he died. Coincidence? Premonition? I shall never know but I do know that I shall be forever grateful to him'.⁹

Premonition or not, Swinnerton's encounter was certainly not the norm, as numerous other examples like that of Muriel Mildenhall serve to demonstrate. Why, oh why, did we not ask our elders all about the genealogical past before they died? Why is it only now, when it is too late, that I think to ask? Interestingly, these family historians do not attempt to answer such questions – they just express regret at not gleaning the information (as opposed to regret at the actual death) *ad infinitum*. The closest anyone came to providing an answer in the Birmingham Society accounts was President Swinnerton, perhaps because of the

⁸ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking ~ About This Ancestry Business. Members of the Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry Recount Their Genealogical Adventures* (Birmingham, 1974), 47.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

fortuitousness of his encounter with his great-uncle, and his intriguing, yet joking, suggestion that perhaps this was some sort of mysterious premonition on the part of a man facing up to his own mortality. Nonetheless, what unites his example with the many others that were not so fortunate is that, not only did genealogical research begin for most in the Birmingham Society in the 1970s and 1980s as they entered the 'Third Age',¹⁰ but that the death of a close family member often coincided with the spark of interest. Of the contributors in 1981, for instance, over half had lost one or both parents in the preceding decade, and only 16% still had both parents alive. Indeed, of the latter, the majority had lost grandparents in the previous few years.¹¹ Not all reflected on these losses (which is unsurprising considering that they are providing accounts of their genealogical adventures), but some comments made in passing are revealing. William Peplow, for instance, also then in his seventies, provided the following account, which is worth quoting at length:

How often one regrets that information which could have been transmitted by word of mouth is missing because one's immediate forebears had no interest in family history. My father died in 1963 aged 99. In 1894 he rode a penny-farthing bicycle from Stowbridge to Shifnal in Shropshire to attend his grandfather William Peplow's 100th birthday. Personal contact with a man born in 1794 who served in the 90th Foot in Ireland and married in Armagh in 1815. A man who at his centenary had a family of 151 (13 children, 58 grandchildren, 77 great-grandchildren and 2 great-great-grandchildren). What information might have been gleaned! And yet my father did not know where his grandfather was born, even the names of his 10 daughters and whom they had married.¹²

Crucially, Peplow thus began his searches shortly after his father's death, becoming an early family history society member in a bid to discover what had not otherwise been forthcoming. He soon came across the information about the 100th birthday celebrations in local newspaper records and thus established his link to the eighteenth century. He then began to find out about the lives of that multitude of ancestors who in his view he should have been told about

¹⁰ Peter Laslett, *A Fresh Map of Life: The Emergence of the Third Age* (Basingstoke, 1996), second edition. For critical discussion of this concept in relation to family historians, see Chapter 2 above.

¹¹ Compiled from Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking ~ Again*.

¹² Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 29.

and been able to remember without needing to become a genealogist (although his evident enthusiasm for searching does suggest that he is, nonetheless, quite content with his newfound passion). In place of the joyful transmission of information between generations experienced by Swinnerton, then, Peplow, it seems – like so many others – found himself motivated to genealogical research when left with the deafening silence emanating from his father's grave.

Recent familial deaths are only mentioned in passing by all of the examples discussed thus far – Abbot's grandparents, Swinnerton's great-uncle, Peplow's father – yet their coincidence with regret at not having asked for information before they died is compelling. Did the new interest in genealogy amongst seventy-something members of the Birmingham Society in the 1970s and 1980s arise as a result of the experience of close familial death amongst family historians in these early decades of the massive growth in genealogical practice? Could family history be seen as some sort of a response to losing parents and grandparents, a stage in a life cycle at which practitioners discover at the funerals and thereafter, as they grieve and reflect, that they are now the oldest generation, with one foot in the grave themselves? Is their uncertainty about such a death glimpsed obliquely by their regret at the fact that their relatives have died without passing on much information about – and thus forgetting and consigning partly to oblivion – the generations that only they could remember?

These are thorny questions to address, particularly when we consider that mortality is rarely addressed explicitly by family historians in this era. One way in which we can begin to understand these questions a little more is, again, provided by the Birmingham Society material, as alongside the accounts reflecting on family history interest a rudimentary 'work-in-progress' family tree was provided, to demonstrate to other society members the extent of research done up to that point. Much is made of the fact that, perhaps due to the lack of genealogical conversations before the deaths of close relatives, little has been achieved.

Frederick Markwell, for instance, remarked: ‘The Markwell family tree as shown looks singularly unimpressive after five years of research – no sign yet of completing those 32 great-great-grandparents’.¹³ More relevant to the present discussion, however, is not these more distant generations and how far back into the past a family historian has got, but, paradoxically, the dates of the practitioner’s own birth (and marriage), and the deaths of close relatives such as spouse, mother, father and grandparents.

It is intriguing to note that many had lost close relatives in the years just prior to their interest in family history. As we have seen, this was true for over half of those contributing in 1981, and similarly 58% had lost parents or grandparents in the previous decade in 1974.¹⁴ John Young lost his father in 1973, Gladys Reeves lost hers in 1971, whilst Jeffery Gee also lost his mother in 1971, Angela Adams lost hers in 1966, Barry Jones lost his the same year and so on.¹⁵ Only one society member contributing to the 1974 volume had both parents still alive and had not lost most of their grandparents (the latter providing an equally significant wall of silence if, as we have seen, some parents were apparently not eager to talk about their ancestral past, or simply did not know much about their own grandparents). The death of grandparents and parents, in the case of some members who remarked upon when they began

¹³ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁴ Data compiled from Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*. Seven entries were lacking in sufficient data to include in calculations. The deaths of spouses, aunts and uncles may shed further light to those recently deceased, especially as their deaths are mentioned in passing by a couple of practitioners, although unfortunately data on them is not included. ‘I became interested in family history about 18 months ago when on the death of an uncle I realised that apart from my children and three cousins I did not know any existing blood relations’ remarked Norman Gardiner. Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking ~ Again*, 28. Henry Gowers, meanwhile, began on the death of his sister. Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 67. Nor can we be sure about how many were prompted to consider their ancestry upon becoming parents or grandparents. Dan Waddell, for instance, introduced the guidebook to accompany *Who Do You Think You Are?* thus: ‘Last year I became a father for the first time. I was not too bothered about the sex of my child before the birth, but when I discovered it was a boy I realised this guaranteed that my family name, Waddell, would continue for at least another generation. To my surprise I found satisfaction in this, pride even. Then I wondered why; it was just a name, after all, and before my son’s birth my interest in family history had been negligible, to put it mildly. I started to think of my father’s past, and the path that had led to the present’. Dan Waddell, *Who Do You Think You Are? The Essential Guide to Tracing your Family History*, (London, 2004), p. 8-9

¹⁵ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 24, 88, 55, 7, 16, 38. See also 49, 63, 68, 69, 75, 83 etc.

researching, intriguingly had recently lost close relatives. Sydney Swain, for example, was inspired to drop in at his local library at West Bromwich one Saturday morning ‘armed with the flimsiest of information’ in the immediate aftermath of the death of his father, in 1972.¹⁶

‘It was in September 1971 I decided to trace my ancestry’ wrote Malcolm Partridge.

According to his family tree, both of his parents were still alive at that point, but the tree also reveals that his paternal grandfather, James Partridge, had died in 1971 – the year to which Malcolm precisely dates his decision to trace his ancestry. Whilst making no mention of this event as a motivating force, other remarks about his search are revealing. Initially, Malcolm resolved to trace both his father’s father’s and mother’s father’s lines, but it seems that his interest soon turned towards the line of his recently deceased paternal grandfather. ‘The first information came from my father’, Malcolm went on – ‘he told me his father was born at Handsworth in 1879, he married Agnes Willis in 1898. All he could remember about my great grandfather was that he married Eliza Guest, but didn’t know the date’.¹⁷ We can thus reasonably assume that, filled with questions at the death of his grandfather, like the other examples cited above, Malcolm turned to his father to learn more about him, and about the almost forgotten generation that came before that. Again, as was the case for William Peplow, the parent of the budding genealogist showed frustratingly little interest. Malcolm Partridge’s father did not know when his own paternal grandfather was born, married or died. Malcolm’s interest in his deceased grandfather James was just not apparent when, a generation earlier, his father when he lost his own grandfather. Now – as his father does not know and James Partridge has just died – there is no way of finding out about him other than through searching the records. Indeed, James was the last of Malcolm’s four grandparents to die. With him, the very means of remembering the past died.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 45. Many other examples of this scenario can be given. See for instance: 55, 56, 59, 88, 91 etc.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

Was Malcolm's age and stage of life typical? As we have seen in Chapter 2, at least 61% (and probably more) of the Birmingham Society membership contributing to the volume in 1974 were aged over 50, and thus do fit the stereotype of the greying ancestor hunter,¹⁸ taking up the trail into the familial past as they became, as it were, 'orphaned' just as the years of retirement yawned before them. And yet, there are clearly exceptions. Malcolm, for instance, does not fit the model of a retired person, with time on their hands and a new concern about mortality emerging upon the death of their parents. His father would fit that description, had he taken up the pursuit, and yet he was uninterested in remembering the details of those that had gone before him. For Malcolm, the imperative to research appeared, like a wide age range of other society members, after the last member of an older generation has passed away, yet it was not simply because he was suddenly worried that he would be the next to go – rather that those who had gone have nobody to remember them.

We should thus be cautious about reaching overly deterministic and schematic conclusions about family history as a 'stage of the life cycle' or a characteristic of the 'Third Age'. To reach an understanding of what is going on with those who do not fit this categorisation, such as Malcolm Partridge, we must explore how family history interest relates not just to the history of leisure and attitudes to the past, but to attitudes to death and the dead, to mortality and changing understandings of the meanings of human life, and indirectly to the history of religion and secularisation. Does, then, any link to organised religion exist? Do variations in religious practice and attitudes to the dead encountered in family history practice exist throughout the second half of the twentieth century, and between British practitioners and those from overseas with British ancestry? Does the finding of meanings through resurrective practices coincide more with the 'family history' or 'genealogical' pole of identity construction discussed in Chapter 5? Do reflections upon existential questions and mortality emerge from the practice, or do such practices in

¹⁸ In addition to this it must be pointed out that practitioners also seem to come from a predominantly white, Judeo-Christian background, as suggested in Chapter 2.

themselves provide strategies for immortality without making such reflection necessary? It is to these questions that we now turn.

Part of the explanation as to why so many members of the Birmingham Society expressed regret at not having spoken to recently deceased relatives about genealogical information and yet do not refer at all to their grief or concerns about their own mortality lie in wider attitudes to death in the modern period, and later twentieth century in particular.¹⁹ Philippe Ariès famously contrasted the simplicity of the ‘tamed death’ of the Middle Ages (ritualised, in bed, with priest, family and even strangers present, involving no great fear, theatrics or intense emotion as the dying person was guided into a new, but comprehensible state) with the ‘wild death’ of western modernity as the survivor’s grief came to take precedence over the dying person’s dying a ‘good death’. The modern ‘wild death’, Ariès argued, is and has been characterised by a sense of frightfulness, as the unacceptable separation from a loved one, leading to an increasing elaboration of cemeteries and visits in the nineteenth century (‘wild death’ as exaltation of the dead) and the later sense of death as unnameable and taboo, funerals and grief as private affairs (‘wild death’ as culturally unutterable).²⁰ Arguably, the silence on the subject of the death of family members by family historians is part of this taboo, and the concern not to allow ancestors to be forgotten reflects more on practitioners’ struggle to comprehend death than upon their relationship with those ancestors themselves. That would certainly explain why much genealogical practice

¹⁹ Whilst, of course, the collection was not a forum for textual mourning, it was nonetheless put together as a ‘living biography’ of members who seemingly found a significance in their genealogical activities *itself* worthy of preserving. This, again, hints at an unspoken concern with mortality in the family historian that is projected into the past.

²⁰ Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes Towards Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (Baltimore, 1974), translated by P. M. Ranum; *The Hour of Our Death* (London, 1981), translated by H. Weaver. The history of attitudes to death is, of course, more complex than I am able to address here, and I draw on Ariès’s categories only as ideal types. For alternatives to and further development of Ariès’s ideas, see: Ralph A. Houlbrooke (ed.), *Death, Ritual and Bereavement* (London, 1989); Ralph A. Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480-1750* (Oxford, 1998); David Clark (ed.), *The Sociology of Death: Theory, Culture, Practice* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA, 1993). On modern death, see: P. Jupp and G. Howarth (eds.), *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal* (Basingstoke, 1997); Julie Rugg, ‘From Reason to Regulation: 1760-1850’, in P. Jupp and C. Gittings (eds.), *Death in England: An Illustrated History* (Manchester, 1999).

amongst the members of the Birmingham Society discussed above began after a close familial death and why the loss of information, as opposed to loss of relative, is what was emphasised. After all, once genealogical research has proceeded beyond a couple of generations, there is increasingly little possibility of any personal knowledge of the forebear in question.

Following Ariès' line of thought, John Gillis has pointed out that the modern notion of the lifetime (or 'chronotype') is that of 'a vector of time divided into a series of distinct ages that occur at standardised intervals and in the same sequence in the life of every person' such that the older one becomes, the closer death seems. In the Middle Ages, by contrast, death was far more common and unexpected, seen to come not at the end of a biological 'life-cycle' but potentially at any moment, as much to the young as the old. As it was understood in religious terms and with a communal chronotype that did not individualise the life-span, 'they accepted mortality and could imagine an immortality beyond time itself, while we, unable to accept mortality, have substituted longevity for eternity'.²¹

The fact that most family historians (and this is true beyond the Birmingham Society of the 1970s and 1980s) conduct their research in their retirement or 'third age' is suggestive in that it is conducted in that part of the modern 'life cycle' that comes before death, yet which lacks communal institutions to comprehend the approaching mortality. Perhaps the closer one comes to the end of that cycle in the late twentieth century, the more pertinent such questions become (as well as coinciding with the greater amount of leisure time

²¹ John Gillis, *A World of their Own Making: A History of Myth and Ritual in Family Life* (Oxford, 1997), p. 42. This does not mean that the 'medieval' period is seen by Gillis to have ended in the 1950s, however. Rather, a complex development in the history of attitudes to death has unfolded throughout the period which Gillis explores, with many nuances. Nevertheless, as a distinction intended to provide a greater understanding of contemporary culture by drawing a comparison with a distinct 'other', Gillis' distinction remains helpful, particularly in light of a collapse in Christian discourse dating from the late-1960s and 1970s discussed below in a British context, with comparative North American material in which, again, no overly simplistic comparisons should be drawn.

provided by retirement) as the large number of genealogists aged 50 or over suggests.²² As we have seen, however, remembering and recording the ancestors is of paramount importance in the resurrective practices of family history not only for those approaching death, but also for those at an earlier stage of the modern life-cycle, when (if we were to construct a schematic, life-cycle-based view of these themes) mortality may be less of a concern such that no genealogical interest would be expected among the middle-aged or semi-retired. Thus, even when cultural anxieties about mortality, the murmurs of anxiety that constitute 'the wild death' of modernity, are less pronounced among the young, without recourse to the eternal upon the occasion of the death of relatives who have reached the end of the modern line, family history can still become a key site for stopping the dead from being forgotten by resurrective genealogy and the creative production of family trees, books and websites. We can therefore have it both ways: elderly genealogists approaching the wide gate of mortality turn all the more to memorialise the dead, yet the young may be inspired to do so too when they encounter it in older relatives because the common factor is mindfulness of, not just nearness to, wild death. That more do so when older is thus partly a matter of leisure time, partly a closeness to anxiety over taboo death, yet a common (lack of) understanding of mortality unites all practitioners.

But is all this reading too much between the lines? Do family historians and genealogists really have such anxieties about death, and if they do not state this, how can we know for certain? Is such a dichotomy between the communal, religious past and the individualistic, modern present too simplistic? To answer such questions it is useful to range more widely than the Birmingham material, to establish a picture of the relationship between family history and organised religion in the later twentieth century – and any such discussion has to begin with the Mormons. As we have seen in Chapter 1 and 2, the Church of Latter-day Saints has been responsible for the collection of genealogical information on over 2

²² Indeed, it is interesting in this regard to point out that members of local history societies are also often predominantly aged over 50 years.

billion individuals (1 in 10 of all humans that have ever lived), as the beliefs of the church lead members to seek and preserve such records for family ancestors to establish a lineal connection to them, for the purposes of their salvation through a 'baptism of the dead'. Whether one is alive or dead makes little difference, as in Mormon theology all wait in the spirit world for the Millennium to come. *Mormon Doctrine* states that 'genealogical research may be performed for those who have died without knowledge of the gospel, but who presumably would have received it had the opportunity come to them'.²³ With Mormonism, then, the salvation of mankind enters the realm of genealogy and an idiosyncratic relationship between religious practice, eternity and genealogy has developed. Mormons reject purgatory, yet the genealogical prayers of the living still echo in eternity. Even Roman Catholic saints have been baptised, including Ss. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Francis of Assisi and Joan of Arc (fourteen times).²⁴ As Julia Watson has explained, 'they get a second and eternal life through baptism and other rituals that bring them into what the Mormons see as the true Church of Jesus Christ'.²⁵ Those that are not related to practicing Mormons are seen as 'lost', but are nonetheless recorded and made available to other genealogical searchers.

This is the point at which the relevance of genealogical 'information' for a non-Mormon searcher would seem to be sharply distinguished from that of a dedicated Smithian. The labours of Mormons have simply helped those non-Mormon members of, say, the Birmingham Society since the late 1960s only in so far as they provided easily consultable microfilm records and the I.G.I. 'Thank heavens for people like the Mormon church which is willing to help without demanding something in return' wrote Brian Austin in *Family Tree*

²³ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, 1966, second edition), p. 308-9.

²⁴ Vern Anderson, 'Dead or Alive, Mormons Want Everyone Baptised', *Missoulian*, April 30, 1994, A-5.

²⁵ Julia Watson, 'Ordering the Family: Genealogy as Autobiographical Pedigree', in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (eds.), *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography* (Minneapolis and London, 1996), p. 305-6.

Magazine in 1985.²⁶ As the church's members are predominantly North American, the belief system is rarely remarked upon by British practitioners, seen as idiosyncratic at best.

Raphael Samuel refers to the Mormon enterprise as a 'bizarre databank'.²⁷ Nonetheless, in the case of both North American Mormons and British family history society members in the mid-1970s alike, there seems to be a shared significance attached to the recollection and recording of the genealogical information of the dead that relates to existential questions and mortality. One group envisages the dead entering eternity by retrospective conversion, whilst the other (in the absence of any notion of eternity or immortality) is stirred by anxieties that the dead should not be 'lost' by being forgotten, thus extending their longevity to the greatest extent this side of eternity, even beyond the grave, by refusing to forget them. 'Nearly all my researches have been into my Sprawson line and I have shamefully neglected my other forebears, something I must change' remarked Eric Sprawson, for example.²⁸

What, then, are we to make of this seeming dividing line between 'religious' and 'non-religious' genealogical practitioners? For one thing, little mention of religiosity is made by family historians.²⁹ Both Mormon genealogists and non-Mormon, non-religious British practitioners in the late twentieth century, however, have come to envisage an 'ultimate', somehow transcendent, genealogy of mankind. The fact that 'the Creator has the master list' has not stopped the endeavours of Mormons to catalogue humanity.³⁰ Nor has it stopped them making their climate-controlled genealogical repository – the so-called 'mountain of

²⁶ *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(4) (May-June 1985), p. 28.

²⁷ Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, p. 27.

²⁸ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 76.

²⁹ The stipulation for membership of the Catholic Family History Society, for example, is not practicing Catholicism but tracing Catholic ancestry – the practices of which constitute the society's activities. See: Catholic Family History Society, *Catholic Ancestor*; *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(1) (November-December 1984), p. 20.

³⁰ Anderson, 'Dead or Alive'.

names' – from being able to withstand the detonation of a nuclear bomb.³¹ Meanwhile, in the later twentieth century, such projects have begun to become conceivable for non-Mormon genealogists. *Family Tree Maker*, a leading genealogical software program, for instance, began the 'World Family Tree Project' in the late 1990s so that users of the software, and of the *Ancestry.com* website, could submit their research and so contribute to the creation of an interlocking family tree of humanity. As Catherine Nash has noted, such efforts provide a strange counterpoint to the genetic researchers who contemporaneously hurried to map out 'life itself' in the Human Genome Project.³² In contrast to Mormon belief, however, the 'master list' of mankind is thus not held by the Creator, but by the genealogist, just as the manual of human function lies in the hand of the geneticist.³³

In practice, however, dichotomies between a Mormon and secular-genealogical family tree of humanity are not so apparent, as the endeavour of compiling every recorded human name without recourse to Mormon efforts would be nonsensical. Furthermore, the World Family Tree Project is principally a web space providing the opportunity for genealogists to 'connect' their researches with others, to pool and share information. That *Family Tree Maker* software must be bought to this end is a major commercial hurdle, and in practice, most online genealogists in the late 1990s and early twenty-first century make use of the *Ancestry.com* website alongside the Mormon counterpart at *FamilySearch.org*, as well

³¹ Alex Shoumatoff, *The Mountain of Names: A History of the Human Family* (New York, Tokyo and London, 1985), p. 253, p. 289.

³² Catherine Nash, 'Genealogical Identities', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 20 (2002), p. 27-28.

³³ Evelyn Fox Keller has argued that mapping the genome provided the high point of the genetic determinism of the 'century of the gene', as it was envisaged by geneticists that the 'Holy Grail' was simply to hold humanity's manual on a CD in the palm of the hand (thus taking it out of God's). As we have seen in Chapter 5, this genetic determinism has played a very significant part in the understandings of genealogical identities on both sides of the Atlantic as the century of the gene reached its end. The 'mapping' of recent Western humanity's genealogy in the World Family Tree Project can, thus, itself become quasi-religious, providing a secularist 'immortality' like that of the gene which, to the genetic determinist, exists as 'an inherently stable, potentially immortal, unit that could be transferred intact through the generations'. Evelyn Fox Keller, *The Century of the Gene* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2000), p. 6-7, p. 14.

as *GenesReunited.com*.³⁴ The success of the latter exemplifies the nature of this online practice: ‘connecting relations and generations has never been so simple’.³⁵ Building a ‘tree of life’ that connects and contains all existing genealogical information is, Mormons aside, only a pipe-dream pondered in passing by practitioners enthused by their interest in their own family, and realising that others exist who are researching branches that overlap.

This attitude emerged predominantly from the internet genealogy of the 1990s and was not mentioned, for instance, by members of the Birmingham Society in 1974 or 1981. Online newsgroups give us a glimpse of how visions of a ‘tree of life’ emerge from the increasing number of genealogical connections being made with overseas researchers with British ancestry. A South African genealogist, for instance, asked: ‘Is there an open, public family tree/diagram website to which anyone can contribute? Wouldn’t it be great if there was a collaborative and open/free site which would have a world family tree for all to use. I suggest we put Adam and Eve at the top (with accommodation space for other opinions of course) and many blank entries below them for whoever, then everyone else’s entries until the present’.³⁶ However, such ideas spring particularly from the desire to make genealogical research as widely available to others as possible, which is actually a more common desire expressed by *fin de siècle* online genealogists than compiling a ‘tree of life’.

‘I am interested in making my family history publicly accessible on the web’ remarked one British family historian: ‘Ideally, I would like a main page that shows family relationships graphically. Each individual’s name can be hyperlinked to a page with information about that individual, including vitals, pictures, documents, and some great

³⁴ The first attempt at placing genealogical data in a standardised software format was the Mormon ‘Personal Ancestry File’, introduced in 1987. This was adopted by many of the major genealogical database programs in the early 1990s and thus paved the way for the World Family Tree Project, yet which at the same time allowed genealogists to use many different source websites and software in their efforts. See: E. Powell Crowe, *Genealogy Online: Researching your Roots* (New York, 1995), p. 26, p. 31-32.

³⁵ Genes Reunited, ‘Family Tree • Genealogy • Ancestor • Ancestry • Family History’, (2006), <www.genesreunited.co.uk> (accessed 17 May 2006).

³⁶ Anon, (6 January 2004), ‘Is there an open, public family tree/diagram website to which anyone can contribute?’ in *alt.genealogy* [Usenet], (accessed 13 January 2004).

anecdotal information about some of them that my grandparents gave me.’³⁷ What is important for him/her is clearly, as it was with the Birmingham Society members, remembering and preserving as much as possible about individual ancestors (both genealogical ‘vital statistics’ and family historical biographical information). This consequently prevents the unthinkable second death of forgetting by using the technology most likely to give the dead the greatest possible ‘longevity’ this side of eternity. Indeed, rather than compiling a static, ‘complete’ genealogy of humanity, as we have seen in Chapter 5, genealogies are perpetually unfinished, and this reflexively self-constructed aspect of genealogical practice has flourished in the generation of websites. For instance, in the Society of Genealogists’ magazine *Computers in Genealogy* in 2000, professional-amateur J. Bending stated a preference for ‘the principle of one permanent URL for an individual... [as] ephemeral URLs are a major drawback of the Web, since it is possible that a minor child may, after research, become a major individual requiring his own page with its own URL’.³⁸ This can, in turn, give rise to establishing links to other family history websites, where research with other genealogists’ labours overlap,³⁹ however the primary emphasis is on the safe recording and availability of the data. ‘I have a database of about 1,400 names recorded in Family Tree Maker 11’ wrote an Australian genealogist in a newsgroup in 2003,⁴⁰ while Bending’s own staggeringly extensive site contained 40,000 links between index pages and relative’s personal information details when he published his article recommending this already widespread practice to others in 2001.⁴¹ As Paul Basu has noted, the open-ended

³⁷ Joe F., (24 January 2004), ‘Putting a family tree online’ in *alt.genealogy* [Usenet], (accessed 3 February 2004).

³⁸ J. Bending, ‘Thoughts on the Presentation of Information on the Web’, *Computers in Genealogy*, 7(3) (September 2000), p. 117.

³⁹ See: *Ibid.*, p. 118.

⁴⁰ jackgru, (4 December 2003), ‘Suggestions Appreciated’ in *soc.genealogy.australia+nz* [Usenet], (accessed 17 December 2003).

⁴¹ J. Bending, ‘The Final Development of a Family History Website’, *Computers in Genealogy*, 7(5/6) (March/June 2001), p. 241-42.

nature of the genealogical research process, in which the narrative of the family is perpetually evolving (both backwards in time with every new discovery and forwards with new births, marriages, deaths and reunions), means that it is particularly well-suited to being told via the internet. As such, many researchers-come-web-designers thus proclaim that their sites are ‘works in progress’, with labels and links announcing the addition of new features and details of the latest updates.⁴² The ever-evolving nature of the genealogical homepage is thus also the perfect memory machine.⁴³ As soon as a child is born, it can find its place on the perpetually unfinished family history homepage – its mortality already stretched to the horizon of the best technology on offer – a site of memorial not prone to the wind and rain of the centuries like gravestones.

How intriguing, then, that in the modern cemetery, family historians have felt quite at home searching for and recording the monumental inscriptions of gravestones. The emergence of family historians as a principal ‘user group’ of contemporary cemeteries is indeed related principally to their preservation as sources of information. As Doris Francis *et al* have recently pointed out, a deteriorating gravestone has become emblematic of the fragility of remembering, raising existential questions about the memorialisation of the dead.⁴⁴ This is not limited to Britain. L. Burge told the sixth Australasian congress on genealogy and heraldry in May 1991 about the Rockwood Cemetery project, of the Society of Australian Genealogists, begun in 1982: ‘From a group of 40 to 50 volunteers per “Picnic”, five members were given the permanent title of “Supervisor”. Each Supervisor was responsible for the team of 10 to 15 people who would be given pre-selected areas to transcribe’. And, of course, ‘at the end of the day, transcription sheets would be

⁴² Paul Basu, ‘Homecomings’, p. 116.

⁴³ Mary Douglas, ‘The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space’, in Arien Mack (ed.), *Home: A Place in the World* (New York, 1993) coins this term for the home itself.

⁴⁴ Doris Francis, Leonie Kellaheer and Georgina Neophytou, *The Secret Cemetery* (Oxford, 2003), p. 108-115. See also: Keith Snell, ‘Gravestones, Belonging and Local Attachment in England, 1700-2000’, *Past and Present*, 179 (2003).

collected...and I would enter the data into a computer...[to] capture for all time the great volume of information'.⁴⁵

The (re-)recording of such data from gravestones, to make the mortality of the dead as unforgettable as possible, in Britain and Australia alike has been widespread.⁴⁶ York Cemetery Trust is a good example of this, having compiled a surname index, listing of grave occupancies, memorial inscriptions, still-birth register, a grave photograph archive and cemetery maps.⁴⁷ The compiling of memorial inscriptions has not always been as systematic as this, however. Guidebooks frequently advise family historians to make every effort to locate relevant tombstones, even when information on the family is believed to be fairly complete. For instance, 'different surnames appearing on a stone may indicate married daughters or other relatives, and may be extremely valuable in clarifying identity and relationships'. Furthermore, 'people did tend to be buried near their relations, so whenever copying an inscription it is always worthwhile noting those on neighbouring tombstones'.⁴⁸ The unsuspecting dead may thus suddenly be resurrected so the perpetual light of genealogical memory shines upon them. Again, the emphasis is upon information, and no reference is made to the fact that this is a burial site of ancestors. Roger Bennett of the Birmingham Society, for instance, recounted his own excursion among the long churchyard grass: 'My main search is for details of my earliest known ancestor Ralph Bennett who I

⁴⁵ L. Burge, 'Rockwood Cemetery', in A. M. Bartlett (ed.), *Our Heritage in History: Papers of the Sixth Australasian Congress on Genealogy and Heraldry, Launceston, Tasmania, May 1991* (Launceston, 1991), p. 57-60.

⁴⁶ The Federation of Family History Societies, for example, launched a campaign to transcribe monumental inscriptions throughout Britain in the late 1970s. See: Don Steel, *Discovering Your Family History* (London, 1980), p. 122. Also, from the late 1960s until the early twenty-first century, for example, Sheila and John Mitchell have recorded the pre-1855 inscriptions and gravestones in eight counties in Central Scotland and published them in 12 volumes. See David Hey (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History* (Oxford, 1996), p. 206. Numerous local monumental transcriptions have become available through the family history societies, in pamphlet form. See: Federation of Family History Societies (Publications) Ltd., 'Welcome to GENfair', (2006), <www.ffhs.co.uk> (accessed 18 May 2006).

⁴⁷ York Cemetery Trust, 'Genealogy at York Cemetery', *York Cemetery*, (20 February 2006), <<http://www.yorkcemetery.co.uk>> (accessed 26 July 2006).

⁴⁸ Steel, *Discovering Your Family History*, p. 122.

believe to be the Ralph buried at Wolstanton in 1785. The register entry is tantalisingly brief, and a search of that wild churchyard did not reveal his tombstone, which I fear may be one of those laid face downwards to make paths'.⁴⁹ Poor old Ralph thus was not only gone, but lost – fearful stuff indeed. The ‘fear’ was, in other words, that Ralph was now beyond recording and remembering, such that Roger’s visit in 1974 to this once religious space – the intersection of the mortal and immortal – had shifted dramatically, indicating that whilst churchyards may be the site of religious burials, they do not necessarily constitute religious spaces in the late twentieth century. Perhaps Callum Brown’s notion of the cultural death of Christian Britain is helpful to this regard.⁵⁰

In any case, a more accurate description of a graveyard from the point of view of information-seeking genealogists would be a knowledge cache. Roger’s fellow society member Frederick Markwell demonstrates this tendency even more dramatically. On a day-trip to the church on the Holy Island of Lindisfarne, Frederick stumbled across a memorial tablet of an ancestor ‘that launched me on the “career” of genealogy which has now become a way of life and brought me so many friends... When I retire I really must try to set it all down if only for the sake of some future Markwell’.⁵¹ As such, it was not the church itself as a religious building, and the prayers that his ancestor evidently offered there, that inspired Frederick, increasingly mindful of his retirement, with a consolatory ‘way of life’, but the location of information about his ancestor that led to a tongue of fire coming to rest upon him. He did not seek to resurrect the religious practices to which the church memorial stone pointed, but to resurrect his ancestor Thomas Markwell himself, by recording the genealogical and biographical details of his life, to transmit to a future generation to keep alive indefinitely.

⁴⁹ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 20.

⁵⁰ Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000* (London and New York, 2001).

⁵¹ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 28.

We encounter an analogous re-reading of religious culture in late twentieth-century genealogists' use of family Bibles. For example, 'my father's sister helped by producing a family Bible of the Willis side of the family. Within its pages were listed my great grandparents, George Willis and Rebecca Cartwright with their eight children' wrote Malcolm Partridge who, we recall, was spurred into that search by the death of his father.⁵² R. J. Hetherington placed his 'beautifully inscribed Bible, signed by the Earl of Lichfield and presented to one who retired from the police force of Birmingham at the beginning of the century' in a 'small family museum', whilst finding the inscription of genealogical data in an uncle's old family Bible inspired Geoffrey Hitchman to begin his search, as it provided details of both his grandfather and great-grandfather.⁵³ Both demonstrate an emphasis upon preservation, not religiosity. Those who inscribed their own pedigree inside the front and back covers of a Bible did so as a kind of mimetic act upon the physical extremities of the very text that inspired their religious practice, thereby grafting themselves onto the Messiah's earthly ancestry going back to Adam. As Mary Bouquet notes, they are 'like the lists of names that are found in the Biblical text. The selection of one among the many possible recipients of The Text is analogous to the path leading from Adam to Christ'.⁵⁴

In any case, such religious practice is all a long way from the use that genealogists since the late 1960s found for old, forgotten Bibles. If, then, death is culturally

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 4, 41. There are numerous other examples. See, for instance: 49 and Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking ~ Again (About this Ancestry Business)* (Birmingham, 1981), 11, 22 etc.

⁵⁴ Mary Bouquet, 'Family Trees and Their Affinities: The Visual Imperative of the Genealogical Diagram', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 2(1) (March 1996), p. 48. Indeed, Herbert McCabe has demonstrated that St. Matthew's account of the genealogy of Christ aims to show that Jesus was tied into the squalid realities of human life and sex and politics, as the genealogy constitutes something of a rogue's gallery of ancestors, including prostitutes, murderers, liars etc. 'The moral is too obvious to labour' writes McCabe, 'Jesus did not belong to the nice clean world of Angela Macnamara or Mary Whitehouse, or to the honest, reasonable, sincere world of the *Observer* or the *Irish Times*, he belonged to a family of murderers, cheats, cowards, adulterers and liars'. Herbert McCabe OP, *God Matters* (London and New York, 1987), p. 249. It is this earthly descent that is thus echoed in the inscriptions in family Bibles – emphasising the sinful nature of both those earthly lives recounted in the pages and lived in the contemporary lives that sit in the margin (or, rather, the back cover) of the text.

incomprehensible and wild, why not turn to the pages of the Bible and organised religion itself? The efforts of an evangelical Christian to engage with, and possibly convert, some unsuspecting genealogists in an online newsgroup sheds some light on this question. 'Don't treat your ancestors as dead and gone. If they trusted God with their lives, they are with the Lord, and you will see them again. Take comfort in that' posted HisFriend in the *alt.genealogy* newsgroup in January 2004. He asked the genealogists using this newsgroup (who include practitioners from Britain, the US, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and elsewhere) to consider Matthew 22: 32: 'God is not the God of the dead, but of the living'.⁵⁵ In pointing to his belief in eternity (and thereby urging the comfort of what Ariès termed a more 'tamed' conception of death), HisFriend received quite a wide variety of responses, albeit with certain similar themes, making us move beyond arriving at an overly simplistic characterisation of modern genealogy as a homogenous, secularist response to the void of mortality, what Zygmunt Bauman calls that 'absolute, unimaginable other of being', the 'absolute nothing [that] makes no sense', 'the end of all perception'.⁵⁶

Some American practitioners, however, responded just as such a secularist characterisation might expect: 'PLEASE take your right wing stuff to alt.religion or alt.georgebush or whatever, and keep it out of a newsgroup that has no need for it! This is an informational group NOT a group for you to spew your holier than thou crap!'⁵⁷ The dividing line between the two understandings of immortality versus longevity by remembering, and religion versus information is thus very firmly reinforced by an American practitioner that is quite conscious of his considered position on such questions in a continent

⁵⁵ HisFriend, (9 January 2004), 'Your Ancestors are Alive' in *alt.genealogy* [Usenet], (accessed 13 January 2004).

⁵⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 2.

⁵⁷ Gerjunkie, (9 January 2004), 'Re: Your Ancestors are Alive' in *alt.genealogy* [Usenet], (accessed 13 January 2004).

of far greater religious practice and belief than Western Europe and Britain.⁵⁸ Stevie, a British family historian living in the post-Christian Britain of 2004, was a lot less certain in his response, however:

Well, I'm not sure about all the Bible stuff, but I *do* like to think that they're alive in *me*. Not only genetically, but you have to realize that part of their psychological make-up, their individual upbringing, their hopes and dreams, their whole way of seeing life has been carried down in varying degrees to you. The events in their lives and their reactions to them have had some impact on your life, even if you're not aware of it. You are the end result of their lives. If there is a God, and if there is an afterlife, I'll be looking forward to meeting these people who have somehow made such a difference in my life. I've got lots of questions for them.⁵⁹

In contrast to the secularist drawing of firm boundaries, Stevie is willing to accept the possibility that he may see his ancestors in the afterlife that in his view may or may not exist, yet which – if it does – would look the ultimate family reunion. As John Gillis has pointed out, an imaginary of heaven has become commonplace on both sides of the Atlantic in the twentieth century, whereby ‘God will be a personal character willing to be hugged, individuals will retain their personalities, families will reunite, and earthly activities will continue’.⁶⁰ In Stevie’s remarks the emphasis is really upon finally getting to find that genealogical and biographical information that he had struggled to find whilst on earth. God and the Bible are uncertainties that, at best, permit this reunion, however it seems that Stevie is ultimately more at ease with the extended longevity of ancestors mysteriously ‘living in him’, than of the eternity described by the Christ of St. John’s gospel: ‘I am in my Father and you in me and I in you’.⁶¹ The familial oneness Stevie describes is at once genetic, substantial, psychological, behavioural, experiential, cultural and, perhaps, spiritual. Events,

⁵⁸ See, for instance: Grace Davie, ‘American Activity: A Vibrant Religious Market’ in *Europe: The Exceptional Case: Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London, 2002), pp. 27-53.

⁵⁹ Stevie, (9 January 2004), ‘Re: Your Ancestors are Alive’ in *alt.genealogy* [Usenet], (accessed 13 January 2004).

⁶⁰ Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making*, p. 219.

⁶¹ *Jn* 14: 20.

traits and genes are passed on – a sort of essentialism that moves beyond genetic determinism to encompass a broader, holistic (and, might we say, New Age) sense of the family historian's dead ancestors being perpetuated in his earthly life, which provides the singular point to which all ancestral lives converge, bearing them onwards, ever increasing their longevity in the personhood and memory of the genealogist and, by implication, those that follow thereafter.

How vital, then, that the practitioner uncover and explore the lives of his forebears. Their attitudes, dispositions, appearance and experiences are, in this understanding, constitutive of his or her own, and to know them is thus to know thyself. This certainly helps us to understand another British newsgroup user's response to HisFriend's evangelism. f/fgorge wrote: 'This is a Genealogical help group and your information is not helpful! Your information is a statement that when we get to Heaven our ancestors will be waiting. If we can't find out who they are here on Earth while still alive it will be difficult to know who they are, unless they plan on introducing themselves... So knowing that and knowing that they will ALL be in Heaven is of no help in our earthly Genealogical research! I don't know about you but I am interested in finding these people BEFORE I die... If you can provide us with some concrete help in our Earthly research you are welcome to be here'.⁶²

The image of heaven in this practitioner's understanding is startling – again, a continuation of earth – but this time with no sense of transcendent communion. The individualism of family historian and ancestors persists to the extent that in the heavenly city, lives of different generations of ancestors would be conducted in eternal ignorance of one another's existence! The imperative to find these ancestors before the practitioner dies could not be greater – after all, the key to family history's resurrective practice – the 'information' on the lives of the deceased contained in archives, libraries and gravestones will no longer be available in the hereafter!

⁶² f/fgorge, (11 January 2004), 'Re: Your Ancestors are Alive' in *alt.genealogy* [Usenet], (accessed 13 January 2004).

For both Stevie and f/fgeorge, 'information' is raised up to quasi-divine proportions. On the one hand, it provides knowledge of one's self (the bearer and point of unity of all past generations), and on the other, it is the key to a fuller kingdom of heaven. As we have seen with regards to the use of family Bibles and gravestones, the information is the cornerstone of genealogical practice. To uncover it brings it out of the forgotten past (as no belief in the eternal memory of God persists) into the present and future of perpetual, indefinite remembering. The deposit of faith is now the genealogical data – the family historian (and his computer or 'family book') is the ark in which that deposit is carried. Another response to HisFriend by Peter Taylor, an Australian genealogist, underlines the point further: 'So what you are saying, HisFriend, is that we should all abandon our quest to learn about our family histories and wait until we die to be united? Sorry, buddy, but my family has spent TOO LONG not knowing about one complete side of our ancestry. And it has only been due to MY RESEARCH that we have found out that my mother had a sister. My mother died 2 years ago never knowing this. My mother died WONDERING if she indeed had any siblings. I have fulfilled my mothers wish by finding out just that... So, sorry buddy, but I don't buy your bible-bashing crap. I also DO NOT HAPPEN TO BELIEVE that there is a god... END OF DISCUSSION!'⁶³ Inspired to research by his mother's death, Peter feels that it is he alone that has uncovered a whole set of genealogical connections, and begins to become enraged at the suggestion that his quest is trivial when seen from the eternal perspective. That would mean, after all, that his deceased mother would already be reunited with her family, that all would have been revealed to her, and that his own researches in response to her death would be revealed as purely for his own interest. As the genealogical information that he uncovered bound him very closely to his deceased mother, such that her memory and familial relationships are now aboard Peter's genealogical ark, the religious alternative is rejected out of hand as sheer ignorance.

⁶³ Peter Taylor, (11 January 2004), 'Re: Your Ancestors are Alive' in *alt.genealogy* [Usenet], (accessed 13 January 2004).

Peter Taylor's response also demonstrates how often people have begun their family history as a response to familial death. Equally, however, it could be provoked by the other side of the urge to record – passing on to the next generation (for increased longevity) – such as after having children of their own, or in response to a sense of responsibility concerning the transmission of this knowledge to future generations. My own findings corroborate this. 'My father spent the last 20 years or so researching our family tree... He also wrote his own genealogy program using a beta version of dBase III... But he had a stroke last summer, so I'm taking over,' wrote John Anderson in 2004 in the alt.genealogy newsgroup.⁶⁴ In this case, by the early twenty-first century the concerns with mortality and remembering that had motivated practitioners in the late 1970s to record their genealogical data on computer led to the whole enterprise being passed on to the younger generation to ensure perpetual memory. That John is keen to update his father's software programming expresses his concern to use the best possible technology for the job, as well as expressing a certain relish at taking up genealogy at exactly the same time that his father confronted his mortality.

Furthermore, the sense of ancestors somehow living 'in me' noted in the online newsgroups was itself first apparent in the early family history societies, such as the B.M.S.G.H. in the early 1970s. Marjorie Leigh-Dugmore, researching after her father's death, for instance, found ancestors of a wide variety of religious denominations and concluded: 'There I am an ecumenical movement of my own', as if, like Stevie, her selfhood contained the lives and dispositions of her ancestors.⁶⁵ Rather than turning to the religion of her ancestors, they are, rather, resurrected in the here and now, just as f/George could not wait for heaven to learn of his ancestors. Jean Christie, meanwhile, asserted forcefully in a letter to *Family Tree Magazine* in 1990 that 'when you are dead, you are NOT dead.

⁶⁴ John Anderson, (7 January 2004), 'I need help converting genealogy records' in alt.genealogy [Usenet], (accessed 13 January 2004).

⁶⁵ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 13.

Memories of you and your shared family genes live on in others'.⁶⁶ John Abbott, as we have already seen, regretted bitterly that he had not questioned the previous generation before they passed on, and therefore turned to the next best thing, seeing his diverse ancestors as united only in his own practices:

An eighteenth century clergyman dies old and penniless in the servants' garret of a Leicestershire rectory. A young girl in Birmingham stares horror-struck at a crude drawing of seven coffins. A crusader in the dusty heart of Palestine saves Richard Coeur-de-Lion from captivity by pretending to be the king. These people, a gulf of years separating them, have only one thing in common, which they never knew. Long after they were dead and all but forgotten, a remote descendent of all three discovered for himself, these and many other stories about his ancestors.⁶⁷

Not only are they united in his research and personhood, these colourful ancestors are saved from being forgotten and thus brought back to life. Consequently, upon reading a description of his fifth great-grandfather, Abbott wrote: 'suddenly, through the mists of two centuries, my ancestor became alive for me'.⁶⁸ For Elizabeth Halford, reading old letters and diaries had a similar effect: 'from those I felt that I knew the people who had written them... As the weeks went by, I began to live in a world of the past... I turned a small bedroom into an office where I could lay out all the papers and books I was collecting... I was sad to round off the last chapter [of my family history book], as I had lived and worked with these people for so long that they had become my friends'.⁶⁹ Heaven can wait – these ancestors can be known, can become alive again, resuscitated and present to the family historian, as close as old friends, entering their thoughts and transforming their domestic space.

These relationships/discoveries/resuscitations were so 'real' that D. Lindsay saw finding new ancestors as like giving birth: 'I truly never expected to find any provable line of

⁶⁶ Jean Christie, 'Viewpoint', *Family Tree Magazine*, 6(4) (February 1990), p. 3.

⁶⁷ Abbott, *Family Patterns*, p. 9

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51-52.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Halford, 'How I Wrote a Family History', *Family Tree Magazine*, 1(3) (March-April 1985), p. 16-17.

descent. And the sensation, when I did, was not unlike that of becoming a mother – dumbfounded astonishment and monumental, but totally unjustified pride’. She goes on to ask her fellow practitioners: ‘Have you ever noticed that other people’s ancestors, like other people’s children, are never quite as attractive, interesting and accomplished as one’s own?’⁷⁰ Such intimacy leads to a sense of oneness, as we have seen in Chapters 4 and 5, where the identity of self and other pass into each other. When seen in light of resurrective practice, this is even more striking, as the dead live again in the family historian. ‘Discover Yourself... Find out the secrets of your family’s past’ enthused a leaflet produced to promote the National Archives in 2003.⁷¹ ‘Merging past and present...’ ran the title of a Doncaster and District Family History Society leaflet for the same year, surrounded by nineteenth-century photographs of people that, the reader might assume, are their ancestors, waiting for them to be resuscitated and remembered.⁷² J.M. Fox contributed this poem to *Family Tree Magazine* in January 1989:

Searching your family tree;
The facts puzzled in layered pieces.

Relative association;
Our surname shared,
we were born
four days/one lifetime
apart/together.

Discovery
of her leaf and branch
draws me
to the forest clearing.

Affinity guided;
each step a brush with life.

Hers.

⁷⁰ D. Lindsay, ‘Triumphs and Tribulations of a Family Historian’, *Family Tree Magazine*, 16(2) (December 1999), p. 16.

⁷¹ The National Archives, ‘Discover Yourself’, ephemeral leaflet placed in local record offices and libraries in autumn 2003.

⁷² Doncaster and District Family History Society, ‘Merging Past and Present...’, ephemeral leaflet placed in Yorkshire record offices and libraries in autumn 2003.

Mine.

Close enough,
long enough,
to see my own reflection
in grandmother's eyes.⁷³

This closeness/oneness with the living dead also at times manifests itself in coincidental and 'supernatural' contact with ancestors. 'It is the strange coincidences and odd finds that intrigue me most' remarked Elizabeth Simpson in 1974 after finding a portrait of her great-grandfather in antiques shop in Lichfield.⁷⁴ 'My son Gordon Hamar Wakelin, a qualified Surveyor' enthused a fellow society member, 'was working in Kingston, Jamaica in 1972, and discovered a tombstone of...Captain William Wakelin, Late Commander of H.M.S. Suffolk, died October 1705', who eerily possessed the same surname as Gordon's recently deceased father. After subsequent genealogical investigation it turned out that the captain was indeed an ancestor: 'They had rather a queer feeling looking at the tombstone,' we are told.⁷⁵ Again, it is intriguing that this should happen after the loss of Gordon's father, and speak to the existential questions of mortality with a sense of 'strange but true', that such coincidences 'point to something' or that 'there's more than we know'. Such statements are left unspoken though, perhaps seen as too uncertain, with the corresponding beliefs in the agency of the dead (expressed, for instance, by Haley) possibly seen as too crass for the British practitioner who is unwilling to verbalise such a sense. This did not stop Annie Durward telling of the 'family ghosts', however, or Philip Hickman who told of his regret at not asking late elderly relatives for genealogical information before they 'had gone to join their forebears'.⁷⁶

⁷³ *Family Tree Magazine*, 5(3) (January 1989), p. 11.

⁷⁴ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking*, 9.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 96, 113.

American genealogists can be far more explicit about the ‘agency’ of their ancestors, however. Helen Hinchliff, for instance, in her foreword to a compendium of serendipitous genealogy tells of her genealogical research as being led by an ‘Old Soul’, which she envisages thus: ‘In the centre are my ancestors, ranged in a circle. They are connected by a mysterious umbilical chord to Old Soul and to a second upper circle composed of my living relatives, who reside in the upper right corner. Guided by Old Soul, I travel a path between them, learning from each, communing with each’. She asserts that many other genealogists have this sense (contributors to the two volumes of *Psychic Roots*) ‘although they might call him by another name: within these pages you will encounter the Great God of Genealogy, fate, providence, God. Regardless of the name that is used, all who sense this force report that it empowers them to get in touch with and to learn from their ancestors’.⁷⁷

How different such explicit reflection sounds from the British context (as did the secularist defence offered to HisFriend as opposed to the uncertainty of Stevie’s response). Nonetheless, as we encountered this in those less explicit British examples above after what for Callum Brown constituted a discursive collapse of Christianity in Britain, a sense of the ‘spiritual’ and ‘intuitive’ has persisted despite the collapse of the ‘religious’. Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead have indeed argued that a ‘spiritual revolution’ can be discerned in the decline of traditional religious practice since the 1960s in Britain (and, they argue, in modern western culture – albeit with certain variations – beyond national boundaries). The ‘massive subjective turn in modern culture’ is, for Heelas and Woodhead, ‘shorthand for a major cultural shift of which we all have some experience. It is a turn away from life lived in terms of external or “objective” roles, duties and obligations, and towards a life lived by reference

⁷⁷ Henry Z. Jones, Jr, *Psychic Roots: Serendipity and Intuition in Genealogy* (Baltimore, 1993), p. ix. See also: Henry Z. Jones, Jr, *More Psychic Roots: Further Adventures in Serendipity and Intuition in Genealogy* (Baltimore, 1997); Megan Smolenyak, *In Search of Our Ancestors: 101 Inspiring Stories of Serendipity and Connection in Rediscovering Our Family History* (Holbrook, 2000); *Honouring Our Ancestors: Inspiring Stories of the Quest for our Roots* (Orem, 2002).

to one's own subjective experiences'.⁷⁸ Exploring these two models in the religious/spiritual practice of early twenty-first Kendal, Heelas and Woodhead concluded that the increasing popularity of 'subjective-life forms of the sacred', which emphasise inner sources of significance and authority are growing dramatically, at the expense of 'life-as forms of the sacred'. 'Most notably the term "spirituality" is often used to express commitment to a deep truth that is to be found within what belongs to this world', they write.⁷⁹ Whilst this spiritual revolution is not yet complete in Kendal, nonetheless the trend is so striking that Heelas and Woodhead expect overall congregational decline to continue for the next 25 to 30 years as attendances at congregations shrink to around 1 per cent of the population or below. From Callum Brown's perspective, such congregational decline is a surface manifestation of a discursive collapse of Christianity in Britain that dates from the 1960s, when 'the cycle of inter-generational renewal of Christian affiliation, a cycle which had for so many centuries tied the people however closely or loosely to the churches and to Christian moral benchmarks, was permanently disrupted in the "swinging sixties"'.⁸⁰

When faced with mortality, then, seen in light of a collapse in religious discourses, family history has provided a site for addressing such questions, re-reading religious texts, records and spaces in a British post-Christian context such that mortality is addressed without the necessity of making this explicit. As we saw in Chapter 5, it is the coinciding of a

⁷⁸ Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, with Benjamin Seel, Bronislaw Szerszynski and Karin Tusting, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford, 2005), p. 2. See also: Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford, 1996); Steven J. Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age: A History of Spiritual Practices* (London and New York, 2003); Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman (eds.), *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality* (Edinburgh, 2000); Paul Heelas, with the assistance of David Martin and Paul Morris, *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity* (Oxford, 1998); Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults* (Oxford and New York, 1996); Grace Davie, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (eds.), *Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular and Alternative Futures* (Aldershot, 2003).

⁷⁹ Heelas and Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution*, p. 6.

⁸⁰ Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, p. 1. On the 'secularisation debate', see: Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford, 2002); Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford, 1994); Rodney Stark, 'Secularisation, R.I.P.', *Sociology of Religion* 60:3 (1999), pp. 249-73; 'Secularization' in Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas (eds.), *Religion in Modern Times: An Interpretive Anthology* (Oxford, 2000).

reflexive (and thus, for the practitioner, seemingly ‘free’ and self-determined) search for identity in genealogy that coincides with a primordial, ascribed familial identity that helps us to understand the appeal of late-modern genealogy and family history. In a similar manner, ‘free’, reflexive ‘spirituality’ has flourished in opposition to ‘religion’ viewed as primordial and ascribed. Even in North America and Australia, as Ronald Lambert has documented, ‘genealogy can be said to encroach on territory traditionally occupied by religious faith’ as most genealogists express no religious affiliation or motivation, but ‘placed a “spiritual” as opposed to “religious” interpretation on genealogical experiences’.⁸¹

Genealogy has thus provided an ‘immortality strategy’, a cultural framework based on remembering primordial and historical ‘information’ which accommodates the certainty of death without recourse to the ‘uncertainty’ of immortality, or the eternal memory of God. Through genealogy, the horizons of personal biography are pushed forward and backward in time and death contextualised as a lineage event signalling the passing of generations.⁸² In this way, ancestors are resurrected by the genealogist and family historian, assimilated into their very personhood, and projected indefinitely into the future by their practices. This understanding of time makes forgetting impossible, unthinkable, a cultural crime that constitutes nothing less than a second (and truly fatal) death, and gives rise to an urgency to pass on this genealogical work ‘for my children’s sake’.⁸³ The ubiquitous lament is thus that ‘one generation too easily lets go knowledge for which another will look in vain’⁸⁴, and practitioners concentrate their ‘energies on producing a family history for the benefit of

⁸¹ Lambert, ‘Constructing Symbolic Ancestry’, p. 304, p. 319. On the relationship and variations between North American and European understandings of secularisation theory, see: José Casanova, ‘Beyond European and American Exceptionalisms: Towards a Global Perspective’, in Grace Davie, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (eds.), *Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular and Alternative Futures* (Aldershot, 2003). On the emerging literature of genealogy and the ‘New Age’ in guiding North American and Australian roots tourism, see: Basu, ‘Homecomings’, p. 208-10.

⁸² Lambert, ‘Constructing Symbolic Ancestry’, p. 304.

⁸³ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking ~ Again*, 32.

⁸⁴ J. L. Waddy, *The Waddy Family* (Bognor Regis, 1982), p. vii.

future generations'.⁸⁵ It is thus not uncommon for family historians in the 1970s and 1980s to conclude their family history books with 'a separate sheet to facilitate additions to the story'.⁸⁶ One family historian explained that he has 'left blank pages...which individual members can use for the extension of their own branches'.⁸⁷ With the advent of computer-based technology, this has, however, become unnecessary, as the internet has provided a perfect enabling technology by which to 'outlive your lifetime', such that 'once you place your family history on the internet, no matter what happens to your home computer (which contains your files and data) your work will be preserved'.⁸⁸

In both formats, the resurrective practices of the family historian are central. G. A. Beale, for instance, reflected on his efforts that: 'theoretically, if not in practice, the family historian is the centre of the familial, and custodian of its psyche'.⁸⁹ The insertion of family photographs in family history books and websites is important to this end. Don Steel's remarks on the subject in his guidebook are typical: 'few documents can rival the appeal of the photograph – our ancestors materialise from the dusty album and become real people... it gives identity and personality to... [the] names and dates on a family tree'.⁹⁰ And, just as photographs aid the resuscitation and remembering of ancestors, so too the importance of contemporary photography is vital, coming to be viewed by some family historians as 'futuresography'. 'Photography for posterity is real and important; recording your life and the

⁸⁵ *Penty Family Name Society Newsletter*, 14 (2001), p. 1. See also, for example: R. S. Münchenberg, *The History and Family Tree of Johann Friedrich Münchenberg and Johanne Eleonore Münchenberg and their Descendants, 1782-1971* (S.I., n.d.), p. 5.

⁸⁶ Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry, *Personally Speaking ~ Again*, 35.

⁸⁷ A. C. Crooke, *The Crookes of Pendle* (S.I., 1980), p. 41.

⁸⁸ Timothy W. Polk, *How to Outlive Your Lifetime! A Complete Guide to Preserving A Place in Your Family's Hearts and History* (Sunnyvale, 1994); Richard S. Wilson, *Publishing Your Family History on the Internet* (La Habra, 1999), p. 8.

⁸⁹ G. A. Beale, *The Uses of Genealogy and the Familial Historian together with the Beales of Blandford* (London, 1981), p. 38.

⁹⁰ Don Steel, 'The Family Photographic Archive: A Survey', in Don Steel and L. Taylor (eds.) *Family History in Focus* (Guildford, 1984), p. 9.

life of your family rests squarely on you and your camera... The ability to control time has always been one of man's dreams and the camera is the nearest thing to a time machine that man has yet invented. Perhaps this is the new role for your camera – a way of meeting your grandchildren in a world very different from yours' wrote P. Marmoy in 1984.⁹¹ As Annette Kuhn has pointed out, family photographs seem, on the surface, to primarily record, whereas the photograph's seizing of a moment always, even in that very moment, anticipates and assumes, loss: 'The record looks towards a future time when things will be different, anticipating a need to remember what will soon pass'.⁹²

What better epitaph for the resurrective practice of family history emerging in late twentieth century, when so many have asked questions and found answers to the dilemmas of human mortality in the very rejection of organised religion. 'Most of us know five generations personally (grandparents, parents, ourselves, children and grandchildren) and it requires the experience of only six selected individuals to cover nearly a millennium' reflected John Abbott, on compiling his family history.⁹³ This temporal stretching, this pushing of the boundaries of longevity as far as conceivably possible is not ancestor worship, but a mortality strategy and resurrective practice encountered in both the 'genealogical' primordialism of constructing a family tree and the biographical communing of 'family history' practice, where self passes into other. The genealogical 'bones' of births, marriages and deaths, and the family historical 'flesh' of the biographies of the dead are thus remembered in unison, and so kept alive. As such, without cultural reference to eternity, family history and genealogy have provided a compelling site of resurrective practice whereby practitioners are able to address existential questions at a less obviously theological

⁹¹ P. Marmoy, 'Futurography', in Don Steel and L. Taylor (eds.), *Family History in Focus* (Guildford, 1984), p. 175-76.

⁹² Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London and New York, 2002, new edition), p. 49.

⁹³ Abbott, *Family Patterns*, p. 83.

level.⁹⁴ Those who may ‘believe without belonging’,⁹⁵ have come to belong without believing.

⁹⁴ For a similar argument, see: Lambert, ‘Constructing Symbolic Ancestry’, p. 311.

⁹⁵ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford, 1994). This, undoubtedly explains why much genealogical practice is conducted with such vigorous, ‘quasi-religious’ enthusiasm. Indeed, in light of Ariès distinction of medieval and modern death, it is interesting to consider Eamon Duffy’s point that ‘for medieval people, as for us, to die meant to enter a great silence, and the fear of being forgotten in that silence was as real to them as to any of the generations that followed. But for them that silence was not absolute and could be breached. To find ways and means of doing so was one of their central religious preoccupations. For what late medieval English men and women at the point of death seen most to have wanted was that their names should be kept constantly in the memory and thus in the prayers of the living’. Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven and London, 1992), p. 328.

Conclusion

When Horace Round commented in 1901 upon the rapid growth of interest in genealogy and of the genealogical materials becoming available, he predicted that ‘it is likely to increase further’.¹ He could have had no idea that the census being taken in the year that he wrote would, one hundred years later, be made digitally available using the best technology on offer and that this technology would not be sufficient to cope with the numbers of those eager to examine its contents. A number of fascinating and unexpected themes have emerged in this thesis, having avoided making the assumption that the activities of these genealogists – a century apart – are identical, and having examined these practices on their own terms rather than by reifying them as increased access to a wonderful thing called “history”.

Crucially, professional historians should not be so quick to assume that practitioners are engaging in historical research for its own sake. By looking at what family historians do on their own terms, this has been demonstrated in many contexts. Rather than signifying solely a ‘popular craving for the past’, various other elements have become apparent. It has been shown that the ‘family history phenomenon’ is not an undifferentiated ‘thing’. It contains diverse practices and conceptualisations. Identity construction, addressing existential questions, pursuing cultural capital, organising family reunions, and passing on information – to a younger generation – amongst other things, are all vitally important in reaching a fuller understanding of this ‘phenomenon’. Family history and genealogy are concerned with the present and the future, regardless of the fact that their researches are

¹ John Horace Round, *Studies in Peerage and Family History* (Westminster, 1901), p. ix.

directed towards 'the past'. This thesis has therefore focused as much on the cultural work of family history and of the dead in late-twentieth century British culture as about 'history'.

Indeed, 'heritage' has been largely absent from my account, illustrating the extent to which this thesis has adopted a quite different approach from those who comment upon 'history and the public'. The implications of this for post-war British history are that the attitudes of academics and archivists can be as much a part of "history" as those whom they seek to educate in it. The activities of family historians and genealogists demonstrate that post-war British culture has been as much about uncertainty and lack of ontological security in the present as it has been a nostalgic flight to the past.

Revealing the diversity of practices and historical skills previously submerged under the comments of professional historians on 'genealogy' and 'family history' has therefore been of paramount importance. This has been shown with regard to shifts in the location, type and availability of records, as well as in the emergence of various different categorisations of practices (including Round's 'new critical genealogy', humble pedigree hunting, 'family history' for 'ordinary' people, 'internet genealogy' and so on). Furthermore, this diversity has also been demonstrated in terms of the ways ancestral research is presented (both biographically and in family trees), and in historical skills (ranging from indexing and transcription groups, to the production of diverse family history books and websites, or 'mere name gathering'). However, this does not imply that family historians' standards of palaeography and record linkage are necessarily inferior. In fact, by emphasising the diversity in terms of competences and perceptions of competences, I have introduced the category of 'professional-amateur' in order to both enhance our understanding of this variegation and be less simplistic in referring to it.

How, then, could this research be developed further? It would certainly be helpful to find sources from which to reconstruct more precisely the particular social, geographical, ethnic, religious and gendered demographic composition of the family history movement for

the 1970s and 1980s. In addition, it would be interesting to explore the place of the attitudes of family historians and genealogists in the history of British attitudes to race. To what extent, for example, does the significance placed by archivists on ethnic inclusivity since the late 1990s coincide with the concerns of family history societies? How, for instance, does the search for familial rootedness in a geographical sense through family history by white British practitioners relate to the history of multiculturalism?

Another strand that would be fascinating to develop would be to write more about attitudes to the family and death in late twentieth-century culture, especially as it has been argued here that these themes have been central to reaching an understanding of family history and genealogical practices. The dichotomy posited between religion and spirituality, for instance, would be particularly interesting to expand upon in light of the manner in which family history and genealogy have provided a compelling site of resurrective practice whereby practitioners have been able to address existential questions at a less obviously theological level. The link made, for example, by Callum Brown between cultural and religious change in understanding the history of secularisation in twentieth-century Britain in terms of 'discursive Christianity' is suggestive in this regard, and could lead to much fruitful work on late twentieth-century 'religious culture'.² Does, for instance, the distinction between 'longevity' and 'eternity' shed light on other contemporary phenomena, such as the spiritual revolution and beliefs in reincarnation?

In addition, to open up other identity categories in late twentieth-century Britain, the complex interplay between essentialist and individualised languages in evidence here with regard to both existential questions and identity construction may thus be pursued in broader

² Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000* (London and New York, 2001), p. 12. For similarly intriguing implication of the interplay of culture and religion in another period, as well as the expression and transmission of religion through cultural terms, and the limits of a poststructuralist approach in this respect, see: Brad Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1999), p. 8-10.

culture. Debates over the family, for instance, and the emergence of life politics,³ deserve a much fuller investigation than they have thus far received. As Anthony Giddens has suggested, ‘life-political issues place a question mark against the internally referential systems of modernity’ and thus ‘bring back to prominence those moral and existential questions repressed by the core institutions of modernity’. Such questions reveal what Giddens terms ‘existential contradiction’ regarding how human beings should approach the question of their own finitude.⁴ Further exploration of how such contradictions have been negotiated and contested through cultural and historical analysis could only deepen our understandings of these identifications and controversies.

The interplay between what has been termed here the ‘primordial’ and the ‘reflexive’ poles of identity construction could similarly illuminate late twentieth-century debates over the family. The persistence of a primordial view of family in what Marilyn Strathern has called English kinship ‘after nature’ demands further exploration – particularly in light of existential contradictions and genetic discourses.⁵ This is especially true in the coincidence of a primordial definition of the family alongside individualised languages of self-determination, moving us beyond the emancipatory politics of theorists such as Julia Watson. For Watson, family history ‘freed’ from any ‘naturalised practice’, may become ‘a liberatory method of relationality without pedigrees [which] may become, for the reflexive subject, a means of getting a new kind of life’.⁶ This, however, is only half of the story. On the contrary, family history and genealogy have provided such a compelling site for the

³ Life-politics, for Anthony Giddens, correspond to four domains: ‘existence’, ‘finitude’, ‘individual and communal life’, and ‘self-identity’. These correspond to the ‘internally referential systems’ of ‘nature’, ‘reproduction’, ‘global systems’ and ‘self and body’, which they problematise. Thus substantive moral questions have been raised in the late-modernity concerning environmental ethics, the rights of the unborn, the limits of scientific/technological innovation, and gender difference/animal rights, respectively. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 227.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 223-27.

⁵ Marilyn Strathern, *After Nature: English Kinship in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1992).

⁶ Julia Watson, ‘Ordering the Family: Genealogy as Autobiographical Pedigree’, in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (eds.), *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography* (Minneapolis and London, 1996), p. 319.

construction of a wide diversity of identities precisely because they do *not* make primordial definitions explicit. They thus redress the cultural uncertainties of a pluralisation of family forms and of a sense of deracination and ‘lack’ without remarking upon them extensively, or making them explicit. My research suggests, therefore, that it is not in strident individualism alone that late twentieth-century culture must be understood, but in its contradictions and dilemmas.

A further apparent contradiction which has made family history and genealogy compelling for so many is the at once ‘professional’ and ‘amateur’ possibilities it contains. By now it should be clear that any overly dismissive attitude of professional historians to these ‘amateurs’ is simplistic at best, and arrogant at worst. Jokes made at the expense of family historians in history departments are thus telling. At a history research skills seminar, for example, a doctoral student at the University of York was intrigued by a tutor’s advice on identifying potential candidates for advice in repositories and libraries. ‘If you see someone using a pencil – don’t bother going up to them. If you see someone using a propelling pencil – that would be a better bet. And if you are lucky enough to see someone using a laptop – go to them, they’re more likely to be a serious scholar’. The observation that the person using the pencil was likely to be someone researching their family tree resulted, of course, in uproarious laughter.⁷ However, once the diversity of family history practice has been asserted in so many ways, and the realisation that historical research into the ancestral past can say as much about the present as professional historical research can, we should not be so self-assured in drawing lines between what constitutes ‘serious’ research. Indeed, the history of genealogy is so intriguing, on the one hand, because its impulse for professionalization failed, yet that, on the other, this impulse emerged from the same scholarship that was crucial

⁷ Julie Hirst, ‘Where Myth and Reality Merge: An Unexpected Encounter Between My Genealogical and Doctoral Research’. Paper given at the Women’s History Network Annual Conference, London Guildhall University, 8 September 2001, p. 1.

to the establishment of history as a professional discipline.⁸ That professional historians today would gain nothing in terms of career prospects from researching their family history and may well be teased for doing so is thus an intriguing thought – particularly in light of Horace Round’s interest in genealogy for genealogy’s sake. Contemporary debates over ‘what is history’ are far from resolved, after all. The question of ‘who we think we are’ continues to run deep.

⁸ On the complexities of this development, and debates over the significance of the likes of Round and Tout, see: Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 176.

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