



One Student's Journey

Born in 1947, I was brought up as an only child by a single parent. However, I'd always known that my father, who disappeared out of our lives when I was 6, was married with a grown up daughter who was a schoolteacher. For many years I had wondered whether I should make efforts to trace any living members of my father's 'other family'. I was aware that the Internet had vastly increased opportunities to research into family history. So when I saw a course on family history advertised at CORE it gave me the incentive I needed to start my enquiries.

Gill Groom, the tutor, had planned an interesting course, teaching a different theme each week, such as how to interrogate census details, examining parish records, finding documents about paupers, soldiers etc. over the weeks we discovered lots of useful websites, developed our IT skills, and very importantly learnt about how our ancestors had lived and worked. Each student had different family interests to pursue. Several of us found a skeleton in the cupboard and we were all moved by the scale of deprivation and poverty many of our forebears had suffered. What I found amazing is that they all overcame adversities otherwise we wouldn't be here now!

Back to my personal journey, Gill had advised us to start with what we knew. I wrote down my own name, my mother's name and my maternal grandparents. I thought I'd never get any further back than this because I had no other information to hand. I was astounded to find that within a few weeks I knew names, occupations and the domestic circumstances of ancestors on my mother's side going back to my great, great, great, great grandparents from 1749. Meanwhile, from the Internet, I discovered a distant relative also doing similar research and we exchanged information including some superb old photographs. I love the social history revelations. For example, I found my maternal great, great grandfather was a radical early trade unionist in the mid-19th century attempting to improve conditions and pay in the collieries.

Towards the end of the course I braced myself to look into my father's history. I learnt from Internet sources his full name, and then used other techniques taught by Gill to ascertain the date of his death, marriage and birth of his legitimate daughter. Although now in her 80s I was astonished to discover that my half sister and her husband were still alive and well. Further enquiries, not without some emotional turmoil, resulted in our first meeting, just 6 months after starting the family history course, when I also met my nephew and niece. Since then my sister and my brother-in-law have visited me. I am delighted to find that they are warm, kind-hearted and absolutely wonderful people and we now keep in touch as sisters do. I have met other 'new cousins' and have lots of lines to pursue on both sides of my family.

I am so grateful to all those responsible for setting up the family history course and putting me on track with the requisite skills to delve into my past. Beyond my dreams, I have a sister with whom I am forging a close relationship.

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