

Making the most of your computer

## Software and hardware – the latest tools

# Family Tree Maker 2008

James Taylor reviews the latest version of this well-known software package

**F**amily Tree Maker (FTM) is now in its 17th manifestation and, aside from the updates it has made to content and packaging, makes two interesting claims for this latest version – that it has been the number one selling family history software for 18 years and that it has undergone a total rewrite of its database engine and interface.

The first of these claims is, at best, hyperbole. Launched in 1989, it took some time to become number one – *Generations Family Tree* occupied that position for some years, certainly in the UK. Its second claim must also be taken with a pinch of salt, although its database does take a little longer to load.

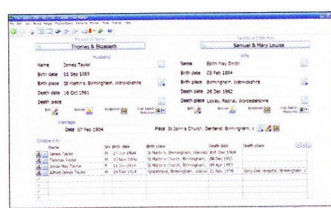
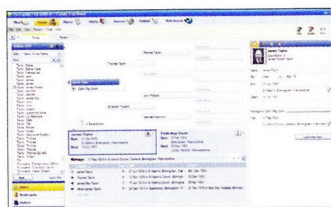
The interface is indeed different from those of previous versions. The default screen is set as the 'Family' tab of the 'People View' and it crams in lots of useful information. Simultaneously you can view the person index, pedigree chart, and family group. There's also a customisable pane that can show a photograph, facts (such as BMD information), media, notes and tasks – all relating to the selected person.

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From the 'Person' tab you can display a timeline of that person's life, including events such as birth, residence, marriage, occupation, and so on. When I tried this it omitted some children's birth information, although it did show their marriages and deaths. You can also incorporate world historical events into the timeline to put their lives in context – although this seems to mean mostly US history, in spite of *FTM* proclaiming itself to be a UK version. The spell check is in US English too, which is rather annoying.

The new 'Places View' lists all the places contained in your database, giving you the opportunity of 'correcting' them according to its gazetteer (which, unfortunately, defaults to similarly-named US places) and bringing up a map of the place and its environs. You can choose a conventional road map, an aerial view, or a useful hybrid of both, all zooming in to show street names. There's a 3D option but this needs a driver, currently only in beta form. There's also an option to print the map.

The 'Media View' shows all your media, grouped by person, category (for example audio, census, photo), or source titles. You can add captions, dates and descriptions, and allocate categories. You can also view all your media files together. The 'Sources View'



*Family Tree Maker* has been the best-selling genealogy software for some time – changes made to the new version, however, could allow rivals to steal a march

brings all your sources together and lets you easily add notes, media and links.

The 'Publish View' is where it gets disappointing, mainly in what has been left out. Unlike in previous versions there are no more unique paginated, indexed, drop-line descendant charts that could be incorporated in *FTM's* book. The book itself, an ordered collection of your choice of reports optionally incorporating your own text or scanned items, has gone too. At least, you can't print it yourself anymore – instead you have to upload it to Ancestry Press to be professionally bound and sent to you. The cost for this has emerged as an 'introductory' \$29.95 (about £15) plus ex-US shipping for a thin 24-page book. And although now less verbose, Ancestry's terms and conditions still give it the right to 'distribute' your file however it wishes. Books produced in previous versions of *FTM* cannot be edited in Ancestry Press or *FTM2008*.

Fan trees, the hourglass tree, the all-in-one tree, are all notable by their omission, as is the useful genealogy report (an extensive narrative that could include every descendant and incorporate your notes).

*Family Tree Maker 2008* comes in three editions: as a single CD (described as an upgrade but actually the full program, and with 14 days free access to the Ancestry.co.uk search facility); the Deluxe Edition (with



three months free Ancestry.co.uk access, a printed Getting Started Guide, and the *FTM2008* UK Training DVD); and the Platinum Edition, which has six months Ancestry.co.uk access, and the *Official Guide to Family Tree Maker 2008* (a printed book).

If you're an existing user you will probably test drive this version and find yourself mourning the missing charts and resenting having now to pay for a printed book. *FTM 2008* is probably not the best software update for you. If you're a new user interested in presenting your research to your wider family, you'd be better off finding software elsewhere, without having to pay a premium. On the other hand, the retained Ancestry search facility (at extra cost) and the new features, with information more conveniently grouped, will make your research and analysis easier.

*FTM* is now more of a money-spinner for Ancestry, with less utility for users. It has been the best-selling genealogy software – there may now be an opportunity for a new contender to seize the crown. ■

Ancestry sells the Deluxe and Platinum versions of *FTM 2008* from its UK website [www.ancestry.co.uk/shop](http://www.ancestry.co.uk/shop). They are also available in UK editions from several UK retailers, including [www.twrcomputing.co.uk](http://www.twrcomputing.co.uk) (tel: 01284 828271), which also sells the single UK CD and offers free delivery and support.