

Absolute Beginners...

7 GOLDEN RULES

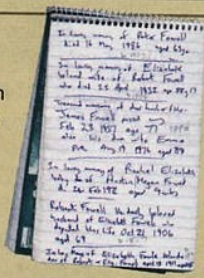
If you're new to family history, these principles will help you get the most from your pursuit

1 WORK BACKWARDS

Whatever you do in your research, start with yourself and work backwards, generation by generation, ensuring that you have verified your sources at each stage.

2 BE ORGANISED & HONEST

You must be systematic and organised – you'll collect a lot of information. Start with a simple filing system using A4 binders with loose-leaf pages and subject dividers, and an index card file for each of the family names/members and events. Have somewhere to keep certificates and other documents. While your record keeping may be methodical, to be truly worthwhile it must also be honest. There are always skeletons in the cupboard to a greater or lesser degree – do not ignore them.



3 START WITH YOUR RELATIVES

Assemble all the information you can from relatives. Gather together – or take copies of – all the available birth, marriage and death certificates of family members, or ask for the approximate dates of birth, marriage and death. Talk to as many relatives as possible, including the eldest. They will all have information; some that they'll readily tell you, though they may be reluctant with revealing certain events. Make comprehensive notes.

4 SET YOUR SIGHTS

An early decision needs to be made on where to concentrate your researches. Don't aim to research your total ancestry – the data could soon overwhelm you. It's better to start with yourself, moving to your parents and grandparents, then choose a branch to follow.

5 UNDERSTAND SURNAMES

Surnames are usually derived from one of four basic roots: a place, occupation, from a patronymic relationship, or nickname. The less common the name, the easier searches (usually) are.

6 CLASSES & SOCIETIES

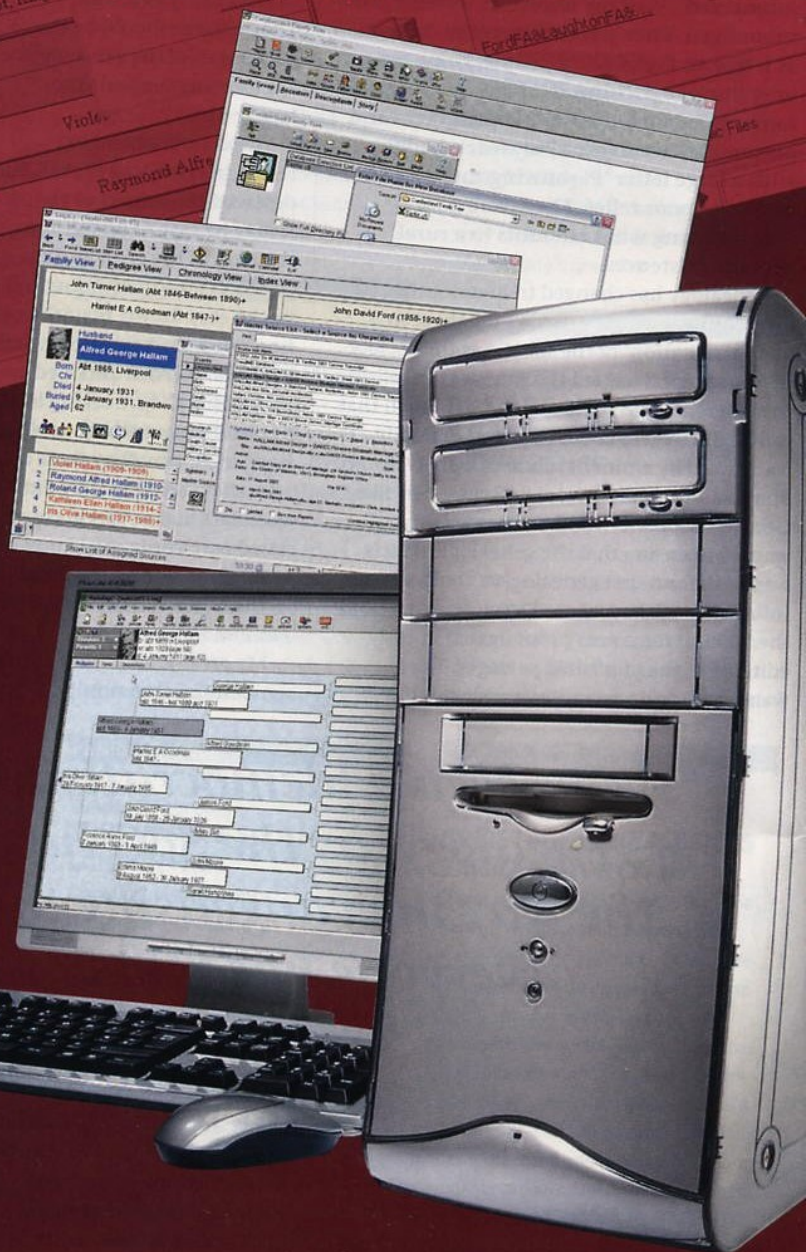
It's always worth joining a family history society – or more than one. You'll get a good grounding in the essentials of family history research and you may well meet people with a similar interest and drive. Check the full list of family history societies with the FFHS, at www.ffhs.org.uk

7 USE TECHNOLOGY

Using technology is not a necessity, but it can be a great help. A computer is an efficient tool for storing, copying, sharing and presenting data, and – along with wordprocessors, email, Internet, scanning and printing – there are programs specifically designed to help you draw up and publish your family tree and history. The Internet is home to a great deal of useful information.

Get started with genealogy software

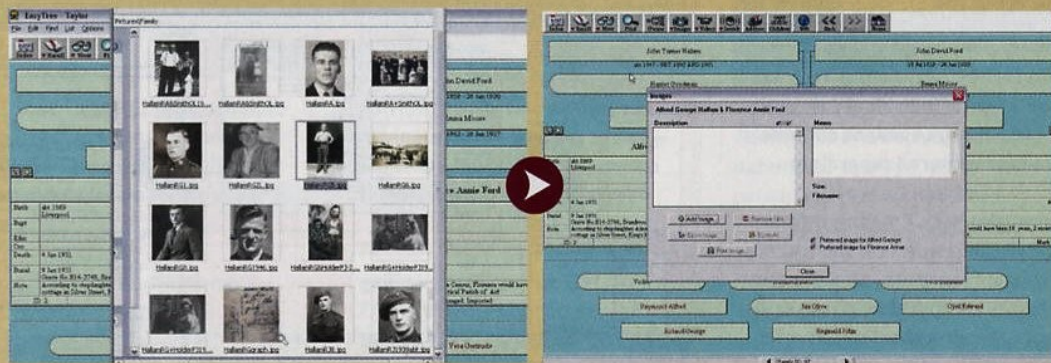
Just to glance at the list of family tree software packages available can be daunting in the extreme. But what can they do for you? We offer some practical guidance



WALKTHROUGH

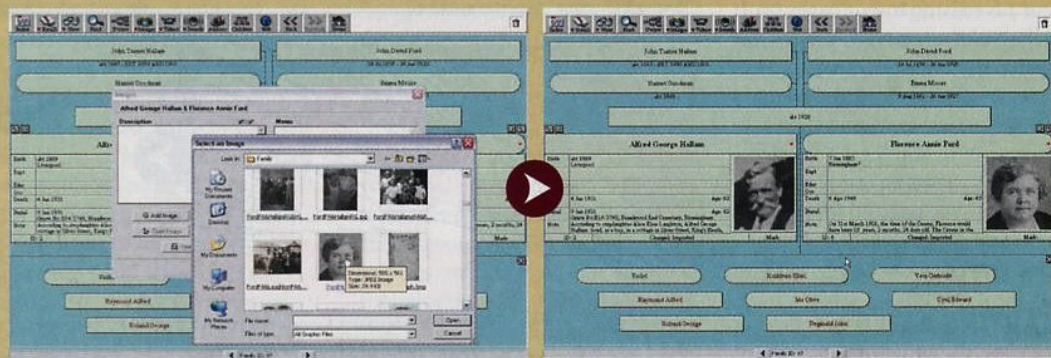
Adding your pictures

A picture is worth a thousand words, so preserve your family snaps for posterity



[1] Most genealogical software lets you add pictures (and sounds and videos) to your data. Pictures can adorn your screen displays, be added to your reports and charts, and sometimes printed as picture galleries or scrapbooks. Scan your pictures and name them with the date if you know it so that they appear in order.

[2] Like other packages, Generations enables you to add single or multiple pictures to each individual, selected from your picture directory. You then choose one picture to be the primary or preferred image to appear on that individual's printout. Sometimes you can have different pictures for reports and charts.



[3] It doesn't matter what size the image is, the software will reduce or enlarge it to fit the space it has allocated. With image-editing software (sometimes supplied) you can crop unnecessary space and adjust brightness and contrast to suit.

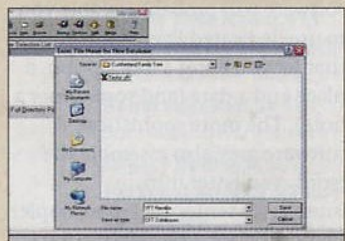
[4] Most software lets your carefully chosen (alright, sometimes you have only one) picture illustrate your display and editing screen, not only helping to identify your family but to bring them back to life for you.

Many family historians are used to working on paper with no help from their computers, and draw their family trees on rolls of wallpaper. This is OK, but redrawing diagrams and rewriting notes to accommodate new family members can waste time as well as introducing errors. What's more, keeping track of the all-important sources of the information can become a nightmare.

Family tree software – which is only a specialised database – can overcome all of these problems. It can remember everyone you tell it about, together with all their personal details and especially their relationships with each other. And that's not just 'nuclear' relationships such as parents and children, but widely separated ones, even unto the fourth cousin five times removed. It does this in specialised notes or database fields, although many packages will accept free-form notes as well. It can record baptisms, schools attended, occupations, military service and so on. Some software is intelligent and will alert you to mistakes – like entering someone's birth after their mother's death, for instance. You can search your data too, from simple searches for names to sophisticated searches using multiple parameters.

And when you want to get all this information out, genealogical software can produce organised lists in chronological order from the oldest family member to the youngest (or the other way round), without making any mistakes or mixing anyone up. Some programs can take your briefest details and produce intelligible sentences and some can go further and produce multi-page books. And, of course, most software can produce charts of some sort, identifying either ancestors or descendants and laying them out graphically so that the relationships between the generations are immediately apparent. Many can produce drop-line descendant charts (what most people think of as a family tree) even if it spreads across reams of paper. And your software can do these things over and over without making mistakes or forgetting anybody.

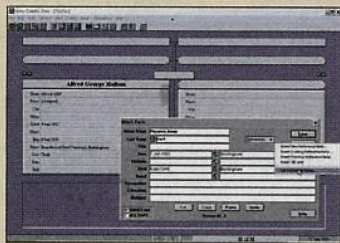
There is software to suit every pocket and level of capability, from cheap to expensive and from basic to complex. Cheap isn't necessarily simple, nor is complex necessarily expensive. If you're new to genealogy or computers you might want to test the water first with an inexpensive package. You can always move up when you're ready for more power. You can manage this in two ways.



DESTINATION: With most software – this is Cumberland Family Tree – you can choose the name and folder, or directory, for your data files

Some software from the same publisher will share the same program file format. GSP, for example, will sell you its *Times Family Tree* for £9.99. When you outgrow that you can move up to its *Family Tree v3* at £19.95 or its *Family Tree Genealogy Suite v4* at £49.99 using the same data files. Alternatively – and this works with almost every software package – you can export your data from your old package in a file format called GEDCOM (Genealogy Data Communications) and then import it into your new package. GEDCOM is a dedicated format for genealogy data transfer developed by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the Mormons). GEDCOM files appear with the file extension .GED. Be warned – there have been several versions over the years and you might lose some data if your software only

knows an older version, but it's still better than re-keying everything in again. Almost all genealogical software is PC-based and can be used with nearly all Windows operating systems. Don't rely on it working on the earliest Windows 3.11 or the latest Windows XP. Check with your supplier. US-based Apple Mac users have two or three software packages they can use, but those are withering away, with Genealogy.com (owners of Mac versions of *Family Tree Maker* and *Ultimate Family Tree*) having announced that they would develop these titles no further. In the UK you're limited to only one – *Reunion*. This shares ancestry with the *Generations* series, so check our reviews of those. You could, alternatively, use a Mac emulator on your PC. Every package has its strengths



DATA ENTRY: *Easy Family Tree* has a fairly typical individual data entry screen – though husband and wife's details are entered separately

and weaknesses. One might make it easy to add notes on the sources of your information, another may be better at producing charts and reports, while a third might offer more opportunities to use the Internet for research or to publish your own data files. Decide what you want from your software and make your choice accordingly. How will you know? Quiz one of the specialist suppliers. You'll find them advertising in our pages (a quick poll of our advertisers revealed the best sellers to be *Family Tree Maker* (by far), *Family Historian*, *RootsMagic*, and *Generations 8*). You'll get a good overview by reading our reviews each issue – see page 76 for a fresh batch, and check out the reviews listing on your CD.

STARTING A FILE

Your software will probably allow you to have more than one family tree, though not necessarily open at the same time. Each family tree will need its own 'file', although some files are a collection of separate components. Plan to get organised before installation by setting up separate folders for each file. When the software asks where you want to create your file, point it at the right folder. Each family tree file should have a different – and meaningful – name. Windows now lets you use long names, so you could have a file called, say, 'The Smiths of Aston Manor', with no problems.

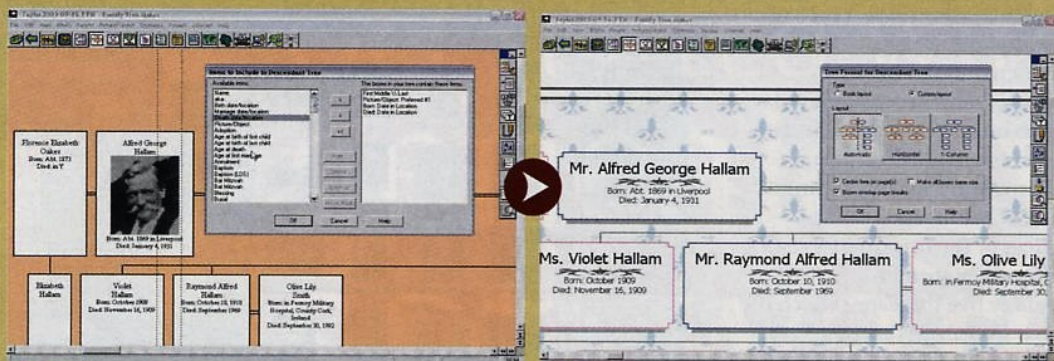
ADDING FAMILY RECORDS

Most genealogy software gives you some sort of index card to enter your facts on and will probably set up the first one for you after installation. You'll need to know names, of course (maiden names for women), date and place of birth and death, and possibly the same for baptism and burial. The place data you enter for an individual may be used by the software as part of a master

WALKTHROUGH

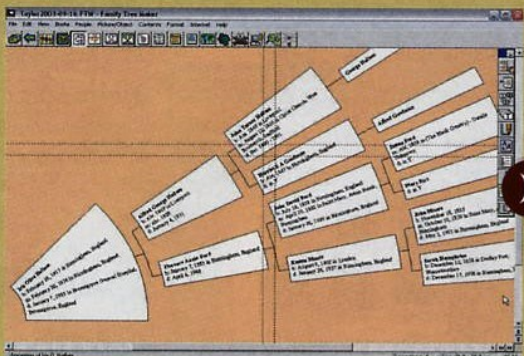
Designing your charts

Customise your charts to include only the people and information you want

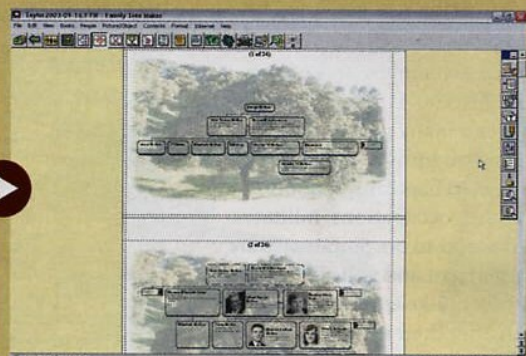


[1] Most software provides ancestor and descendant charts. You may also get Hourglass charts (ancestor and descendant) or All-in-One (which shows everybody). Descendant charts are merely descendant reports with boxes drawn round individuals. The most familiar is the 'drop-line', like this from *Family Tree Maker (FTM)*.

[2] As well as control over content, *FTM* also has a variety of styles, offering further control over box shapes, fonts, lines, pictures and backgrounds. You also get a say in the shape of the tree. You can reduce the amount of paper needed by only showing direct lines of descent.



[3] Fan trees are an interesting variant on the more standard type of presentation, and they can include the same information (but not usually pictures). This is *Family Tree Maker's* ancestor fan tree before any style changes are applied.



[4] *FTM* can apply different backgrounds to your tree. This is 'Scenic'. It also has 'book-style' where the tree is drawn on consecutively-numbered pages with pointers to continuation sheets for every branch. This makes savings on paper and fits the program's indexed book

location list. You therefore want it to be specific enough to be informative (town and district, say) but not so specific as to be unique (no house numbers unless lots of your relatives were born in the same house). Marriage information (where, when and whether) might be entered on the family screen or separately dependent on the software. You can often also enter details for parents and children on the same family screen. Entering data for siblings usually means moving to the parents' screen and entering them as children. As long as you remember to use the right screen, your software will always preserve the right relationships between family members, no matter how far flung they may be.

ADDING EVENTS

Some of the 'events' in a person's life, such as birth, marriage and

death, you will have already entered as part of the Family Record screen. But there are dozens of other events you can record too. You do this in two ways. You'll probably find that you have a screen for individual notes for every family member. This is ideal for recording information such as anecdotes, family legends, and other data that doesn't easily fit into a specific category. However, your software will probably enable you to use dedicated Events screens that let you enter a description, a place and a date (and sometimes a note). The more sophisticated software may also assemble the words you enter into an intelligible sentence. For example, for occupation you might enter 'timber carter', 'Bedford' and '1914' and the software will construct the sentence 'In 1914 he was working as a timber carter in

Bedford'. With some software you can change or completely override the sentence constructed. As well as occupation, events can include adoption, cremation, education, emigration, military service and others. You may also be able to create your own.

ADDING SOURCES

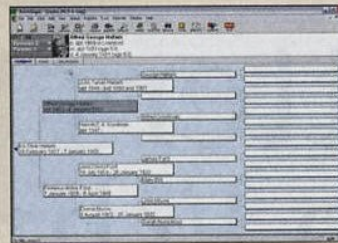
Sources are very important in genealogy. They're your proof that what you say happened actually did happen. In software terms, sources are notes added to an event or fact to validate that event or fact. In reports they appear as footnotes or endnotes. Unlike other entries, sources are independent of individuals or families, although once created they can be attached to an individual's events. Some software, such as *Legacy*, gives you multi-form entry screens that guide what you put in and then



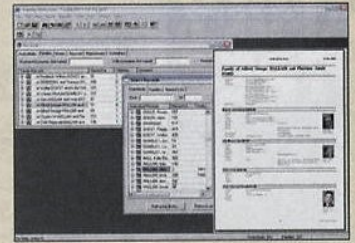
EVENTS: Like most other packages *The Master Genealogist* lets you pick from a list of events. Note: Alfred worked at, not as a bicycle factory



LEGACY DELUXE: You can define 'master' and 'detail' sources – master sources with additional comments for a specific event



NAVIGATION: In *RootsMagic* you can navigate just by clicking on any name. Double-clicking opens up that person's data entry screen



FAMILY GROUP CHART: This is *Family Historian's*, which includes parent and children, all facts and notes, together with sources

format what you print out. In real terms, sources are either personal or documentary. The most obvious example of a documentary source is the birth certificate. This can be entered as a master source, copying its content in as much detail as you want. You can then attach this source to the child, the father, his place of birth, his occupation, the mother, her occupation (if any), her place of birth, her usual address, the informant, and the informant's address, among others. And remember, the source only has to be entered once. Other source documentation can include baptism, marriage, divorce, death, burial, probate, census, property, military, and employment, as well as histories, letters, diaries, and biographies.

You'll no doubt acquire a lot of information by letter or word of mouth from relatives and others. Record the sources of these as well. So if Aunt Alice tells you that Granddad was in the army but you have no other confirmation, record the fact and cite as a source something like 'Alice Scroggins, personal recollection'. That way

you'll always know where the information came from.

NAVIGATION

Navigation here means moving around your family tree from one person to another. Most packages have an alphabetical index, also known as a 'picklist' that you can call up and from which you can select the person you want. Some also have an interactive Pedigree screen, where you can change to a view of another person's details by clicking on their name. You can usually get to an editing screen as well. Some software shows siblings and children and clicking their button or tab takes you to their individual screens. There might also be a Search menu item and some packages have Hotkeys and Bookmarks. Whatever the system used, it's never a problem finding the people you want.

REPORTS AND CHARTS

There is a school of thought that contends that all the work you put into researching and compiling your family history is wasted if you don't share the results with others. Not all

genealogy software excels in this. Quality of output can vary from basic to excellent and, if well-laid-out printing is important to you, check with your supplier which is the best product for that purpose before parting with your money (and read our reviews). Most reports that can be printed can also be viewed on screen.

Reports generally fall into four categories: Ancestral, Descendant, Statistical and Administrative. The content of most reports is obvious from their descriptions but one of the standard ancestral reports which you may not have heard of is the Ahnentafel Report, which lists the ancestors of an individual in a narrative format, but only includes the birth, marriage and death information. There's also the Modified Register Report, a narrative report that lists an individual's descendants with or without notes and events listings. Some programs can produce their own narrative descendant reports that can track all a person's descendants, and their spouses, printing all associated facts, events, notes, even photographs. If this interests you, look for

Cumberland Family Tree, *Family Tree Maker*, *Family Historian* and *Legacy*. The first two can produce indexed 'books' combining different reports and charts.

Charts show the relationship between your family members in a graphical way; the best-known is the drop-line descendant chart. Almost all software can produce these on-screen. Printout can be something different, spreading across reams of paper. To tame your charts, investigate *Family Tree Maker's* book-format which not only saves paper but links each page. A popular ancestor chart is the Pedigree.

Other reports and charts can include calendars, relationship charts, maps, scrapbooks and blank forms for research purposes. You may have some control over what goes in. There is also third-party software to draw charts. ■

BY JAMES TAYLOR

James is a professional software reviewer and an amateur family historian – who, it transpires, comes from a long line of peasants. He has been reviewing genealogy software since the days of DOS.

Prices and suppliers

Where to learn more about specific software titles – and where to buy them from

BTR – Back To Roots

[t] 01453 821 300 [w] www.backtoroots.co.uk

FMM – Focus Multimedia

[t] 01889 570 156 [w] www.focusmm.co.uk

GSP – Global Software Publishing

[t] 01480 496 575 [w] www.gsp.cc

LDS – Church of Latter-Day Saints

[t] 0121 785 2200 [w] www.lds.org.uk

S&N – S&N Genealogy

[t] 01722 716 121 [w] www.genealogysupplies.com

TWR – TWR Computing

[t] 01284 828 271 [w] www.twrcomputing.co.uk

SOFTWARE TITLE	ON THE WEB	SUPPLIER	PRICE
Cumberland Family Tree <small>(download and unlock code)</small>	www.cf-software.com	S&N	£27.50
Family Historian	www.family-historian.co.uk	BTR/S&N/TWR	£44.95
Family Tree v3	www.gsp.cc	GSP	£19.95
Family Tree Genealogy Suite v4	www.gsp.cc	GSP	£49.99
Family Tree Legends	www.familytreelegends.com	TWR	£29.95
Family Tree Maker v11	www.genealogy.com	BTR/S&N/TWR	£29.95
Generations Family Tree Essentials <small>(Not Compatible with Windows NT or 2000: some loss of functionality with XP)</small>		BTR/S&N	£12.95
Generations v8.5a <small>(Not Compatible with Windows NT or 2000)</small>	www.broderbund.com	BTR/TWR	£19.95
Legacy Deluxe 4	www.legacyfamilytree.com	S&N	£38.13
Personal Ancestral File v5	www.lds.org.uk	LDS	£5.95
RootsMagic	www.rootsmagic.com	S&N	£24.95
Times Family Tree	www.gsp.cc	GSP	£9.99
The Master Genealogist Gold Edition	www.whollygenes.com	TWR	£59.95
The Master Genealogist Silver UK Edition <small>(Not Compatible with Windows XP)</small>	www.focusmm.co.uk	FMM	£9.99