

# Family Search

## The historical background:

According to the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** (also known as the Mormons), in 1820 a New York State farmer called Joseph Smith (1805-1844) asked God which Christian denomination he should follow. God told him that all the churches had become sinful and He had chosen Smith to restore the 'true' church, which he did and the church's theology and teaching became The Book of Mormon, published in 1830. The charismatic Smith's Christian sect soon built-up a huge following but Smith was eventually assassinated, and led by Smith's successor as prophet, Brigham Young, the persecuted group fled across the USA and established Utah, then in Indian territory, in 1847, and its capital Salt Lake City and in 1875, the Mormons founded the Brigham Young University, and in 1894, the Genealogical Society of Utah.

The Mormons, today now numbering 15 million, believe that Smith, and his successors as leaders of the Latter-day Saints (LDS), are prophets who reveal God's will. Smith's revelations went way beyond the well-know prohibitions on drinking tea, coffee and alcohol. Marriages, when 'sealed' in special temples, are eternal and continue in Heaven. There is a distinct layer of Heaven just for Mormons (the 'Celestial layer') and Mormons should baptise their ancestors so they can join them there, the Mormons are fascinated by genealogy because, as their official statement puts it: 'Family history is more than a hobby, it's an activity that blesses both the living and the dead. Connecting generations with the blessings of the temple serves ancestors, safeguards individuals, and strengthens families' and this has been brilliant news for family historians because it has led to the biggest free family history website in the world: FamilySearch.

In pursuit of baptising the dead, the LDS began microfilming parish records in 1938 and in 1973, established the Mormon **International Genealogical Index** – through which you could read simplified transcriptions of these records with the key information – available through special Family History Centres attached to local Mormon churches and it had 20 million entries and they commenced the gigantic project of indexing global records, which continues to this day. By 1993, they had 200 million entries.

**Ancestry.com** was founded in 1990 by Paul B. Allen and Dan Taggart, two BYU graduates and in 1998 the free searchable database **FamilySearch.org** was launched online and by 1999, this had 640 million entries from different parts of the world. In 2014, it passed the one billion mark. The website, it should be stressed, is far from comprehensive. If your family are from Dorset then the site is not as useful because much of Dorset is yet to be indexed. There are also many transcription errors. But the site is, undoubtedly, invaluable to family historians.

The range of information at FamilySearch is quite staggering – it has over 2,130 historical record collections including 126 collections on Britain and Ireland, the England data includes records of school pupils, workhouses, national censuses, taxation, electoral rolls, Nonconformist records, bishops' transcripts, will indexes, monumental inscriptions, and military records. Then there is a collection of more than 200,000 digitised books relating to family and local history, such as those published by the Record Society, though not all of these available online. However, there is not a clear divide in what is available where and to whom. The indexes are freely available through the FamilySearch website, anywhere and to anyone however, if you want to see the digitised images of the records then you may have to go to your local Family History Centre.

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- Start your search online at: **[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)**
- The research Wiki launched in 2008, boasts more than 84,000 family history articles (in a variety of languages) and is updated just as Wikipedia is:  
**[www.familysearch.org/Wiki/en/Main\\_Page](http://www.familysearch.org/Wiki/en/Main_Page)**
- One ongoing project, which began in 2014, is the development of partnerships with subscription websites in order to speed up the process of digitising and indexing all the world's genealogy records. Currently, FamilySearch is partnered with **Ancestry**, **Findmypast**, **My Heritage** and **American Ancestors**.  
Each of these sites have digitised and indexed thousands of records and customers pay to access them. According to the agreements, this system will continue until the companies recoup their investment and then their records and indexes will simply be added to FamilySearch. In the meantime, there is free access to the partner sites at Family History Centres, you will find details of the partner websites accessible via the centres at **[www.familytr.ee/FSCintro](http://www.familytr.ee/FSCintro)**
- There are 4,700 Family History Centres globally and 94 in the UK, you can look for the nearest one to you using the finding aid at **[www.familysearch.org/locations](http://www.familysearch.org/locations)**