

Choosing Software

It's all relative

Family historians wishing to commit their research to PC have a bewildering selection of software to choose from. But how do you pick which is best for you? **James Taylor** cuts through the hype

The basic interface for most leading titles is the **family card**. This shows details of an individual and his or her spouse, with names, place and date of birth, marriage and death, plus space for a photograph.

Most titles have special **forms** for inputting data, while many allow you to create your own for unusual sources. They will also accept free-form notes for recording anecdotes and family legends.

Sources are the notes added to an event or fact to validate it. In reports they appear as footnotes or endnotes. So for a birth date you would attach data copied from the birth certificate (you can sometimes attach an actual scan of the document). Sources can also be a letter, a diary or a relative's recollections.

All titles have various **chart** options — from hourglass to 3D. The best-known is probably the traditional drop-line descendant chart — what most people think of as a family tree.

It's likely that at some point you'll want to print a **report** of your research. All the leading packages can produce the two basic text reports — **ancestor** and **descendant** — while some can produce **timelines** showing everyone in chronological order in the context of major events in their time frame. Some can produce their own **book** reports. Others have various features for transferring your reports to CD-ROM or creating websites.

TIPS

Family History Books

Some titles produce their own book reports that can track all a person's descendants and their spouses, printing all associated facts, events, notes, and even photographs. If this interests you, choose between *Family Historian*, *Ancestral Quest*, *Legacy* or *Family Tree Maker*.

Ancestral Quest

Usability: ●●●

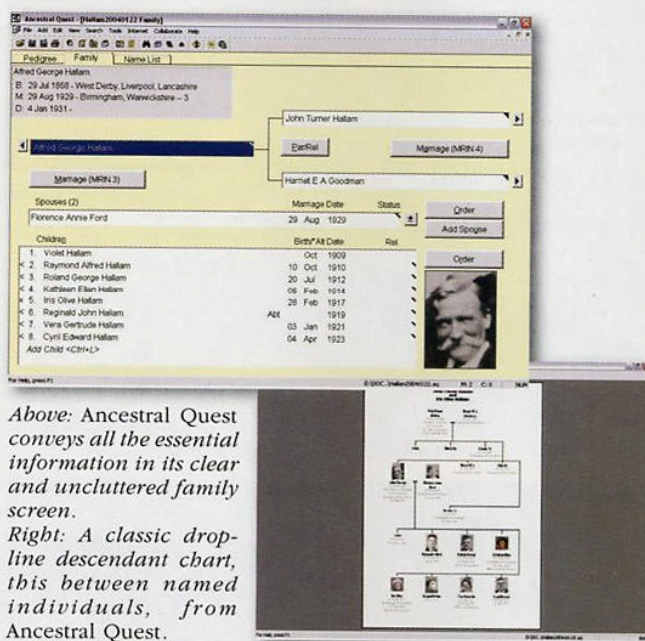
Flexibility: ●●

Presentation: ●●●●

Approximate price: £19.13

Homepage: www.ancestquest.com

Ancestral Quest, now in version 11, was one of the first to be published commercially and has influenced several others currently on the market. It lets you link multimedia objects to individuals in your database, but also goes a little bit further in letting you combine these into slide shows with background audio, which you



Above: *Ancestral Quest* conveys all the essential information in its clear and uncluttered family screen.

Right: A classic drop-line descendant chart, this between named individuals, from *Ancestral Quest*.

can then put on a CD. You can now print your reports to a PDF file, making it easier to put them on your website or send them as email attachments. Among the new reports options is a direct line-of-descent chart between any two individuals, printed as a drop-line chart.

You can link from each relevant name on your tree to the Ancestry.com and FamilySearch databases, to see if there are any matches. You also get full database compatibility with the LDS Church's free software *Personal Ancestral File*, which may be useful for swapping data with others.

The Master Genealogist

Usability: ●●●

Flexibility: ●●●●●

Presentation: ●●●●

Approximate price: £9.99 to £60

Homepage: www.wbollygenes.com

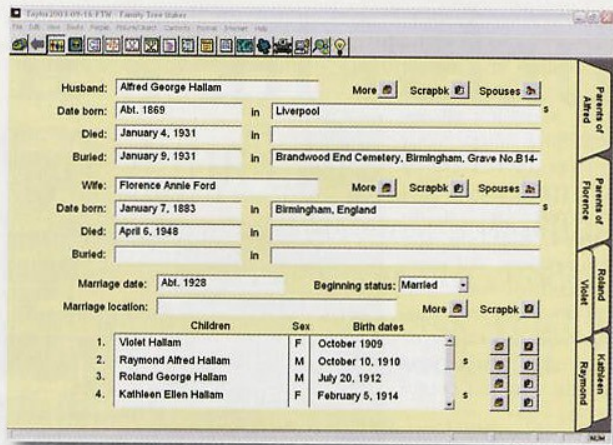
The Master Genealogist Gold Edition is one of the most expensive programs you can buy (£60). Focus Multimedia, however, has brought out *The Master Genealogist Silver UK Edition*, an anglicised version with a significantly reduced price tag (£9.99) and is ideal for most purposes.

Reporting is a strong point of *The Master*



This plain family screen holds more information than some other software.

Choosing Software



Family Tree Maker's family group screen provides access to parents and children and buttons for notes and more detail.

number of the page where the branch continues. This saves you from having to tape all the separate sheets together and saving the reams of paper otherwise needed for the empty spaces. Second, it can help you to compile a book which you can divide into chapters, including the aforesaid 'book' charts as well as notes, kinship lists, family groups, narrative reports, calendar, locations map, timeline, contents page and an index.

Heredis

Usability: ●●●●
Flexibility: ●●●●
Presentation: ●●●●
Approximate price: £20
Homepage: www.myheredis.com



Reviewed in last month's magazine, this innovative title from across the channel is now in its 7th edition. A new Mac version has just been released. It offers an attractive and relatively flexible package. Beginners, in particular, will find it easy to get the hang of, with enough advanced features to satisfy the more experienced researcher (including a 3D tree). There's an unrestricted standard edition which is free to download.



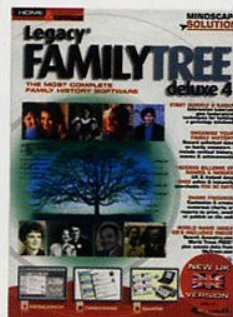
TIPS

Backing up

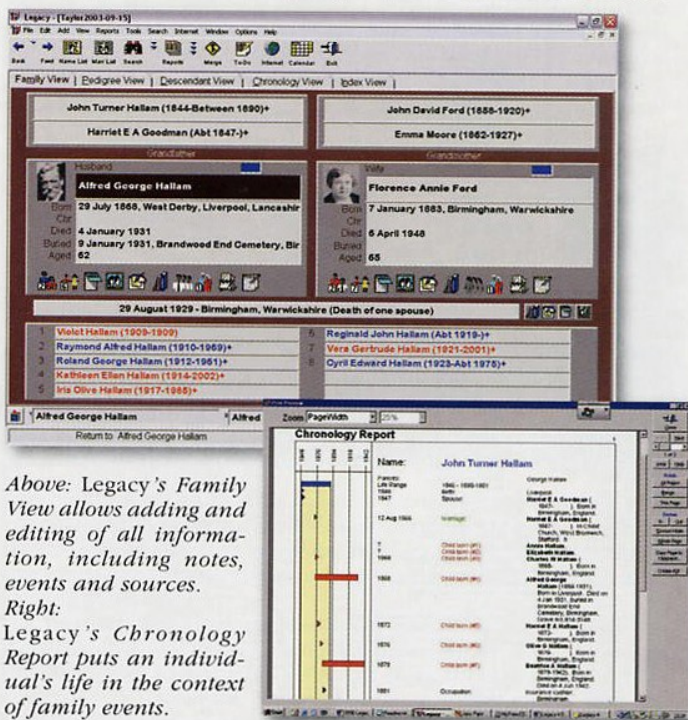
Although it's easy to slip into bad habits, it is vitally important that you back up your work regularly. And if you are trying out a new software title, make sure you begin working with copies of your GEDCOM file. You never know what a new piece of software may make of it!

Legacy

Usability: ●●●●
Flexibility: ●●●●
Presentation: ●●●●
Approximate price: £38
Homepage: www.legacyfamilytree.com



Legacy Deluxe 5 has four display options, including Chronology, which lists, in chronological order, the main events in an individual's life, alongside plenty of report options. Legacy uses IntelliMerge software, designed to safely combine duplicate entries, track multiple parental lines (birth, adoptive, foster). You can also build



Above: Legacy's Family View allows adding and editing of all information, including notes, events and sources.
 Right: Legacy's Chronology Report puts an individual's life in the context of family events.

web pages, email, and use the multiple views feature to see two family files side-by-side. There's an extra facility to specify child/parent status including 'adopted', 'challenged' and 'disproved'.

What sets Legacy Deluxe v5 apart from its predecessors and competitors is the new Multiple Lines of Descent book report, which lets you merge two or more lines of descent, cross-referencing entries without repeating them and saving you from time-consuming checking.

The unrestricted free Standard edition of version 5 is also available (from www.legacyfamilytree.com), and is an excellent program in its own right.

Rootsmagic

Usability: ●●●●
Flexibility: ●●●●
Presentation: ●●●●
Approximate price: £24.95
Homepage: www.rootsmagic.com

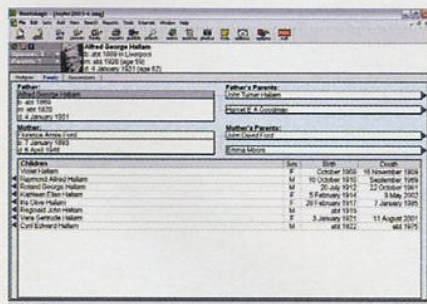
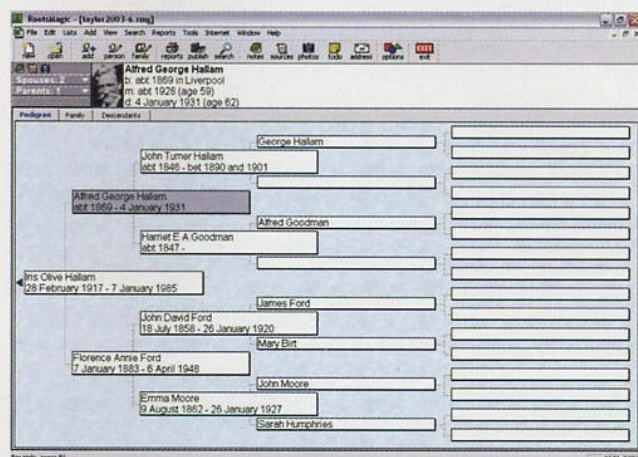
RootsMagic v1.03 has all the usual features of a top-end genealogical program plus a versatile array of reports, lists and charts

TIPS

Printouts

Almost all software can produce drop-line descendant charts on-screen. Resulting printouts can spread across reams of paper which you have to glue together. To tame your charts check out *Family Tree Maker's* book-format, or *Ancestral Quest's* Line of Descent chart.

(although strangely no drop-line descendant chart). The most impressive is the Narrative report, which can be used for descendants, ancestors or ancestors with children, and includes notes, source bibliography, photographs and an index. It can also form the basis of a book whose other chapters can include pedigree charts, family and individual summaries, a picture scrapbook, photo tree, descendants and kinship lists, all fully indexed and for as many individuals or families as you like. You can output to PDF (Adobe Acrobat), export to your word processor (in RTF format) or create a website with photos, notes, sources, index, surname list and GEDCOM file.



Above: RootsMagic's family screen shows vital data for father and mother with a listing of their children and references to their parents.

Left: The pedigree screen can be used for navigation and to access data entry screens.

Times Family Tree

Usability: ●●●

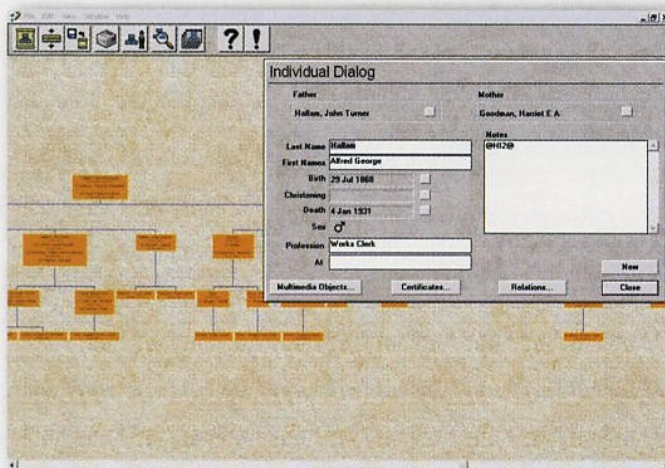
Flexibility: ●

Presentation: ●

Approximate price: £9.99

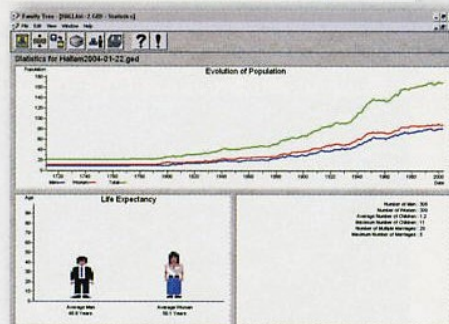
Homepage: www.gsp.cc

Times Family Tree is one of the cheapest on our list, but for that price you still get all the essential features — but not a lot else. You can make the usual entries, of course, and add photographs and sound clips for a multimedia album. There are a variety of family tree print outs, including a selection of certificate templates. The program can also analyse your family statistics, including average number of children. However, there are no text reports. You can import and, perhaps more importantly, export GEDCOM files when you're ready to move on.



Above: In *Times Family Tree* your main viewing screens are the ancestor or descendant charts. Clicking any person's box brings up their data entry screen.

Right: *Times Family Tree* can generate some generally depressing statistics showing your family's life expectancy!



JARGON BUSTER

Gedcom What happens if you want to move your data from one title to another? You don't have to retype it all in — you can use a GEDCOM file. **GEDCOM** stands for **GE**nealogy **D**ata **COM**munications, is a dedicated file format for genealogy data transfer. Most titles have their own unique file format, but can accept GEDCOMs.

PDF file A file format which captures all the elements of a printed document as an electronic image that you can view, navigate, print, or forward to someone else. PDF will appear exactly the same on any computer. To use the files, all you need is the free *Acrobat Reader* (www.adobe.com).

RTF (Rich Text Format) A format which allows you to transfer word processed documents between different programs. Such files have the suffix .rtf.

TIPS

Before you buy Before you pay any money for a program, it's a good idea to test it first to see if you like the way it works. Many have demo versions free to download — *Legacy's* free standard version, for example, is a pretty capable program in its own right.

UK software There are some titles that have been tailored for the UK researcher. These are worth considering because they offer ready-made forms for filling in data, specifically designed for British standard sources. Of course you can get by with US titles as many allow you to create your own forms.

Managing without Remember you will already have software on your computer which could be used for family history. Database and spreadsheets programs, and even Microsoft Word, can be used to compile family history data. You should also have a graphics package which you can use to draw your own tree — much more time consuming than ready-formatted trees, but it does give you total control.