

HEATHER GARNSEY

Title

Finding Your Ancestors in the Genealogical Haystack

Summary

How improving your search techniques will help locate ancestors who seem determined not to be found.

Knowing how to search is the key to getting good results. While search screens prompt you to put in a name and to press the enter key, it is often not that easy. This session looks at some of the reasons you may not be getting positive results with your searches – and it isn't always because the person you are looking for just isn't there.

Abstract

We all have ancestors who appear to have joined witness protection programs – those who are not readily located no matter how many times we search. It can be easy to jump to the conclusion that they aren't there when we get endless 'no results' no matter how many times or ways we search.

This session will explore the three main reasons a record may not be found. The most usual is that the researcher is looking under the wrong name – either because the person is listed under a variation of the expected name or because the indexing or OCR-generated record has misinterpreted the original document.

A nil search result may also occur because the search is being conducted in the wrong time period, often due to basing the search on misinformation collected along the way, or simply because our ancestors did the unexpected – getting remarried at 74 or living to 102. Restricting our search to a record set or time period when we *think* we are going to find them may lead us to erroneously conclude they aren't there.

And of course misconceptions about where someone lived can lead to many a frustrating search. Years can be spent searching for a birth in NSW because a death certificate states the deceased was born in Windsor in 1848, only to discover that the informant had just assumed they were, or that their origins had been fabricated to hide a convict background.

And of course our eagerness to launch into a search without reading help files, checking how and why a record was created or understanding its idiosyncrasies can all exacerbate the problem.

This session will demonstrate to researchers how improving their search techniques may help to unearth ancestors who seem determined not to be found.

Audience

Beginner – Intermediate