

# Introduction

Few other pastimes have caught the imagination and involvement of Australians as has family history.<sup>1</sup> From quiet beginnings with modest numbers of participants, largely interested in establishing lineage connections to nobility, wealth or property, family history has become a popular pastime with wide appeal to increasing numbers of participants vitally interested in the who, how, why and when their ancestors came, from whence they came and how they settled and fared.<sup>2</sup> The growing number of family history societies and their membership, the establishment of family history services in public libraries and archives, the proliferation and range of family history related websites, the development of both commercial and no charge on-line databases and services, and continued internet activity are indicative of the popularity of the pastime.<sup>3</sup>

Explorations of the nature and causes of this growth in popularity in Australia are limited. From around the time of the Australian Bicentenary in 1988 (and perhaps inspired by the publicity, community interest and activity attending that event), a small number of researchers sought to gain an understanding of why this growth occurred by determining a profile of family historians and their motivations for participation.<sup>4</sup> Using data from members of various family history societies, these researchers identified similar characteristics in the profiles they established. They found commonalities in the motivations for participating in family history activity. However little evidence was provided to demonstrate, explain or analyse the asserted

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, family history refers to all forms of research undertaken by family historians and relating to their (or other's) family histories. It includes genealogy, which refers to a specific aspect of family history, namely the study of tracing one's ancestors. Often, in the literature and in public discourse, the two terms are used interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> Paula Hamilton & Paul Ashton, 'At Home With the Past: Initial Findings From the Survey,' *Australian Cultural History*, No. 23, 2003, pp. 11-12; Noeline Kyle, *I Want Some Identity, A Profile of Local Family History Group Members, Their Research and Educational Needs*, School of Behavioural and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, 1987, p. 1; Nick Vine Hall, 'Establishing An Identity,' *Society of Australian Genealogists, 1932-1982: Golden Jubilee History*, Society of Australian Genealogists, Sydney, 1982, pp. 86-87.

<sup>3</sup> Kyle, p. 3; Kylie J Veale, *The Changing Face of Genealogy: An Empirical Study of the Genealogical Community Online*, Ph.D. Candidacy Proposal, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, 23 June 2004, pp. 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Winsome A. N. Van den Bossche, *Amateur Historical Enquiry in the Tracing of Ancestry: Establishing a Profile of a Genealogist*, Masters thesis, Melbourne, 1988.

levels of growth. Subsequent studies have continued to make assertions about the growing popularity of family history and who its main participants are.<sup>5</sup>

The commonly held image of family historians that has emerged from these studies, and similar studies in the U.S.A., U.K. and Canada, is that of family historians as being primarily female, older than forty, from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, and with research interests in the United Kingdom and Ireland.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, John Dulong referred to the image of 'little old ladies in tennis shoes' that had been disparagingly coined to describe family historians who first had begun to visit repositories seeking to conduct family history research into Revolutionary War ancestors in the U.S.A.<sup>7</sup>

Family historians have also been characterised as seeking illustrious ancestors to either confirm lofty views of themselves, or as a means to add lustre to their otherwise undistinguished lives.<sup>8</sup> Social researchers have claimed that family historians are only interested in collecting the vital statistics of their ancestors, that family history is a form of religious practice,<sup>9</sup> and that the practice of family history is a reaction to mobility of families, breakdown in family units and changes in society.<sup>10</sup> In examining the motivation for participation in family history, several researchers have identified curiosity related reasons as the main motivators but with little exploration into the causal factors for participation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John T. Spurway, 'The Growth of Family History in Australia,' *The Push: A Journal of Early Australian Social History*, Vol. 27, 1989, p. 53; Ronald D. Lambert, *A Study of Genealogists & Family Historians*, University of Waterloo, 1998, p. 74; Vine Hall, p. 85; Kyle, p. 4, Geoffrey Bruce Humble, *Genealogy and the Internet*, Master thesis, Charles Sturt University, Mitchell, January 1999, p. 86.

<sup>6</sup> Hamilton & Ashton, pp. 11-12; Graeme Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2000, p. 81; Lambert, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> John P. Dulong, *Genealogical Groups in a Changing Organizational Environment: From Lineage to Heritage*, Ph.D. dissertation, Wayne State University, Detroit, 1986, p. 84.

<sup>8</sup> Rachel Eskin Fisher, *A Place in History: Genealogy, Jewish Identity, Modernity*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1999, p. 192; Lambert, p. 5; David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Lambert, pp. 2-6; Cardell K. Jacobson, 'Social Dislocations and the Search for Genealogical Roots,' *Human Relations*, 1986, Vol. 39 No. 4, p. 350.

<sup>10</sup> Davison, p. 83; Dulong, p. 297; Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1996, p. 224; Jacobson, p. 348; Simon Michael Titley-Bayes, *Family History in England, C 1945 – 2006: Culture, Identity and (Im)mortality*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of York, York, 2006, p. 70.

<sup>11</sup> Kyle, pp. 4-6; Van den Bossche, pp. 15-18; Lambert, pp. 3-4; Pamela J Drake, *Findings From The Fullerton Genealogy Study*, Masters thesis, California State University, Fullerton, 2001, p. 4.

This profile is in part borne out by the *Australians and the Past* survey which demonstrated that women were far more likely to be involved or concerned with family history and were in the majority as custodians and communicators of the intimate and domestic past whereas males were more interested in wider stages – world and European history.<sup>12</sup>

Many of these profiles from surveys, particularly Australian studies, are now 20 years old. New research is needed to consider present day motivations, participation and profiles in the light of the advent of the internet, the effects of digitisation and accessibility of records. New family historians are now a generation removed from the rapid growth of interest that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s and it will be useful to learn the current factors that affect interest.

What is missing in the existing scholarship is a focussed study identifying the extent and nature of the growth of family history in Australia, an updated evaluation of what has attracted people to the activity, and the various ways in which family historians conduct their research. This thesis addresses these gaps.

The principal method for exploring this subject was through an on-line survey of Australian family historians, asking them to provide demographic details and information about what their research process entails and where and why they conduct their research. Family historians were also asked about their motivations to begin and continue researching their family histories and to relate how that process began.

Previous Australian surveys have examined parts of this picture, exploring demographics and motivations but through the constraints of a limited section of the family history community. The survey undertaken for this thesis was directed to the widest possible population of Australian family historians and thereby allows a broader picture to be developed.

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<sup>12</sup> Hamilton & Ashton, p. 8.

The following two chapters consider the nature and history of family history so that the findings of this research project can be situated within an historical context. In Chapter 3 previous surveys are examined to identify methods and processes and to review their findings and their applicability to this work. The methods, including advantages and disadvantages of surveys, are discussed in Chapter 4 along with the development of the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey and the areas and questions included. Chapter 5 presents the results from the survey, and Chapter 6 then considers the information and implications generated.

## Chapter 1

### Nature and History of Family History

A commonly held view among researchers is that family history is one of the fastest growing leisure activities in western society.<sup>1</sup> Anecdotal evidence regarding the growth in interest is plentiful, ranging from popular accounts through to published family history society membership numbers and subscription numbers for commercial Internet sites. However, research literature examining the history, popularity, growth in interest and motivation for participation – both within Australia and internationally, is limited.<sup>2</sup> Previous scholarship on family history essentially looked at profiles of family historians, examining who, how and why people undertake family history research.<sup>3</sup> There are, however, a number of accounts that review the evolution of family history within specific western societies, and the ways that the pastime has now become what is perceived as a widespread activity in the twenty-first century. This chapter evaluates and draws on these accounts in order to explore the nature and history of family history. In particular, it examines the Australian experience in the context of available literature from other countries. It begins with an overview of the origins of family history in the practice of creating pedigrees and lineages, explores its nature and evolution in colonial Australia and the changes which occurred in the late twentieth century, in Australia and elsewhere. The chapter then turns its attention to some current issues including concerns about research standards and the challenges of researching family histories that extend beyond the English-speaking world.

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<sup>1</sup> Sydney Ann Beckett, *Current Practices and the Use of Computers in Genealogical Research*, Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, Philadelphia, 1993, p. 2; Graeme Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2000, p. 80; Margot Hornblower, *Roots Mania*, *Time Magazine*, April 19 1999, <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0.8816.990751.00.html> ; accessed 7 March 2008; Adrienne Julia Horne, *The Pursuit of Popular Genealogy*, Masters Thesis, University of Calgary, Calgary, 2002, p. 1; David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 16; Peggy T. Sinko and Scott N. Peters, *A Survey of Genealogists at the Newberry Library*, *Library Trends*, Summer, 1983, p. 97; Simon Michael Tittley-Bayes, *Family History in England, C 1945 – 2006: Culture, Identity and (Im)mortality*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of York, York, 2006, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> John P. Dulong, *Genealogical Groups in a Changing Organizational Environment: From Lineage to Heritage*, Ph.D. dissertation, Wayne State University, Detroit, 1986, p. 14; Kylie J. Veale, *The Changing Face of Genealogy: An Empirical Study of the Genealogical Community Online*, Ph.D. Candidacy Proposal, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, 23 June 2004, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Rachel Eskin Fisher, *A Place in History: Genealogy, Jewish Identity, Modernity*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1999, p. 38.

### ***Origins: Pedigrees and Lineages***

Early written genealogies began to emerge in Western Europe from approximately 1500 and concentrated on recording the pedigrees of royal and noble families. Most frequently recorded by monks or chroniclers who wrote down the oral traditions of the kings in whose realms they lived, these practices have been recorded in England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and Norway. Vital for claims to a throne, genealogical ties and the truth of their construction were on occasion modified to suit a political purpose. Records tracing lineages of common folk in Europe began emerging in the sixteenth century and were linked to the development of nation states where monarchs felt the need for information regarding their subjects for taxation and conscription purposes.<sup>4</sup> Other cultures (China, Japan, Korea and others) used recorded genealogy as part of their tradition of ancestor worship while others maintained oral traditions, recounting birth, death and marriage dates and kinship, but more frequently as a list of names.<sup>5</sup> Inscriptions in stonework in southern India provide a detailed pedigree for the maharajas of Travencore, showing descent direct and unbroken from the old Cera Kings from the ninth century A.D. These very long pedigrees of princes and great persons began as oral traditions which were later committed to a written record.<sup>6</sup> Questions of descent and kinship were of great political importance, since birth determined many of the privileges of the nobility. In France, such privileges were an important element in determining superiority in the court of Louis XIV.<sup>7</sup> Recording lineages to identify political relationships or to establish the purity of religious leadership is seen in the Hebrew Bible or Tanakh and these

...biblical genealogies were promoted during and after the Babylonian captivity when racial purity was insisted upon ... the Priesthood,

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<sup>4</sup> James B. Allen, Jessie L Embury and Kahlile B Mehr, 'Hearts Turned to the Fathers,' *BYU Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 1994-95, pp. 12-13.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p 12; Eirionedd A. Baskerville, 'Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru' The National Library of Wales, *The Family and Local History Handbook*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, The Genealogical Services Directory, ed. Robert Blatchford, York, 2003, p. 172; Ian Richardson, *Laggan*, Laggan Community Association, C.A.D.I.S.P.A., Faculty of Education, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, 1995, p. 44; Alex Haley, 'Black History, Oral History and Genealogy,' *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, Routledge, London, 2003, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Genealogy, (2008) in Encyclopaedia Britannica, [www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/228297/genealogy](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/228297/genealogy) accessed 18 November 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Winsome A. N. Van Den Bossche, *Amateur Historical Enquiry in the Tracing of Ancestry: Establishing a Profile of a Genealogist*, 1988, Masters thesis, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, p. 7.

which was confined to Levites... included only those who could prove descent from Aaron, and the High Priesthood to the family of Zadok.<sup>8</sup>

Those 'genealogies preserved by rabbis in late antiquity and the middle ages seemed designed to preserve the power of those with high-status lineage.'<sup>9</sup> Indeed, genealogical recording in various forms appears to have been a part of most societies, both pre and post-industrial.<sup>10</sup>

In England, as elsewhere, establishing lineages and connections to nobility and privileged families was a well-established practice and in 1709, Arthur Collins published *The Peerage of England*, which was a compilation of all the peerages created in England prior to the Act of Union. This became the main genealogical reference work in the United Kingdom. Collins' work accepted many of the myths the old families perpetuated, and is described as 'having many vestiges of error, and some of fraud, which time and vanity have rendered sacred.'<sup>11</sup> The nineteenth century with its great growth in the middle classes saw Collins' work overtaken by newer and more expansive publications from John Debrett (*Peerage and Baronetage*) and John Burke (*Burke's General and Heraldic Dictionary of the Peerage and Baronetage of the United Kingdom [Burke's Peerage], Commoners and Landed Gentry* and many others).<sup>12</sup> Based on Collins' earlier work, *Burke's Peerage*, which grew to become regarded as quasi-official, perpetuated the myths embedded in *The Peerage of England* and also included more information from the families magnifying those inaccuracies. Burke's later work *Landed Gentry* included many more inaccuracies.<sup>13</sup>

While land demonstrated material wealth, the possession of a pedigree offered the potent mix of respectability and social status, and, as has already been mentioned, if

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Fisher, p. 48.

<sup>10</sup> Tittley-Bayes, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> Anthony Camp, "Family History" in *The Oxford Companion to Family and Local History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., ed. David Hey., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, p. 40.

<sup>12</sup> John T. Spurway, 'The Growth of Family History in Australia,' *The Push: A Journal of Early Australian Social History*, 1989, Vol. 27, p 60. Spurway writes that Debrett's *Peerage* was first published in 1802, and had reached its sixteenth edition in 1825. *Baronetage* was first published in 1808 and published frequently from that date.

<sup>13</sup> Camp, p. 40.

facts needed to be clouded in the ‘mists of antiquity,’ then that was acceptable, particularly if proving otherwise was difficult. From a political point of view ‘legend and genealogy have always been quite compatible.’<sup>14</sup> For the royal families of England, Scotland and Europe it was important to connect to historical figures from antiquity. Frequently these pedigrees were ‘presented as *belles-lettres*, essays with “Noble Design” and were to display the deeds of a “Heroic Ancestry.”’<sup>15</sup> And it was a practice that carried across the oceans to the new world. Patrick Quinn, for example, observes that ‘with the notable exception of research conducted by the Mormons as part of their theology, genealogical research in quest of a pedigree was the norm in the United States for the first three quarters of the nineteenth century.’<sup>16</sup> In nineteenth century United States, the practice of creating genealogies with falsified and inaccurate treatment of royal and noble descents was common.<sup>17</sup> It was not, however, well received.

Early European settlers in America brought with them contempt for genealogy. The nobles of their homelands had used genealogy to secure their rights to govern and simultaneously enforced social immobility on the lives of the commoners. In escaping to America they found a society where civic government held sway rather than that of kinship and where social mobility was not governed by lineage.<sup>18</sup> In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries genealogies still had the ‘aura of an aristocratic pastime,’ and ‘were often (a) commercial activity undertaken at the behest of middle-class aspirations.’ Consequently those who pursued such genealogies were frequently ridiculed by those Americans who deplored such aristocratic attitudes.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Spurway, pp. 62-63.

<sup>15</sup> Van Den Bossche, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Patrick M. Quinn, ‘The Surge of Interest in Genealogy Reflects a Populist Strand of Society with Important Implications for our Culture,’ *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Vol. 37, No. 36, 1991, p. B2.

<sup>17</sup> Lloyd DeWitt Bockstruck, ‘Four Centuries of Genealogy: A Historical Overview,’ *Renaissance Quarterly*, 1983, p. 167.

<sup>18</sup> Horne, p. 26.

<sup>19</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 24; Titley-Bayes, p. 69.

Similar practices of seeking aristocratic lineages were part of nineteenth century genealogy behaviour in England. David Hey, in writing about these practices, observes:

... (they) involved many attempts by those who had acquired land through fortunes made in industry or trade to gain entry into the *Peerage* by grafting themselves onto medieval noble pedigrees...<sup>20</sup>

From 1893, Horace Round and his associates, who comprised the ‘critical school of genealogy,’ attacked the ‘monstrous fictions of these fabulous pedigrees’ contained in *Burke’s Peerage*, and were especially critical of the ‘errors, miss-statements and absurdities’ embedded in the work.<sup>21</sup> His ‘school of modern genealogists demythologised the past, separating legend from fact, bringing a high standard of scholarship to the subject, and became a potent influence in raising critical standards.’<sup>22</sup>

### **Colonial Interest**

John Spurway’s explanation of early Australian genealogical interest is that the Australian imitators of the English landed gentry sought to define their status and save themselves from social oblivion occasioned through their isolation in the colonies. This desire had grown out of the English practice of defining an hereditary elite who did not belong to the Peerage but who, never-the-less, held social rather than legal status. The publication by John Burke of *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Commoners of Great Britain and Ireland* – later known as the *History of the Landed Gentry*, had as its essential criteria for inclusion, the ownership of land and particular attachment to an identifiable estate.<sup>23</sup> Australian land owners – ‘the Squattocracy’ - were quick to align themselves as colonial landed gentry, considering themselves a part of the wider contexts of Australian and Imperial history, even though few

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<sup>20</sup> David Hey, *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 61 & p. 400; Quinn, p. B2.

<sup>21</sup> Tittley-Bayes, p. 52.

<sup>22</sup> Van den Bossche, p. 8; Camp, p. 40, Hey, p. 571.

<sup>23</sup> Spurway, p. 60.

enjoyed the birth and breeding that was acceptable to the English landed gentry.<sup>24</sup> One opinion offers that, by expressing an interest in genealogy, early Australians were declaring their love and loyalty for the 'home country'.<sup>25</sup> However, other views have a less flattering perspective and argue that such a practice was a mechanism to obtain power and prestige.<sup>26</sup>

This period saw genealogy almost inseparable from 'snobbery' and, in the case of *Burke's Peerage*, many fanciful anecdotes were presented as facts. In Australia, publications such as *Australian Men of Mark* and *Burke's Colonial Gentry (1891)*, repeated these failings. These publications attract considerable criticism, being described as 'appallingly bad and without real research or consideration and printing whatever the families wanted them to print.'<sup>27</sup> Others have labelled them as 'the most pretentious and the controversial register of the best Australian families' whose 'origins were often far from illustrious and whose wealth was but newly gained.'<sup>28</sup> Nineteenth century genealogy produced volumes of poor quality research, and was symptomatic of a 'time of pretension and social climbing, based upon bogus evidence of gentility.'<sup>29</sup>

### **Current Issues**

The twenty first century has seen the continued growth and changes of the late twentieth century in family history matters. With that continued growth and interest has come a focus on matters that were problematic earlier and new issues which exercise opinions and practices. Among these contemporary concerns are those to do

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 68; Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1965, p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> Paul de Serville, *Pounds and Pedigees: The Upper Class in Victoria 1850-80*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1991, pp. 191-192.

<sup>26</sup> Ward, p. 37.

<sup>27</sup> Evan Best, Councillor, Society of Australian Genealogists, Transcript of Interview with Leon Alekna, Neutral Bay, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2007, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> Davison, p. 89.

<sup>29</sup> Geoffrey Bruce Humble, *Genealogy and the Internet*, Masters thesis, Charles Sturt University, Mitchell, January 1999, p. 120.

with standards of research, the ‘western society’ nature of the practice and the challenges of family history for non-English speaking origin societies.

### **Changes**

Historians observe that changes in the nature of family history began to take place late in the nineteenth century across the English-speaking world. In the U.S.A., the focus of genealogical practice was on lineage and, particularly, on descent from ‘early Americans’ which held sway until the 1910s when a broader interest in genealogy began to develop. This broader interest moved away from the focus on a single ancestor towards an interest in heritage provided by all of an individual’s ancestors – inverting the view of the ‘family tree.’<sup>30</sup> This shift was mirrored in the United Kingdom where there was also a movement of people who began to enjoy materially better circumstances, doing genealogy simply out of an interest in the origins of their family that had grown past the idea of simple pedigrees.<sup>31</sup>

Some writers state that Americans became interested in genealogy ‘because their ancestors belonged to distinctive groups other than royalty,’ with connections to Pilgrim Settlers and Revolutionary War participants interesting individuals. This interest saw the formation of lineage and heritage societies which were ‘devoted to promoting respect and reverence for the deeds of those who had played a role in the great events of national history.’<sup>32</sup> Industrialisation and urbanisation had created a new upper middle-class who began to turn to genealogy as a means of reinforcing and legitimising its position from both ‘the horde of immigrants’ and ‘the nouvelle (sic) riche’. The *Deseret News Weekly* in 1885 recorded:

... it might be difficult for many persons who have during recent years become so wonderfully exercised over genealogical matters

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<sup>30</sup> Fisher, pp. 34-35.

<sup>31</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 36; Titley-Bayes, p. 298.

<sup>32</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, pp. 24-26. The writers list The Society of Cincinnati, founded in 1783 by officers of the American Continental Army, the Sons of the American Revolution, the Union of Veterans of the Civil War, the Society of Colonial Wars, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the National Society of Colonial Dames in America, the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Society of Mayflower Descendants, establishing a different order of social class and status.

that it amounts to a mania with them, to tell just why they are so affected...<sup>33</sup>

John Dulong writes that this interest and the nationalist feelings engendered by the American Centennial celebrations of 1876, created the first wave of genealogical interest in the U.S.A., which was largely the domain of the 'WASP upper-class'.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast to Dulong's evaluations of motivations, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter – the Latter-day Saints) were engaged in genealogical research from 1840 as part of their theology. This involvement was motivated by entirely different reasons to those who were engaged in seeking social prestige through pedigree searching, and was more of a search for family names regardless of station.<sup>35</sup> It is difficult to assess the relative populations of family historians engaged in the different approaches to family history research, but the efforts of the Latter-day Saints tended to be of a more persistent nature, with individuals continuing to add to their collection of names, in their efforts to link families together to fulfil religious obligations.<sup>36</sup> By contrast, those seeking pedigrees for social reasons may well have been satisfied once a suitable connection had been established.

Organised genealogical practice was also evident in Europe, principally in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s. Here different reasoning was the catalyst. The German Bureau for Racial Research began to systematically gather and photograph old parish records, encouraging the German people to trace their ancestry at least back to 1800 as part of a renewal of German nationalism.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, members of the Jewish community began gathering information that they feared may be lost as German nationalism gained momentum.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Deseret News Weekly*, Salt Lake City, 1 April 1885, p. 174.

<sup>34</sup> Dulong, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Quinn, p. B2.

<sup>36</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 42. The Latter-day Saint religious obligation lies in linking families together through temple ordinances. The constant and increasing volume of ordinances processed each year indicates a considerable number of individuals engaged in active research.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 219.

<sup>38</sup> Fisher, pp. 49, & 57.

Gradually there began to be a distinct change in genealogical practice, shifting the emphasis away from lineage and exclusive status towards interests that conferred heritage and identity.<sup>39</sup> In Australia there began to be a gradual thawing to the question of convict ancestry – previously a ‘taboo’ subject, with public addresses and publication of papers and biographies of convict settlers.<sup>40</sup> Robert Hughes, writing about Australian attitudes to convict ancestry prior to the 1960s, described the reaction of the upper middle classes when mention was made of convict ancestry as creating ‘paroxysms of social embarrassment.’ He wrote: ‘None wanted to have convict ancestors ... Fifty years ago, convict ancestry was a stain to be hidden.’<sup>41</sup> So virulent had been the campaign to halt ‘the contagion’ of the transportation of convicts from England that emancipists felt compelled to disassociate themselves from their origins and hide their past, particularly when their present circumstances included a measure of successful enterprise.<sup>42</sup> Ron Lambert, following his survey of members of convict ancestry society members, describes the attitudes to the stain of convict ancestry as exemplified in the institutional practice of destroying federal census data on the grounds ‘that this ‘protected’ citizens from potentially embarrassing information about their ancestry’ and in the way

...some genealogical organizations also required patrons using their resources to pledge not to use discoveries about convict ancestry to the possible detriment of living descendants.<sup>43</sup>

Lambert adds further that his respondents speculated how members in their families may have known about their convict origins and ‘how this knowledge might have

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<sup>39</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 37; Dulong, p. 22; Fisher, p. 32; Cardell K. Jacobson, ‘Social Dislocations and the Search for Genealogical Roots,’ *Human Relations*, Vol. 39. No. 4, 1986, p. 348.

<sup>40</sup> Nancy Gray, ‘Researchers and Research,’ *The Society of Australian Genealogists Golden Jubilee History 1932 – 1982*, The Wentworth Press, Marrickville, 1982, p. 48. Gray refers to Professor Arnold Wood’s public address titled ‘Convicts,’ Herbert Rumsey’s ‘Pioneers of Sydney Cove,’ published in 1937, and A.J. Gray’s address in 1953 ‘John Irving - The First Australian Emancipist’.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: A History of Transportation of Convicts to Australia, 1787-1868*, Vintage, London, 2003, p. 158.

<sup>42</sup> Babette Smith, *Australia’s Birthstain: the Startling Legacy of the Convict Era*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2008, p. 253.

<sup>43</sup> Ronald D. Lambert, ‘Reclaiming the Ancestral Past: Narrative, Rhetoric and the “Convict Stain,”’ *Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 2002, p. 115.

been suppressed or ‘lost’ to family memory.’<sup>44</sup> Following generations considered convict heritage to be a ‘stain’ and set about disguising their lineage by developing fictional family trees. More extreme measures included the ostracism of ‘ageing convict couples’ by their families, and forbidding discussion about the topic.<sup>45</sup> Shame about convict stain persisted in many convict descendant families through and into the boom that began during the 1970s. Often family papers were destroyed in an attempt to hide any evidence of linkage – much to the frustration of present day family historians.<sup>46</sup>

The formation of the Society of Australian Genealogists (S.A.G.) in 1932 demonstrates that genealogical interest had begun to diversify from pedigree hunting in Australia and Spurway argues that this was initially in response to the desire of those from English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish descent to be able to reconnect with their ‘true identities’.<sup>47</sup> With the interest of the Society’s founder Herbert Rumsey in Australia’s convict past, members began to be drawn to their own convict connections. When Rumsey first endeavoured to have the prominence of convicts in Australian history raised he was ‘shouted down’ and at the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Sydney, no mention was made of convicts. The convict stigma was still strongly evident.<sup>48</sup> The formation of Australian lineage based societies including the Fellowship of First Fleeters and The 1788-1820 Pioneer Association in 1968, the First Fleet Fellowship of Victoria in 1984 and others dedicated to links with convict ancestry demonstrates an ‘embracing of the convict past and an inverted view of a

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 115.

<sup>45</sup> Bruce Tranter and Jed Donoghue, ‘Convict Ancestry: a Neglected Aspect of Australian Identity,’ *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 2003, p. 556.

<sup>46</sup> Graham Lewis, former Treasurer and Web Master, Society of Australian Genealogists, Transcript of Interview with Leon Alekna, Killara NSW, 30 August 2007, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> John T. Spurway, p. 85.

<sup>48</sup> Heather Garnsey, Executive Officer, Society of Australian Genealogists, Transcript of Interview with Leon Alekna, Sydney 7<sup>th</sup> June 2007, p. 3.

social pedigree'.<sup>49</sup> Attitudes to convict ancestry have now come full circle where for some 'it is now acceptable, even desirable to acknowledge convicts as ancestors'.<sup>50</sup>

Such changes developed slowly in Australia and internationally, with spikes in interest in the U.S.A. coinciding with the economic depression in the 1920s and 1930s and explained by people having time to indulge in family history research, although the connection remains anecdotal.<sup>51</sup> The two decades between 1940 and 1960 were decades of rapid growth in family history research. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, through the Genealogical Society of Utah, was deeply involved in encouraging family history research in many parts of the world fuelling curiosity that would later explode in widespread interest.<sup>52</sup> In the U.S.A. there was little change in the family history sector until the mid-1970s when a confluence of events, including the publication of *Roots* and the U.S.A. Bicentennial, dramatically changed the dynamic.<sup>53</sup> However, it is clear that growth in interest continued to build with the formation of family history societies in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the U.S.A. Non-English speaking countries do not appear to have experienced the same growth in interest and, while there were some societies formed in those countries, there is a suggestion that they were formed to meet the interests of English background individuals in settler societies rather than those of the host nation.<sup>54</sup> By the time the mid-1970s arrived, American, Canadian, U.K., and Australian societies already had good membership numbers, and libraries and other genealogical service organisations were experiencing growth in demand for their facilities and services.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Spurway, p. 73; Nick Vine Hall, 'Establishing An Identity,' *The Society of Australian Genealogists 1932-1982: Golden Jubilee History*, Society of Australian Genealogists, 1982, p. 85.

<sup>50</sup> Paula Hamilton, 'Memory Studies and Cultural History,' in *Cultural History in Australia*, eds. Hsu-Ming Teo and Richard White, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2003, p. 87. Hamilton, in the End Notes to her essay states that for Convict Society members, descent from a convict is considered preferable to descent from the 'brutal' guards who brought them out. See p. 248.

<sup>51</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 92; Jacobson, p. 348.

<sup>52</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 153. They write that the Genealogical Library in Salt Lake City in 1960 had over 85,000 patrons attend the library and a further 24,600 patrons using the archives. Over 99% were LDS Church members. This changed in later years when interest in genealogy dramatically expanded outside the Latter-day Saints.

<sup>53</sup> Dulong, p. 35.

<sup>54</sup> Keith Johnson, Councillor and Fellow, Society of Australian Genealogists, Transcript of Interview with Leon Alekna, North Sydney, 10<sup>th</sup> September 2007, p. 24.

<sup>55</sup> Sinko and Peters, p. 97.

The frequently argued view that the advent of Bicentennial celebrations in the U.S.A., Canada and Australia, and the publication of *Roots The Saga of an American Family* in 1976 by Alex Haley and its subsequent transformation into a television mini-series, served to rapidly change the pursuit of family history from the preserve of the 'WASP' elite to a mass market activity or hobby for all people.<sup>56</sup> Americans who were members of the growing middle class now saw the possibility for them to enquire after their heritage. After all, if the descendant of an African slave could realistically and simply uncover his heritage, so could they. And millions began to make enquiries.<sup>57</sup> Many historians see the publication of *Roots* as a watershed moment in the history of genealogical interest and give considerable credit to its impetus in increasing the numbers of researchers.<sup>58</sup>

Spurway writes that Australians, after the passage of about three generations, gradually began to accept convict ancestry, and curiosity about their convict origins encouraged people to acquire an interest in family history.<sup>59</sup> Just as the idea of an African slave playing an important role in ancestry for Americans, Australians may well have been fascinated by the idea of having convict connections.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the 'stain' Australians felt at a convict past began to change to pride at the prospect of having a convict in their lineage.<sup>61</sup> Lambert suggests that Australians learnt of their convicts because they became participants in family history and that the prospect of convict origins stimulates our interest in family history.<sup>62</sup> He also suggests that Australians are more enthusiastic about family history than either Americans or Canadians, attributing the interest to Australia's unique history.<sup>63</sup> What is not explained, however, is why Australians of non-convict descent are equally as

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<sup>56</sup> Dulong, p. 78 & 299; Horne, p. 3; Lowenthal, p. 38.

<sup>57</sup> Dulong, p. 35.

<sup>58</sup> Beckett, p. 2; Dulong, pp. 21-22; Fisher, p. 36; Tittley-Bayes, p. 170.

<sup>59</sup> Spurway, pp. 91-93.

<sup>60</sup> Perry McIntyre, Councillor, Society of Australian Genealogists, Transcript of Interview with Leon Alekna, Camperdown NSW, 16 August 2007, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> Lambert, Reclaiming, p. 115.

<sup>62</sup> Ronald D. Lambert, 'Sounding the Depths of the Convict-Descendant Pool,' *The Mail*, July-August 2001, pp. 21 – 23.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23.

interested in family history, nor is evidence offered to show that Australian interest has eclipsed American interest.

In 1982 Nick Vine Hall published figures that suggest Australian interest in family history is second only to that of the U.S.A. He used as his measure membership of family history societies per head of population. This measurement places Australian interest at 11.33 genealogists per 10,000 of population, against 6.67 in the U.K. while American interest was substantially stronger at 22.71.<sup>64</sup> What this does not address is the percentage of family historians who do not actually belong to societies – in Australia or elsewhere. The shortcoming of Vine Hall's measurement is that it includes only those family historians who belong to family history societies, making it more a measurement of family history society membership than of engagement in family history.

What Vine Hall's figures do establish are markers illustrating the growth of interest in family history that had occurred by the late twentieth century, as does the increase in the number of family history societies.<sup>65</sup> This growth was also a reflection of a change of focus from the practice of seeking noble pedigrees to researching family history regardless of family origins.

### Research Standards

As earlier mentioned, in the late nineteenth century, Horace Round and his critical school of genealogy colleagues set out to deflate those who 'laid fanciful claims to lofty ancestry through dubious pedigrees' indicating that there was sufficient activity in this practice to excite their attention.<sup>66</sup> Achieving a form of social status through acceptable ancestry is a practice that has not entirely been overcome in current day family history research. Indeed there is ample evidence to show that the competitive nature of some family historians has them aim to obtain a level of prestige through

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<sup>64</sup> Vine Hall, p. 86.

<sup>65</sup> The growth in family history societies is discussed in this thesis in Chapter 2, pp. 35-40.

<sup>66</sup> Tittley-Bayes, p. 129. See also Bockstruck, p. 167.

connections to interesting or famous ancestors.<sup>67</sup> However, as argued earlier, much of contemporary family history has defined itself by opposition to the social climbers, with contemporary family history practice requiring claimants with links to famous ancestry to better document their connections than earlier times when tenuous claims were sufficient.<sup>68</sup> The argument is for better research standards.

Family history practice has consistently been plagued by dubious standards of research and proof. At heart is the fact that family history has never been an academic discipline, with the tension between professional family historians (i.e. those who earn remuneration from their efforts in research on behalf of others) and the novice amateur, lying behind the lack of academic discipline.<sup>69</sup> Prior to the interest in family history becoming of wider appeal, the drawing up of pedigrees was largely the domain of professional genealogists who followed their own research and recording processes.<sup>70</sup> When individuals wanted to trace their own family trees they were faced with the fact that there was little material available of an instructional nature and beginners were obliged to fumble their way into scholarly habits and processes.<sup>71</sup> So great was the dearth of instructional material that when the Genealogical Society of Utah printed lesson materials in 1912 and distributed them to the world wide Church membership, they quickly sold out, indicating a substantial demand for such instruction.<sup>72</sup> The pre-printed genealogical forms the society produced were similarly quickly adopted, becoming the template for the forms commonly used by family historians today.<sup>73</sup>

Today, as in previous times, those who set out as beginners frequently have no research experience and are often unaware of ‘the most basic techniques of acquiring

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<sup>67</sup> Best, p. 15.

<sup>68</sup> Titley-Bayes, p. 131.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, p. 116.

<sup>70</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 24.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p. 62.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p. 69.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, p. 49 – referring to family group sheets, pedigree charts and individual record sheets.

information from source materials.’<sup>74</sup> In their survey of genealogists at the Newberry Library, Peggy Sinko and Scott Peters found that the collection of programs, seminars and classes, while serving an important educational function, had little impact and ‘do not reach or are not of interest to many family historians,’ who remain largely self-taught.<sup>75</sup> Spurway, before the proliferation of internet family history, stated that for family history to continue its rise to respectability, it would need to depend on professional and ethical standards, and that the practice of family history should rest on a foundation of good scholarship.<sup>76</sup> The novice family historian today finds that there is little effort to manage standards of research and that they are free – even encouraged -to conduct their research at their own level of ability.<sup>77</sup> Consequently there is an increased likelihood that poorly documented research will proliferate, particularly with the capacities of today’s electronic communications where errors in research can be duplicated so easily.<sup>78</sup> The commonly expressed great fear of seasoned and professional family historians is that:

Some genealogists will jump to conclusions and a lot of wrong dates and connections will be put in print. Their pedigrees will be false pedigrees and won’t have the standard.<sup>79</sup>

Indeed, the practice of ‘copying and pasting’ from various family trees has become so prevalent that not just errors of dates occur, but connections to the wrong individual are perpetuated. As one individual makes that wrong connection and shares their information with others, that ‘wrong’ connection is accepted as fact and the process of duplication and sharing continues to others. Margot Hornblower, writing about the phenomenon of genealogical interest in 1999 in *Time*, drew attention to the belief by wide sections of the community (including family historians) who think that if information is available on a computer, then it is the gospel truth.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Titley-Bayes, p. 124.

<sup>75</sup> Sinko and Peters, pp. 104-105.

<sup>76</sup> Spurway, pp. 93-98.

<sup>77</sup> Dulong, p. 269.

<sup>78</sup> Beckett, p. 25.

<sup>79</sup> Keith Johnson, Councillor and Fellow, Society of Australian Genealogists, Transcript of Interview with Leon Alekna, North Sydney NSW, 10<sup>th</sup> September 2007, p. 25.

<sup>80</sup> Hornblower, p. 3.

The challenge that faces the family history community (and all other historians) is how to encourage high standards of evidence in research when the democratic nature of family history and the ease modern day family historians have in transferring and sharing information seems to act as discouragement against rigorous scholarship. Hornblower's observation about the 'gospel truth' seems ever more applicable.

### A Western Practice

Some researchers maintain that the pursuit of family history is largely a western social practice, and particularly confined to those of English speaking countries and backgrounds. Spurway writes

...the fact remains that Australian families whose forebears come from countries other than Great Britain, Ireland or Germany are largely uninterested in tracing their origins.<sup>81</sup>

Dulong offers a different perspective by suggesting that genealogical curiosity does exist in other countries without offering specific examples, but then adds that it is only in the U.S.A. that the practice has widely permeated society.<sup>82</sup> A further aspect that strengthens this perception is that, if a researcher in an English-speaking settler society has ancestors from non-English speaking countries, the researcher may no longer have the language skills to be able to read the documentation from those non-English-speaking countries and may thus be discouraged from engaging in research.

Other writers have differing views, stating that it is wrong to assume that family history is largely a U.S.A. or English-speaking background phenomenon, and that around the world various migrant groups explore their pride and place through the pursuit of family history, albeit perhaps in different ways.<sup>83</sup> Commentators provide lists of countries where family history is actively pursued, demonstrating that family

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<sup>81</sup> Spurway, p. 103. See also Garnsey, p. 5.

<sup>82</sup> Dulong, p. 13.

<sup>83</sup> Richard A. Frazier, *Genealogical Research, Internet Research and Genealogical Tourism*, Masters thesis, University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie, May 2001, p. 39; Hornblower, p. 1.

history research has a wider interest than simply western, English-speaking societies.<sup>84</sup> The existence of Jewish family history organisations in the 1920s and 30s in Germany is well known and today such organisations can be found throughout Europe, in Brazil and Australia.<sup>85</sup> James Allen, Jessie Embury and Kahlile Mehr detail an extensive list of microfilming of records by the Latter-day Saints in a vast number of countries and languages, beginning in the late 1930s and reaching a crescendo in the 1970s and 80s. Records were filmed in many Asian countries, southern Africa, South America, Israel and southern Europe. Polynesian genealogical information was gathered from Hawaii, Samoa, New Zealand, Tonga and Tahiti, being of interest to the large populations of Church members in those countries who were engaged in family history research.<sup>86</sup>

The existence of records and research activities in countries outside the English-speaking world runs counter to the claim that people from non-Anglo-Celtic ancestral backgrounds have either no interest or no need to consider family history as a pastime. In Australia, the claim emerges from the apparent lack of participation by migrants from non-English-speaking backgrounds in family history. The argument goes that recent migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds have no need to be involved in family history because their origins are most recently held in memory, or because their cultures involve a much closer relationship with elderly relatives and where oral tradition is a strong component of family relationships.<sup>87</sup>

Such a conclusion is problematic when considering the research needs of non-English speaking background migrants, and their descendants. Of a necessity, at least some of the resources they would consult are in their countries of origin, not in Australia. Furthermore, Australian family history societies have Australian resources and then, from the United Kingdom and Ireland, since these locations reflect the main backgrounds of the early generations of white settlement in Australia. Accordingly,

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<sup>84</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 250; Fisher, p. 36; Hornblower, p. 2.

<sup>85</sup> Fisher, pp. 55-58.

<sup>86</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, pp. 155, 157, 250.

<sup>87</sup> Spurway, p. 103; Van den Bossche, p. 18; Noeline Kyle, *I Want Some Identity, A Profile of Local Family History Group Members, Their Research and Educational Needs*, School of Behavioural and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, 1987, p. 4.

non-English speaking background migrants are unlikely to see value in using these resources, or Australian archives and libraries because the family information they seek is not held in these venues. Their research efforts will be directed elsewhere and, hence, their activities as family historians tend to fall outside the family history radar.

There are other explanations. Peter Read, in writing about the results of the *Australians and the Past* survey, asked the question why some people do not talk to their families about the past. He surmised that one obvious answer is that people ‘may be too traumatised by their past,’ with the old country ‘symbolising a past deliberately forsaken.’<sup>88</sup> In part, this is a reflection on Hansen’s Law which suggests that there is a ‘third generation effect’ evident with migrant societies – ‘What the son wishes to forget, the grandson wishes to remember.’ Fisher describes the process as:

Once a proto-genealogist discovers the reason behind his elders’ silence, he is driven to learn more. Rather than feeling shame, he feels hunger.<sup>89</sup>

The conclusion drawn from this is that family history will not be of interest to descendants of recently arrived non-English speaking background immigrants, rather those of earlier arrival date and resident in local society for many generations will have a family history interest.<sup>90</sup> This is supported by Heather Garnsey, Executive Officer for the Society of Australian Genealogists, in the Australian context commenting that interest in different cultural backgrounds comes from the grandchildren of migrants, particularly when the migrant grandparents begin to pass away.<sup>91</sup> Jacobson in his research found some support for the ‘Three Generation Effect’, finding that those whose ancestors came earlier showed significantly greater interest than those of more recent migrants.<sup>92</sup>

One further explanation for a lack of interest in culturally diverse family backgrounds can be gleaned from the U.S.A. example where, until the 1980s, it was deemed ‘not

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<sup>88</sup> Peter Read, ‘Before Rockets and Aeroplanes: Family History,’ *Australian Cultural History*, No. 22, 2003, p. 134.

<sup>89</sup> Fisher, p. 95.

<sup>90</sup> Jacobson, p. 348.

<sup>91</sup> Garnsey, p. 6.

<sup>92</sup> Jacobson, p. 352.

American' to admit such backgrounds, and hence there was a reluctance to participate in family history.<sup>93</sup> By contrast, today it is common to be aware and proud of ethnicity. The formation in the U.S.A. of growing numbers of family history societies by 1986 formed specifically to cater for the needs of those from a wide range of European countries, and for native and African Americans, demonstrates a growing demand by those whose family lines are outside Anglo-Celtic traditions.<sup>94</sup> The rising tide of migrant cultural awareness encouraged many new family historians who were drawn to existing non-Anglo-Celtic family history societies and also led to the formation of many more similarly based societies in the U.S.A.<sup>95</sup> Drawing on her informal study of family historians, Noeline Kyle suggested that there were few Australians who do not have a wider ancestry than the traditional Anglo-Saxon or Irish, and noted that her respondents (425) listed a total of 37 countries of origin aside from the United Kingdom and Ireland.<sup>96</sup> Mark Kelly, Australian Manager for the Latter-day Saints Family History Department, states that at Australian Latter-day Saint family history centres, the experience is mostly Anglo-Celtic but that there are pockets of intense interest for various cultural groups, naming the Chinese, Polynesian and South Americans as examples.<sup>97</sup> Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton draw attention to the strong interest in family history among Aboriginal groups with the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Family History Unit in Canberra at the centre of extensive research capabilities.<sup>98</sup> There is also a growing number of ethnic community based history groups, museums and other organisations whose activities overtly encompass family history.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Dulong, p. 294.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 20 & 294.

<sup>96</sup> Kyle, p. 6.

<sup>97</sup> Mark Kelly, Australian Manager, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Department, Transcript of Interview with Leon Alekna, Carlingford, 20<sup>th</sup> June 2007.

<sup>98</sup> Paul Ashton & Paula Hamilton, *History at the Crossroads, Australians and the Past*, Halstead Press, Ultimo, 2010, p. 28.

<sup>99</sup> See for example – kythera-family.net at [www.kythera-family.net](http://www.kythera-family.net); Australia Kfarsqhab Association at [www.kfarsqhab.com.au](http://www.kfarsqhab.com.au); Australian Lebanese Historical Society at [www.alhs.org.au](http://www.alhs.org.au); Chinese Australian Family Historians of Victoria at [www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/cafhov](http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/cafhov); and The Italian Association of Assistance at [www.coasit.org.au/heritage](http://www.coasit.org.au/heritage).

Accommodating those from non-English-speaking backgrounds in the mainstream of family history research is a challenge for those organisations who are providers of family history records and services. Given the evidence that there is interest in family history among those from other than Anglo-Celtic background, the challenge is how to provide services for them. The evidence examined so far suggests that aside from research guides published by archival organisations, libraries and Latter-day Saint microfilm collections, little is offered to either meet their needs or to encourage their involvement in family history.

### ***Conclusion***

The modern day practice of family history has come from a number of origins. These include an association with ancestor worship, with a form of religious service qualification, with the development of military and taxation purposes in nation states, and with the practice of developing pedigrees connecting to noble and royal lineage. Understanding the origins of family history and particularly the practice of a search for pedigrees with noble lineages provides the background to the early interest that developed in colonial Australia. From this basis, this chapter has traced the changing nature of family history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as it evolved into a pastime that, in Australia, included pride in discovering convict ancestry and into a pursuit that has changed the emphasis away from lineage towards heritage provided by all ancestors – ‘inverting the family tree’. Attention then turned to two ongoing and current issues that confront family historians and especially the established family history societies. These are the concern over research standards and the capacity for inaccuracies to be introduced and perpetuated, along with the desire to see that family history continues to expand its democratic base and can cater for not just Australians from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds but also those from non-English-speaking backgrounds. The following chapter discusses the growth that has occurred in participation in family history, examining the various factors that have worked in concert to arouse interest and to facilitate participation.

## Chapter 2

### Explaining the Growth of Family History

The previous chapter considered the origins of family history and how the practice has changed and developed. This chapter focuses on explaining the growth in participation of family history, beginning with the oft-repeated statements about the key events in the late twentieth century that have been identified as stimulants to growth. The chapter then evaluates other factors that have had an impact. These include the effects of changing costs and accessibility to records in family history research, technological developments, increased leisure time and other social and cultural factors along with media coverage. The purpose is to provide context and background for the development of the survey that sits at the core of this thesis, a topic that is addressed in Chapter 3.

#### ***The Roots Phenomenon***

In explaining the growth of interest in family history in the late twentieth century, commentators and researchers have repeatedly asserted a pivotal role played by the publication of Alex Haley's book *Roots The Saga of an American Family* in 1976 and the subsequent televising of the mini-series of the same name.<sup>1</sup> *Roots* has been described as the catalyst in the U.S.A. that led to a flood of people wanting to know about their own family history, while in the U.K. *Roots* is identified as the spark that caused a mass democratic involvement in history, as 'a historically symptomatic text, read and watched by millions.'<sup>2</sup> An Australian writer similarly argues that the publication of *Roots* led to a 'much stronger world-wide interest.'<sup>3</sup> However, while

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<sup>1</sup> James B. Allen, Jessie L. Embury and Kahlile B. Mehr, 'Hearts Turned to the Fathers,' *BYU Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 1994-95, p. 291; John P. Dulong, *Genealogical Groups in a Changing Organizational Environment: From Lineage to Heritage*, Ph.D. dissertation, Wayne State University, Detroit, 1986 p. 316; Adrienne Julia Horne, *The Pursuit of Popular Genealogy*, Masters thesis, the University of Calgary, Calgary, 2002, p. 3; Nick Vine Hall, 'Establishing An Identity,' *The Society of Australian Genealogists 1932-1982: Golden Jubilee History*, the Society of Australian Genealogists, Sydney, 1982, p. 86; Simon Michael Titley-Bayes, *Family History in England, C 1945 – 2006: Culture, Identity and (Im)mortality*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of York, York, 2006, p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> Dulong, p. 316; Titley-Bayes, pp. 25 & 105.

<sup>3</sup> Vine Hall, p. 86.

these and other researchers acknowledge the impact of *Roots*, there is a chorus of recognition that there were other public events that also had an impact.

The growth in interest in family history around the world was already underway before the advent of *Roots*. In Canada, Australia and the U.S.A., bicentennial preparations and celebrations in the years preceding the publication of *Roots* were also important in the growth in interest.<sup>4</sup> The timing of these events occurring in close proximity to each other had a multiplier effect. John Dulong encapsulates the effect this way: ‘The Bicentennial made people curious: *Roots* convinced them that family history was a possibility.’ He adds further that the events were interdependent, with the American Bicentennial laying the foundation for the explosive interest generated by *Roots*.<sup>5</sup> The effects of bicentennial celebrations in Canada, the U.S.A. and Australia were not directly felt in England. However, from the 1960s, overseas enquiries from these countries were contributing significantly to a growing United Kingdom interest and it is telling that it was after *Roots* that the majority of U.K. local family history societies were formed.<sup>6</sup> That both the bicentennials and *Roots* had a substantial impact on interest is one of the ‘givens’ of family history research, but assessing their relative individual effect is almost impossible because they were chronologically adjacent and, indeed, little substantive research has been done to evaluate the impact of these events.<sup>7</sup>

Researchers argue that the seeds for the startling growth were, however, planted long before these events took place, and a series of interconnected factors were involved, some about social change, some about cultural concerns and some about those factors which made family history easier.<sup>8</sup> These factors, as Simon Titley-Bayes describes, both pushed and pulled at the interest of prospective family historians<sup>9</sup> – allowing

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<sup>4</sup> Dulong, p. 20-21; Horne, p. 3; John T. Spurway, ‘The Growth of Family History in Australia,’ *The Push: A Journal of Early Australian Social History*, 1989, Vol. 27, p. 102; Vine Hall, p. 85. Vine Hall was referring to the James Cook Bicentenary as the point at which Australian interest in family history began its rise.

<sup>5</sup> Dulong, p. 317.

<sup>6</sup> Titley-Bayes, pp. 33 & 38.

<sup>7</sup> Dulong, p. 316.

<sup>8</sup> Titley-Bayes, p. 50.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 89.

family history to become easier for participants - and are examined in the following pages.

### ***Family History Societies – Growth and Membership***

Family history societies, from the formation of the first society in the nineteenth century, have played an influential part in the development of family history. A 'barely averted genealogical tragedy in 1844,' provoked the formation of the New England Genealogical Society. William H Montague happened upon a janitor who was about to feed pages of the 1798 U.S.A. District Tax rolls for Massachusetts and Maine into the furnace at Boston Customs House. Motivated by the potential destruction of public documents and family papers, the society was formed to prevent other such catastrophes and to ensure they were available for research by interested parties.<sup>10</sup> Collecting records and making them available to their members to enable documentary research remains a fundamental reason for the existence of family history societies.

The expansion in the numbers of family history societies follows a similar trajectory to the expansion of interest in family history. In the U.S.A., following the formation of the New England Genealogical Society, a host of other societies were formed between 1869 and 1892 in all parts of the country, and reflected the interest created by the U.S.A. Centennial celebrations.<sup>11</sup> In the U.K. the first organised genealogical endeavour occurred in 1893 with the formation of the Genealogical Cooperative Research Club, which began with the purpose of indexing classes of records at the Public Records Office in London.<sup>12</sup> However, in contrast to the U.S.A., organised genealogical practice remained modest in proportions until after the formation of the Society of Genealogists in London in 1911. The formation of the London society represented institutionalisation of the growing movement in critical genealogy that had its origin with historian Horace Round in the mid nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 25; Dulong, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Lloyd DeWitt Bockstruck, 'Four Centuries of Genealogy: A Historical Overview,' *Renaissance Quarterly*, 1983, Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 165.

<sup>12</sup> Tittley-Bayes, p. 30.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29.

Growing American interest in family history was inspired by public encouragement from Congressional leaders to provide historical sketches of their counties to commemorate the U.S.A. Centennial. Americans were encouraged to search for their ancestors and the publication of considerable numbers of local and county histories frequently contained biographical sketches (often laudatory) of many of the county's residents.<sup>14</sup> The centennial celebrations thus provided an impetus for inculcating family history interest into the American population that became the basis for future generations. This encouragement also brought about the formation of several 'patriotic' or 'hereditary' based societies. While they tended to be exclusive in nature, Lloyd Bockstruck says they actually opened the door to a wider section of the American community. These lineage based societies initially had as their focus American first families from the 1600s, but as more recent migrants participated in matters such as the American Independence battles, their descendants became eligible to join many of these societies.<sup>15</sup> During the period 1870 to 1900 the rising middle-class in the United States looked for new avenues of social fellowship, joining various types of societies in great numbers. As the twentieth century approached, genealogical societies began to appear with a broader genealogical interest, reflecting the nationalist sentiment engendered by the Centennial celebrations, so much so that by 1911 the number of new societies and their members in the United States were described as a 'tidal wave of ancestry searching.'<sup>16</sup> Further family history societies came into existence in the U.S.A. during the 1930s, but the majority were formed during the 1960s and 1970s in response to growing interest in the forthcoming Bicentennial celebrations.<sup>17</sup>

Organised genealogical activity began in Australia with the formation of the Society of Australian Genealogists in Sydney in 1932. Three of the founding members of the Australian society – Herbert Rumsey, Edward Hill and George Townend, were members of the Society of Genealogists and consequently the Australian society was

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<sup>14</sup> Bockstruck, p. 164.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>16</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, pp. 26 – 27; Rachel Eskin Fisher, *A Place in History: Genealogy, Jewish Identity, Modernity*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1999, p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> Dulong, pp. 18 & 142.

modelled along the lines of the London society.<sup>18</sup> In the U.K. membership of the Society of Genealogists remained static through to 1933 with new members replacing those who passed away, barely keeping the society afloat.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, early membership figures published in the society's annual reports show the Australian society grew progressively through the 1930s, 40s and 50s indicating that family history in Australia perhaps had developed a stronger following than was so far evident in the U.K.<sup>20</sup>

Growth in the number of Australian societies was much slower than that experienced in the U.S.A., possibly because of official policies that continued the practice of 'protecting people (read: those of influence and prestige) from embarrassment'.<sup>21</sup> The Society of Australian Genealogists remained the only Australian society for nearly ten years until the Genealogical Society of Victoria came into existence in 1941. It was a further fourteen years later that a trickle of new societies began to come into existence in the 1950s and 60s, including two convict descendant societies which were formed in 1968.<sup>22</sup>

Immediately following the publication of *Roots* a dramatic growth in new societies occurred in the U.S.A., Australia and the U.K. From 1977 to 1980 the number of Australian societies more than doubled, and began an avalanche that continued through the 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>23</sup> In the U.K., part of the reason for expansion of the numbers of societies arose from dissatisfaction with the service provided by the Society of Genealogists.<sup>24</sup> According to Heather Garnsey, this rapid expansion had an effect on membership numbers of the early Australian societies as members found more convenient nearby locations for their research rather than travelling to the major

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<sup>18</sup> Errol Lea-Scarlett, 'Up and Down, Then Up Again,' *The Society of Australian Genealogists 1932-1982: Golden Jubilee History*, Marrickville, NSW, 1982, p. 18.

<sup>19</sup> Tittley-Bayes, p. 31.

<sup>20</sup> These figures were obtained by reading the annual reports for the Society of Australian Genealogists, located in the archives at Richmond Villa.

<sup>21</sup> Babette Smith, *Australia's Birthstain: the Startling Legacy of the Convict Era*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2008, p. 253.

<sup>22</sup> Ralph Reid, *Into History: Guide to the Societies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, St Clair NSW, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* Australian family history society numbers grew from 18 to 49, growing to an eventual total of 220.

<sup>24</sup> Tittley-Bayes, p. 34.

centres in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra.<sup>25</sup> The growth in new societies tapered quickly in the second half of the 1990s and membership numbers for individual societies began to steadily decline.<sup>26</sup>

There are no formal studies of family history society membership either in Australia or internationally. The trends that Garnsey describes are only able to be determined by examining the annual report publications from each society and not all societies are happy to disclose their membership numbers. What is known, however, is that other circumstances have allowed family historians to conduct their research at venues other than at a family history society.

There are a number of reasons why society membership has tapered. As earlier discussed, the technological changes that family history research has undergone represent a major factor. Changes in technology have been an aspect that family history societies have generally been slow to embrace, ignoring innovation until change became unavoidable and they were forced to react.<sup>27</sup> In part, the explanation for the reluctance to embrace technology lies in the fact that most societies have limited budgets and do not have the funds to invest in technological change, even though their future viability may well depend on their ability to provide access to their record collections through new technology, earning income as they do so.<sup>28</sup>

Family history societies originally drew people into membership for two reasons – access to records and social contact.<sup>29</sup> There are now considerably more venues to satisfy these needs than when societies were originally formed.<sup>30</sup> The Do-It-Yourself ethos actually encourages researchers to use the resources most readily available to

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<sup>25</sup> Heather Garnsey, Executive Officer, Society of Australian Genealogists, Transcript of Interview with Leon Alekna, Sydney, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2007, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Dulong, pp. 263 & 275; Martyn Killion, Vice President, Society of Australian Genealogists, Transcript of Interview with Leon Alekna, Sydney NSW, 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2007, p. 16; Graham Lewis, former Treasurer and Web Master, Society of Australian Genealogists, Transcript of Interview with Leon Alekna, Killara NSW, 30 August 2007, p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> Lewis, p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> Horne, p. 96.

<sup>30</sup> Dulong, p. 344; Spurway, p. 59.

them at the time of their choosing. Increasingly, this is not satisfied by the scheduled opening times of a society or archive, but from the comfort of a researcher's home through electronic gateways that are available around the clock.<sup>31</sup>

Another aspect for consideration is the changing demographics of membership for many societies. Those individuals who participated in the formation of their local society, and who dedicated countless hours of service in collecting and collating records, and generally operating their organisation are now ageing and are less able to play such an active role.<sup>32</sup> While societies continue to attract new membership, they have different priorities and frequently members may only remain for a few years then move on. The turnover rate has increased substantially.<sup>33</sup>

The focus by the majority of family history societies on British Isles family history has meant that they have not been attractive choices for researchers with interests in other countries, and this has led to the formation of nationality based societies – particularly in the U.S.A. but evident in Australia as well.<sup>34</sup> The concentration by family history societies on investing in and collecting records that reflect the interests of their members becomes a self-fulfilling practice, discouraging those researchers with different interests and obliging them to look elsewhere. Accordingly, family history societies actually restrict their capacity to recruit new members because the proportion of the population with exclusively British Isles ancestry continues to decline.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Killion, p. 16; Lewis, p. 15.

<sup>32</sup> Jan Worthington, Vice President, Society of Australian Genealogists, Transcript of Interview with Leon Alekna, North Sydney NSW, 12<sup>th</sup> September 2007, p. 23; Garnsey, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Killion, p. 16; Ken Knight, Vice Patron, Society of Australian Genealogists, Transcript of Interview with Leon Alekna, Sydney NSW, 27<sup>th</sup> September 2007, p. 15; Perry McIntyre, Councillor, Society of Australian Genealogists, Transcript of Interview with Leon Alekna, Camperdown NSW, 16<sup>th</sup> August 2007, p. 11; Malcolm Sainty, President, Society of Australian Genealogists, Transcript of Interview with Leon Alekna, North Sydney NSW, 9<sup>th</sup> August 2007, p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> Dulong, p. 198; Fisher, p. 68.

<sup>35</sup> Noeline Kyle, I Want Some Identity, A Profile of Local Family History Group Members, Their Research and Educational Needs, School of Behavioural and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, 1987, p. 6.

Family history society members are in the minority as far as total numbers of family history researchers are concerned.<sup>36</sup> While no actual census to determine relative populations has been attempted there are key indicators that demonstrate probable dimensions. Firstly, the volumes of ‘hits’ and membership numbers that the web sites for *FamilySearch*, *GenesReunited*, *Ancestry.com*, *Findmypast.com* and others have achieved indicates a far greater population of researchers than the total population for family history societies.<sup>37</sup> Secondly, several researchers have arrived at the same conclusion before the impact of internet family history became widespread for a variety of reasons. Foremost is the idea that many family historians are simply ‘averse to joining organisations’.<sup>38</sup> The users of libraries and other repositories that in many respects have more to offer than was previously available through societies represents another population that attracts researchers who think that everything should be available free of cost and they select their research venues on that basis.<sup>39</sup> Thirdly, the vast numbers of Latter-day Saint family history centres around the world cater primarily to Church members who are, in the main, not members of family history societies. Lambert’s study of the Ontario Genealogical Society membership supports this view.<sup>40</sup> Family history society members are, however, the most visible and easily accessed population of family historians and this may account for the concentration of research on society membership.

### **Accessibility and Costs**

Mid-nineteenth century and earlier efforts at genealogical research relied on having the literacy skills and financial resources to access such written records as were available, frequently requiring researchers to travel great distances, sometimes on foot, or horse or some other means of conveyance to the place where such records were kept. There were no central repositories and source material was rarely available

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<sup>36</sup> Dulong, p. 54.

<sup>37</sup> Garnsey, p. 3. Note: ‘Hits’ are also recorded for a person who visits the site multiple times, diluting the quantum.

<sup>38</sup> Fisher, p. 17; Garnsey, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> Dulong, p. 323; Garnsey, p. 11.

<sup>40</sup> Ronald D. Lambert, ‘A Profile of the Membership of the Ontario Genealogical Society,’ *Families*, Vol. 34, No. 2, May 1995, pp. 73-80.

in written form.<sup>41</sup> The difficulties were multiplied for migrants, who wanted to trace their families. They had to return to their countries and places of origin to conduct their research. They recorded the results of their research laboriously in longhand, on such materials as they had available. Family history research was difficult, inconvenient, expensive, required patience, time consuming and not for the hobbyist and therefore limited to those who had the resources to hire professional researchers, or undertake it themselves.<sup>42</sup>

While individual researchers compiled extensive family trees and eventually published their results,<sup>43</sup> James Allen, Jessie Embury & Kahlile Mehr write that it was the Latter-day Saint Church leadership who saw the barriers to entry for individuals to engage in family history and began to put into place measures that would allow members of the Church to more easily participate in family history research.<sup>44</sup> The initial impetus by the Church was to provide a network of paid genealogical agents who would do research in London, eastern U.S.A., Germany, Switzerland and Scotland for Church members.<sup>45</sup>

The idea of ‘pooled’ research helped to reduce the cost of research to Latter-day Saints, but it was not the complete answer. It was a change in emphasis from paid research to self-help that became the keystone for reducing costs.<sup>46</sup> In response to the self-help attitudes that developed, the genealogical societies formed in eastern U.S.A. in the mid-nineteenth century began collating records and making their collections available to the general public, thus facilitating an access revolution for genealogy.<sup>47</sup> In 1894 the Genealogical Society of Utah began gathering records and making their

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<sup>41</sup> Kylie J. Veale, *The Changing Face of Genealogy: An Empirical Study of the Genealogical Community Online*, Ph.D. candidacy proposal, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, 23 June 2004, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 131.

<sup>43</sup> Bockstruck, pp. 163-164. Bockstruck records that in 1862 in the U.S.A., the first bibliography of genealogies in the U.S.A. was published with 108 identified genealogies.

<sup>44</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 37. In 1888 Latter-day Saint Church President Wilford Woodruff was concerned about costs and saw that cooperative efforts could save money and improve the quality of research.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p. 49.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p. 185.

<sup>47</sup> Veale, p. 3.

collections available, initially to Latter-day Saints, but then to all interested visitors to their library.<sup>48</sup> The question of improving access for researchers by creating repositories of information began the simplification process and introduced a significant driver of downward pressure on the costs of family history. At the later end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, public libraries and archives also joined the move to making their collections more accessible to family historians. Whether this was in response to demand or as a way to increase patronage for their collections is currently not able to be assessed and there is little research information available to evaluate the effect of this process other than through observation of a movement towards greater interest in genealogical activity, evidenced by the growing formation of family history and hereditary societies, and the increased use of public and other collections by family historians. Researchers have, however, described how the availability of records had an impact in attracting people to research those records. As Titley-Bayes observes, in England as parish registers were collected and deposited into County Record Offices, so the people came in to use them.<sup>49</sup>

While there were changes in the practices of archives in dealing with family historians, there were other factors at work such as the increasing availability of records like the International Genealogical Index (IGI) and locally held census records on microfilm as supply side changes that contributed to rising interest.<sup>50</sup> Much of the present day research in family history relies heavily on the availability of microfilmed documents, with the Latter-day Saint effort in providing such records contributing to the explosion of family history activity that has occurred since the 1970s.<sup>51</sup> The improving of access to their collections by public libraries, archives and other repositories has also acted as a catalyst in the gathering of new material, especially at the local level.

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<sup>48</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 47. The authors record that at the time, the Society library was the only one of its type in the western U.S.A.

<sup>49</sup> Titley-Bayes, p. 67.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 68 & 143.

<sup>51</sup> Fisher, pp. 44-47.

The Latter-day Saints set about the simplification and streamlining of family history research for Church members, with a long range plan in 1976 intending that every member of the Church would find it possible to undertake their family history.<sup>52</sup> That process according to Allen, Embury and Mehr, involved the creation of multiple automated data files and their subsequent widespread distribution through the use of personal computers made available in the Church's Family History Centres.<sup>53</sup> The now computerised and indexed names were always there but in the past only the most dedicated researchers would trawl through those records. Commenting about the simplification process, Heather Garnsey observes that people will now use these resources because suddenly 'it's easy for them, and this is what is driving trends in research now'.<sup>54</sup>

Others have written that the storing and sharing of information has been transformative in creating interest in family history.<sup>55</sup> This process of collecting and storing data was also in response to demands by researchers for such material, illustrating Titley-Bayes' concept of factors which both 'pushed and pulled' family history activity.<sup>56</sup> While the growing accessibility of records was one driver that reduced the cost of, and increased accessibility to, family history research, perhaps the most important impetus for growth in interest was technological innovation.<sup>57</sup>

### ***Technological Change***

Technological change in the way family history research is undertaken is highlighted by researchers into family history, noting the effect that it has had upon reducing

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<sup>52</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, pp. 272 & 277. The authors refer to statements made by LDS Church leaders – Boyd K Packer in 1976 and James E Faust in 1987 stating the Church's intention to make genealogy simpler.

<sup>53</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 271. Dulong notes that at that point in time, investment in personal computers was beyond the reach of many genealogists, see p. 242.

<sup>54</sup> Garnsey, pp. 13-14.

<sup>55</sup> Dulong, p. 316; Fisher, p. 36; Veale, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Titley-Bayes, p. 89..

<sup>57</sup> Dulong, p. 20.

costs, improving accessibility, simplifying research, making family history research faster and making family history accessible for all who are interested.<sup>58</sup>

There is common acknowledgement by writers regarding the importance of the Latter-day Saints' move from 1938 into microfilming records.<sup>59</sup> Initial efforts at microfilming were centred on those countries where Church members had the greatest ancestry, but spread rapidly after the close of World War 11 into other European countries and into South America and Asia.<sup>60</sup> The post-war period expansion of microfilming is described as a new 'technological age that provided genealogists the miracle they had long awaited – access to records, easily, cheaply.'<sup>61</sup> The size of the microfilming project undertaken by the Latter-day Saints is unprecedented and was the catalyst, with several writers attributing to that undertaking 'the increase in amateur genealogical work in the western world from 1945, with the technology clearing the way for many family historians to do their migrant research.'<sup>62</sup>

A measure of the change that the availability of microfilmed records brought about is in the volumes of film ordered from the Genealogical Society of Utah by the Latter-day Saint branch libraries by both church members and non-members. In 1964 1,295 rolls of film were ordered, rising to 22,691 in 1966, reflecting a substantial demand from a growing population of family historians.<sup>63</sup> In 1986, the number of Latter-day Saint libraries had increased to over 400 with usage by non-Latter-day Saint patrons reported to be as high as 50% and in some locations, as much as 80%.<sup>64</sup> In 1968 between 170,000 and 200,000 patrons were using the Latter-day Saint branch libraries each year.<sup>65</sup> By 1994 over 2,000 Family History Centres around the world were ordering approximately 75,000 rolls of film each month – an average of 3,500 rolls

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p. 81.

<sup>59</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, pp. 213 – 215; Dulong, p. 223; Fisher, p. 44; Titley-Bayes, p. 89; Veale, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, pp. 213 - 215.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid* p. 228.

<sup>62</sup> Dulong, p. 272; Veale, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 281.

<sup>64</sup> Dulong, p. 217.

<sup>65</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 190.

per day.<sup>66</sup> In Australia, Kelly reports that the average between Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint patrons is fairly even with non-Latter-day Saint patrons in some Centres amounting to 90% of patronage.<sup>67</sup> While actual head counts of patrons using their Centres in Australia are not collected or available, the growth in the number of Centres throughout Australia is reflective of growing demand and interest.<sup>68</sup>

The ready availability of microfilmed records encouraged another improvement in accessibility. Further efforts were made by family historians collectively and individually, to create indexes that would simplify the research process, increase the speed at which researchers could check records for ancestral information and reduce the cost of research.<sup>69</sup> Again, the technology of the time was employed. The major microform index – The International Genealogical Index (IGI), has been called ‘the world’s most frequently used and misused aid to family history research’ and is described by other writers as a major contributor to accessibility for family historians.<sup>70</sup> The arrival of the IGI on microfiche was both a response to demand as well as a facilitator for family historians’ research, and provided further impetus to the shift towards indexed records and mass family history research.<sup>71</sup> A major example of collaborative indexing and transcription was the project of 1994 to transcribe the 1881 British Census which Anthony J Camp, Director of the Society of Genealogists, described as

... the largest joint genealogical project ever undertaken in England. The results are revolutionizing genealogical research in England, Wales and Scotland: and giving beginners in the subject a flying start when they need it most.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 281 and 287.

<sup>67</sup> Mark Kelly, Transcript of Interview with the Australian Manager of the Later-day Saints Family History Department, Carlingford, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2007, p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> The number of LDS Family History Centres in Australia grew from 2 in 1971 to 151 in 2007. Figures were provided by Mark Kelly.

<sup>69</sup> Tittley-Bayes, p. 81.

<sup>70</sup> Spurway, p. 58.

<sup>71</sup> Tittley-Bayes, pp. 75, 81.

<sup>72</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 320.

This mass indexing and transcription of the British census, along with the 1880 U.S.A. census and the 1881 Canadian census and compiled on compact disk, is further evidence of growing cooperative efforts by family historians to engage the latest technology to create research tools that would improve accessibility thus ‘facilitating a more rapid discovery of forebears’.<sup>73</sup>

Essential to the success of the IGI and later computerised indexes and resource materials was the creation of a phonetic filing system, so that names that sounded alike could be located together.<sup>74</sup> Devised by Harry Russell in 1925, this phonetic filing system is the basis on which current computerised genealogical search engines function today. Enabling family historians to search records using ‘Soundex’ capabilities has been a further contributor to improving speed of research and simplifying the task for the novice family historian.

Automation in family history has been described as a major impetus in the growth of family history.<sup>75</sup> Researchers have concentrated on the advent of personal computing, but automation had an earlier impact on family history work. Mechanical data processing was of interest to the Genealogical Society of Utah from 1941, and the use of computer technology was introduced by the Society in 1956.<sup>76</sup> The merging of family history and computer technology, along with a myriad of family history software programmes, provided family history with a major boost, and inspired a new generation of family historians.<sup>77</sup> What the personal computer really did was to begin the process of taking family history work out of the library and archive and into the home.<sup>78</sup> The personal computer and family history software and the ability to transfer genealogical information from one computer software package to another via Gedcom from 1986 provided yet another improvement in handling genealogical information.

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<sup>73</sup> Tittley-Bayes, p. 89.

<sup>74</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 100.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, p 332; Veale, p. 3.

<sup>76</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 178.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p. 304; Fisher, p. 102; Veale, p. 3.

<sup>78</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 338; Dulong, p. 79.

Titley-Bayes sees the technological developments such as the use of computers in family history work both as a response to demand and as an increase in supply.<sup>79</sup>

Electronic communication via email is a further important impetus for growth in family history research. With email, family historians have the ability to conduct their research through a community of like-minded researchers, discussing their interests through bulletin boards and mailing lists in the hope of finding others with corresponding research interests.<sup>80</sup> When coupled with the capacities of the internet, family historians have the capacity to display, share and swap information on their families, obtaining their information in what Margot Hornblower describes as ‘a few hours of research,’ rather than the laborious task of spending months trawling through microfilms in a library.<sup>81</sup> The internet also provides the family historian with an invaluable tool for connecting with living relatives, overcoming the reliance on mail services, providing much faster responses and offering instant gratification.<sup>82</sup> Kylie Veale sees the internet as a logical step in what she calls a ‘chain reaction of access and technological revolution within family history,’ attributing its rise to provoking a fundamental change – the transformation of family history into a mass hobby.<sup>83</sup> The internet and the instant gratification it affords has also led to the growing trend towards ‘fast food’ family historians – those who are entirely satisfied with being able to link into another’s published research available on the internet.<sup>84</sup>

There are several different types of websites available to the family historian (commercial, not for profit group sites, individual websites, and those of libraries and repositories), all offering greater convenience.<sup>85</sup> The development of the internet simply added to the proliferation of ways in which family historians could conduct

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<sup>79</sup> Titley-Bayes, p. 104.

<sup>80</sup> Richard A. Frazier, *Genealogical Research, Internet Research and Genealogical Tourism*, Masters thesis, University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie, May 2001, p. 4. Frazier notes that Rootsweb.com in 2001 had over 23,000 different mailing lists.

<sup>81</sup> Fisher, p 71; Frazier, p 11; Margot Hornblower, *Roots Mania*, *Time Magazine*, 19 April 1999, <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0.8816.990751.00.html> accessed 7 March 2008, p. 4.

<sup>82</sup> Hornblower, p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> Veale, p. 3.

<sup>84</sup> Garnsey, p. 10; Killion, p. 16.

<sup>85</sup> Fisher, p. 46.

their research, and Titley-Bayes observes that the increase in activity it has brought about is as striking as the growth of Record Office use in the U.K.<sup>86</sup> Rachel Fisher states that Jewish family historians who have embraced the internet use it as an additional mode of family history research and communication rather than a replacement of any of the previous modes of research.<sup>87</sup> Some family history society leaders are not as convinced that this approach is universal and speak of a style of researcher who is entirely satisfied with information they can glean from the internet, who has no inclination to check the information they obtain against primary sources for accuracy and who are disinclined to investigate any other research tools or methods if they are not accessible via computer.<sup>88</sup>

The immense attraction of the internet to family historians is indisputable, with some asserting that family history has again ‘taken-off’ since the advent of the internet.<sup>89</sup> The effect that the Internet has accomplished is that it has facilitated family history interest amongst a new generation.<sup>90</sup> When the Latter-day Saints launched their *FamilySearch* website in 1999 the response was overwhelming with over 30 million ‘hits’ on its first day,<sup>91</sup> and reaching 3 billion hits to the site in May 2000, less than 12 months after the site was officially launched.<sup>92</sup> The *Genes Reunited* website in the space of a year came to have 3 million members in the U.K., and in 2012, according to figures provided on the company’s website, grown to over 11 million members.<sup>93</sup> Fisher in 1999 wrote that the internet had sped communication and broadened resources, but was unable to provide access to the lifeblood of family historians – original source documents.<sup>94</sup> The turn of the century saw use of the computer and internet by family historians change, with the advent of digitised copies of primary

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<sup>86</sup> Titley-Bayes, pp. 92 and 96.

<sup>87</sup> Fisher, p. 76.

<sup>88</sup> Sainty, p. 8; Johnson, p. 20.

<sup>89</sup> Geoffrey Bruce Humble, *Genealogy and the Internet*, Masters thesis, Charles Sturt University, Mitchell, January 1999, p. 102.

<sup>90</sup> Titley-Bayes, p. 47.

<sup>91</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 332; Frazier, p. 4; Hornblower, p. 2.

<sup>92</sup> Three Billion Hits on FamilySearch Web Site, [http://www.familysearch.org/eng/home/news/frameset\\_news.asp?PAGE=Press/2000-05-17\\_FS\\_3\\_Billion.asp](http://www.familysearch.org/eng/home/news/frameset_news.asp?PAGE=Press/2000-05-17_FS_3_Billion.asp) accessed 14 October 2008.

<sup>93</sup> Titley-Bayes, p. 48; *Genes Reunited*, [www.genesreunited.com.uk](http://www.genesreunited.com.uk)

<sup>94</sup> Fisher, p. 44.

records becoming available on-line.<sup>95</sup> It brought with it the ability to conduct research outside the normal opening hours of libraries, societies, archives and other repositories, allowing non-retirees and people with young families to become involved and generally making the pastime more accessible. Along with the improved accessibility to records, technology changes have supported and encouraged more self-publishing, enabling the family historian to undertake the publication of his / her own family history.

Foremost in the move to publish original source records in digital format and to make them available on-line have been the genealogical service organisations – archives and other government repositories.<sup>96</sup> Commercial operators such as *Ancestry.com* and *Findmypast.com* have also been quick to see the possibilities of providing primary record digital images on their web sites. The move by commercial operators into the provision of on-line databases is significant, indicating an important shift in source provision and demonstrates a continuing strong demand and growth in interest for genealogical resources. Richard Frazier notes that *Ancestry.com* claims to be the market leader with annual revenue in the U.S.A. in 2008 at \$150 million.<sup>97</sup> Rapidly growing subscriber bases for *Ancestry.com* and others lend support to the claim that new family historians are being attracted to the pastime.<sup>98</sup> As Heather Garnsey observes

In the U.K. *Ancestry* talks about having 200,000 subscribers. If those figures are right ... that's a hell of a lot more members than what you have in Societies. There might be 20 to 30,000 people who are members of Societies and that is a huge difference ... it's about access to records and the way people now approach these things.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Tittley-Bayes, p. 96.

<sup>96</sup> Dulong, pp 208 & 359. Government sponsored websites such as *Scotlands People*, and the *Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages*, and *State Records NSW* are a few examples.

<sup>97</sup> Frazier, p. 70.

<sup>98</sup> Hornblower, p. 1.

<sup>99</sup> Garnsey, p. 3.

In Australia, *Ancestry.com* report double digit growth expected each year with around 50% of subscribers being existing family history society members and the balance new to the activity. Brad Argent, Australasian Manager for *Ancestry.com*, observes that the biggest area of growth in *Ancestry.com*'s user base in Australia comes from the 18-24 year old and the 45-54 year old age brackets, indicating the attraction of family history to new participants.<sup>100</sup>

The movement to provide more primary source material in digital images over the internet will receive even greater impetus when the Latter-day Saint website *FamilySearch.org* begins to make available its vast collection of microfilmed records, enabling even greater ability for researchers to conduct their research at home and making the use of microfilm redundant.<sup>101</sup> There is a concern at the speed at which technological changes are occurring, suggesting that the high turnover of technology could actually be harmful to family history practice and that digital technology represents both opportunities and risks.<sup>102</sup>

While limited research into internet usage by family historians has been undertaken, the concentration has been to examine profiles of family historians rather than to investigate reasons for growth.<sup>103</sup> There have been other investigations into internet usage by family historians looking at how the medium is used, but to date they have not been finalised.<sup>104</sup>

### ***Cultural and Social Factors***

Apart from changes in the accessibility and costs for family history research and the dramatic impact of ongoing technological change, commentators have identified what can be best described as a variety of social and cultural factors that have influenced

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<sup>100</sup> Brad Argent, Australasian Manager, *Ancestry.com*, Transcript of Interview with Leon Alekna, conducted at 185 Elizabeth Street, Sydney NSW, 22 July 2008, p. 1.

<sup>101</sup> Kelly, p 3.

<sup>102</sup> Fisher, p 44.

<sup>103</sup> See Pamela J. Drake, Findings From the Fullerton Genealogy Study: Masters thesis, California State University, Fullerton, 2001.

<sup>104</sup> See Veale.

growth. Again, these largely consist of assertions but warrant some consideration as background for the survey conducted for this thesis and as starting points for further research.

Dulong noted that waves of family history interest have followed times of economic hardship, and are evident in the 1890s, 1930s and the late 1970s as times of economic recession in the U.S.A.<sup>105</sup> The argument advanced is that economic recessions caused a 'status revolution – threatening the security of the middle class' which turned their attention 'to a search for ancestral knowledge'.<sup>106</sup> Others suggest a different explanation in that the Great Depression of the 1930s saw an 'unexpected stimulus to genealogical work; many who were out of work took some opportunity to do some long-neglected family research.'<sup>107</sup> The question as to whether economically straightened times are a causal factor for interest in family history work remains open and is a possible area for social researchers to investigate to support or negate the proposition.

Titley-Bayes argues that other 'material and historic factors' are seen to have contributed to the growth in interest and activity in family history in Great Britain from the 1950s. He identifies the impact of a considerable fall in the average working hours for 25 to 60 year olds and the consequent availability of more free time to pursue their family history. He further notes that earlier retirement and increased longevity as complementing increasingly affluent leisure time. Coinciding with these demographic changes was the fact that travel became cheaper, enabling the development of family history as a popular pursuit.<sup>108</sup> Australian social conditions have followed a similar trajectory, undoubtedly enabling people to invest in lifestyle interests such as the pursuit of family history.<sup>109</sup> The argument is that improved social conditions undoubtedly provide family historians with a greater capacity to pursue their interests. In and of themselves, however, are they a causal factor? Or rather, are

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<sup>105</sup> Dulong, pp 341-342.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, p. 342.

<sup>107</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 92.

<sup>108</sup> Titley-Bayes, pp. 68-73.

<sup>109</sup> Garnsey, p. 4.

they more of an enabler once the motivation has begun in the mind of the novice family historian?

### ***Popularising Family History***

An essential set of factors influencing the growth in family history are the various ways in which family history has been popularised – through books, radio, television, magazines, electronic publications and public commemorations. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, most writers credit the publication of Alex Haley's book *Roots* and the subsequent televising of the mini-series of the same name with providing a major impetus to an increase in interest in family history.<sup>110</sup> The *Roots* phenomenon is just one example of the supposedly powerful effect media of various modes has had on the growth in interest in family history.

Television discovered the growing appetite for productions which had a family history flavour. Tittley-Bayes writes that the BBC in 1980 followed the viewing success of *Roots* 'with its five programme series on BBC2 entitled *Discovering Your Family History*' which also attracted a large viewing audience.<sup>111</sup> Nick Vine Hall, in writing about *Roots* the television mini-series, relates that it was broadcast several times in Australia, and that the sequel *Roots: The Next Generation* was also broadcast several times. He adds:

Australian-produced historical television series, such as *The Timeless Land*, and *Against the Wind*, have done much to encourage a wider community interest in Australia's history, and family history in particular.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 291; Beckett, p. 2; Dulong, p. 2; Fisher, p. 36; Frazier, p. 24; Cardell K. Jacobson, 'Social Dislocations and the Search for Genealogical Roots,' *Human Relations*, 1986, Vol. 39, No. 4, p. 348; Patrick M. Quinn, 'The Surge of Interest in Genealogy Reflects a Populist Strand of Society with Important Implications for our Culture,' *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Vol. 37, No. 36, 1991, p. B2; Spurway, p. 162; Donald S. Litzer, 'Library and Genealogical Society Cooperation in Developing Local Genealogical Services and Collections,' *Reference and Users Services Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No.1, p. 37; Tittley-Bayes, p. 38; Vine Hall, p. 86.

<sup>111</sup> Tittley-Bayes, p. 88.

<sup>112</sup> Vine Hall, p. 86.

Garnsey describes the current broadcasting on television of the U.K. series *Who Do You Think You Are?* as having a positive effect on creating interest in family history both in the U.K. and in Australia, with a 'surge of interest in England about history, heritage, tracing the history of your house, as much as the history of your family.'<sup>113</sup>

Daytime television talk shows such as *The Midday Show* with Ray Martin on the Nine Network between 1985 and 1998 also played a significant promotional role for family history. The show featured regular appearances by genealogist and author Janet Reakes who was able to regale audiences and viewers, encouraging them to consider their own family histories while discussing various resources and techniques that would help them in their research.

Radio broadcasts have also played a part in promoting family history as an interest. Perry McIntyre writes of the effect that Phillip Geeves' weekly broadcasts on ABC Radio, coupled with his *Sydney Morning Herald* columns, between 1978 and 1983 had on his listening audience. His public promotion of family and local history, she maintains, helped the dramatic growth in membership for the Society of Australian Genealogists.<sup>114</sup> Spurway, in writing about Geeves' efforts, states that Geeves knew his appeals 'were likely to encourage readers ... to begin work to discover' their personal links with Australian history.<sup>115</sup> Following Geeves' demise, Nick Vine Hall took over the role of promoting genealogical matters on radio, which continued the membership growth for the Society of Australian Genealogists. McIntyre remarks that Vine Hall's impact was one of instant recognition for both family history and the Society of Australian Genealogists.<sup>116</sup>

The frequent, regular interest and popularisation in the media of family history had a direct effect on the membership enquiries for the Society of Australian Genealogists and presumably on the other family history societies around Australia that sprang into

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<sup>113</sup> Garnsey, p. 2.

<sup>114</sup> Perry McIntyre, 'Phillip Geeves, Family History and the S.A.G. 1970s – 1983,' *Descent*, Vol. 36, No. 3, September 2006, pp. 113-114. See also Keith Johnson, 'Death of an Honourary Member,' *Descent*, Vol. 13, No. 3, September 1983, p. 133.

<sup>115</sup> Spurway, p. 56.

<sup>116</sup> Perry McIntyre, Councillor, Society of Australian Genealogists, Transcript of Interview with Leon Alekna, Camperdown NSW, 16 August 2007, p. 15.

existence in these pre-Bicentennial celebration years.<sup>117</sup> The flurry of constant media attention abated after the Australian Bicentennial celebrations and Garnsey observes that new membership enquiries began to level off, but interest in the community continued unabated.<sup>118</sup>

Publications have also played a role in promoting family history to the public. From feature articles in newspapers and magazines, to special interest family history and local history magazines, family history guides and self-help books, the ever increasing volume available suggests a continued market and interest. Vine Hall, writing about the Society of Australian Genealogists guide book, *Compiling Your Family History*, notes that from the time of its first publication in 1965, up until 1982 it had sold in excess of 30,000 copies, and ‘encouraged many thousands of Australians to engage in systematic genealogical research.’<sup>119</sup> By the time its 22<sup>nd</sup> edition was published in 2008, sales had reached over 85,000 copies.<sup>120</sup> Titley-Bayes writes that ‘many other guidebooks proliferated in the wake of *Roots*.’<sup>121</sup> An examination of the shelves and catalogues of major booksellers in the U.S., Canada, U.K. and Australia indicates just how significant the industry of genealogical publications has grown to be.

Genealogical magazines remain an important part of this publication industry. The first such publication *The Register*, was produced by the New England Historic Genealogical Society in 1847 which remains a vital publication today.<sup>122</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr describe an early such publication *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* whose first edition was in January 1910, had as its major purpose religious doctrines, provided material on personal and family histories, pedigrees of particular families, helpful information on how to undertake research, articles on various kinds of records and record collections, and historical articles of general

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<sup>117</sup> Knight, p. 8.

<sup>118</sup> Garnsey, p. 2.

<sup>119</sup> Vine Hall, p. 90.

<sup>120</sup> Figure provided by Heather Garnsey, Executive Officer, Society of Australian Genealogists, July 2010.

<sup>121</sup> Titley-Bayes, p. 170.

<sup>122</sup> Bockstruck, p. 164.

interest.<sup>123</sup> Apart from matters of religious doctrines, the content remains similar for many of the present day genealogical magazines and family history society journals.

Electronic publication of family history newsletters is a growing part of this industry since the advent of the internet. Commercial and service organisations with an interest in family history have used this vehicle as a means to create traffic for their websites, providing researchers with a forum to discuss particular genealogical subjects, and as part of their research services.<sup>124</sup> Little has been written regarding usage or value that this format of publication provides to family historians. However, given that the resource continues to grow and commercial operators continue to invest in the medium, this lends credence to the idea that it is of value as a family history resource.

A question that therefore arises about media is whether it simply acts to reinforce existing interest in family history, or does it act as a catalyst in raising interest in the pastime? The sense gained in this review suggests that both are possibly true.

### **Conclusion**

The discussion on the various factors that have influenced the growth in family history around the world illustrates that the movement has been subject to a complex series of factors. Dramatic changes in technology that have been driving factors in the changes to record accessibility and the costs to access them, changes in social and cultural conditions and the popularisation of family history have occurred both in concert with one another and in rapid succession. Titley-Bayes' description that these factors both 'push' and 'pull' at creating interest in family history seems to offer the best explanation of what has and is still occurring. While little effort has been made by researchers to date to examine the effect of each of these factors of influence, it is quite clear that they have created a momentum that shows every sign of continuing.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Allen, Embury and Mehr, p. 73.

<sup>124</sup> Commercial operators such as *Ancestry*, and *Findmypast*, as well as service organisations such as State Records NSW, many family history societies and *Rootsweb* are typical examples of organisations providing electronic newsletters to interested subscribers.

<sup>125</sup> Maritz Poll, *Recent Maritz Poll Shows Explosion in Popularity of Genealogy*, <http://www.genealogy.com/press-051600.html>, accessed 14th March 2007.

In the following chapter, previous research that has been conducted into family historians, their motivations and practices is examined, considering their survey populations, and the way in which their participants were recruited. Questions that these researchers utilised in their survey instruments to learn about demographic characteristics, motivations and behaviours are also considered along with the conclusions they reached.

## Chapter 3

### Surveys of Family Historians

Set against the background of the history, nature and growth of family history, surveys of family historians have taken place from the time that a dramatic increase in interest in family history began to become apparent. Each of these surveys has investigated some aspects of who family historians are, their interests and their motivations. This chapter evaluates the methodologies and conclusions of these surveys.

The studies evaluated here are those conducted in the U.S.A. by Cardell Jacobson in 1976, Peggy Sinko & Scott Peters 1983, Sydney Beckett 1993, Richard Frazier 2001, Pamela Drake 2001; in Canada by Ronald Lambert in 1994, and Adrienne Horne 2001; and in Australia by Winsome Van den Bossche 1988, and Geoffrey Humble 1999, as well as Noeline Kyle's informal study of 1987.<sup>1</sup> With two exceptions (Drake and Humble) each selected a target population of family historians and sought to generalise their findings of that group across the entire population of family historians.

#### **Previous Surveys**

Previous research into family history activity has examined various aspects of participation and, from the literature reviewed, has been concentrated in the U.S.A., Canada, U.K. and Australia. These countries coincide with where a dramatic visible

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<sup>1</sup> Sydney Ann Beckett, *Current Practices and the Use of Computers in Genealogical Research*, Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, Philadelphia, 1993; Pamela J. Drake, *Findings From the Fullerton Genealogy Study*: Masters thesis, California State University, Fullerton, 2001; Richard A. Frazier, *Genealogical Research, Internet Research and Genealogical Tourism*, Masters thesis, University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie, May 2001; Adrienne Julia Horne, *The Pursuit of Popular Genealogy*, Masters thesis, University of Calgary, Calgary, 2002; Geoffrey Bruce Humble, *Genealogy and the Internet*, Masters thesis, Charles Sturt University, Mitchell, 1999; Cardell K. Jacobson, 'Social Dislocations and the Search for Genealogical Roots,' *Human Relations*, 1986, Vol. 39, No. 4; Ronald D. Lambert, *A Study of Genealogists & Family Historians*, University of Waterloo, Faculty of Arts, 2000; Noeline Kyle, *I Want Some Identity, A Profile of Local Family History Group Members, Their Research and Educational Needs*, School of Behavioural and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, 1987; Peggy T. Sinko and Scott N. Peters, *A Survey of Genealogists at the Newberry Library*, *Library Trends*, Summer, 1983; Winsome A. N. Van den Bossche, *Amateur Historical Enquiry in the Tracing of Ancestry: Establishing a Profile of a Genealogist, A Victorian Survey*, Masters thesis, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 1988.

growth in numbers participating in family history has been observed. While there is evidence that there is participation in family history activity in other countries as witnessed in 1984 by the presence of family history societies in sixteen countries outside of the U.K., U.S.A., Canada and Australia, the numbers of these groups do not appear to have increased significantly in parallel with growth in the U.S.A., Canada, U.K. and Australia.<sup>2</sup> Formal studies of genealogical activity in non-English speaking countries do not appear to have been conducted although language barriers preclude making a definitive statement.

### ***Sampling Populations***

Some researchers expressed concerns regarding the shortcomings of using a particular concentration of family historians for research purposes.<sup>3</sup> Frazier and Horne raised the question of who responds to a survey request, suggesting that those who respond tend to be female and therefore a higher proportion of female participation results<sup>4</sup>

Another concern lies in using family history society populations. When a family historian sees no advantage in society membership to conduct their family history research they are excluded from the survey population and a skewed concentration of interests emerges.<sup>5</sup> Finally using family history society populations also distorts the age picture that emerges. Family history society members have been shown to be older than the general populations and, anecdotally, younger family historians seem to be drawn to the use of technology rather than utilising the resources available in a family history society.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Keith A. Johnson and Malcolm R. Sainty, *Genealogical Research Directory 1984*, Genealogical Research Directory, North Sydney, 1984, p. 425. It should be noted that there may well be family history societies in other countries that did not see fit to subscribe to entries in Johnson and Sainty's publication or where language barriers made sales by the publishers unlikely. The 2006 directory lists virtually the same countries from outside of the U.K., U.S.A., Canada and Australia.

<sup>3</sup> Beckett, p. 83; Lambert, *Study of Genealogists*, p. 76.

<sup>4</sup> Horne, p. 80; Frazier, p. 50.

<sup>5</sup> Kyle, p. 6; Lambert, *Study of Genealogists*, p. 79.

<sup>6</sup> Ronald D. Lambert, 'A Profile of the Membership of the Ontario Genealogical Society,' *Families*, Vol. 34, No. 22, May 1995, p. 76.

In conducting their surveys, finding a representative population was an issue for most researchers. Jacobson, Kyle, Van den Bossche and Lambert used members of family history societies, although Van den Bossche did not set out to limit participation in her survey to family history society members.<sup>7</sup> Lambert observed that members of the Ontario Genealogical Society were accessible and the same applied to Kyle who used members of various NSW family history societies, and Van den Bossche whose participants essentially came from the two principal family history societies in Victoria.

The population focus for Sinko & Peters was the users of the Newbury Library in Chicago, while Beckett sought participants from among attendees at genealogical conferences in the U.S.A.<sup>8</sup> Horne selected her small group of 33 participants (a statistically insignificant number - for the first part of her survey) from members of a beginners' genealogical class she taught, from professional genealogists' advertisements, those who responded to a request on an electronic mailing list for the Alberta Genealogical Society, word of mouth and from a referral from a fellow student.<sup>9</sup> Horne also sent a random survey to 500 homes selected from the Calgary telephone directory.<sup>10</sup>

Frazier used *Rootsweb* mailing lists for Wisconsin and Minnesota to attract his survey participants, while Humble used *Rootsweb* mailing lists for the U.K. and Australia to recruit his participants.<sup>11</sup> Drake also used email mailing lists and also included discussion groups, genealogical newsletters and websites to attract her substantial number of participants.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lambert, *Study of Genealogists*, p. 2; Van den Bossche, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Beckett, p. 52; Sinko and Peters, p. 97.

<sup>9</sup> Horne, p. 46.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 50.

<sup>11</sup> Frazier, p. 7; Humble, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Drake, p. 2.

Drake's multi-platform recruitment strategy provided by far the largest population of participants (4,109) – nearly three times that of the next largest, Van den Bossche.<sup>13</sup> In terms of reaching a diverse population of family historians, Drake's approach would appear to have been more successful than others but it should be understood that her survey base included all of the U.S.A. (with a considerably larger overall population) whereas Van den Bossche was interested in participants from Victoria – a substantial difference.

From a representative perspective most researchers demonstrate a level of success in that their selected survey populations did provide usable data for analysis. The question then becomes whether their survey population is representative of firstly their target population or secondly, the wider genealogical population.

### **Further research**

The evaluation of existing surveys against the background of the history, nature and growth of family history in Australia has identified the need for further research into the background and motivations of Australia's family historians if we are to gain a more detailed understanding of their profiles and activities. The outstanding matters for clarification remain whether the stereotypes proffered about family historians are still (if they ever were) correct. This includes the male/female balance amongst researchers, their age distribution and education levels. Further adding to the demographic picture is the question of where Australian family historians are located and the mix between urban and rural researchers, and religious beliefs.

Related to the demographic profile are questions of whether family history is a primarily Anglo-Celtic phenomenon as stated by some writers, or whether there is a broader picture to be revealed.<sup>14</sup> Researchers have enquired from family historians about the first ancestors to arrive in Australia and then appeared to conclude that this

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<sup>13</sup> Veale's survey attracted 7,600 worldwide participants but the details of the results are currently unavailable.

<sup>14</sup> Heather Garnsey, Executive Officer, Society of Australian Genealogists, Transcript of Interview with Leon Alekna, Sydney NSW, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2007, p. 5; John T. Spurway, 'The Growth of Family History in Australia,' *The Push: A Journal of Early Australian Social History*, 1989, Vol. 27, p. 103.

'first' ancestor is the focus of their research. Whether this conclusion is accurate or not needs to be tested, particularly bearing in mind that the likelihood of a much broader ancestry is now present in the Australian population. How and whether those immigrants from non-English-speaking-backgrounds participate in family history research will also test the validity of Hansen's law. Finally, testing immigration related matters will show the extent to which Australian family historians include recently arrived immigrants from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Another aspect requiring more investigation is participation in family history societies. These organisations have been and remain the visible public profile of family history practice. Published membership figures over recent years have shown declines in membership and it is important to understand if these declines portend changes in research practices, loss of interest and declines in overall participation. Questions about family history society membership will also allow a clearer picture to be drawn about the representativeness of society membership for the entire Australian family history community. What family historians expect from their membership when they join and why they cease their memberships are also important to understand in fleshing out the society picture. Where and how non-English-speaking-background family historians pursue their research is a further part of this picture. Rounding out this matter of research practices are questions about how family historians' research practices have changed and the effects of these changes.

Previous research has identified curiosity related matters as the principal motivating force for initial participation in family history research. Aspects of that curiosity need further investigation to widen the understanding of motivations and the part curiosity plays.

Australian convict ancestry has now become a cause for celebration, but research has not identified it as a motivating force. Rather, convict ancestry is seen as a bonus for family history research as the convict link was not known prior to commencing family history research. Lambert suggests that the possibility of discovering convict ancestry acts as a rich stimulus for genealogical interest.<sup>15</sup> If this is so, then the obvious

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<sup>15</sup> See Ronald D. Lambert, 'Sounding the Depths of the Convict-Descendant Pool,' *The Mail*, July-August 2001, p. 21.

question arises about why Australians with no convict ancestry become interested in family history.

A further generation has passed since *Roots* was first shown on Australian television in the 1970s and understanding if this production continues to exert an influence over motivations or if it has been replaced with other events and milestones is an important consideration for research.

Lambert identified the role played by older female relatives as being important in his investigation of Ontario Genealogical Society members in understanding the question of motivation. The part played by elderly relatives, be they male or female, in providing motivation for individuals to commence family history research has yet to be explored in Australia.

### **Recruitment**

Researchers utilised the available means and technologies. Mostly these revolved around postal services, especially before the internet was available, but variations were also employed. Mail services and preparing information for distribution by post involves a level of expense that may have been a limiting factor for many researchers. Only Lambert flagged this as a constraint,<sup>16</sup> but it would seem logical to expect that this was a consideration for other researchers as well.

Sinko & Peters posted their survey and letter of recruitment to 536 users of the Newbury Library and received 250 'usable' responses – a 46% response rate.<sup>17</sup> Lambert utilised a similar approach, writing to 1,518 members of the Ontario Genealogical Society receiving 1,348 responses, which he remarked was an extremely high response rate (89%).<sup>18</sup> Lambert noted that his participants were highly motivated and were encouraged to participate by an accompanying letter from the President of the Society. He also utilised a follow-up mail out to those who had not responded

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<sup>16</sup> Lambert, *A Profile*, p. 74.

<sup>17</sup> Sinko and Peters, p. 101.

<sup>18</sup> Lambert, *A Profile*, p. 74.

which added further numbers to his respondent pool. Horne's survey and letter of recruitment was mailed to 500 homes and achieved a total of 140 responses or 28%. Of these 96 said they were not family historians, reducing her data pool to 44 participants, although how they defined 'family historian' is something of a moot point.<sup>19</sup>

Both Kyle and Van den Bossche used family history society journals and newsletters to recruit their participants. Van den Bossche distributed her survey by placing notices at libraries, archives, the Genealogical Society of Victoria, the Australian Institute of Genealogical Studies and LDS family history centres and providing copies of her survey for recruits to collect. Participants then mailed the completed surveys to the researcher. Van den Bossche also placed advertisements in the 'Help Wanted' sections of *The Age* and *Weekly Times* but stated that she found these advertisements to have a very low response rate.<sup>20</sup> Given that 1,497 responses were received by Van den Bossche, it would appear that she had also reached a pool of highly motivated individuals, although there is no measure of how many family historians actually saw the survey to make a decision regarding participation. Kyle did not detail how she physically distributed her surveys to interested participants.

A different strategy was employed by Beckett to distribute her survey. 800 attendees at three genealogical conferences in the U.S.A. were handed the survey and asked to complete it and then deposit their responses into boxes for collection.<sup>21</sup> A total of 372 responses were received – a 46% response rate. Later surveys have had the advantage of electronic communication to advertise, recruit, distribute and collect surveys. Humble promoted and invited participants for his survey by using *Rootsweb* mailing lists for the U.K. and Australia. Those who were interested in participating requested a copy of the survey by email and the survey document was returned to them also by email. There were 455 requests which resulted in 302 completed surveys.<sup>22</sup> The

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<sup>19</sup> Horne, p. 53.

<sup>20</sup> Van den Boscche, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Beckett, p. 53. The Conferences were for the National Genealogical Society, the Federation of Genealogical Societies and the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society.

<sup>22</sup> Humble, p. 85.

method of distribution and return by email is a unique approach and presents a further disadvantage not discussed in Humble's research. Respondents were required to complete the survey and return the completed document by email. This suggests that the survey went out as an editable document so that answers could be typed into the document. The implication of this approach is that the integrity of the document is open to change by the respondent, resulting in a larger task to proof read the complete questions and answers before including the data into the study. Further, it limits the population to those who not only use computers (the target population) but also limits it to those who have the appropriate software to open, complete and return the document.

Frazier's survey was conducted by advertising to subscribers of *Rootsweb* email lists for Minnesota and Wisconsin and asking subscribers to visit a survey web-site to complete the survey. He received 1,374 'usable' responses in 30 days.<sup>23</sup> There are however, no figures available to understand the rate of responses he received. What is demonstrated is the volume of responses achieved in a short space of time from this approach. Drake also used a web-site survey and received 4,109 responses over the space of nine days and is by far the largest response number over the briefest survey period.<sup>24</sup>

These survey experiences show that there are different ways to reach populations of family historians and obtain survey results from them. Postal surveys appear to be very effective where the population is known – as in the membership of a genealogical society – and where there are individuals of influence who are able to assist in motivating potential survey participants into providing responses. There are also cost implications for this process, involving the preparation of documents for mailing, postal charges, receiving and collating responses and then data analysis. Targeting attendees at genealogical conferences and like events provided quick responses which would be useful for selected types of research. The cost considerations for this approach appear to be less onerous than postal surveys. It does, however, leave the question of population somewhat unclear – were the respondents

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<sup>23</sup> Frazier, p. 42.

<sup>24</sup> Drake, p. 2.

predominantly from the local area, or do they belong to a particular organisation? The web based surveys demonstrate that they can attract strong volumes of responses over brief time spans for relatively low cost. Similarly, the ability to process the information electronically, improving speed and effort to tabulate results is a highly attractive capability. The limiting factor is the population attracted to responding to the survey which is a function of where and how participation in the survey is promoted.

### **Survey Questions**

One of the difficulties in evaluating the content of previous surveys and the responses they elicited is that the questions asked are not available for all the surveys. Where they are available, they and their responses were evaluated for adaptation and use in the survey conducted for this thesis. Where the survey questions were not available, the reported findings were used as a basis to identify the types of information sought. The discussion here, consequently, identifies the key information and themes that were the focus of the previous surveys.

### **Demographic Characteristics**

All the surveys sought information on the demographic characteristics of their respondents and, consequently, of their groups of family historians. In particular, they sought details about gender, age, cultural background and levels of education. Their concern was to establish a picture of who is doing family history research and, possibly, to test the prevailing stereotype of family historians as primarily older women from educated, Anglo-Celtic, middle class backgrounds.<sup>25</sup>

In terms of gender and age, Sinko and Peters' 1983 survey of family history users of the Newbury Library in Chicago found more female users (58.6%) than males, the age range spanned 70 years, providing an average age of 47.9 years with no statistical difference in age between men and women.<sup>26</sup> Subsequent surveys by other researchers

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<sup>25</sup> Drake, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Sinko and Peters, p. 102.

– Kyle 1987, Van Den Bossche 1988, Lambert 1994, Frazier 2001, Drake 2002, and Beckett 2003 - all found greater participation by females in family history although with differing figures, ranging from 60% of the survey population to 78%.<sup>27</sup> Aside from Drake in 2002, these surveys drew their populations from family history society membership to obtain their results. Accordingly, their conclusions are not necessarily reflective of the broader genealogical community, particularly when several observed that women more so than men were inclined to join family history societies, and that men appear to work more independently.<sup>28</sup> One further observation made by Kyle was that there were growing numbers of younger males joining societies and that this might suggest a trend representative of the total genealogical population.<sup>29</sup>

At least four of the surveys – those by Drake, Kyle, Lambert and Van den Bossche – showed an interest in cultural backgrounds, and asked about where respondents' ancestors originated. Both Lambert and Drake further explored this aspect by questioning their participants about the migration of their ancestors in order to test for the third generation effect (it is the third generation of an immigrant family that becomes interested in family history) as observed by Hansen.<sup>30</sup> As these surveys were primarily restricted to members of family history societies, the results unsurprisingly reflected the resources and backgrounds represented in those societies and, consequently, a strong Anglo-Celtic profile of family historians emerged.

Some attention has been paid to the educational levels of family historians. In 1986 Dulong suggested that family historians belonging to family history societies were not as educated as previous generations of family historians. His conclusion arose from reflecting on the social status of the earlier generations who had the time, resources and literacy levels that used genealogy to sustain their status.<sup>31</sup> By contrast, Kyle's 1987 study of NSW family history society members, Van Den Bossche's 1988 study

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<sup>27</sup> Beckett, p. 76; Drake, p. 4; Frazier, p. 50; Kyle, p. 2; Lambert, *A Profile*, p. 74; Van den Bossche, p. 14B.

<sup>28</sup> Beckett, pp. 76-80; John P. Dulong, *Genealogical Groups in a Changing Organizational Environment: From Lineage to Heritage*, Ph.D. dissertation, Wayne State University, Detroit, 1986, pp. 81-82; Richard A. Frazier, p. 50; Horne, p. 159.

<sup>29</sup> Kyle, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Eugene I Bender and George Kagiwada, 'Hansen's Law of Third Generation Return and the Study of American Religio-Ethnic Groups,' *Phylon*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 1968, pp 360-370.

<sup>31</sup> Dulong, pp. 81-82.

of Genealogical Society of Victoria and Australian Institute of Genealogical Studies members, and Lambert's 1994 study of members from the Ontario Genealogical Society show that 50% of respondents had completed university or graduate work, indicating a relatively highly educated population compared to the general population.<sup>32</sup>

In terms of examining the demographic characteristics of Australian family historians previous surveys were limited and are now somewhat dated, omitting details that could provide greater clarity in developing a picture of today's family historian.

### Motivations

Kyle, Van den Bossche, Beckett and Lambert, in examining the question of motivation, nominated curiosity factors as major provocateurs to arouse genealogical interest and participation.<sup>33</sup> The search for a sense of identity was also identified by Van den Bossche and Horne as a separate motivating factor, with both researchers subsequently nominating this motive as the prime reason family historians engage in research.<sup>34</sup>

Both Kyle and Van den Bossche explored the subject reaching separate conclusions about the principal motivating factors. Their questions to participants offered the opportunity to 'write-in' their responses and also provided a very limited number of set responses from which participants could select. Van den Bossche's survey responses showed there were a wide variety of reasons her participants suggested as their motivation(s) to begin family history research. The major motivation she found was that of curiosity about their origins (67%) followed by a deeper sense of identity (15%), a study of history (14%) and a desire to belong (4%).<sup>35</sup> Kyle found that her respondents were mainly involved in family history for curiosity reasons – to find out

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<sup>32</sup> Kyle, p. 5; Lambert, *A Profile*, p. 5; Van Den Bossche, p. 23.

<sup>33</sup> Beckett, p. 77; Rachel Eskin Fisher, *A Place in History: Genealogy, Jewish Identity, Modernity*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1999, p. 224; Horne, p. 107.

<sup>34</sup> Horne, p. 3; Van den Bossche, p. 23.

<sup>35</sup> Van den Bossche, p. 26.

whom their ancestors were, where they came from and something about their lives, but did not nominate percentages for the reasons her participants nominated.<sup>36</sup>

Lambert's study of members of the Ontario Genealogical Society extensively explored the related question of reasons to begin research and differentiated between original reasons for commencing family history research and those for continuing to research. He developed a list of 25 possible reasons from face-to-face interviews during 1993 and then used that list as the basis for his survey questions. His respondents nominated three categories of reasons to commence research: 'to learn about my roots or about who I am, to come to know my ancestors as people, and for posterity'.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, Lambert developed possible reasons for family historians to continue their research, allowing his participants to select from this separate list. He also explored people or events that may have influenced his respondents to commence their genealogical research, looking for specific events that may have acted as triggers. Answers to these questions identified the following three main influences: family influences (which included reunions, anniversaries, birthdays, family stories and a relative requesting information), death of close family members and associated comments about ageing, and sundry motives that include curiosity and a desire to learn about roots and heritage, tracing diseases or to check stories.<sup>38</sup>

Drake was interested in motivations to begin genealogical research from a psychological viewpoint. She was interested in seeing what needs are met by the pursuit of information about one's ancestors, and based her questions on those of Sinko & Peters and Lambert.<sup>39</sup> Drake listed 24 motivations that were based on Lambert's reasons for beginning family history research and asked her respondents to rate them from irrelevant to very important.<sup>40</sup> By examining genealogical behaviour and its relationship with interest, mobility, generativity and sense of place, Drake described interest as a predictor of behaviour and the number of years involved in

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<sup>36</sup> Kyle, p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> Lambert, *A Profile*, p. 151.

<sup>38</sup> Lambert, *Study of Genealogists*, pp. 227-228.

<sup>39</sup> Drake, p. 2. Regrettably the questions asked by Sinko & Peters in their survey were unavailable for this thesis.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

genealogical activity, with interest being predicted by genealogical activity and generativity. Unfortunately there was no discussion of the actual motivations provided available to consider for this thesis.

Closely related to the question of motivation, Van den Bossche's study of 1988 is the only research to examine the reasons why the growth in interest in family history has been so pronounced. Her participants were asked to 'write-in' what they thought 'best explained' the booming interest in family history, which provided a slightly different perspective to the reasons respondents had listed as their initial motivations.<sup>41</sup> Responses to the question produced a wide variety of answers ranging from 'curiosity' at 38% of responses, through to national or state based celebration events (eg Bicentennial), media coverage, increased leisure time and activity, heritage and education.<sup>42</sup> Regrettably, Van den Bossche elected simply to list the reasons and provide a considerable number of quotations from respondents without offering any analysis or conclusions. Van den Bossche simply listed these different explanations for growth but did not offer an opinion about them.

### **Social Mobility and Change**

There is an argument that people engage in family history research because of a concern about instability and change in the society in which they live. Essentially this argument offers that the rapid changes to the structure of society, particularly immigration which brings people from different cultures, different languages, beliefs, dress, social behaviours and values, cause those who are entrenched members of that society to feel threatened about having their values and beliefs (and thus, those of their society) diluted. Engaging in family history is a means of buttressing themselves from those changes. Writers suggest that engagement in family history research is a

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<sup>41</sup> Van den Bossche's question about causes for growth was not about motivation per se. The explanations provided by her respondents do not necessarily provide answers to why they were motivated to begin family history research, but they do suggest some possible motivating influences at the time.

<sup>42</sup> Van Den Bossche, p. 32.

direct reaction to the stresses felt through social change, family disruption and a desire for cultural identity.<sup>43</sup> One survey aimed to address aspects of these issues.

With an interest in questions of geographic mobility, social class mobility and which national/immigrant groups are engaged in genealogical research, Jacobson compared sample populations from the Wisconsin State Genealogical Society (203 participants) and 73 hobbyists taking part in county recreation classes at a Milwaukee high school.<sup>44</sup> His 1986 study examined attitudes to social mobility and social change and the effects that they have on participation in family history. He strongly argued that none of these concerns lay behind increased participation in family history.<sup>45</sup> His finding is supported by Lambert's research in which he did not obtain a single response in support of the social mobility proposition.<sup>46</sup> Jacobson's conclusion was that 'stayers not movers' were more likely to be involved in family history and that 'traditionality and not resistance to change' was a key motivator for participation.<sup>47</sup> Other social writers have suggested that people begin family history in a quest to maintain a sense of identity because of the complex society in which we now live, and because we need a sense of belonging and identity.<sup>48</sup> Ashton and Hamilton, writing about the results of the 'Australians and the Past' survey, comment that family history motivation is linked to memorialization and self-preservation – 'to preserve the past ... to preserve the self.'<sup>49</sup> Such a proposition does not appear to be supported in any of the various surveys that considered motivation. Jacobson specifically commented that there was no evidence to sustain this suggestion and where such may arise, then the interest is 'coincidental or the result of other factors'.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Paul Ashton & Paula Hamilton, *History at the Crossroads, Australians and the Past*, Halstead Press, Ultimo, 2010; p. 18; Graeme Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2000, p. 82.

<sup>44</sup> Jacobson, p. 348.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 354-355.

<sup>46</sup> Lambert, *A Profile*, p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> Jacobson, p. 356.

<sup>48</sup> Davison, p. 82, Dulong, p. 307, Fisher, p. 232.

<sup>49</sup> Ashton and Hamilton, *History at the Crossroads*, p. 32.

<sup>50</sup> Jacobson, p. 355.

By contrast, Van den Bossche was also interested in this question, directly attributing the boom in family history research to instability in Australian society.<sup>51</sup> She asked her participants why they engaged in family history and drew from their responses that they were curious about their origins and deduced that the principal reason for engaging in family history research was that of concern about social change.<sup>52</sup> Her reasoning for arriving at this conclusion was not discussed.

### Origins

In a number of the surveys, tentative steps were made to examine the question of ancestral origin. Drake asked from where the respondents first and last ancestor emigrated, Lambert asked the countries of birth of parents and grandparents and Van den Bossche enquired about the countries from which ancestors originated.<sup>53</sup> Drake did not provide results about where her respondents ancestors originated, being more interested in examining immigration patterns. Lambert and Van den Bossche's investigations were confined to members of family history societies and the results achieved directly reflect the resources held by those societies. Consequently, a strong Anglo-centric profile emerged. Whether this profile is applicable to the wider genealogical population requires testing to determine if the investment in multiculturalism is reflected in the activity and interests of Australia's family historians.

### Religion

Only the surveys by Van den Bossche and Lambert showed an interest in the place of religion in either the demographic profile of family historians or in their motivations for research.<sup>54</sup> In terms of the demographic profiles of their survey respondents, they noted that there were fewer Roman Catholics involved in family history research compared to their percentage of total population. Van den Bossche and Lambert also noted their populations only included very small numbers of Latter-day Saints who

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<sup>51</sup> Van den Bossche, p. 12.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.

<sup>53</sup> Van den Bossche, p. 27, Drake, p. 5, Lambert, *A Study of Genealogists*, p. 76.

<sup>54</sup> Lambert, *A Profile*, p 155; Van den Bossche, p 24.

are known to have a strong religious motivation in their family history research.<sup>55</sup> Little is known about the numbers of Latter-day Saint researchers and any serious attempt to arrive at an overall picture of genealogical research activity in Australia must properly include and assess their participation in research activity. While members of other religious denominations may not be motivated by their beliefs or doctrine to begin family history research, for a properly comprehensive picture to be developed, further investigations are warranted.

### Research Practices

Beckett and Humble touched on the area of research practices in their surveys. However, their interest was focused more on technological aspects – in Beckett’s case, the use of computers and for Humble, the use of computers and the internet.<sup>56</sup> There has been no other research located that examines the research practices of family historians, especially in terms of where, how and why they conduct their research.

### Other Areas of Focus

Horne studied the social impact that family history research has on the researcher and their family. She wanted to understand

who engages in in popular genealogy, what they do when they are practicing popular genealogy, how they relate socially to one another round the pursuit of genealogy and how they conceptualise and explain their genealogical activities.<sup>57</sup>

Frazier was interested in the use of the internet for genealogical travel purposes.<sup>58</sup> Both of these aspects are peripheral to the interests of this thesis.

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<sup>55</sup> Van den Bossche – her survey had 25 Latter-day Saint participants.

<sup>56</sup> Beckett, p. iv; Humble, p. iv.

<sup>57</sup> Horne, p. iii.

<sup>58</sup> Frazier, p. iii.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has considered the earlier surveys of family historians and the aspects that were of interest to researchers. Sampling populations and recruitment were examined along with the aspects enquired into in the survey instruments: demographic characteristics, motivations, social change, origins and research practices. Areas for further research were then identified. Exploring these aspects will provide a far clearer picture of Australia's family historians, their research practices and their motivations. By so doing, a better understanding will emerge of how Australia's family historians have contributed to the larger history picture through their efforts to tie their ancestry into the times and events of the nation.

The following chapter focuses on the development of the survey used as the key research instrument in this thesis. It builds on the advantages and disadvantages identified in existing surveys of family historians in order to examine the challenges in defining a survey population and developing a survey.

## Chapter 4

# Survey Development

Previous surveys of family historians have offered conclusions about who family historians are and what motivates them. They have also provided examples of different methodologies with their strengths and weaknesses, and the evaluation of them in the preceding chapter has highlighted gaps and the need for further research and, indeed, for a different form of survey in order to get a more complex understanding of Australia's family historians. This chapter draws on the experiences of previous surveys and on scholarship about conducting surveys to explain and illustrate the issues addressed and the processes involved in developing and administering the survey used for this thesis. It begins with an evaluation of the challenges involved in considering a survey of Australian family historians and, more specifically, the advantages and disadvantages of various types of surveys. Attention then turns to the question of determining a survey population, the use of questions from earlier surveys and the way questions would be posed to participants. Also considered is the key aspect of recruiting participants and the various vehicles available to reach Australia's family historians.

### ***Challenges***

As has been stated earlier in this thesis, research into family historians and the family history industry in Australia is limited. In part this may be explained by the very individuality of family history practice. Family historians are able to conduct their research in isolation, venturing into various archives and repositories in search of information and then returning to their homes to integrate their finds into their own records. The increasing availability of primary records material over the internet has only encouraged that trend towards isolated efforts. Those family historians who actively participate in the life of family history societies, both conducting their own research and contributing to the research needs of others, are observed to be the visible minority.

This capacity to conduct one's own research in privacy and isolation makes identification of family historians difficult. There is no known census of Australian family historians, no central registry, or list of who they are. They are able to take up or place their research in abeyance at their own convenience and the world at large will be entirely unaware of the fact. Accordingly, conducting representative sampling research is impossible. There are, however, locations and venues that groups of family historians frequently attend in the process of their research. These places include physical locations such as public libraries, family history societies, archives and Latter-day Saint family history centres. There are also virtual locations such as email mailing lists, bulletin boards, websites hosted by some of the physical locations mentioned above, commercial providers and sites that are maintained by family historians. Those who utilise facilities do so at times that suit their own research requirements – i.e. the same genealogist will not usually be found at the same research facility day-in and out.

The options available for researching and establishing a representative sample of family historians are therefore challenging. Using interviews, either group or individual, to gather information is limited by the ability to find individuals who are willing to participate and attend the venue where the interviews would take place. Of a necessity, this would restrict participants to those who live nearby. The critical issue is to obtain a large sample of respondents drawn from a variety of sources and locations in order to have sufficient confidence in the results produced. David de Vaus states that a sample size of 2,000 provides the basis for the most economic payoff in terms of accuracy 'since going beyond this point there is insufficient payoff in terms of accuracy.' He further states that the 'size of the population from which the sample is drawn is largely irrelevant for the accuracy of the sample. It is the absolute size of the sample that is important.'<sup>1</sup> There are further challenges in the way that the survey population may divide into various sub populations (for instance male and female, age groups, and so forth), each requiring sufficient sample sizes in their own right. In the context of this study, these ideal sample sizes impose economic and physical resource constraints, requiring a suitable survey approach that is affordable and able to be achieved by a single researcher. While the survey was interested in statistical

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<sup>1</sup> D.A. de Vaus, *Surveys in Social Research*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2002, p. 81.

information, it was the qualitative aspects that were the principal focus – the ‘why, how and what’ of family history research.

The ideal situation would be to conduct a census of all Australian family historians, but for the reasons already discussed, this is impractical and impossible. The probable numbers involved and the physical distribution are beyond financial and time capacities to collect, analyse and report.<sup>2</sup> By the process of elimination, surveys thus become the logical process for gathering the information. Whether the survey is conducted by face-to-face sessions, postal, telephone or internet means, similar problems present themselves.

In reviewing the ways that surveys can be conducted de Vaus makes the point that ‘it is essential to achieve high response rates at an economical cost’ with the range of methods available for collecting survey data having implications both for response rates and the costs involved in collecting quality information.<sup>3</sup>

Face-to-face surveys are slow and require specially trained interviewers to conduct the survey. Complicating this is the difficulty in knowing where to send interviewers to find their survey population. This difficulty and the costs involved in paying interviewers for their time negated this approach in this instance. Conducting the survey via telephone also ruled itself out for exactly the same reasons as face-to-face surveys – they require skilled interviewers, are costly and the population of family historians is not known, making contact by telephone impractical.<sup>4</sup>

Self-administered surveys overcome many of the cost related problems with skilled interviewers required by the above mentioned methods in relying on respondents to understand and answer the survey. Using the post to survey family historians worked very successfully for Lambert in his study of Ontario genealogists.<sup>5</sup> Postal surveys are cheaper to administer than those conducted by interview, but traditionally provide

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 122.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 123.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald D. Lambert, ‘A Profile of the Membership of the Ontario Genealogical Society,’ *Families*, No. 34, No. 2, May 1995, p. 74.

much lower response rates, and rely vitally on the completed surveys actually being returned.<sup>6</sup> However, Lambert had a defined population (members of the Ontario Genealogical Society) available to survey which was not the case in this current research project. By way of contrast, Horne's survey did not attract the same level of response, achieving 140 replies from a sample of 500.<sup>7</sup> Utilising a variation of mail surveys, Van den Bossche asked her respondents to return completed surveys by post. While a substantial number did so, the issue seems to be more a question of the adequacy of distributing the survey, with the main response arising from insertions into the journals of the two major Victorian family history societies.<sup>8</sup> Using a postal survey for this survey of family historians was impractical for the very same reasons that disqualify face-to-face and telephone interviews, that is not having a known population.

Email surveys present a similar set of challenges. The usual methods include attaching a survey document or including the survey in the text of the email. Humble in 1999 used email to distribute his survey to participants and required the completed surveys to be posted to him by return mail. The numbers of completed and returned surveys received suggest that this model did not attract the volume of responses he might have expected, the process seeming to be cumbersome. His participants volunteered their interest by emailing their desire to participate in the survey.<sup>9</sup> de Vaus describes email surveys as presenting problems with coding responses and as being relatively expensive and slow. 'spam' is another significant issue, requiring careful use of the medium to avoid the perception of annoyance email to recipients.<sup>10</sup> A variation to this method is the combination of using the internet to distribute the survey and email the completed survey to the researcher. This variation reduces the

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<sup>6</sup> de Vaus, p. 123.

<sup>7</sup> Adrienne Julia Horne, *The Pursuit of Popular Genealogy*, Masters thesis, University of Calgary, Calgary, 2002, p. 50.

<sup>8</sup> Winsome A. N. Van den Bossche, *Amateur Historical Enquiry in the Tracing of Ancestry: Establishing a Profile of a Genealogist, A Victorian Survey*, Masters thesis, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 1988, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Bruce Humble, *Genealogy and the Internet*, Masters thesis, Charles Sturt University, Mitchell, 1999, p. 85.

<sup>10</sup> de Vaus, p. 124.

possible appearance of ‘spam’ but still has the inherent difficulties of coding and slowness.<sup>11</sup>

Using the internet to both distribute the survey and to submit completed surveys with responses automatically coded offers a cost effective answer to the issues identified with other methods, and offers a further advantage in providing instant feedback.<sup>12</sup> There are, of course, disadvantages to the use of internet based surveys in that they have a reputation for low response rates – depending on the topic of the survey. de Vaus states that, when used in particular cases these types of surveys will yield good response rates and that the anonymity of the method actually helps to achieve better response rates.<sup>13</sup> Using this format with family historians – particularly surveying them on a topic of high interest to them - fits his ‘particular cases’ model. Two recent surveys of family historians - Drake in California in 2002 and Veale in Perth in 2005 utilised internet based surveys that were publicised through email bulletin boards and family history web sites. Both achieved very large numbers of responses – Drake 4,100 and Veale 7,600, probably because of the immediacy of the survey when potential participants were first made aware of its existence and availability.<sup>14</sup> Both of these surveys were open to international participation which further explains the large number of responses received.

A further disadvantage arises in the challenge to establish response rates. Installing a counter that records visits to the survey site may, in part, overcome this disadvantage. There is, however, no way to measure the number of potential participants who see the survey and decide not to take part. Problems with potential bias also intrude with older people, less educated people, or those from non-English speaking backgrounds being inclined not to respond. Moreover, it is suggested that many from these categories do not have internet access.<sup>15</sup> From the literature observation and

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 126.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 126.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 127.

<sup>14</sup> Pamela J. Drake, Findings From the Fullerton Genealogy Study: Masters thesis, California State University, Fullerton, 2001, p. 4; Kylie J. Veale, The Changing Face of Genealogy: An Empirical Study of the Genealogical Community Online, Ph.D. candidacy proposal, Curtin University of Technology, Perth 23 June 2004, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> de Vaus, p. 128.

discussion with family historians, it is apparent that the internet is now used regularly by the majority of family historians because the volume of resources now available as primary sources virtually make use of the internet mandatory for successful research.

The most significant challenge of internet surveys is that they rely on participants volunteering, and it is not possible to control who completes the survey. Accordingly, they are unlikely to be representative of the general population, although this does not mean that they have no value. de Vaus suggests that targeting specific populations offers a good means of success when seeking for representativeness. The challenge is to have as much of the target population as possible be made aware of the survey and invited to participate. The broader the reach the better, with the central consideration in achieving a quality sample becoming the method by which the survey is distributed.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Deciding on Questioning Technique***

Selecting the best approach to determine the way survey questions were posed involved assessing the strengths and weaknesses each method of surveying provided. This research project had a limited budget of funds, manpower and time which precluded the use of teams of trained interviewers conducting the survey. The nationwide character of the family historian population was a further limiting factor. The decision to use a self-administered survey, distributed by an internet website overcame these issues.

Another factor of concern was that of coding the completed surveys so that the data arising could be meaningfully interpreted.<sup>17</sup> Open ended questions require a more intensive effort to code the responses for analysis, while closed questions simplify the process. The use of a multiple choice answer format where the answers are pre-coded (if the answer choices were carefully considered and researched) offered an effective answer to overcoming the time and cost issues of coding.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 79, 128, 140.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 153 – 155.

Several providers of web-based survey vehicles were recommended by thesis supervisors for consideration. Comparisons were made to evaluate the simplicity of use, ease of creation and establishing survey questions, the ability of a participant to interact with the survey, reporting options available and cost.<sup>18</sup> The use of *SurveyMonkey.com* provided the best options for all of these aspects for a modest cost.

A key issue in creating the survey lay in establishing a survey website that would provide sufficient confidence for participants to log-on and complete the survey. Simply creating a website through a commercial service provider in the present climate of internet fraud would not offer sufficient credibility to attract the volume of response desired. Reviewing this question with university supervisors determined that the university could not provide the hosting site which would have been the ideal solution. Further consideration of the survey website host issue led to an approach to *Rootsweb* – the major sponsor of genealogical web and email list services worldwide, to seek their assistance to host the survey website. *Rootsweb* were agreeable to the request and made space available on their ‘Freepages’ facility – a server that allows individual family historians to create their own website to publish their family history. The address for the survey website thus became:

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~ausgensurvey/>

### **Survey Population**

After consultation with family history societies and family historians known to the researcher it became clear that family historians frequently do not reside in the localities of principal interest to them. Over time, individuals and families have moved localities to follow educational, social and vocational objectives, locating them away from the areas where their families may have originally settled. Therefore, concentrating on surveying a local population – for example, those family historians with an interest in Parramatta, would mean making family historians over a wider area aware of the desire to conduct a survey amongst them. Concentrating on those with

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 141.

Parramatta interests would lead to the survey producing results that are focussed on Parramatta history and would not necessarily reflect the interests of other Australian family historians.

The reverse situation has similar complications. Using filters it is possible to limit responses to only those who reside in a particular locality – for example, Parramatta. The aim in limiting the survey population to a locality would be to generalise the results from that locality across the total population, the implication being that the survey sample would be properly representative of the total population. As earlier discussed, there is no measure available that would allow a locality to be selected as reflective of the total Australian family historian population.

The conclusion was, therefore, that in order to produce a reasonably representative set of findings, the survey had to be exposed to as wide a range as possible of the total Australian family historian population for enough to volunteer to participate. However, this survey approach would not necessarily reach those family historians who no longer pursue family history as an interest, be it for loss of interest reasons or incapacity in some form. Accordingly, the survey population was determined to appropriately include all resident Australian family historians, from which sufficient volunteers would agree to participate to provide approximately 3,000 responses.

### ***Survey Contents***

The focus of this thesis is to learn who the family historians of Australia are, how they go about their practice and their motivations for involvement in family history. The survey therefore asked questions that concentrate on these aspects and were developed building on the work of previous surveys and research and the interests of various participants in the family history community. The following discussion describes the development of the survey.

### Use of earlier questions and ideas

Consideration was given to the questions asked by previous investigators (where their questionnaires were still available) and the responses that were received to those questions. These questions were assessed for their relevance to the central research questions of this thesis.

In previous surveys, research questions about demographic matters posed to respondents were part of the methods used to establish profiles and to be able to make general statements about the backgrounds of people interested in family history.<sup>19</sup> These questions concentrated on matters of age, gender, income, education and (in Winsome Van den Bossche's research) nationality and religion.<sup>20</sup> Drake also examined marital status, numbers of children in the family, involvement with other children and numbers of people living in the household.<sup>21</sup> Drake also enquired into two other matters which are relevant to this study, namely a question about where a respondent lives and whether this address is urban or rural.<sup>22</sup> These two questions were included – albeit with different wording and answering options.

In order to understand the nature and growth of family history in Australia, other aspects beyond the demographic characteristics of family historians needed to be investigated. Motivations to begin and continue family history research is a key issue, and questions used by earlier researchers examining this aspect were of interest. Four researchers (Van den Bossche, Beckett, Lambert and Drake) included questions about motivations in their surveys. Of these, Lambert's study provided the most informative ideas for inclusion in this survey. Using a series of interviews with members of the

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<sup>19</sup> Sydney Ann Beckett, *Current Practices and the Use of Computers in Genealogical Research*, Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, Philadelphia, 1993, p. 160; Drake, p. 7; Richard A. Frazier, *Genealogical Research, Internet Research and Genealogical Tourism*, Masters thesis, University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie, May 2001, p. 134; Horne, p. 182; Ronald D. Lambert, *Survey Document*, University of Waterloo, 1994, p. 76; Van den Bossche, p. 32.

<sup>20</sup> See Beckett; Drake; Frazier; Noeline Kyle *I Want Some Identity, A Profile of Local Family History Group Members, Their Research and Educational Needs*, School of Behavioural and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, 1987; Lambert; Peggy T. Sinko & Scott N. Peters, *A Survey of Genealogists at the Newberry Library*, *Library Trends*, Summer, 1983; and Van den Bossche.

<sup>21</sup> Drake, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

Ontario Genealogical Society, Lambert developed an extensive framework of possible motivations to begin family history research which are largely relevant to the Australian context.<sup>23</sup>

Related to motivation are the influence factors to begin research. Much of the literature ascribes the boom in family history activity which occurred in English speaking countries from the late 1960s, as heavily influenced by the confluence of bicentennial activities and the publication of Alex Haley's *Roots* and the subsequent television mini-series.<sup>24</sup> It is important to understand whether these influencers continued to have an impact on the unabated growth in participation in family history 30 years later, or whether there were new influencers at work, provoking interest. These matters had not been previously considered.

A further related aspect is that of how long family historians have been involved in their research. Asking a question about this matter allowed comparison to genealogical events to assess whether there may be some correlation in provoking family history interest. Van den Bossche, Frazier and Humble included questions enquiring about this matter asking questions about the Australian Bi-centennial, the advent of personal computing, and the *FamilySearch* website, and provided suitable ideas for developing a question in this survey.<sup>25</sup>

Another matter tested was that of the third generation effect. The argument behind this is that family historians become interested only after three generations have passed since the initial immigration. Lambert and Drake asked questions about immigration and they provided suitable models to assess whether the third generation effect is a factor in Australian family history practice.<sup>26</sup> Drake's question asked about both the earliest and most recent immigrants in participants' family lines, and provided a pattern for structuring questions in this survey. It then flowed naturally from these questions to enquire about the places of origin for participants' ancestors.

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<sup>23</sup> Lambert, *A Profile*, p. 227 – 228.

<sup>24</sup> See this thesis, p. 33.

<sup>25</sup> Frazier, p. 126; Humble, p. 184; Van den Bossche, p. 12A.

<sup>26</sup> Drake, p. 2; Lambert, *A Profile*, p. 76.

An aspect of motivation for family historians that arose in Lambert's survey was the presence of other researchers in the lines of the survey participant, testing to see if there was a family history culture already established in the family.<sup>27</sup> This aspect was included in this survey using Lambert's series of questions as a model.

Religious inspiration as a motivator was suggested by some researchers, and questions asking about participants' religion were included as demographic matters by Drake and Lambert.<sup>28</sup> Other researchers also suggested that religion plays a role in motivating family history activity, particularly amongst Latter-day Saints.<sup>29</sup> However, because previous surveys did not attract participation, this aspect has not been adequately considered. Questions therefore were included to examine this aspect of motivation.

Matters of where and why family history activity is conducted have not been effectively considered. Instead researchers selected segments of the family history marketplace, thereby drawing a picture that did not necessarily establish an overall picture of family history research practice. Humble examined family historians who used internet resources; Van den Bossche, Kyle and Lambert focussed on family history society members; and Frazier looked at family historians who used email mailing lists.<sup>30</sup> Family historians, however, use a wider range of venues than these and questions were developed to encompass the spread of venues and why these venues were germane to their family history activities.

The final area of enquiry concerns research behaviour. Family historians have a reputation of being willing to share their research results, yet all evidence about this aspect is purely anecdotal and by observation. Previous researchers have not

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<sup>27</sup> Lambert, *A Profile*, p. 224.

<sup>28</sup> Drake, p 2; Ronald D. Lambert, *A Study of Genealogists & Family Historians*, Faculty of Arts, University of Waterloo, 2000, p. 76.

<sup>29</sup> See James B. Allen, Jessie L Embury and Kahlille B Mehr, 'Hearts Turned to the Fathers,' *BYU Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 1994-95; John P. Dulong, *Genealogical Groups in a Changing Organizational Environment: From Lineage to Heritage*, Ph.D. dissertation, Wayne State University, Detroit, 1986; Simon Michael Titley Bayes, *Family History in England, C1945-2006: Culture, Identity and (Im)mortality*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of York, York, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Kyle, p. 3; Lambert, *Survey of Genealogists*, p. 74; Van den Bossche, p. 14.

examined this matter and questions about this were developed through consultation, discussion and testing.

### **Developing the Survey Questions**

Informal discussions were held with family historians known to the researcher to explore ideas for questions and to develop appropriate wording. Included in this process was initial testing of questions to check if the question(s) were understood and interpreted in such a way to produce a range of usable answers that were particularly relevant to motivations. This process produced several additional alternative answers that were included in the survey choices. Family historians involved in the discussions confirmed the view that motivations can change from the initial reason(s) to begin genealogical research. Consequently questions were developed for both the initial motivating factors and ongoing motivation, with different alternative answers.

A further process followed to crystallise possible answers to questions was through conducting a focus group session with 12 members of the Parramatta Family History Group. Seven areas of planned questioning were discussed with the group covering motivation, collaboration and sharing, research venues, changing research practices and survival of research. The process refined the multiple choice answers being considered for the survey, leading to one question about an aspect of collaboration being omitted from the survey, because it was not producing a range of answers. Group members were asked to discuss their understanding of each question and then to nominate how they would answer that question. The process showed that there was some question wording that needed 'fine tuning' in order to be clearly understood, and the Group provided suggestions that they considered would assist.

In tandem with focus group work and discussions with individual family historians, pilot versions of the survey were provided to 35 family historians for field testing to see how questions would be answered, whether any problems with understanding arose and to receive feedback on areas that were of particular interest to the family historians. This pilot process occurred in two waves with approximately half of the

number in each wave. The pilot process began with 15 family historians testing the initial survey draft. This version of the survey did not provide alternative answers to questions rather requiring participants to provide their own answers. Follow-up conversations with the trial participants led to some questions being redrafted to clarify the meaning. The answers to questions provided by the participants were compared to anticipated alternatives, and where there were consistent 'Other' responses provided, these were incorporated into the survey's answer alternatives. The intent of this process was to reduce the amount of 'write in' answers, simplifying the completion process as much as possible for participants and to make analysis easier.

The second wave of pilot surveys involved 20 family historians who tested the final version of the survey on the website. These participants were asked to test the working of the survey, and comment on any areas where they experienced difficulty in interpretation or in being able to provide an answer. As a result, some typographical errors were corrected and the corrected questions produced satisfactory results.

Regularly throughout the question development process, reviews with thesis supervisors Janis Wilton and John Scott were held. The review process covered all aspects, dealing with questions to be posed and their merits, the wording used to frame the questions and available response choices. The intent of these reviews was to ensure as much as possible that questions posed would be understood the same way on different occasions and that the questions and answers would have the same meaning for all respondents.<sup>31</sup> Guidance was provided on the structure of the questionnaire along with advice on testing and focus group ideas. Review by survey design experts at UNE further clarified question structure and wording and provided for improved protection of respondent privacy, allowing for a draft to be prepared ready for university ethics committee approval and feedback.

A copy of the final survey document is provided in Appendix 1.

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<sup>31</sup> de Vaus, pp. 96-97.

### **Recruitment**

Ensuring a majority of current practicing Australian family historians were made aware of the survey was a considerable task. Fortunately there are several distribution portals that are useful in reaching a large proportion of the family historian population.

An important part of effectively distributing the survey was obtaining support from key players in the Australian family history industry – family history societies, libraries, archives, Latter-day Saint family history centres and commercial operators such as *Ancestry.com* and *Gould Books*. Simply relying on the merits of the research project being undertaken was insufficient to encourage all to support the project. Discussions were held with several key individuals to learn about their interests in the research practices of family historians and the kind of information that they would find useful resulting from the project. With the growth in digital technology and the increasing presence of on-line providers, family history societies were interested in knowing about the way family historians saw the importance of the various research venues. Libraries and archives sought similar information so that their product offerings could be effectively directed. Commercial operators had aligned interests but also saw the survey publicity process as a means of promoting their own stature and product offering. Email list administrators had concerns that their promotion of the survey would be ‘off topic’ and therefore not relevant to their list members. Since examining the research practices was already a significant part of this survey and consequently, when these individuals saw the information that would be developed, virtually all (with the exception of a few Email List Administrators) were pleased to provide support in making their users aware of the survey. Additionally many suggestions were offered for other venues that could be used to publicise the presence of the survey website.

### **Email Mail Lists**

At the time of writing there were 208 mailing lists sponsored by *Rootsweb* that were subscribed to by family historians with an interest in Australian family history. Some of the subscribers were located outside Australia and the survey design filtered these

subscribers by noting a non-Australian postcode should they complete the survey.<sup>32</sup> Each of these mailing lists has different levels of activity with some being very active and others less so. Each list has an administrator who was contacted to enlist their support to publicise the survey to their subscribers.

Reactions from administrators varied. Some (around 10 administrators) saw posting messages about the presence of the survey as not appropriate or 'off-topic' and being the equivalent of SPAM. However, the majority of list administrators did post messages to their lists to promote the presence of the survey.

Given the unknown number of family historians who subscribe to these lists, it remains impractical to attempt to gauge participation rates from this area.

### Family History Societies

Most family history societies have several regular communication methods with their membership. These include journals, newsletters and electronic newsletters. From conversations conducted with many societies, most of those contacted were willing to provide publicity about the survey through all or some of their media. The major challenge was that many do not publish all that frequently – sometimes just the single effort each year. Therefore, timing the announcement of the survey and the dates for which it was available for responses, did not always coincide with individual society publishing dates. Virtually all of the Australian societies are contactable via email and the publicity material was easily distributed through this means.

A poster was email distributed to family history societies with a request to display it so that their members became aware of the survey. Additionally, many societies included a copy of the poster's wording in their newsletters – both hardcopy and electronic. A small number also placed an announcement about the survey on their web pages, enabling visitors to their site to 'click through' to the survey site Introduction page. One society secretary, who acts as Secretary / Treasurer for the AFFHO (Australasian Federation of Family History Organisations) made mention of

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<sup>32</sup> Some of these subscribers may have been Australians living overseas. There was, however, no simple method for discerning this from their email address, so where a participant nominated a non-Australian place of residence, their responses were deleted.

the survey in their newsletter *NewsFlash* which was also distributed to member societies, increasing exposure and providing a form of official status.

### **Latter-day Saint Family History Centres**

Each family history centre is controlled by a local director who in turn reports to Mark Kelly, the Australian Manager of the Family History Department and who is located at the Church offices in Carlingford, N.S.W. Kelly agreed to provide publicity in the form of an announcement to all Australian Family History Centres. Once again a poster was provided to be displayed at each centre, inviting users of that centre to participate in the survey.

### **Libraries and Archives**

A number of other venues exist that service family historians. State libraries, local libraries and government archives attract numbers of family historians through their doors on a daily basis to use the resources of the individual repository. An approach was made to the State Library of NSW to seek their assistance in publicising the survey to family historians who use their facilities and records for their research. Through the State Library of NSW, a copy of the poster and details of the survey purposes and objectives was forwarded to the Librarians Network – an email community connecting librarians around Australia. This enabled each library to have a copy of the poster to display to their users.

A similar route was followed with the Archivists network. State Records NSW accepted a request to display the poster in their reading rooms and also made mention of the survey in their electronic newsletter *Now and Then*. Information about the survey was then forwarded to the Archivists Network for distribution and display at other Australian archives.

### **Commercial Avenues**

Approaches were made to commercial providers of family history products and services – *Ancestry.com*, *Gould Books* and *Australian Family Tree Connections*

*Magazine*. Each made mention of the survey in their publications and newsletters which were distributed nationwide.

### **Reaching Non ESB Family Historians**

The previously mentioned venues cater principally for those who have Australian and United Kingdom research interests. Family historians with interests from other countries required different vehicles and venues to introduce them to the survey and invite their participation.

A variety of means were employed in this regard including requesting community service announcements in newspapers (Spanish, Italian and Arabic), and announcements via particular community websites (Italian, Chinese and Lebanese). Unfortunately the effectiveness of these approaches was spotty at best, having to locate contact details for relevant community leaders from around Australia and then actually engage them in conversation. Frequently there were difficulties in understanding through language differences. However, the majority were willing to provide information about the survey to their readers through their community information sections.

Attempts were also made to enlist the assistance of the various nationality based social clubs. This was a far less successful approach, generally being viewed as not meshing well with their commercial operations. Virtually all of these contacts were made by telephone. Face-to-face interviews may have produced better results, but time and geographic constraints made this impractical.

### **Conclusion**

The discussion in this chapter considered the experiences of previous surveys of family historians and the scholarship relating to surveys. Against this background, the issues relating to the development of the survey used for this thesis were considered along with the processes used to recruit participants.

The methods described in this chapter represented the best means of obtaining widespread publicity distribution for the survey. The shortcoming in the distribution process lay in the posters used to promote the survey at family history societies and Latter-day Saint family history centres. While email lists, website information and electronic newsletters have the ability to include a 'hot link' address straight to the survey, the same capacity does not exist with a formal poster or notices in journals. Accordingly, notices in journals and newsletters were not as effective since they required family historians to note the address in writing and then access the survey later. Reaching non-English-speaking background family historians was a further area of challenge. Where a formally organised family history group is in existence better opportunities exist to publicise the presence of a survey and to recruit participation. Where there is a less structured community of non-ESB family historians, consideration will need to be given as to the best way to involve them in survey participation.

The following chapter reports the results derived from the survey, firstly looking at the demographic data and then aspects about how family historians go about their practice and the places they utilise in pursuit of their interest. The final section reports the results of questions that asked about motivations and influences.

## Chapter 5

### Reporting the Survey and its Results

The *Who Are The Genealogists of Australia?* survey was available for participation via the internet for a four month period from August 1<sup>st</sup> 2009 to November 30<sup>th</sup> 2009 at <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~ausgensurvey/>. During the survey period 3,064 people participated, producing 2,685 completed surveys<sup>1</sup>.

In this chapter the results from the 49 questions asked in the survey are reported. The first section details the demographic data, including age, gender, marital status, education, occupation, place of residence, religion and cultural backgrounds as well as their involvement with family history societies and the number of years they have been participating in family history research. The second section provides information about the practice of family history and how participants engage in that practice while the concluding section reports on the results of questions relating to motivation and the influences to become involved in family history. Throughout, comparative data from the earlier surveys, and, where relevant, from the 2006 Census is itemised.

#### ***Who Are the Family Historians of Australia?***

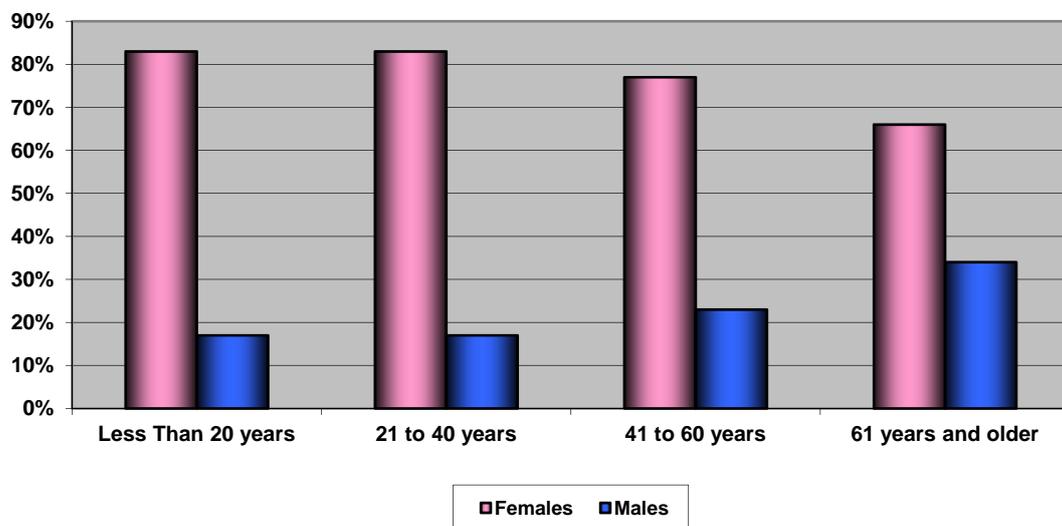
A principal task addressed in this thesis is that of identifying the characteristics of the family historians of Australia through the responses of participants to the *Who Are The Genealogists of Australia?* survey. In essence, that task involved seeking information about their demographic background – age, gender, where they live, marital status, religion, field of employment, education and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, questions were also asked about their ancestral backgrounds and arrival in Australia.

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<sup>1</sup> Some participants experienced difficulties while completing the survey. Some reported site problems while others encountered other disruptions – signing on again later to complete the survey. The uncompleted surveys were discarded from the total.

### Males vs Females

More women responded to the *Who Are The Genealogists of Australia* survey compared to men – 73% compared to 27%. The figure changes with those family historians who responded to the survey who were born outside Australia, with a slightly closer ratio of females 65% and males 35%. The ratio also varied when the age of respondents was considered, with female participation to the survey highest in the younger age groups and males providing their strongest representation in the oldest age bracket.



**Figure 1 - Gender of Survey Participants by Age Group**

Comparing these results to previous Australian research by Noeline Kyle, and Winsome Van den Bossche shows some variances. Kyle's study had a male to female ratio of 78% to 22%.<sup>2</sup> Van Den Bossche found her survey had 66% females and 34% male participation which is a narrower range than this survey produced.<sup>3</sup> As shown in the following table, overseas research by Sydney Beckett, Pamela Drake, Richard Frazier, Kate Friday, Ronald Lambert and Peggy Sinko & Scott Peters all produced results in which female participants predominated in their surveys but with widely

<sup>2</sup> Noeline Kyle, *I Want Some Identity, A Profile of Local Family History Group Members, Their Research and Educational Needs*, School of Behavioural and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, 1987, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Winsome A. N. Van den Bossche, *Amateur Historical Enquiry in the Tracing of Ancestry: Establishing a Profile of a Genealogist, A Victorian Survey*, Masters thesis, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 1988, p. 14B.

different results.<sup>4</sup> Adrienne Horne's 2001 survey is the only survey located in which males were the majority respondents.

Researcher	Year	Sample Size	Males	Females
Sinko & Peters	1983	250	41%	<b>59%</b>
Beckett	1993	372	40%	<b>60%</b>
Lambert	1994	1,348	37%	<b>63%</b>
Frazier	2001	1,374	27%	<b>73%</b>
Horne	2001	30	59%	<b>41%</b>
Drake	2001	4,109	28%	<b>72%</b>
Friday	2006	3,928	38%	<b>62%</b>

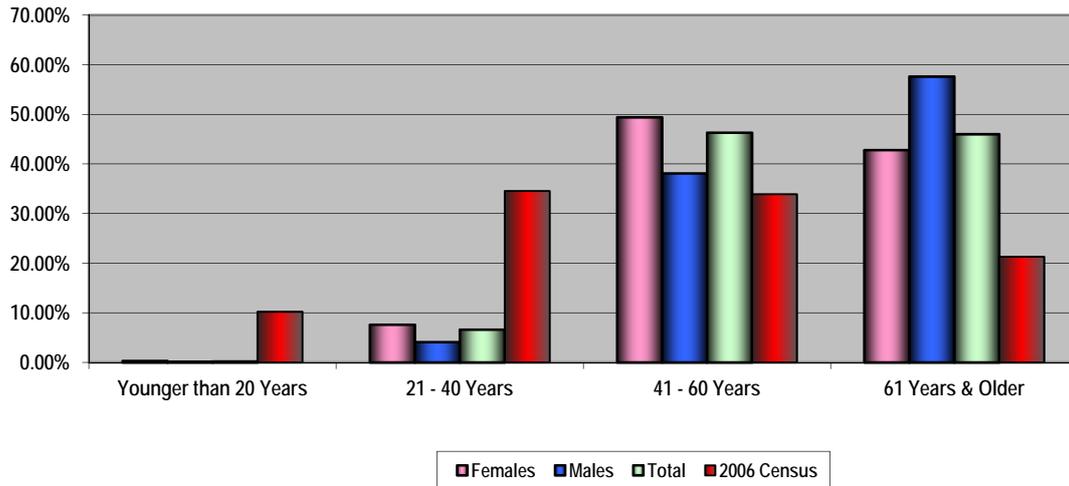
**Table 1 - Comparison of Gender of Participants in Different Surveys**

### Age

Survey respondents were heavily concentrated in the 41 – 60 years and 61 years and older age brackets, with females at their strongest levels of participation in the 41 – 60 years bracket and males in the 61 years and older bracket. Responses by both males and females in the younger age ranges were very limited. The following table compares responses received by age group against the 2006 Australian Census figures.

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<sup>4</sup> Sydney Ann Beckett, *Current Practices and the Use of Computers in Genealogical Research*, Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, Philadelphia, 1993, p. 53; Pamela J. Drake, *Findings From the Fullerton Genealogy Study*: Masters thesis, California State University, Fullerton, 2001, p. 3; Richard A. Frazier, *Genealogical Research, Internet Research and Genealogical Tourism*, Masters thesis, University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie, May 2001, p. 50.



**Figure 2 - Share of Survey Participants by Gender Compared to 2006 Australian Census<sup>5</sup>**

In general terms, the average ages of participants in the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey was calculated as females 57 years, males 60 years with the overall age being 58 years.<sup>6</sup> Previous surveys provided a varied answer to the question of age. Sinko and Peters found an average age of their participants at 47.9 years; Frazier found 40% of his participants were in the 50-64 years bracket; Drake found her participants were concentrated in their 40s, 50s and 60s. Lambert's study had 29% of his respondents aged between 60-69 years and a further 27% 70 years and older, while Friday's survey found her respondents peaked in the 55-64 year age bracket with 33.5% of the total.<sup>7</sup> In the Australian context, Kyle's survey participants had a calculated average age of 49 years as did those who responded to Van Den Bossche's survey, with both having a younger participation age (average age 49 years) when compared to the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey as the following shows.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2006 Census of Population and Housing*, Catalogue No. 2068.0, Census Tables.

<sup>6</sup> Ages were calculated using the midpoint for each age group i.e. Less than 20 years – nominated average 15 years; 21 – 40 years – nominated average 30 years; 41 – 60 years – nominated average 50 years; and 61 years and older – nominated average 70 years. Similar calculations were applied to both Kyle's and Van den Bossche's surveys to arrive at suitable comparison points.

<sup>7</sup> Drake, p. 3; Frazier, p. 53; Kate Friday, *Users of UK e-Genealogy Resources*, Ph.D. dissertation, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, September 2006, p. 5; Ronald D. Lambert, *Study of Genealogists*, p. 75; Peggy T. Sinko and Scott N. Peters, *A Survey of Genealogists at the Newberry Library*, *Library Trends*, Summer, 1983, p. 102.

Age Bracket	Kyle	Van den Bossche	2009
Under 20 years Kyle – under 30 years	7.5%	1%	<b>0.2%</b>
21 – 40 years Kyle – 30 – 40 years	20.7%	29%	<b>6.6%</b>
41 – 60 years Kyle 40 – 50 years	20.9%	44%	<b>46.3%</b>
61 years plus Kyle 50 plus years	50.9%	26%	<b>46.8%</b>
	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 2 - Age Group Comparison of Participants in Different Surveys

### Marital Status

Participants were asked about their marital status with over 75% indicating that they were married. 7% indicated that they were widowed. 2006 Australian Census figures are different.

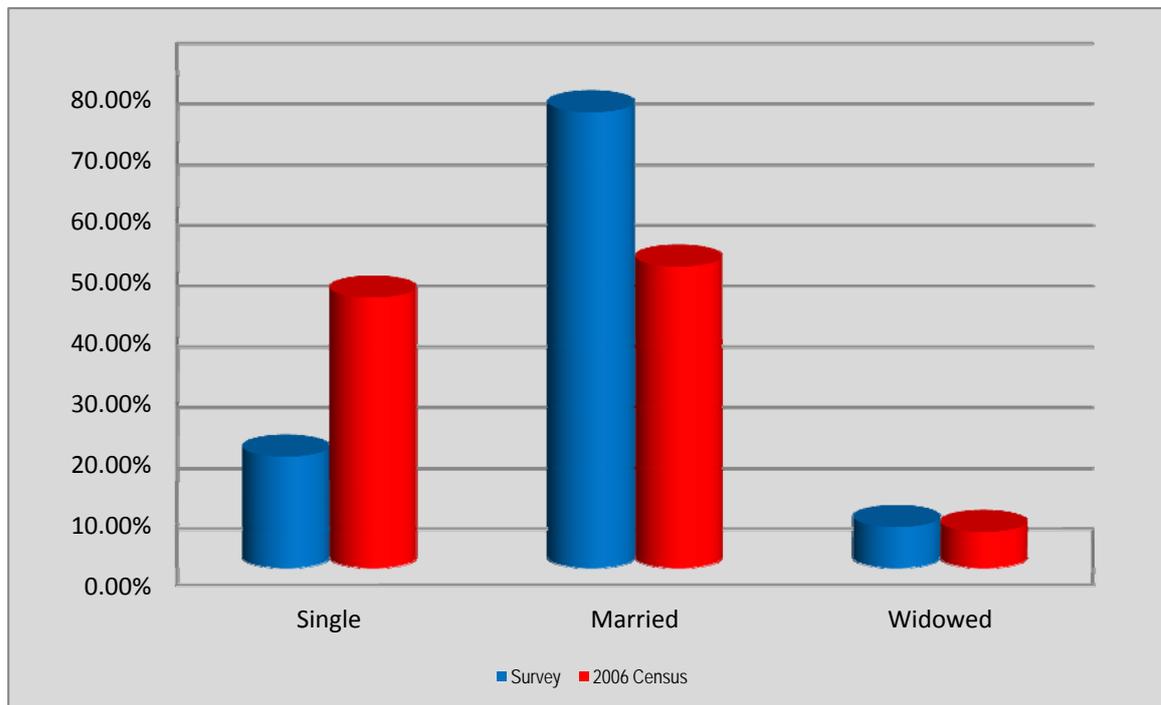
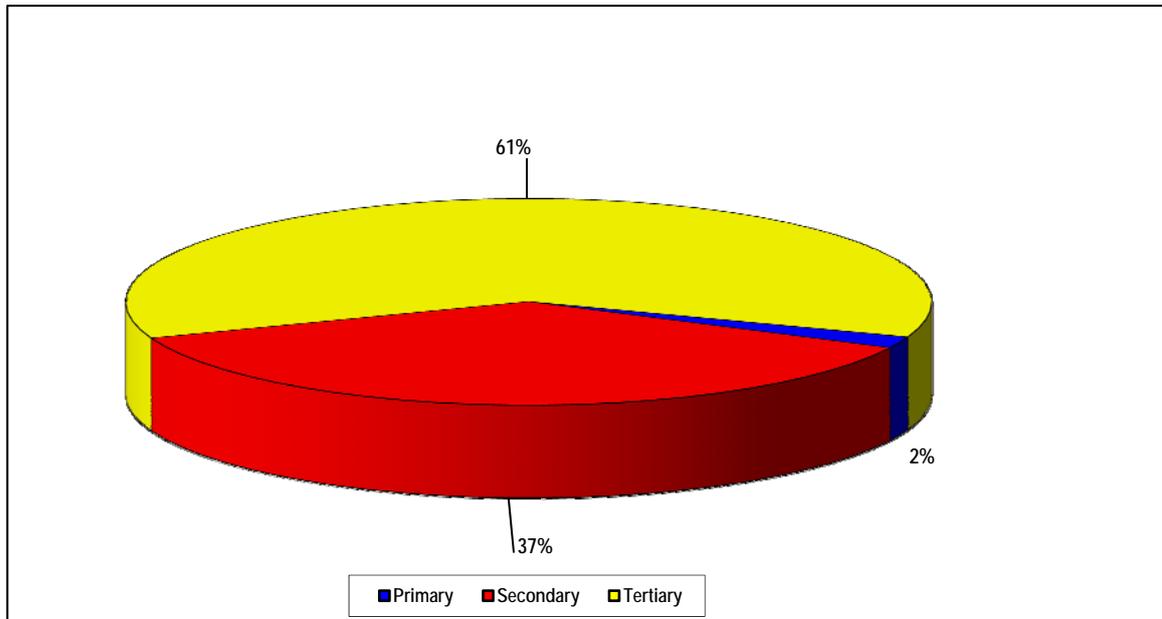


Figure 3 - Marital Status of Survey Participants<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2006 Census of Population and Housing*, Catalogue No. 2068.0 Census Tables.

### Education

Participants were asked to indicate the highest level of education they had completed. 61% advised they were tertiary educated, 37% with secondary education and 2% with only primary education.



**Figure 4 - Highest Level of Education Stated by Survey Participants**

Whether this result provided information that is of value is debatable. Including more categories would have provided a better understanding of the educational standards of family history researchers. The Australian population as shown in census figures are generally well educated with some form of post-secondary education. It would have been further illuminating to see where the 61% who nominated more than secondary education standard had gained their qualifications and what type and level of qualification.

### Occupations

Participants were asked about their occupation or profession based upon 2006 Australian Census categories.<sup>9</sup> Participants were concentrated in the education, health and government sectors.

<sup>9</sup> For the full list of categories, see the survey question in Appendix 1, p. 194.

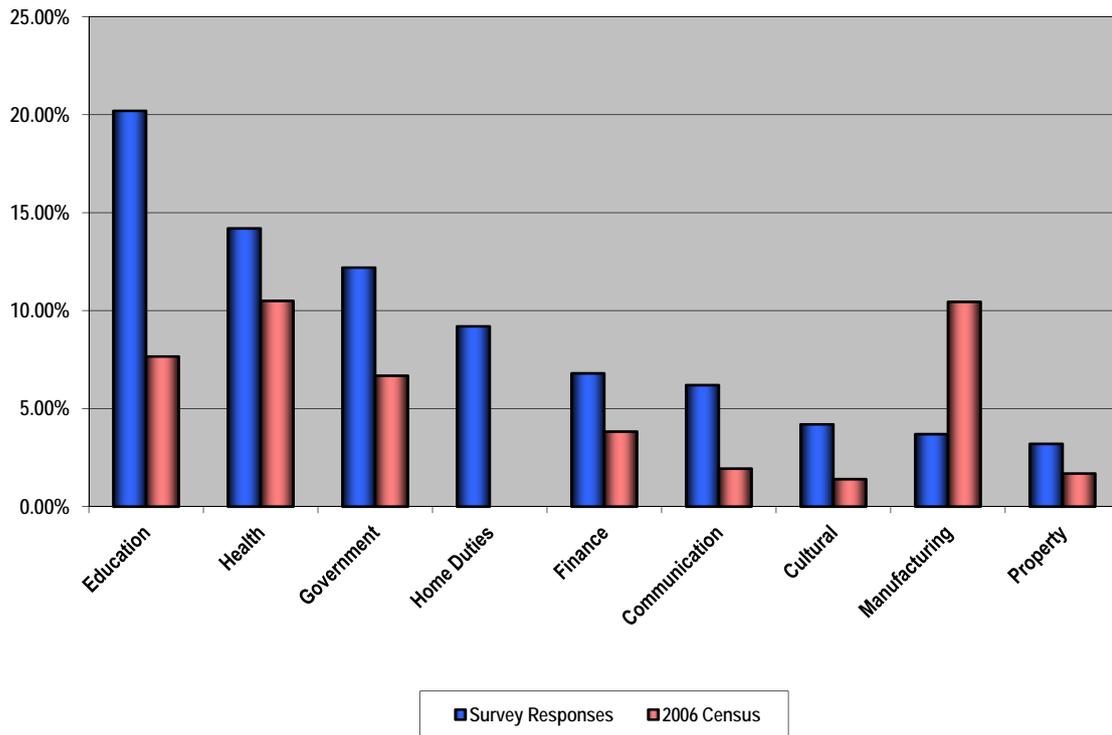
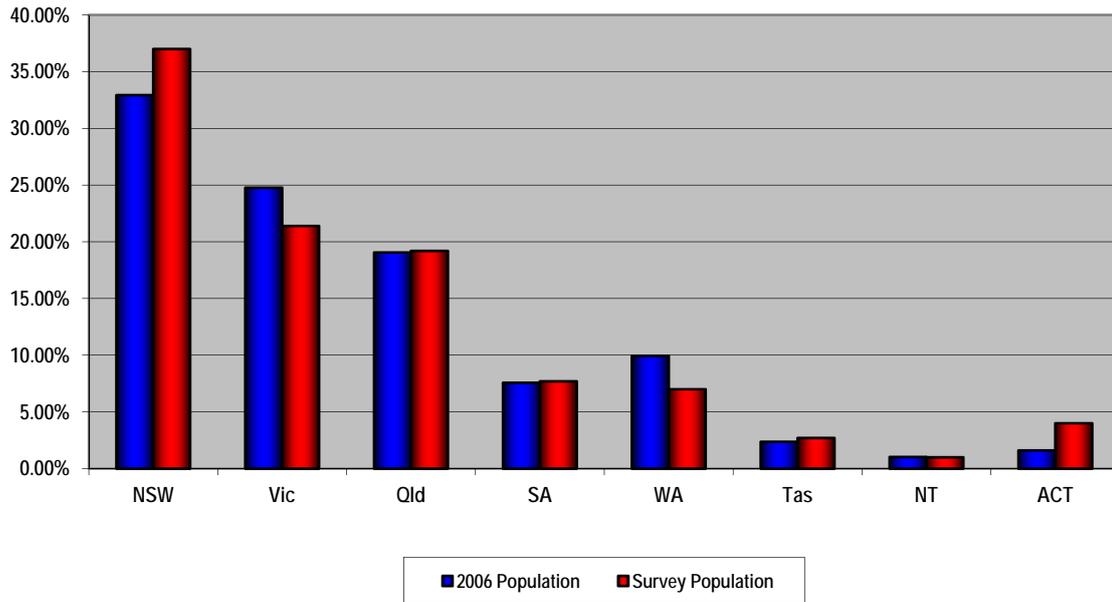


Figure 5 - Ten Leading Occupation Categories Stated by Survey Participants Compared Against 2006 Australian Census<sup>10</sup>

### Places of Residence

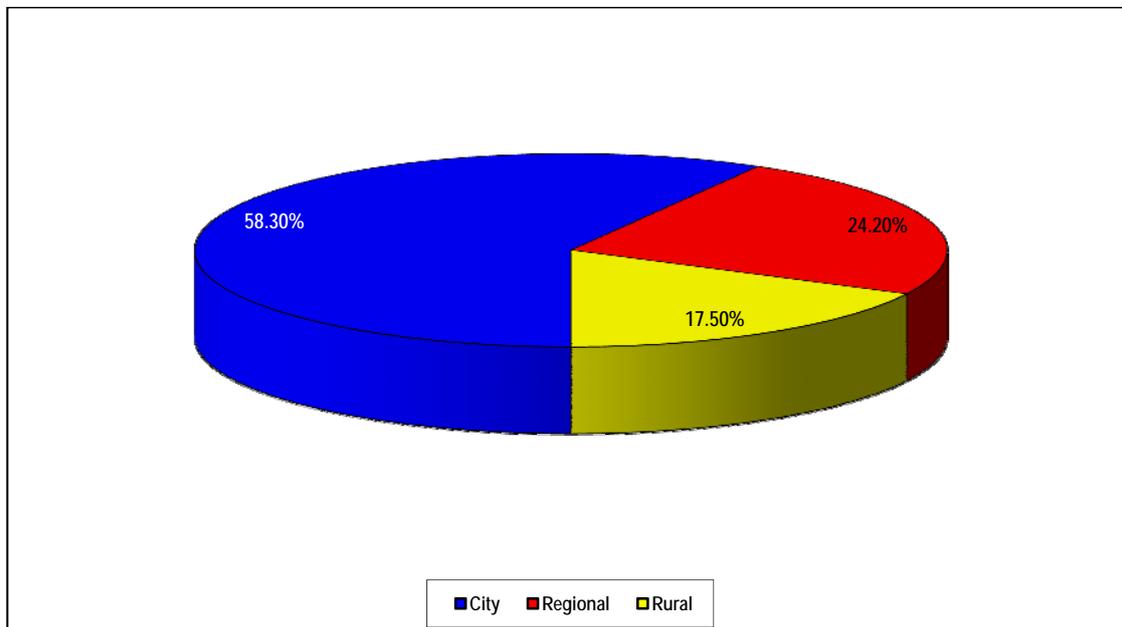
Previous Australian research had not examined the question of locality of family historians, taking their participant information from the organisations they surveyed. In investigating the demographic characteristics of family historians in Australia, knowing where they were located was seen as an essential element in determining the overall picture. Participants were first asked to nominate the State or Territory in which they reside. These patterns were compared with the Australian Bureau of Statistics population distribution figures drawn from the 2006 Australian Census. Survey participants came from the various states consistent with 2006 Census figures.

<sup>10</sup> Derived from Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2006 Community Profile Series*, Cat. No. 2001.0, Table B2.



**Figure 6 - Comparison Between State of Residence of Survey Participants and Australian Population Distribution<sup>11</sup>**

Further exploring the question of residence, participants were asked to nominate whether they lived in a metropolitan city, regional area or were rural based. The results indicated that most participants were located in metropolitan areas.



**Figure 7 - Places of Residence of Survey Participants**

<sup>11</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Demographic Statistics*, Catalogue No. 3101.0, March 2007.

## Religion

A further area of demographic interest relates to the religious affiliation of participants. Again, as a comparison, survey results were set alongside 2006 Australian Census of Population and Housing results. Van Den Bossche also examined this question and her results are included in the following figure.<sup>12</sup> The pattern that emerged from survey participants was different to the patterns found by Van den Bossche and the 2006 Census.

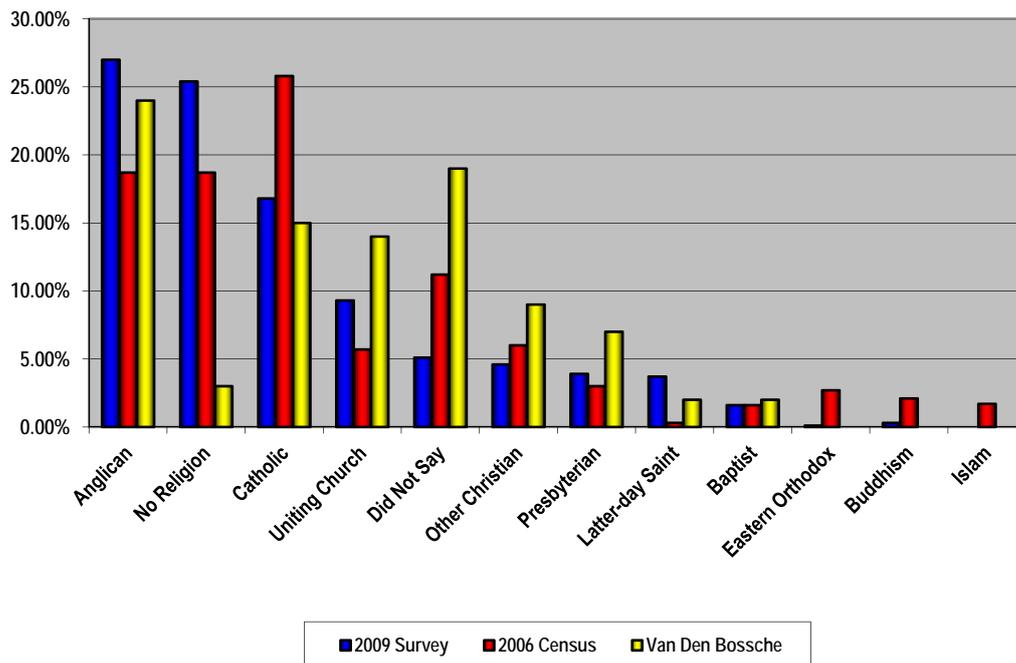


Figure 8 - Religion of Survey Participants Compared to Total Australian Population<sup>13</sup> and Van den Bossche's 1998 Study

## Cultural Backgrounds

The long standing presumption of observers of Australian family history is that participants are primarily of Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. One of the aims of this research was to ascertain if this presumption is correct.

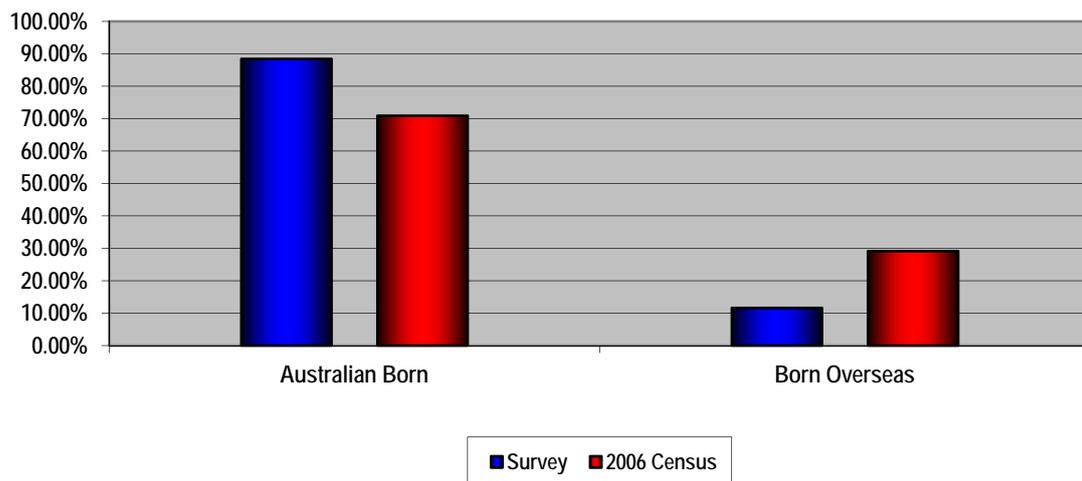
Survey participants were first directly asked if they had Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island ancestors to which 97.9% replied 'NO' and 2.1% replied 'YES'. The 2006

<sup>12</sup> Van den Bossche, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2006 Census of Population and Housing*, B13 Religious Affiliation(a) By Sex, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Catalogue No. 2001.

Australian Census of Population and Housing showed that 2.3% of the Australian population identified as Indigenous.<sup>14</sup> In answering the census question persons were simply asked to *nominate if they identified* as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, which allows a different definition to the question of descent. However, they are of sufficiently similar nature to be used for comparison.

Participants were directly asked if they were born in Australia, to which 88.4% indicated that they were and 11.6% stated that they were born overseas. This shows some variation from Van Den Bossche who had also asked her participants a similar question and found her results to be 95% born in Australia and 5% born overseas.<sup>15</sup> It shows a greater variation when compared to the Australian population at large as found in the results of the 2006 Australian Census as shown in Figure 9 below.



**Figure 9 - Comparison of Australian Born Participants to the Survey and the Total Australian Population<sup>16</sup>**

*Who Are The Genealogists of Australia?* survey participants were then able to nominate where they were born - and for those born overseas, a total of 35 countries

<sup>14</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2006 Australian Census, Catalogue No. 2001, Community Profile Series, B08, Ancestry by Country of Birth of Parents.*

<sup>15</sup> Van Den Bossche, p. 15B.

<sup>16</sup> Derived from Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2006 Australian Census, Catalogue No. 2001, Community Profile Series, B08, Ancestry by Country of Birth of Parents.*

were nominated. The following table shows the most frequently nominated countries.<sup>17</sup>

Country of Origin	Frequency
England	54.4%
New Zealand	17.2%
U.K.	7.2%
Scotland	4.9%
USA	2.6%
Canada	1.6%
Zimbabwe	1.3%
South Africa	1.3%
Holland	1.0%
India	1.0%

**Table 3 - Survey Participants' Most Frequently Nominated Countries of Origin**

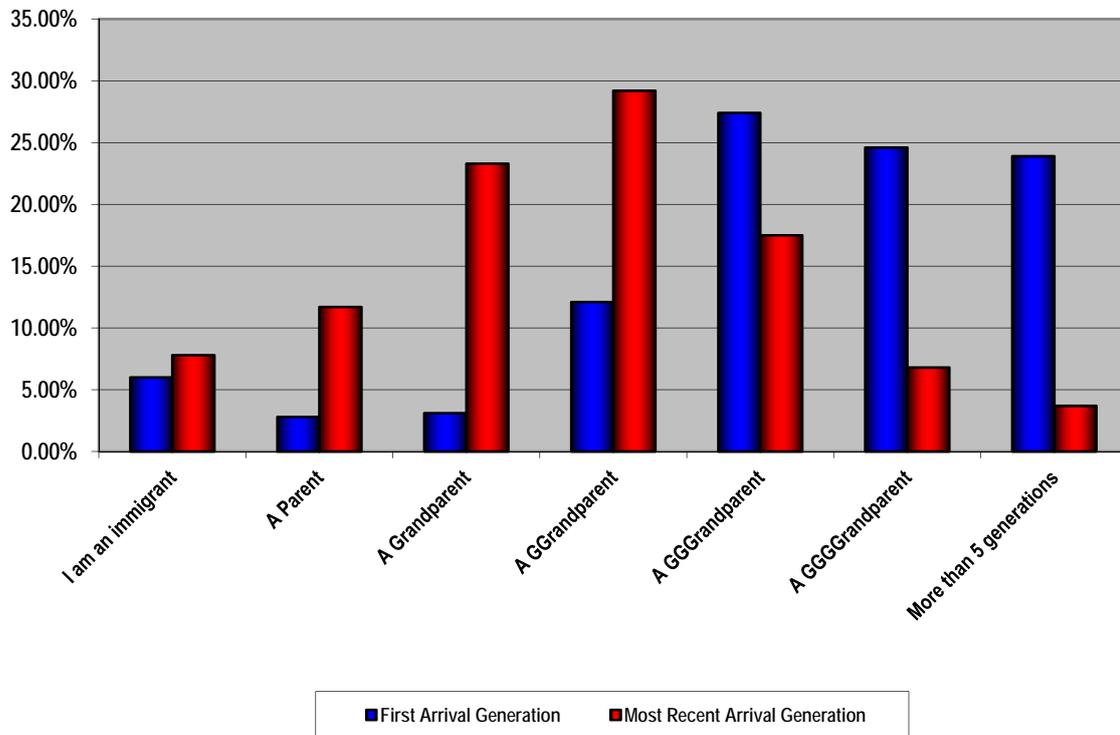
Possible explanations for the variation between the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia* survey and the 2006 census include the following factors. Firstly, it is likely the invitation to participate in the survey did not adequately reach populations of immigrants. Secondly, as the survey was only presented in English, language differences may have precluded understanding of the invitation to participate, and of the survey itself. Thirdly, more recent arrivals are perhaps less focussed on family history because the circumstances of their immigration may include aspects which are in some way painful and/or they are intent on settling and making a life rather than reflecting on or collecting their family stories.<sup>18</sup> And, finally, the ways in which family history is practiced in these immigrant communities may differ from those of the Anglo-Celtic background Australian family history researcher.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> For the full list of places of birth nominated by survey participants, see Appendix III, p 198.

<sup>18</sup> Cardell K. Jacobson, 'Social Dislocations and the Search for Genealogical Roots,' *Human Relations*, 1986, Vol. 39, NO. 4, p. 348.

<sup>19</sup> There are many possible explanations here – class background, lack of records in the places of origin, traditions, expectations in a new land, oral traditions etc.

Examining this question of immigration further, and given that the majority (93.7%) of respondents indicated that they had an immigrant ancestor,<sup>20</sup> participants were then asked to nominate who their earliest immigrant ancestor was that came to Australia, and then to nominate their most recent ancestor that came to Australia.



**Figure 10 - Comparison Between Earliest Arrival Generation and Most Recent Arrival in Australia**

Some survey participants indicated that their earliest immigrant ancestors came to Australia 4, 5 and 6 generations earlier than themselves. In total they accounted for almost 76% of survey participants. Drake’s study found that her respondents for all around the world in 72.5% of cases recorded that their earliest ancestors arrived 6 or more generations earlier.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Lambert’s study found that his participants largely recorded their ancestors as being in Canada or the USA for 125 years or more.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Given that only 2.1% of respondents claimed Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage, and that amongst that 2.1%, some are likely to have immigrant ancestors, this percentage indicates that a small number of respondents do not regard themselves as having immigrant ancestry.

<sup>21</sup> Drake, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Ronald D. Lambert, *A Study of Genealogists & Family Historians*, Faculty of Arts, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, 2000, p. 76.

## The Survey and Its Results

The pattern for the most recent ancestor to arrive in Australia varied substantially to Drake's study. Australian family historians clustered around recent generations, whereas Drake's respondents were clustered towards older generations, with a major concentration for great grandparents (4 generations) and at 5 plus generations.

Generation	Earliest Immigrant	Most Recent Immigrant
None, I am an Immigrant	1.3%	1.8%
1, Parents	1.1%	3.6%
2, Grandparents	3.4%	17.6%
3, Great Grandparents	6.3%	22.9%
4, GG Grandparents	6.7%	16.1%
5, GGG Grandparents	6.5%	9.1%
6 5+ Generations	72.8%	21.7%
No response	1.9%	7.1%

**Table 4 - Drake's (2002) Survey Results for Ancestor Arrival**

Rounding out the immigration demographic, survey respondents were then asked to nominate all the known places from which their ancestors originated. In total, 77 countries were nominated as places of origin for their ancestors with the following figure showing the 14 most frequently nominated.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> For the full list from which participants selected see Appendix 1, p. 181.

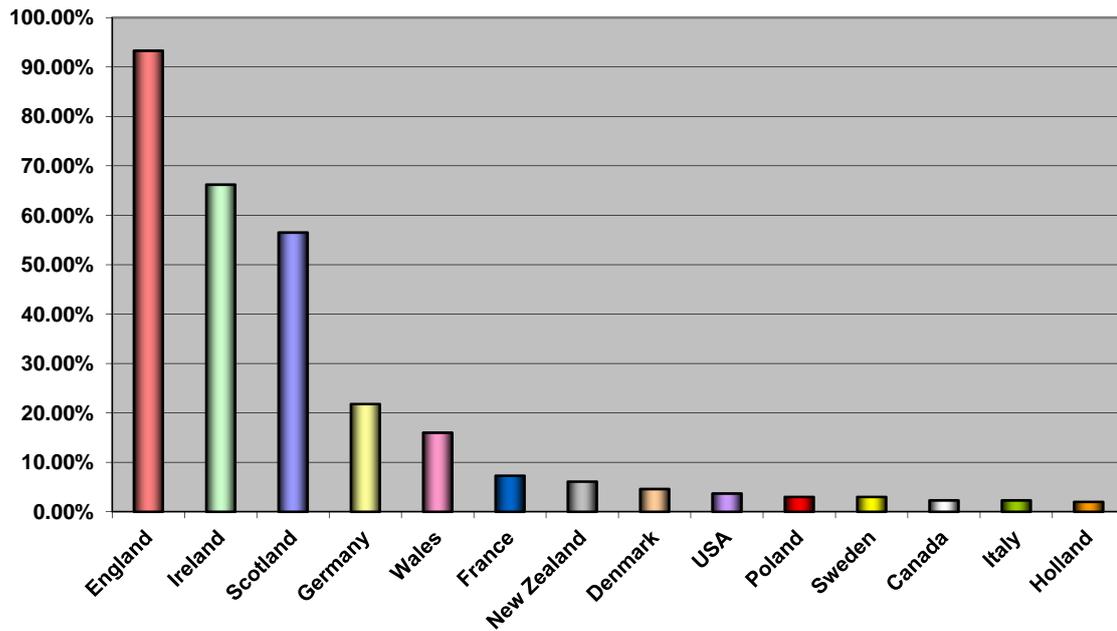


Figure 11 - Most Frequently Nominated Places of Ancestor Origin

### Family History Research

A further and unexplored aspect of the demographic picture in Australia is that of how long survey participants have been involved in family history research. Participants were asked about the number of years they have been actively participating in family history, and responded indicating an average length of involvement of 16 years.

Lambert asked a similar question of Ontario Genealogical Society members in 1994, finding his respondents had on average been researching for 15 years, beginning their research around 1977.<sup>24</sup> Drake's 2001 survey of U.S.A. on-line family historians found a similar time frame with her participants actively researching for about 14 years and beginning their research in approximately 1986.<sup>25</sup> Results for the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey are shown in the following figure with the results indicating the continuing attraction of the pastime to new participants.

<sup>24</sup> Lambert, *A Study*, p. 75.

<sup>25</sup> Drake, p. 4.

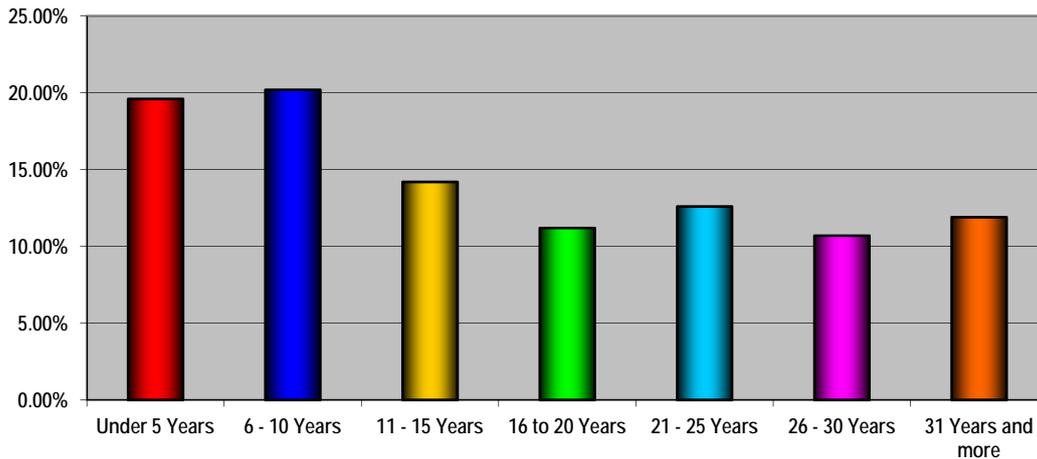


Figure 12 - Number of Years Survey Participants Have Engaged in Family History

### First Generation Researchers

The idea that family history continues to attract new participants as claimed in popular media was also examined by asking survey participants if they were the first generation to research their family history.<sup>26</sup> Those who answered ‘YES’ were clearly in the majority at 64%. This result was consistent across both genders, but split along age groups. The following table summarises the differences.

Are You The First Generation to Research Your Family History?					
	Less Than 20 Years	21 to 40 Years	41 – 60 Years	61 Years and Older	Total
Yes	33.3%	46.4%	60.2%	69.7%	<b>63.7%</b>
No	<b>66.7%</b>	<b>53.6%</b>	<b>39.8%</b>	<b>30.3%</b>	<b>36.3%</b>

Table 5 - Comparison of Age Groups as First Generation Researchers

### Where, What and How

The practice of family history is regarded as important on several levels. Family history contributes to the greater understanding of history by documenting the effects

<sup>26</sup> Caroline Webb, Sudden Spike in climbing the family tree, *The Age*, Melbourne, 8 January 2011, News Section, p. 3.

that historical events and movements have had upon individuals and families. Family history creates and organises histories and memories around individuals and families that might otherwise be lost or ignored. It provides the micro foundation upon which historical movements and events can be seen. By so doing, family history also enriches the traditions of families and provides answers to the most commonly asked of question of ‘Who am I?’ – or in the language of current media interest *Who Do You Think You Are?* In many ways it is the revealing of these family histories that has helped to rewrite the cultural cringe and convict stain so present in early Australian history, demonstrating that the everyday Australian had a history in which they could have pride.

The techniques and facilities utilised by family historians – the where, what and how of their pastime, are important windows into the processes involved in revealing these memories, traditions and histories, as well as the trends that have arisen over time. As discussed in Chapter 2, the past 25 years have seen a dramatic change in family history research, brought about (among other matters) by changes in technology, records availability, affordability, commercial processes, simplifications, ease of access, convenience and the number of facilities provided to conduct research. Over this period of time there have also been substantial changes in family history society membership numbers, posing the question of if and how these changes have affected the practice of family history. Previous Australian research has not examined these issues save for exploring the interest of family historians in using on-line facilities to conduct their research. Both Kyle and Van Den Bossche essentially focussed their attention on members of family history societies but did not explore why family historians were members of those societies.<sup>27</sup> Geoffrey Humble’s research had as its point of focus the interest family historians from around the world had in using the internet to communicate, but did not examine the different ways that family historians conduct their research.<sup>28</sup> Veale’s research survey also examined the use of the internet for family historians but to this date has not been published.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Kyle, p. 3, Van den Bossche, p. 13.

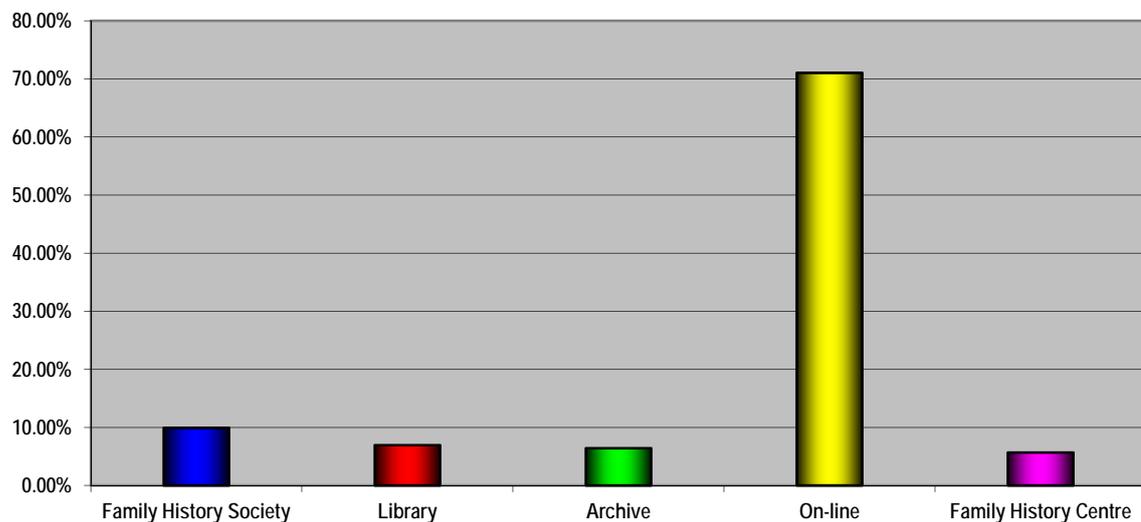
<sup>28</sup> Geoffrey Bruce Humble, *Genealogy and the Internet*, Masters thesis, Charles Sturt University, Mitchell, 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Kylie J. Veale, *The Changing Face of Genealogy: An Empirical Study of the Genealogical Community Online*, Ph.D. candidacy proposal, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, 23 June 2004.

This section of the survey consequently focussed on the questions of where, what and how Australian family historians who responded to the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey conduct their research, the reasons why they use those methods and if and why their research practices have changed. Family historians have long been renowned as willing to share their research and this section also examines their sharing practices.

### Where research is conducted

Survey participants were asked to indicate where they conduct their research by selecting from a range of options and ranking them in order from the one they used the most to the one they used the least.<sup>30</sup> Given the demographics of participants earlier described, with the majority beginning their research since the advent of personal computing, email and the internet, it is unsurprising that over 70% identified 'on-line' as the most used method for conducting their research, with family history societies, libraries, archives and family history centres all rating 10% or less.

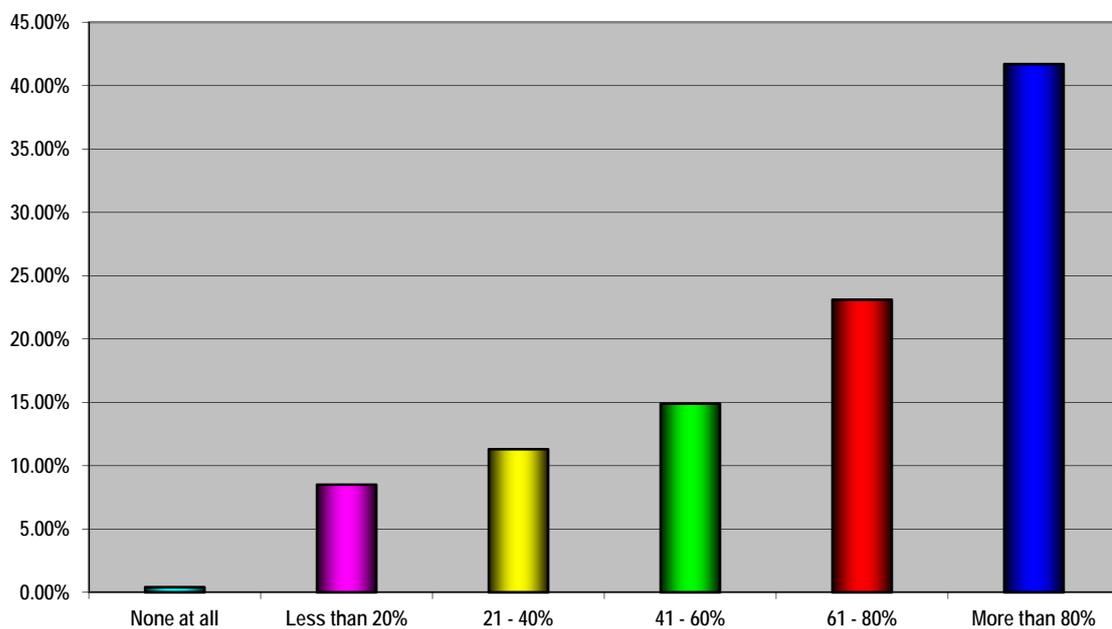


**Figure 13 - Survey Participants' First Choice of Research Venue**

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<sup>30</sup> For the list of options see Appendix 1, p. 188.

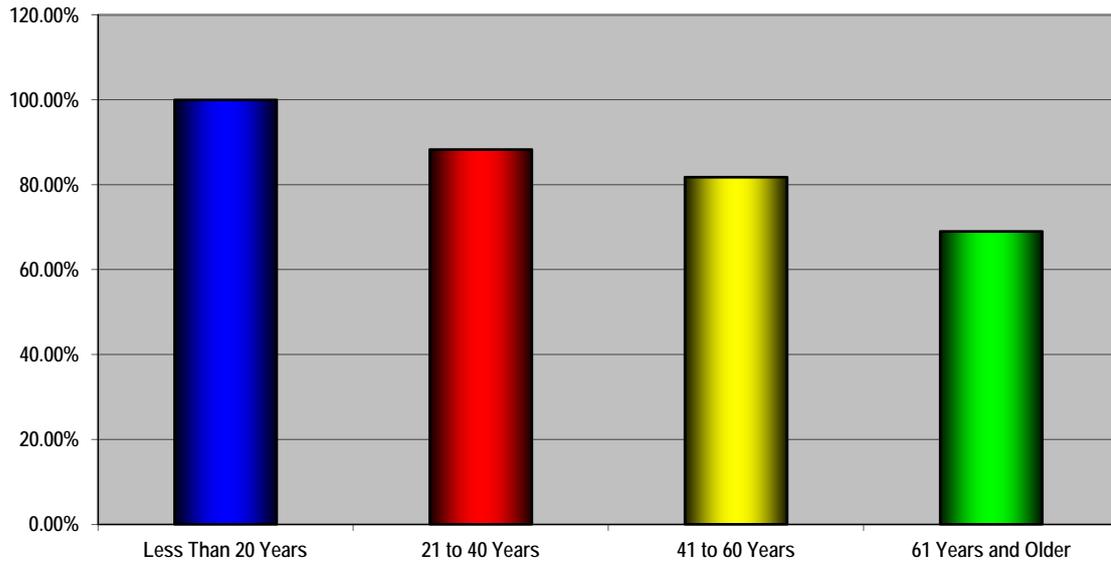
On-line research by family historians has previously attracted the attention of researchers but they did not examine use of on-line research in the context of family historians' overall research activity.<sup>31</sup> Participants in the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey indicated that their research practices strongly involved on-line research, but that on-line research was not the only method they employed. The following graph shows the heavy reliance on on-line research with over 40% of participants using this research method for more than 80% of their research effort, with a further 23% using on-line research for more than 60% of their work.



**Figure 14 - Amount of On-line Research by Survey Participants**

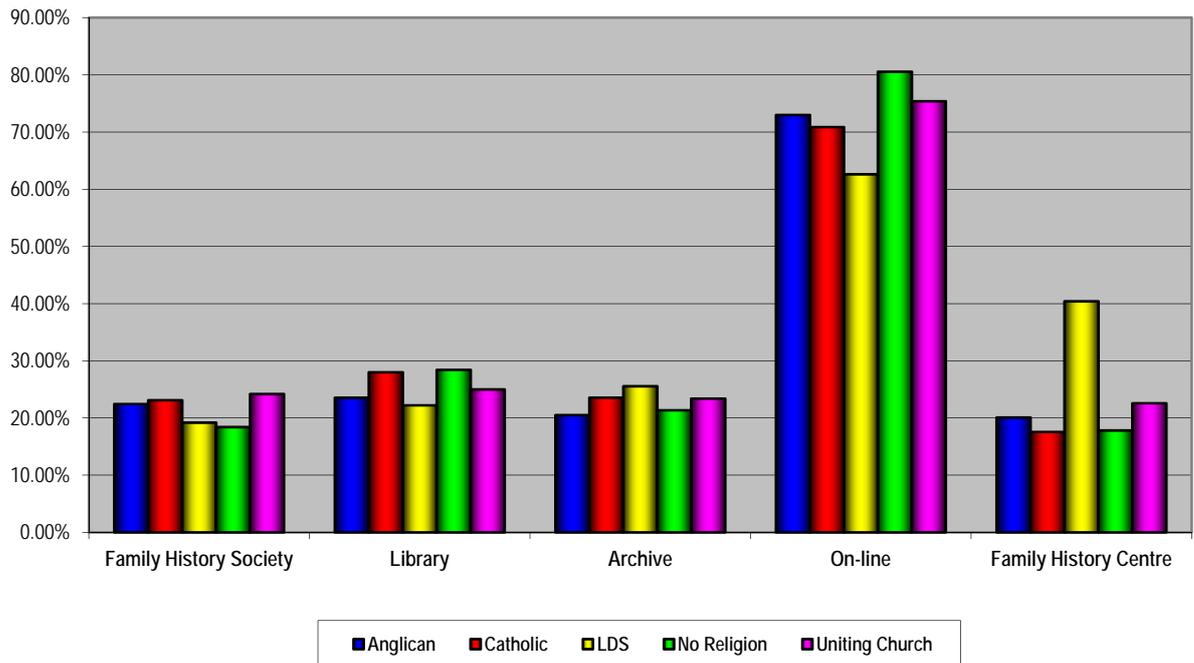
In what is an expected result, younger family historians make greater use of on-line research, reflecting greater familiarity with the technology than that of their older counterparts, or it may be a reflection of time limitations acting more strongly on younger age groups, restricting more of their efforts to research from home. An alternative consideration is that older age groups are familiar with on-line research but also seek and have the time available to utilise other venues. However, each of the age groups reported that they use on-line research for significant amounts of their research.

<sup>31</sup> See Humble; and Veale.



**Figure 15 - On-line Research by Age Groups**

The use of on-line research among participants remained consistent when examined across other criteria. Comparing members of family history societies with non-members produced the same preference for on-line research, although non-family history society members had a greater level of on-line usage at 75% vs. 67% for society members. Family history society members had an obvious second preference for research venue while non-family history society members preferred libraries. Examining these preferences across religious denominations produces the same strong preference for on-line research, albeit with a reasonably wide range as shown in the following.

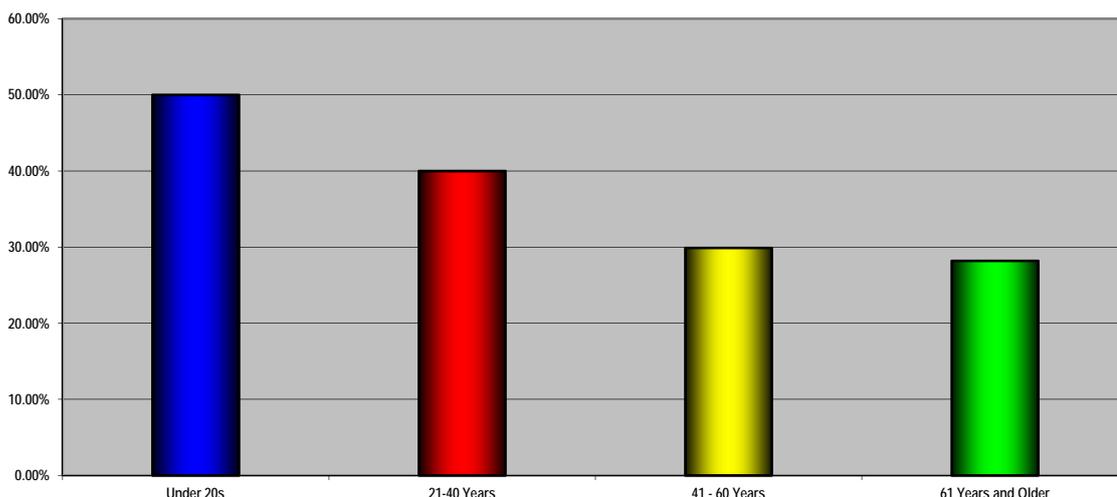


**Figure 16 - Preferred Research Venue of Survey Participants by Religious Denomination**

Libraries feature as the second preference research venue for Catholics, Uniting Church, Anglican and No Religion categories, while Latter-day Saints utilise their own family history centres. There is a possibility that some respondents may have confused family history societies and family history centres, which may have lifted the utilisation of family history society venues.

Libraries were the strongest second preference venue for all age groups, with the 21-40 year age group showing the strongest result.<sup>32</sup>

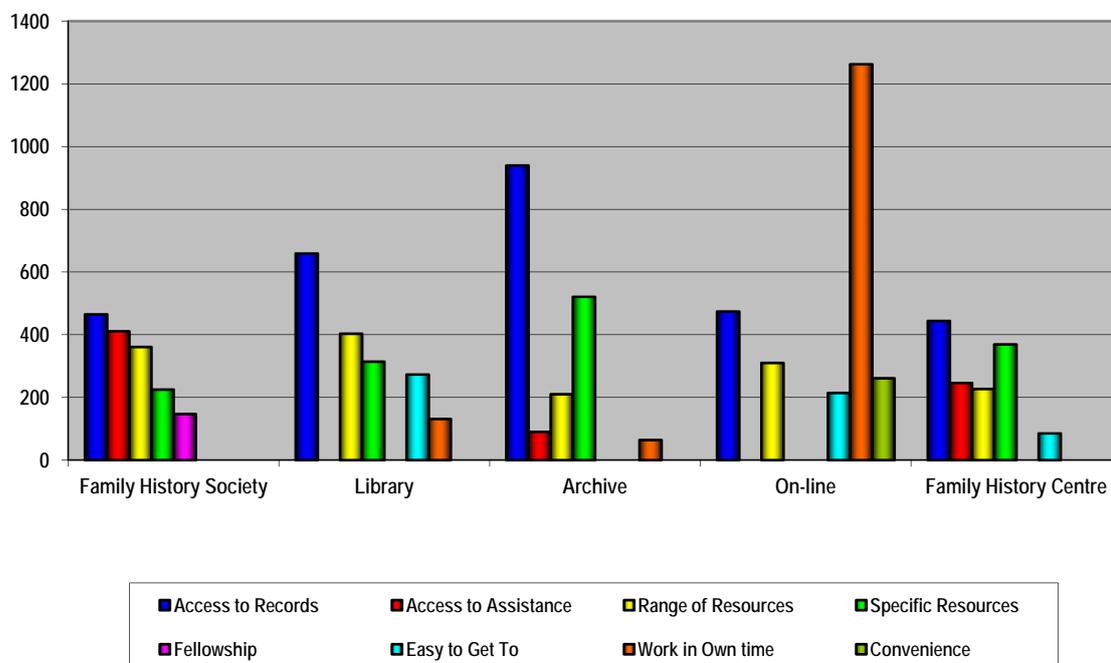
<sup>32</sup> Under 20s showed a higher result but with only 6 participants it is difficult to draw any conclusion.



**Figure 17 - Use of Libraries as Research Venue by Survey Participants by Age Groups**

### Why particular venues are used

Participants were provided with a list of 14 options from which to select the single most appropriate reason for their use of each of the venues they use.<sup>33</sup> For each of the physical venues the principal reason was that of access to records. Where differences began to be revealed were in the secondary reasons – those reasons that were not the most frequently selected.



**Figure 18 - Reasons Why Various Research Venues Are Utilised**

<sup>33</sup> For the full list, see Appendix 1, p 188.

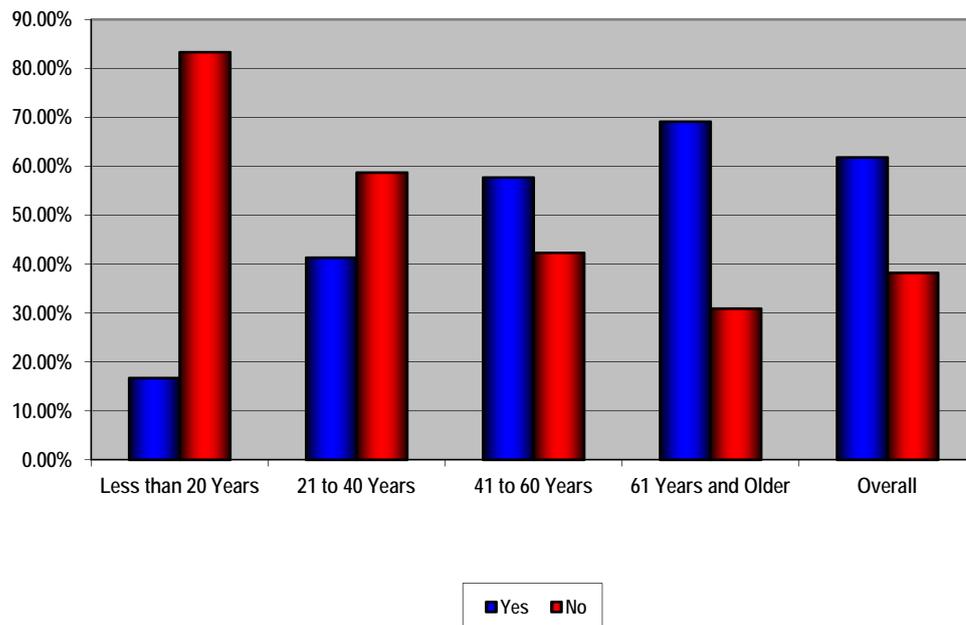
For family history societies, the assistance they can provide to researchers is highly valued along with the record resources they may have available. The social aspect of family history research also features, indicating that companionship and interaction remain valuable to researchers. Libraries benefit from the location they provide, being seen as easy to get to, since they are largely community based. There is also the suggestion that libraries provide a more flexible research setting by enabling researchers to work at times that best suit them. Overwhelmingly, on-line has the attraction of convenience and working in one's own time. Latter-day Saint family history centres are also seen as being able to provide assistance and are easy to get to, while archives and other repositories are perceived to have their strengths in their collections of records.

### **Family history society membership**

From the earlier accounts of the history of family history and family history societies presented in this thesis, it is apparent that family history activity has long been dominated by family history societies, where access to records, expertise and training made research possible for many family historians. Previous Australian research (Kyle, Van Den Bossche) principally surveyed family historians who were members of a family history society or group. Exactly what proportion of Australia's family historians are society members required clarification. Participants in the *Who Are The Genealogists of Australia?* survey were asked if they were members of one or more family history societies, to which 61.7% answered that they were. Males and females were almost the same – females answering 'YES' 61.6% and males answering 'YES' 62.7% with the likelihood of society membership strongest amongst the older age groups.

A considerable note of caution must be raised here before accepting these figures for family history society membership as representative of the family historian population as a whole. Earlier, in speaking about *Ancestry.co.uk* subscribers, Heather Garnsey, Executive Officer for the Society of Australian Genealogists, commented that the membership for *Ancestry.com.uk* was vastly more than the total membership of all

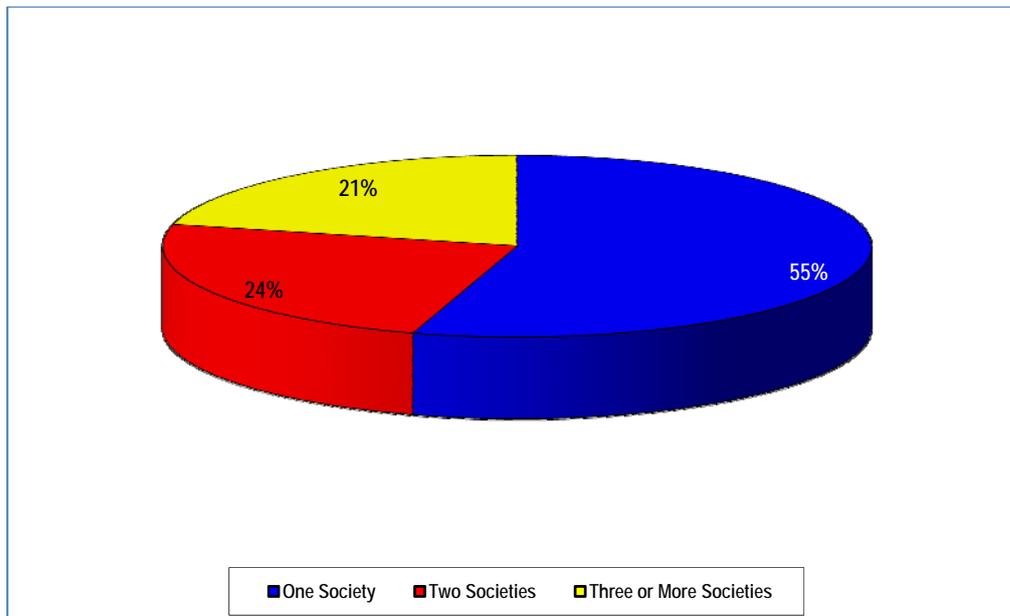
U.K. family history societies – probably 5 times more.<sup>34</sup> Subscriber figures for *Ancestry.com.au* are not published but there is no reason to expect that the number of Australian subscribers would not vary greatly from the U.K. experience and a similar ratio of family history society members would exist. Accordingly the conclusion to be drawn is that participation in the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey by family history society members is probably over represented compared with the actual population of Australian family historians.



**Figure 19 - Family History Society Membership by Age Group**

While many of those who answered that they did belong to a family history society were members of a single society, a significant percentage (45%) were members of two, three or more societies.

<sup>34</sup> Heather Garnsey, Executive Officer, Society of Australian Genealogists, Transcript of Interview with Leon Alekna, Sydney NSW, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2007, p. 3.



**Figure 20 - Numbers of Family History Societies of Which Survey Participants Are Members**

Comments made by participants suggest that their memberships are fluid, changing as the need for research in different localities arises. Participants also commented on the reasons why they joined family history societies. As would be expected, obtaining access to records was the most frequently mentioned reason. Access to assistance, advice and education was also frequently mentioned. Fellowship or friendship was an important expectation for a minor but significant number of participants while other factors appear to be in the 'side light' category.

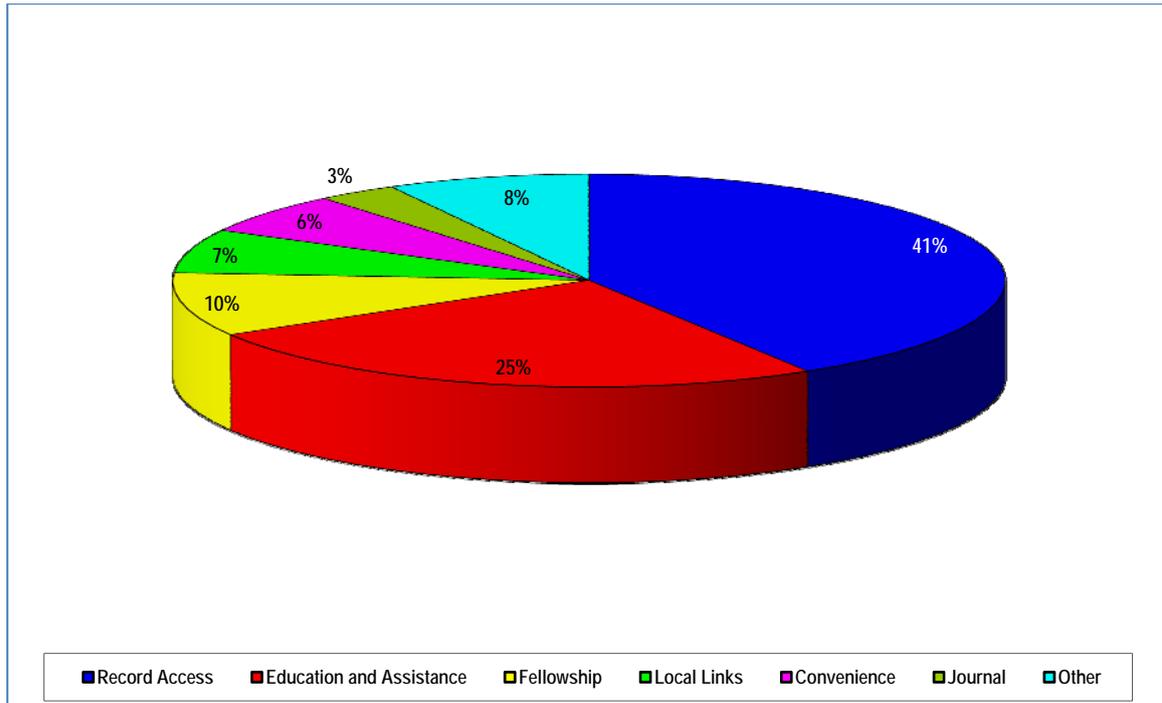


Figure 21 - Principal Reasons Why Survey Participants Joined Family History Societies

When asked what the specific advantages were that they enjoyed from their membership, variances were seen from their original expectations. Access to records and assistance featured as would be expected as the leading answers, but fellowship, journal and education all featured more strongly than specific or unique resources.

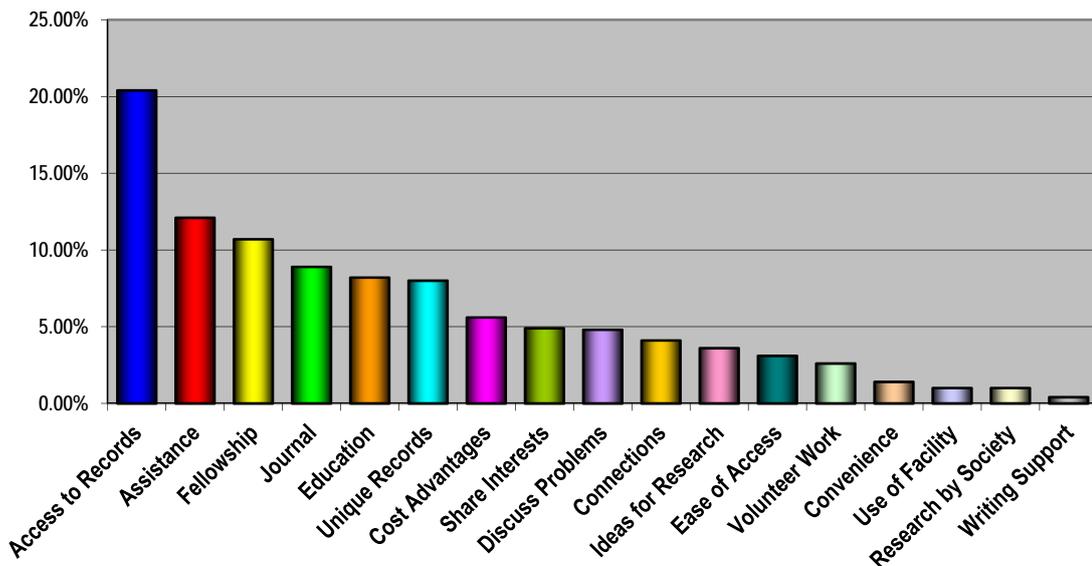
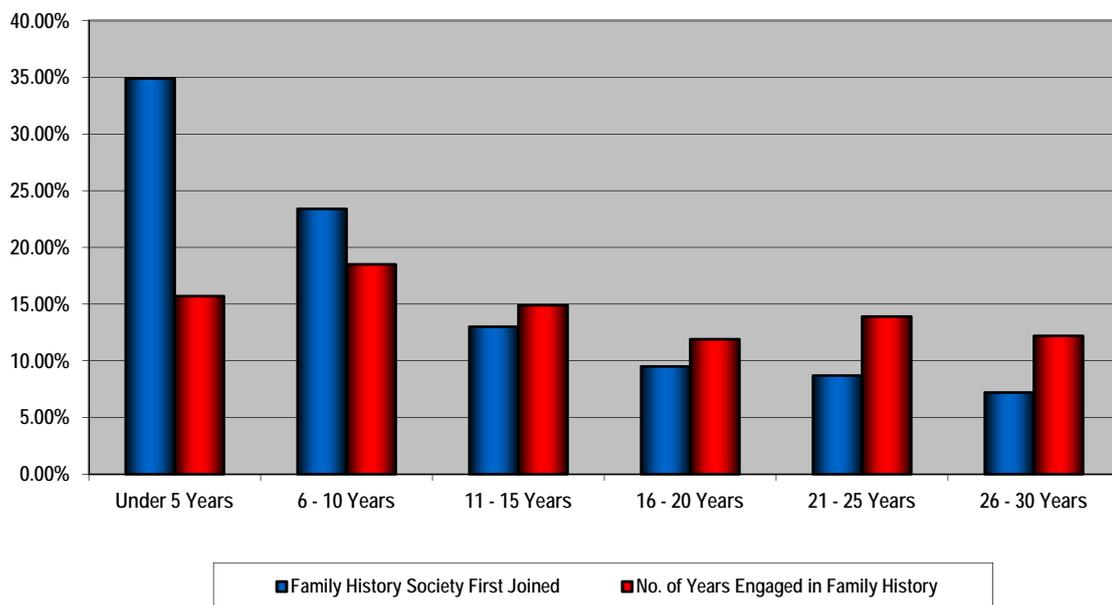


Figure 22 - Specific Advantages Received as Cited by Society Members

Seeing such results emerge, the assumed conclusion would be that family historians have been members of their societies for extended periods of time. When asked how long they had been members of the family history society they first joined another pattern emerges that is different to that which was provided when asked how many years they had been involved in family history research.<sup>35</sup> Survey participants advised that they had been society members for fewer years than their overall participation in family history.

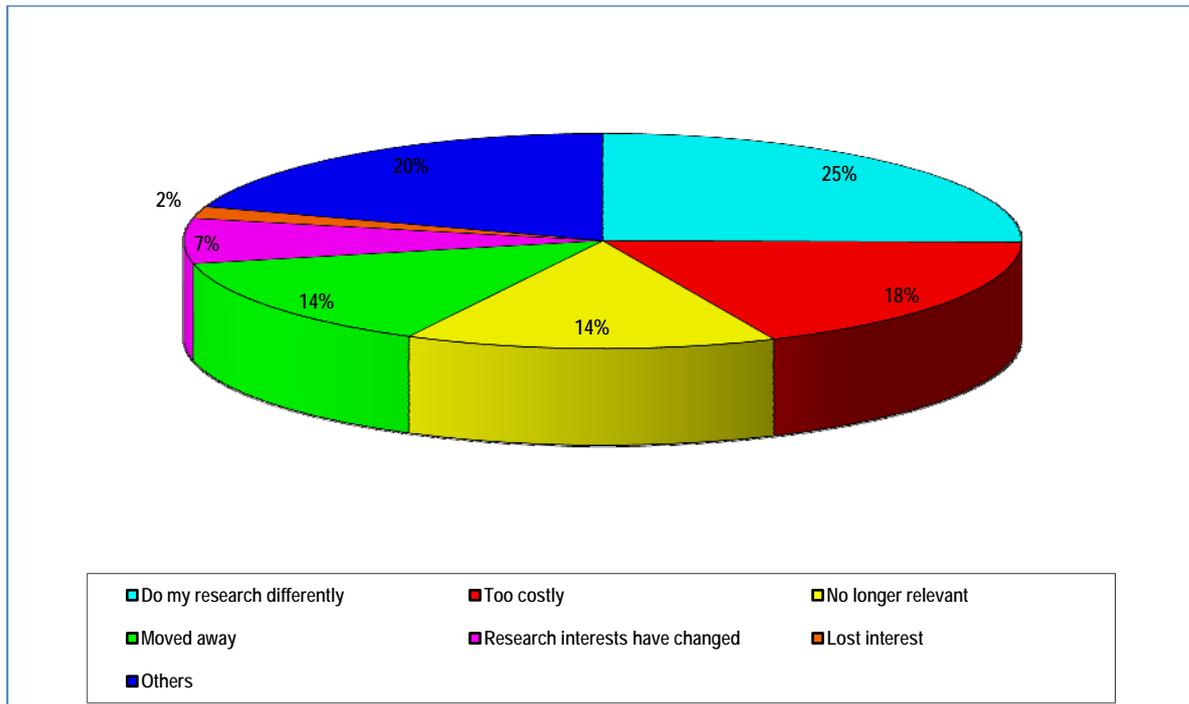


**Figure 23 - Survey Participants Years of Membership of the First Society They Joined vs Number of Years Engaged in Family History**

Survey participants were then questioned to ascertain if at some time in the past they had been members of a family history society if they were not current members, with 36% indicating that in the past they had been a member of a family history society. This left a similar number (36.6%) who had never been or were not a family history society member.

When asked why they were no longer members of a family history society, those survey participants who had previously been members provided the explanations represented in Figure 24.

<sup>35</sup> See Figure 12, p. 106.



**Figure 24 - Reasons Why Survey Participants Are No Longer Family History Society Members**

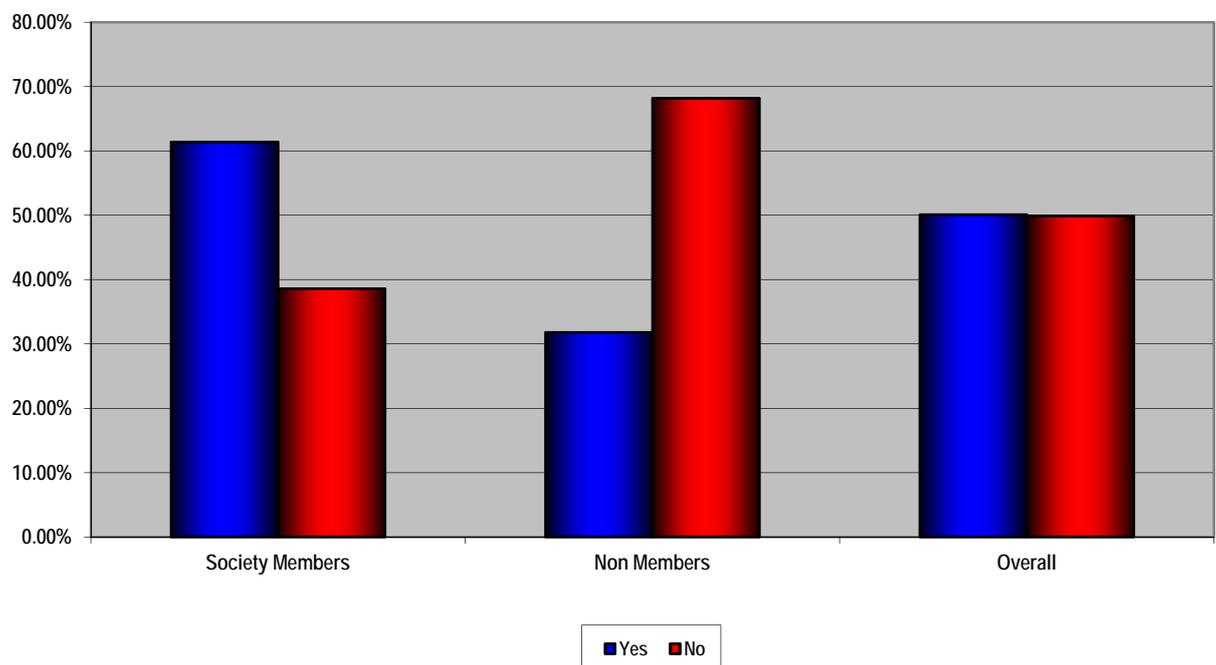
In the ‘Other’ category were indications that former members were unable to access their family history society because opening times were inconvenient to them, interpersonal reactions and administrative policies and issues were unhelpful, and the distance an individual lived away from the society’s rooms was too difficult to overcome. Some respondents commented that either the information they required was unavailable or that they had found a venue that provided the records they needed more conveniently.

## Education

An important aspect of service for family history societies has been the provision of education and training for family historians. These educational services vary greatly – from the provision of a level of formal qualification (Society of Australian Genealogists – Diploma in Family Historical Studies), through to less formal lectures and talks presented as part of a planned event or as part of a regularly scheduled meeting. As earlier discussed, participants in the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey identified as an important factor in their membership of a family history society, the availability of educational activity. In following this aspect

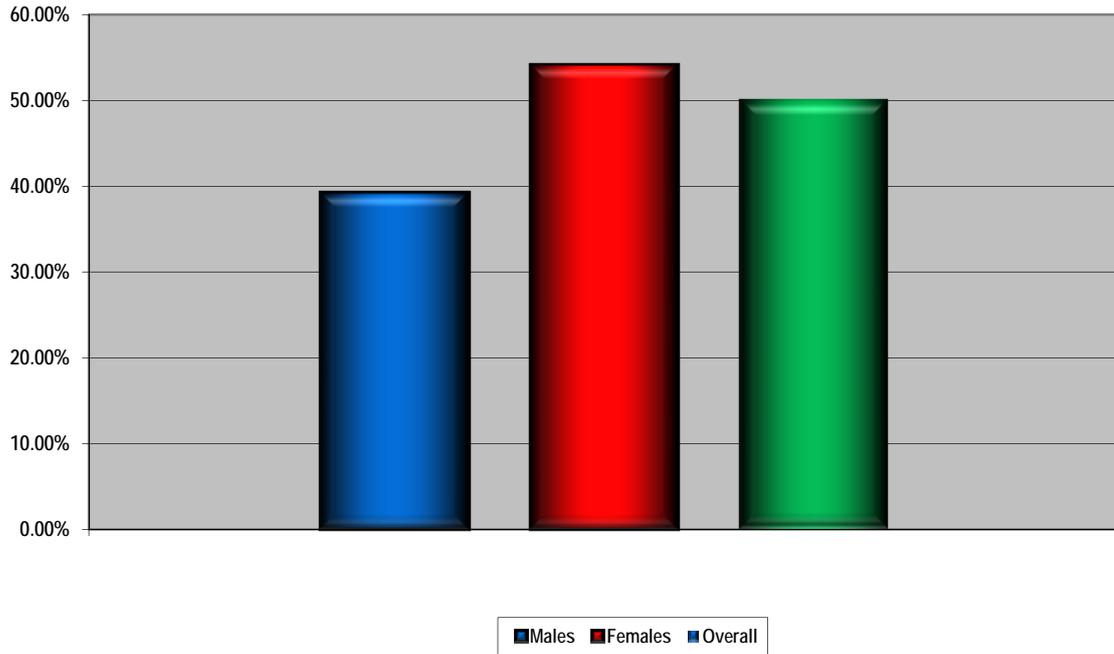
further, participants were asked if they had attended courses or training in family history. Overall there was an almost 50/50 split between those who answered 'Yes' and those who answered 'No', but this conceals wide variations when individual characteristics are considered.

Family history society members were far more likely to have been involved in the education process with 60% stating their involvement. By contrast, only 40% of non-members had been involved in the education process.



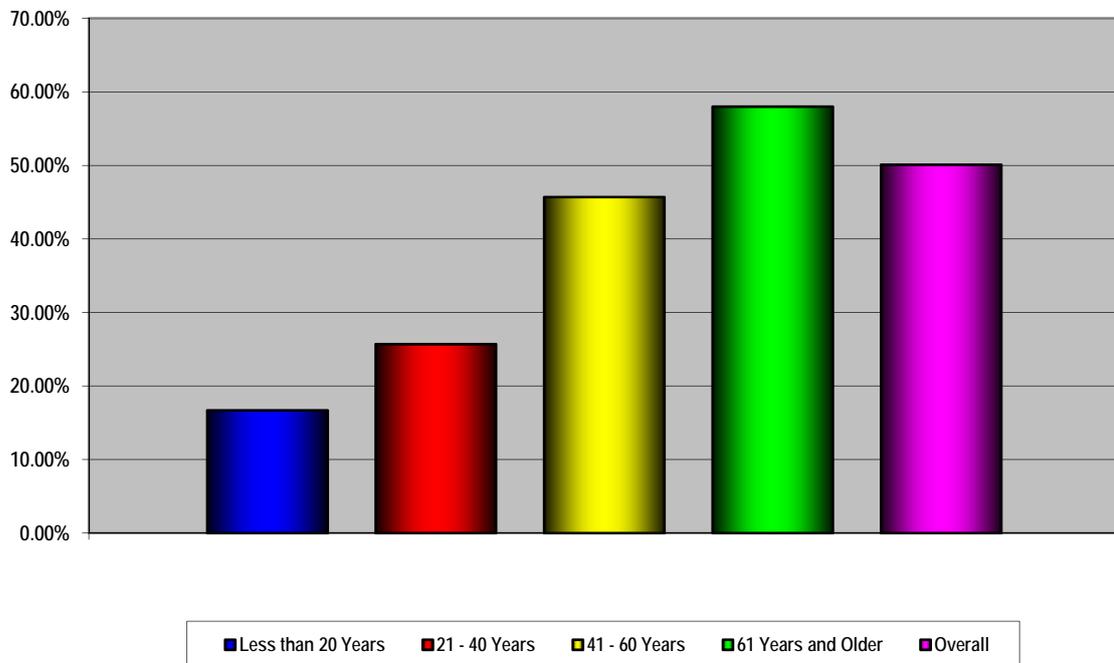
**Figure 25 - Survey Participants Attending Educational Courses**

While equal shares of their respective respondent populations were members of family history societies, females were far more likely to attend courses or training in family history with over 50% reporting their participation, while males were significantly lower at less than 40%.



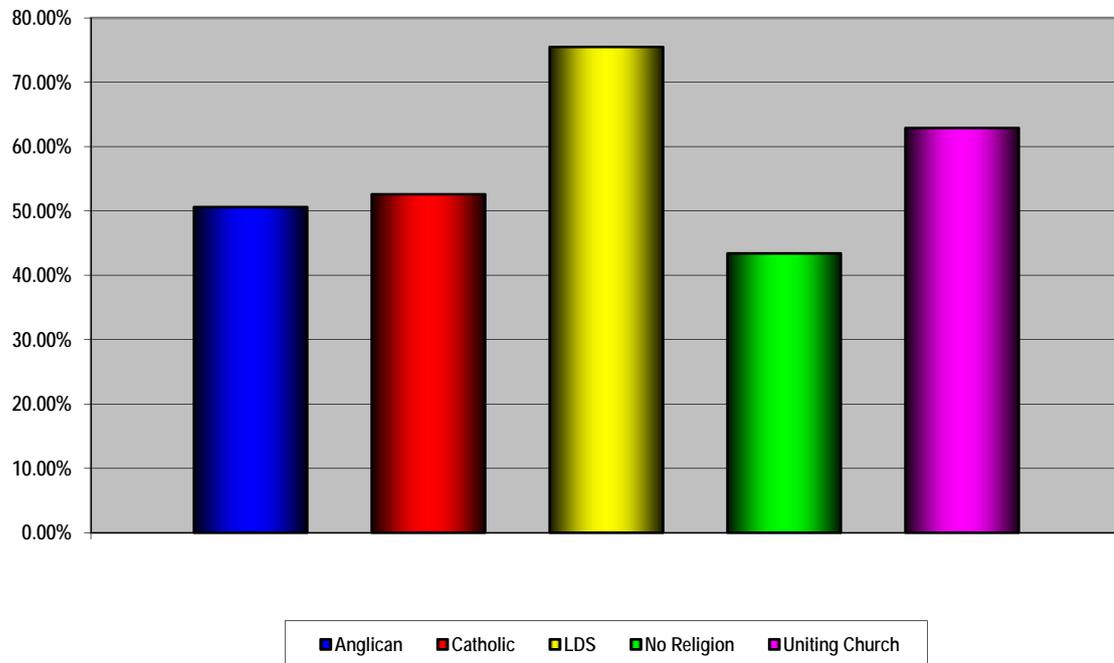
**Figure 26 - Proportions of Males and Females Attending Family History Educational Courses**

The likelihood of family historians participating in educational courses also changes across age groups with participants showing that the 41 – 60 years and 61 years and older age groups participate in education significantly more than younger age groups.



**Figure 27 - Survey Participants in Family History Education Courses by Age Group**

There were modest differences among religious denominations in the proportions involved in educational aspects, with Latter-day Saint and Uniting Church cohorts having higher proportions, and No Religion cohorts the least represented.



**Figure 28 - Participants in Family History Education Courses by Religious Denomination**

It is appropriate to note that the higher proportion of Latter-day Saint participants attending training courses is a reflection of the emphasis given to family history as a factor of their religious observance and with basic courses being provided to church members to encourage them to participate in family history research. Conducted at no-cost, this is a recruiting strategy to family history research rather than post recruitment training.

Examining the question of education further, survey participants were asked what type of course(s) they had attended. Among males and females the answers were similar, but among age groups variations were observed.

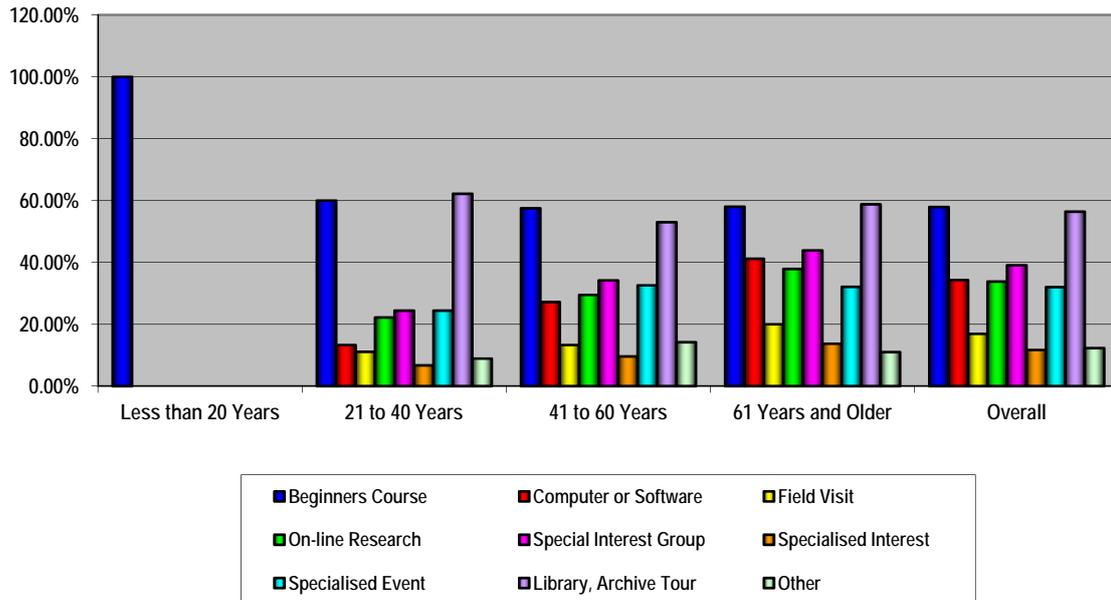


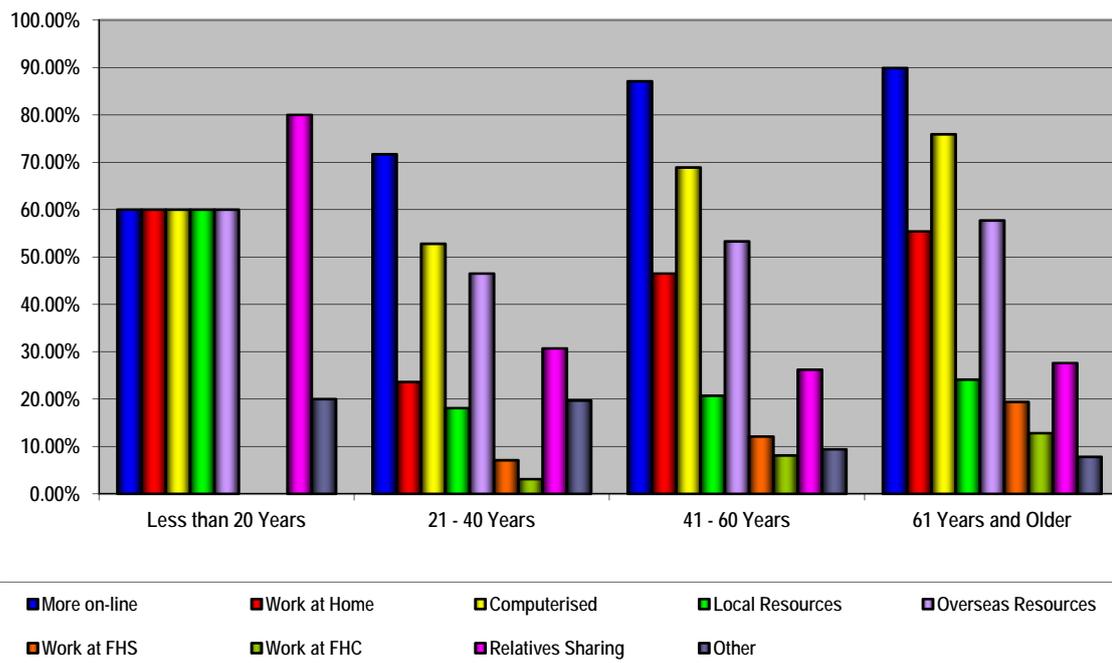
Figure 29 - Type of Course Attended by Survey Participants by Age Group

The participation in computer or software family history courses by family historians reaching their highest levels among those age 61 years and older was a similar result for engagement with on-line research. One interpretation points to those in older age groups coming to terms with technology based research in order to make use of the many options becoming available for research from home. Younger age groups are possibly already familiar with the technology and hence do not need to engage in these types of courses or, as earlier suggested, they do not have the time available to them to attend courses generally.

### Changes in research practice

The way family historians conduct their research is subject to the forces of change, especially those that are related to changes in technology. Participants in the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey were asked if the way they undertake family history research has changed since the time they began their research. A sizable majority, 82.8%, answered ‘YES’, the ways they conduct their research have changed. As earlier discussed over 60% of survey participants have been engaged in family history research for more than 10 years and that major technological advances have been made in accessing records in that time, and it is therefore unsurprising that survey participants answered ‘YES’.

A much higher proportion (30%) of the 21 – 40 years age bracket answered that their research practices have not changed, which corresponds with those who have been only researching their family history for 10 years or less. All age groups strongly indicated that their use of on-line research has been their principal change to their research practices, with the age groups registering this change more strongly as age increases.

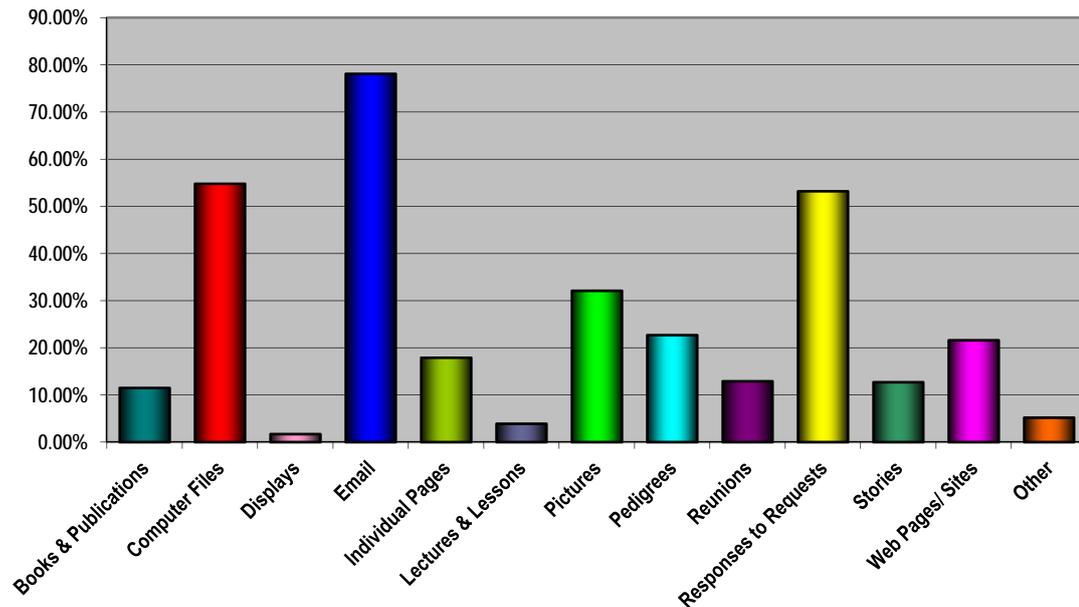


**Figure 30 - Changes to Research Practice by Survey Participants by Age Group**

Each of the age groups advised of changes in the way they conduct their research nominating technology and convenience related changes. Use of overseas resources was also strongly nominated, doubtlessly assisted by technology related factors which have made overseas resources more accessible than was the case in earlier years.

### Sharing

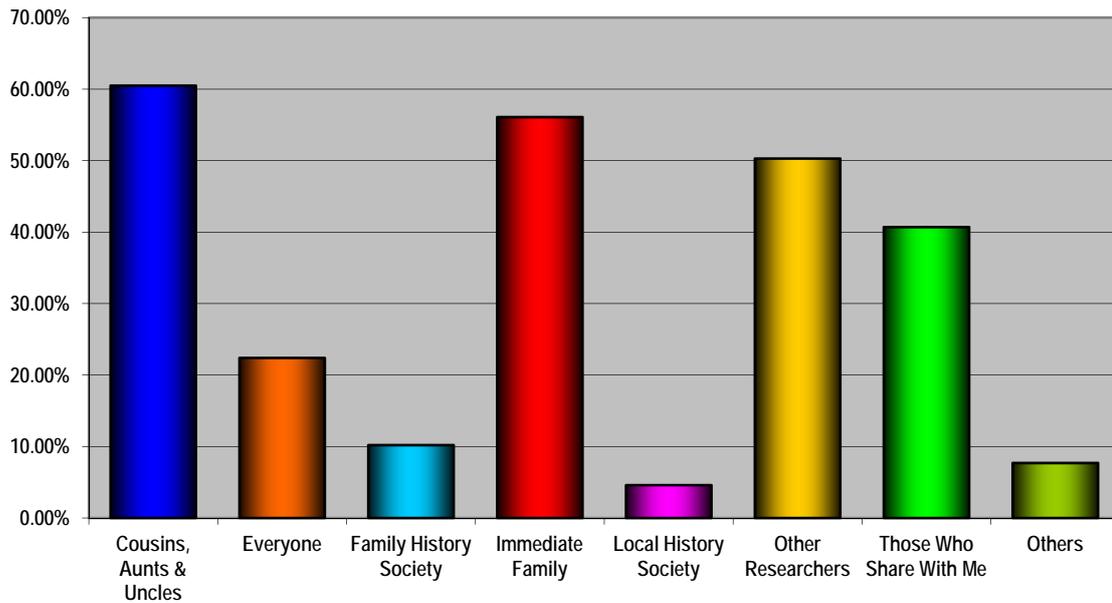
Participants were provided with a number of options for them to indicate how they go about sharing their research. The following figure illustrates that survey participants respond to requests to share and do so using principally electronic means.



**Figure 31 - Methods of Sharing Used by Survey Participants**

When the responses to this question are analysed by age groups, the social aspects of family history feature more strongly as age increases, with reunions, lessons and lectures, and publication showing out more strongly. The other aspect worthy of highlight is that, as participants age, they are more likely to respond to requests for information from other researchers.

Participants were then asked to nominate with whom they share their research. As was the case in answers to an earlier question in the survey, 'Cousins' were nominated very strongly as sharing recipients.

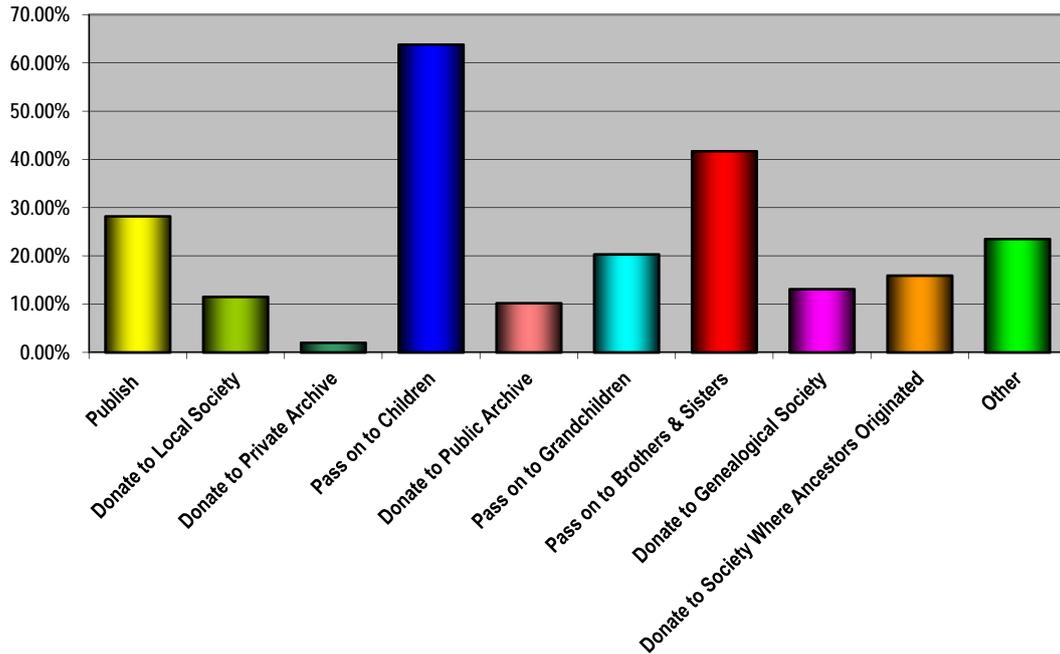


**Figure 32 - Recipients of Shared Family History Research by Survey Participants**

Participants were asked to nominate up to three choices for those they share their research with. On reflection, the categories could have been better defined, separating ‘Cousins’ from ‘Aunts and Uncles’ and defining the term ‘Cousin’ more tightly.<sup>36</sup>

Another part of the ‘Sharing’ theme lies in the idea that family historians want their research efforts to survive and be useful to others. A question was asked of participants enquiring if they had made any plans to ensure their research survives. A substantial majority (81%) indicated that they had. In responding to being asked about the provisions they had made to ensure their research survives, participants selected from a number of provided options from which to make their choice.

<sup>36</sup> In family history ‘cousin’ is any distant relative not in one’s direct family tree. As such it tends to be an umbrella term.



**Figure 33 - Survey Participants Plans to Ensure Their Research Survives**

For those over 41 years of age, passing the research along to their children was the most frequently provided option. For those under 40 years, passing the research to their brothers and sisters was the most frequent option. In the substantial ‘Other’ category were responses such as:

- providing the research to other relatives,
- placing the research onto websites or on-line,
- donating the research to libraries – national, state and local,
- mentioning the research in the participant’s will,
- passing the research to great grandchildren,
- providing the information to *FamilySearch*,
- providing the research to parents,
- offering the research to anyone in the family who is interested,
- distributing the research at reunions.

Allied to the sharing habit of family historians is the question of research collaboration. Over 74% of participants answered that they researched in cooperation with other family members involved in family history research. The ways they

collaborate ranged from formal family divisions of responsibility amongst brothers and sisters, through to informal arrangements. Participants mentioned the following ways in which they collaborate:

- Location specific – where one member lives in a city, attending to the research duties based in the city and providing the results to those who live away from that location.
- Exchanging information via *Genes Reunited* or *Ancestry.com*
- Using *Skype* to converse and share information
- Sharing certificates and sources and pictures
- Using email to converse and share information
- Meeting regularly to compare notes
- Visiting research venues together
- Writing letters
- Personal contact
- Share costs
- Working independently then comparing information
- Splitting responsibilities and sharing each others' results

### **Motivation**

The question of what motivates family historians to begin their research has been a matter of interest for earlier researchers. Kyle, Van Den Bossche and Lambert all examined the topic, commenting that the principal motivator was what they termed 'curiosity related reasons.'<sup>37</sup> The *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey explored this question further, not only asking participants why they began their research, but also asking other questions to discover the influences that may have encouraged an interest and why family historians continue their research.

In answering the major question, participants were asked to select from a range of 26 alternatives, nominating up to 5 choices, to help explain why they became interested

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<sup>37</sup> Kyle, p. 7; Lambert, *Study of Genealogists*, pp. 227-228; Van den Bossche, p. 26.

in family history.<sup>38</sup> By a wide margin participants indicated that the best explanation for why they became interested in family history was that they became curious about their ancestors, where they came from and stories they may have heard about their ancestors.

The following table shows the motivational reasons offered by respondents and the level of responses they generated. The total sums to more than the number of participants because each respondent was able to nominate 5 separate motivations.

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<sup>38</sup> For the complete list of choices provided, see Appendix 1, p. 182.

## The Survey and Its Results

No	Motivation	Category	Responses
1	Curiosity about ancestors / origin / stories	Family	2,521
2	Interest in the history of ancestors' country of origin	History	1,471
3	Interest in Australian history	History	1,086
4	Access to records	Records / Technology	1,073
5	Pride in heritage	History	934
6	Grandparents	Family	793
7	Internet	Records / Technology	694
8	Mother's or father's interest	Family	681
9	Computers	Records / Technology	647
10	Passing of a close relative	Family	567
11	A need to belong	Self	562
12	Meeting a relative	Family	544
13	Family involvement in local history	Family	531
14	Military service of an ancestor	Family	497
15	Word of mouth	Records / Technology	312
16	Immigration	Family	290
17	Book	Records / Technology	288
18	TV program / series	Records / Technology	273
19	DNA / Health related	Self	257
20	Religious doctrine	Self	243
21	Professional interest	Self	226
22	Adoption issues	Self	209
23	Bicentennial	History	192
24	Anzac Day	History	191
25	School	History	182
26	Anniversary	History	148

**Table 6 - Motivations for Beginning Family History by Survey Participants**

The facility was also provided to participants to 'write in' other motivations in an "Other" category, to which a sizable number (357) contributed. Once again curiosity related answers dominated.

*My son wanted to know where he came from at the age of 7.*

*Family silence about the past.*

*Unusual surname – are we all related?*

*We brought a German Shepherd pup which had a longer pedigree than ours at the time.*

*Finding names for twin daughters.*

A major contributor in this 'curiosity' element appeared to be the discovery or the gift of family memorabilia, photographs, and papers that aroused curiosity to enquire further.

*Being supplied with a copy of a family history.*

*Finding the death card of my great great grandmother.*

*Photographs and wanting to know who people were.*

*My mother finding a copy of a poem written in 1800 and being absolutely fascinated by it and needing to know more.*

*Family photographs and letters of my great grandparents.*

*Letters saved by family members.*

*Given a family photo with ? marks on some surnames.*

Respondents also brought to light other motivating ideas, such as the influence of media in discussing family history, particularly mentioning the ABC radio program of Caroline Jones who had a regular time slot with historian Phillip Geeves and later with Nick Vine Hall.

Travel also featured as a motivator with latent family historians travelling to places for both work and leisure that were connected to the family background. Typical comments included:

*Proximity to records while resident in country of ancestors origin.*

*A trip to the U.K. inspired me to find out just where my forebears had come from.*

*My son's move to London and information of eligibility through grandparents.*

Other respondents nominated less obvious motivators such as public displays at shopping centres or other public spaces; a perception of family history as a suitable activity to pursue when retired; a means to indulge their desire to solve puzzles; to track the history of behaviours, characteristics and health matters:

*The thrill of the chase – researching!*

*To satisfy my problem solving interest.*

*I like hunting out solutions, solving puzzles, I read who-dun-its AND history.*

There were also several contributions that fit best into the category of 'simply inspirational.'

*Our local cemetery had a champagne and history tour.*

*Boredom during a university break.*

*A love of all history since childhood – genealogy was a transgression from there.*

*It's a disease actually.*

There was considerable emphasis by respondents who were motivated by the desire to leave information about the family for future generations.

*So my children, nieces and nephews, and future generations know about their heritage.*

*A gift to my children and their possible future children and to others in my extended family.*

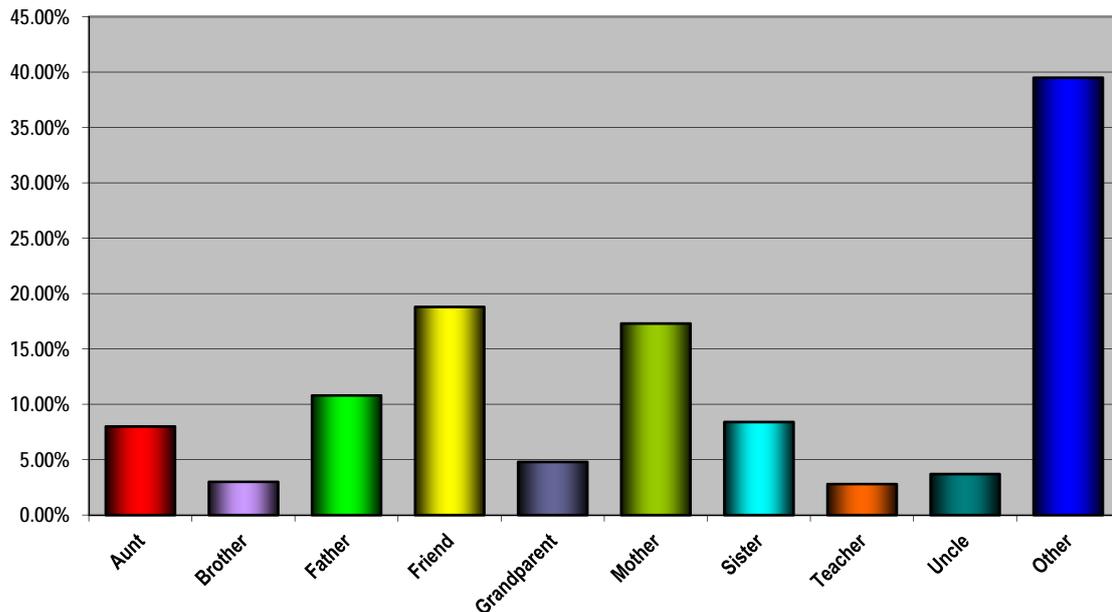
*The need to leave something behind for my children and grandchildren.*

*Desire to pass family history on to their own children.*

*To formulate a record that can be passed on to my children.*

### **The influence of others**

The answers provided by participants about how their interest in family history began also indicated that grandparents and parents had some influence on motivation. Exploring this idea further, participants were asked about whether someone had suggested family history to them as an activity. Just over 16% - a reasonably small proportion, indicated that another person had offered family history research as a suggestion. Examining who that person(s) of influence had been, it was consistent with earlier questions about collaborative research to find that the major influence came from outside the immediate family with 'friends' and 'cousins' being the most numerous.



**Figure 34 - Those Who Suggested Family History Activity to Survey Participants**

In the above figure the 'other' category comprised mainly of 'cousins.' Amongst family history society members, the 'friends' category was slightly stronger and the 'father' or 'mother' categories were slightly lower than non-society members. Examining the figures along gender lines, males were significantly more likely to have been influenced by 'fathers' or 'brothers' or 'others,' whereas females were strongly more likely to have been influenced by their 'mothers.'

### **Other influences**

As well as the influences brought to bear by human interaction, respondents were also asked whether books or television programmes had been a motivating influence. The intent in enquiring about this aspect was to ascertain if that influence attributed to the *Roots* phenomenon remains a factor. When asked whether a particular book or television programme had been of influence in triggering an interest in family history, only 18% said 'Yes' to a book and 17% said 'Yes' to a television programme. Interestingly, when asked if they remembered the name of the book or television programme, more than those who had answered 'Yes' provided an answer.

Books about local, Australian and general history and books relating to a particular family history predominated the answers respondents provided. 'How to' books were also frequently nominated, especially those by Janet Reakes, Nancy Gray and Nick Vine Hall. There were less frequent mentions of selected biographies, family history magazines and family bibles as influences to begin family history research. A total of 6 participants mentioned *Roots*.

Television programmes were also mentioned by participants. The current series *Who Do You Think You Are?* was overwhelmingly the most frequently nominated (358) – 10 times greater than any other programme. Significantly, many participants noted that it was not the influence to start their research, but it had been a spur for them to continue. Its popularity possibly has more to do with it being a current production, but undoubtedly many recent beginners to the pastime may well have been prompted to begin by viewing the programme. *Roots* featured as the next most popular nomination, (31) providing some support to the idea that the programme did motivate people to begin their personal family history research journey. Other programmes mentioned were another recent production *Find My Family*, then another older series *Against the Wind*, television appearances on the *Midday Show* by Janet Reakes, *Rush* and *The Floating Brothel*.

### Continuing motivations

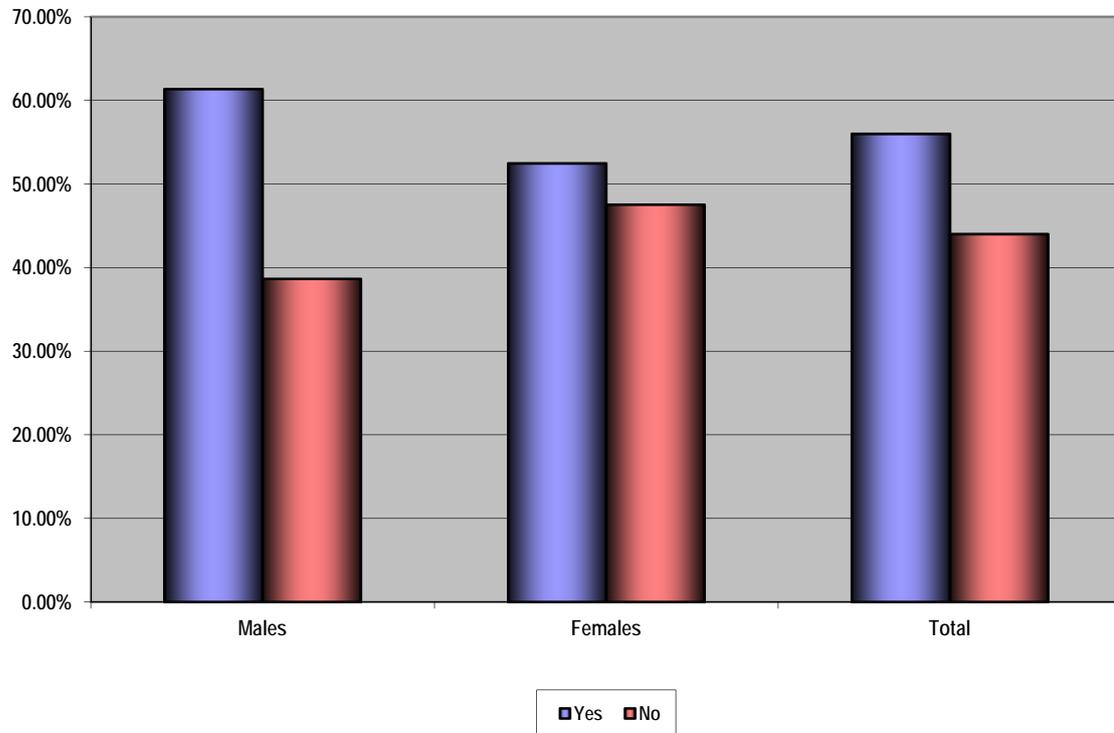
Motivations for family history research involvement change over time. Focus group work prior to the commencement of the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey suggested that the reasons to continue in their family history research are not necessarily the same as their motives for beginning.<sup>39</sup> Accordingly, in the survey, participants were asked if their reasons for continuing to research their family history were the same as when they began.

Participants were reasonably evenly divided over this question in total with 56% indicating that their reasons had not changed and 44% indicating that they had

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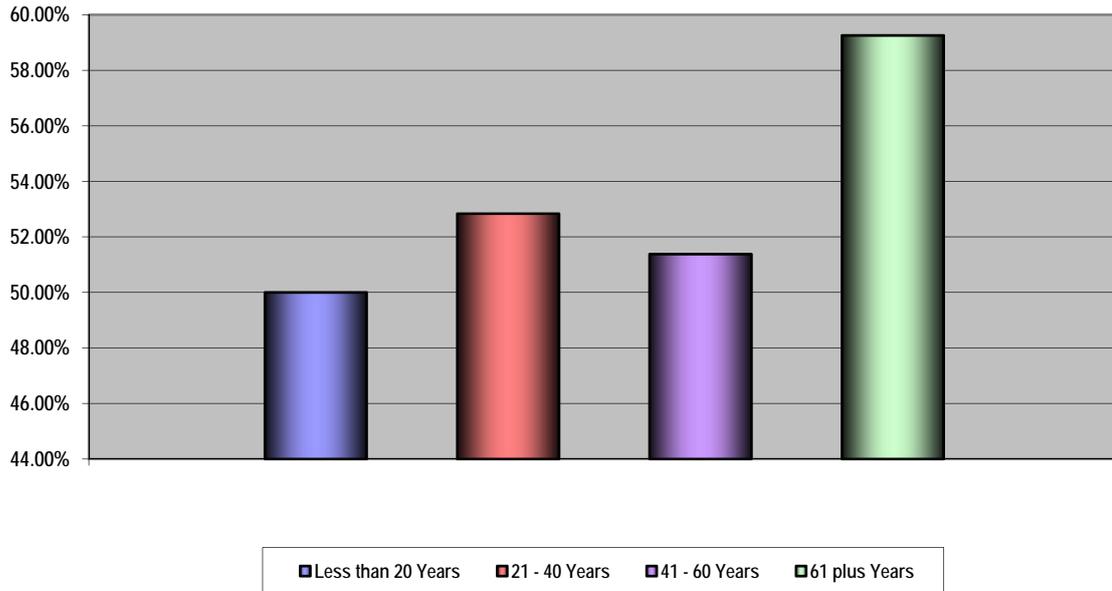
<sup>39</sup> 12 members of the Parramatta Family History Group participated in a focus group session to aid in refining questions for the survey.

changed. Examining this result along gender lines showed males were more likely to have the same reasons as when they started while females were more evenly divided.



**Figure 35 - Changed Motivations for Family History Research by Survey Participants by Gender**

There were also variations seen when the data was examined across age groups with the 61 years and older age group substantially (59%) reporting consistency in motivations from when they first began research.



**Figure 36 - Changed Motivations for Family History Research by Survey Participants by Age Group**

The strong retention of original motivations by those 61 years and older is possibly accounted for by the higher proportion of males in this age group. As shown in the previous graph, males were more likely to have retained their original motivations.

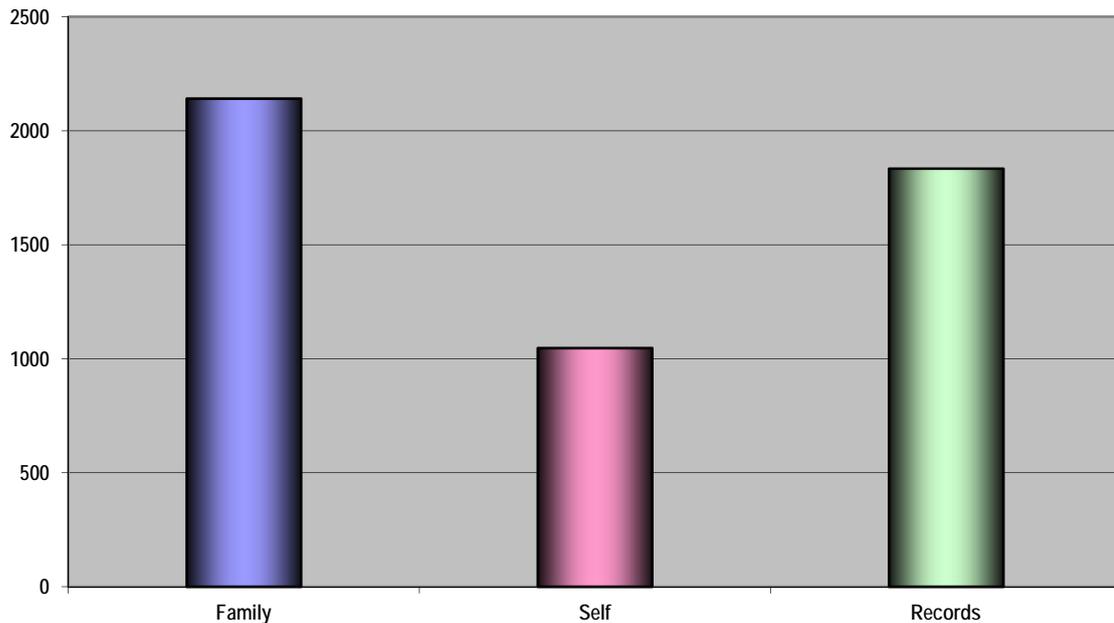
Following up the question of whether motivations have changed, participants were then asked to nominate from a list, their current reasons for researching family history. The list contained many of the original motivations and added several new possible motivations.

## The Survey and Its Results

No.	Motivation	Category	Responses
1	Desire to know more about ancestors	Family	1026
2	I enjoy being the family historian	Self	683
3	Easier access to records	Records / Technology	470
4	Information available on the internet	Records / Technology	459
5	Writing, publication or sharing	Family	307
6	Curiosity	Family	301
7	Earlier generations have passed away	Family	273
8	To meet living relatives	Family	234
9	Expansion of interests	Records / Technology	211
10	Improved computer technology	Records / Technology	205
11	Cheaper access to records	Records / Technology	157
12	As a reason to travel	Self	154
13	Genealogy gives me a sense of competence	Self	154
14	On-line research is time efficient	Records / Technology	154
15	I enjoy the company of other family historians	Self	149
16	Occupy my spare time	Self	137
17	Researching overseas	Records / Technology	95
18	Serving on an executive or committee of a genealogical group	Self	92
19	Larger scale interests	Records / Technology	83
20	Keep my genealogist partner company	Self	38
21	Other reasons		205

**Table 7 - Motivations for Continuing Family History Research by Survey Participants**

Grouping the results into collective categories shows that the importance of family reasons including curiosity remains the strongest group of motivations for continuing research. The absence of the earlier ‘history’ related motivations (interest in the history of ancestors’ country of origin, interest in Australian history, pride in heritage, Bicentennial, Anzac Day, school, anniversary) is the strongest difference between original and ongoing motivations.



**Figure 37 - Continuing Motivations of Survey participants in Grouped Categories**

Not included in the above are those reasons that participants listed in the ‘Other’ category. These answers included succinct statements such as ‘addictive,’ and ‘addiction to research’ as well as reflections participants had describing their enjoyment of solving puzzles:

*Stimulation of the thrill of discovery and the joy of problem solving.*

*I enjoy the chase / research – the solving of puzzles rates #1.*

*I love the discovery process (even more than the findings).*

Other reasons advanced by participants note that individuals have developed professional interests in family history, or have become participants in teaching ‘how to’ courses in family history.

*Now have a genealogy business.*

*I do it full time as a career now – researching other people’s families.*

*Lecturing at conferences and taking classes.*

*Volunteer teaching Genealogy.*

### Religion's part

Religion has long been suspected of providing an influence for involvement in family history. Jacobson noted that individuals who were religious are more likely to have an involvement in family history.<sup>40</sup> Van Den Bossche noted the composition of her survey participants in terms of their religion finding that Anglicans, Presbyterians and Uniting Church members were more involved in family history than Catholics.<sup>41</sup> Lambert's study found that only 1% of his respondents attributed religious teachings or doctrines as a motivator for family history, but did indicate that he felt that among Latter-day Saint family historians this would be a much stronger motivating factor.<sup>42</sup>

Respondents to the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey were asked directly if there was a religious reason behind their family history research activities. An overwhelming majority (94.4%) said 'NO' with 5.6% answering 'YES.' Of the small number (157) of 'YES' answers, 97% were Latter-day Saints and their descriptions of reasons all pointed towards doctrinal obligations.<sup>43</sup>

The conclusion to be drawn for this question is that for the majority of Australian family historians who participated in the survey, religion appears to play no part in their motivations to pursue family history. Latter-day Saint family historians, as evidenced by the answers provided to the survey, however, are strongly motivated by religious matters, confirming the suspicion voiced by Lambert in 1994.

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<sup>40</sup> Jacobson, p. 355.

<sup>41</sup> Van den Bossche, p. 27.

<sup>42</sup> Lambert, *Survey of Genealogists*, pp. 227-228.

<sup>43</sup> An unexplained discrepancy exists in the numbers answering the question of religion with a 'YES' (157) and the responses provided to the main question on motivations where 243 indicated religious doctrine was a motivator for them to begin family history research. Numbers answering both questions were similar with slightly more answering the religion question.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has summarised the raw data under three broad headings. The initial section reports the essential demographic characteristics of participants, including their cultural backgrounds, and the time they have been participating in family history research. The second section provides information from participants about the way they pursue their interest in family history, their involvement with family history societies and the way that changes have influenced their research practice. The final section provides information about motivations and influences.

The following chapter offers analysis of the data obtained from the survey, discussing demographics, practices and motivations in detail. Comments made by participants about various aspects are also provided.

## Chapter 6

### Discussion of Survey Results

The principal questions addressed in this thesis relate to the demographics of family historians, their research practices and their motivations for beginning family history research and for their continued participation in the practice. Earlier sections have presented the statistical information gleaned from direct questions asked of survey participants set in the context of earlier surveys. This section considers the qualitative information provided and assesses the evidence to draw conclusions about the research questions.

#### *Demographic aspects*

The original characterisation of family historians as ‘little old ladies in tennis shoes,’ if ever accurate, has been shown by the results presented in this thesis to be somewhat different in relation to today’s practitioners. The following discussion shows the ways in which the present picture that emerges from the survey is more complex than that earlier characterisation.

Family history, as shown from the results of the *Who Are The Genealogists of Australia?* survey and the research conducted by others, is a pastime that is dominated by females.<sup>1</sup> Graeme Davison conjectured that the reason for this domination is that family history ‘is more likely to appeal to women, who are the customary nurturers and keepers of family tradition.’<sup>2</sup> A question that arises from the survey results is the readiness or willingness of females to participate in surveys. Are females more willing than their male counterparts to participate in surveys? This question remains unresolved in the context of this survey.

In the survey the domination of family history participation by females, when viewed across the age groups, varies considerably. Across all age groups there were more responses from females than males with the ratio at its widest in the younger age

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<sup>1</sup> See pp. 93-94.

<sup>2</sup> Graeme Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2000, p. 81.

groups. The male/female ratio narrows significantly in the oldest age group with male numbers at their strongest in this group at 33.7%. This increased male interest suggests that there is more to be learnt about participation than the explanation of females being customary nurturers and keepers of family tradition. Comments made by some male respondents in the survey suggested that they became involved in family history as they approached retirement age, having more time available to them. Lambert also observed this pattern with members of the Ontario Genealogical Society in his survey, and suggested that the possible cause may lie with differences in workforce participation, with women more likely to be engaged in 'home duties' with flexible hours, thus having research time available to them, while men were more likely to be employed with fixed work hours and thus lacking the opportunity to participate.<sup>3</sup>

However, workforce participation and home duties do not accurately account for the predominance of females engaged in family history. There is clear evidence that in Australia the majority of women of working age are engaged in full-time work across all age groups. Similarly, women remain the principal care givers within both the family and extended family, and anecdotally they shoulder most of the burden of domestic chores around the home. Accordingly, women are frequently more 'time poor' than their male counterparts. Other explanations are needed.

Another possible explanation of the survey results points to participation in family history being an early interest for females irrespective of (or perhaps because of) their status as mothers, whereas male participation grows in the active parenting age group but peaks in the less active parenting years, and coincides with retirement age milestones.<sup>4</sup> The following table illustrates this point.

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<sup>3</sup> Lambert, *A Profile*, p. 75.

<sup>4</sup> This observation makes a broad assumption about age and life stages. At the date of writing no studies examining life stages and leisure activities have been located.

Age Group	Life Stage	Share of Respondents		
		Female	Male	Total
Under 20s	Single	0.3%	0.1%	<b>0.2%</b>
21 – 40 years	Single / Young Married	7.6%	4.1%	<b>6.6%</b>
41 – 60 years	Active Parent / Parent	49.4%	38.1%	<b>46.3%</b>
61 years plus	Parent/ Empty Nesters / Retired	42.8%	57.6%	<b>46.8%</b>
		<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 8 - Life Stage - Age Share of Total Responses by Gender**

Clearly, for those in the survey, family history is an activity to which middle and older age groups are more likely to be drawn, possibly because at this stage of life they have on average more leisure time and the financial resources to pursue the pastime. The graph showing how long survey participants have been engaged in family history lends further support to the involvement by older persons.<sup>5</sup>

The differences between the survey results in relation to age and participation and the results from the earlier surveys by Kyle and Van den Bossche, however, cause pause for reflection. The earlier surveys demonstrated both an earlier age for participation and a younger average age.<sup>6</sup> Kyle and Van den Bossche had respectively 28% and 30% of their survey participants in the under 40 age group and the average age of their survey participants was 49 years. In contrast, this survey, as Table 8 shows, produced older participants and resulted in a higher average age – 58 years.<sup>7</sup>

Explaining these differences is difficult. Has Van den Bossche’s 21 – 40 years cohort flowed through twenty years later into the 41 – 60 year bracket of the current survey, and similarly the 41 – 60 year age cohort flowed into the 61 years and older bracket, consistent with the changes in the total Australian population? It is tempting to accept this at face value. However, a review of aspects of the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey reflect differently on this conclusion.

<sup>5</sup> See Figure 12, p 106.

<sup>6</sup> See Table 2, p. 96.

<sup>7</sup> See Table 8, p. 143.

The *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey was distributed through the major genealogical networks – family history societies, email groups, libraries, archives, commercial operators, bookstores and family history centres. Yet a wide discrepancy exists with the under 40 years age groups suggesting either the numbers of family historians in these age groups is not as strong as previously found, the survey populations are different, or that they conduct their research without as much exposure to the networks described above.<sup>8</sup> ABS population figures show that there has been a decline of 5% between 1987 and 2009 in the proportion of the Australian population that this age group (under 40s) represents, but this decline does not account for the large discrepancy in participation for this survey.<sup>9</sup> Having already noted the popularity of on-line research, particularly amongst ‘time-poor’ researchers, the question remaining is that of where this cohort of under 40 year old researchers conducts their research. Is this the group that is referred to as the ‘fast food’ genealogist?

One factor that may have affected results is illustrated by the *FamilySearch* website operated by the Latter-day Saints. When introduced in 1999, it was designed to simplify family history research, making it easier for a new generation of researchers to access the records of the International Genealogical Index (IGI) from the comfort of their homes and without having to visit family history centres. The subsequent closure of a number of family history centres along with the volume of traffic through the website suggests that this strategy has been working. As the number of records available on *FamilySearch* has grown, the popularity of the site has expanded becoming a ‘must visit’ site for family historians. There are, however, numbers of family historians who rely entirely on the information they find on *FamilySearch* (in large part because it is free of cost) for their research without recourse to other repositories of information. This international website was not available to publish

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<sup>8</sup> Van den Bossche's survey population were Victorian genealogists, mainly members of GSV and the AIGS. The *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia* survey has a different survey population.

<sup>9</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, Estimated Resident Population by Sex and Age, States and Territories of Australia, Table 1, Catalogue No 3201.0, June 1995; Australian Demographic Statistics, Population by Age and Sex, Catalogue 3201.0 June 2000; Australian Demographic Statistics, Table 7 Estimated Resident Population, Age Groups, Australia – at 30 June, Catalogue 3101.0, December 2011.

awareness of the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey and, consequently, for those who rely on this venue, awareness of the survey was non-existent.<sup>10</sup>

The use of such websites as *FamilySearch* and *Google* may thus offer an explanation as to why those particularly in the 21 - 40 year age bracket have not been involved in the survey. The earlier discussion on stages in life has some relevance here with those in active parenting age groups having less time available to utilise other genealogical resources and, consequently, relying on those accessible from their homes. The description of 'fast food' family history also seems to apply here, with satisfaction being obtained in their family history activity from particularly unpaid on-line sources being sufficient for their needs or from other published on-line resources such as *Ancestry.com* or *Genes Reunited*.

In another aspect of demographic description, participants were asked about their occupation or profession based upon Australian 2006 Census occupation categories. It is important to note that there was no 'Retired' category since allowing this choice would have provided a distorted result (given the age range of survey participants).<sup>11</sup> Comparing the occupational background of Australian family historians against the 2006 Australian census shows some strong variances.<sup>12</sup> The Education category clearly produced the largest number of participants, well ahead of the next largest category – Health & Community Services. These are both occupational categories with majority female populations.<sup>13</sup> In these occupation categories there is a definite link to family and heritage. Teachers and health professionals dealing with the culture and backgrounds of students and with health service users would serve to encourage interest in their own family backgrounds and heritage. Given this circumstance it is unsurprising to find a concentration of family historians from these employment backgrounds. Family history, as earlier discussed, requires the investment of time and

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<sup>10</sup> The assumption made is that the *FamilySearch* website would be principally attractive to new and younger researchers because of its ease of access, whereas older genealogists would also have exposure to other venues of research.

<sup>11</sup> Omitting a category for 'Retired' from the question of occupation required participants to nominate what would have been their employment category before they retired. Allowing a 'Retired' category would have bumped actual occupations before retirement into a general and non-specific category.

<sup>12</sup> See Figure 5, p. 98.

<sup>13</sup> ABS Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly, (Cat No 6291.0.55.003), February 2012.

resources. These employment categories would thus appear to provide individuals with the necessary capacities to indulge in family history research.

Is family history an Anglo-Celtic preoccupation? Certainly survey participants strongly identified as having Anglo-Celtic ancestry with respondents nominating English, Irish and Scots ancestry at a rate more than 3 times that of German ancestry and 6 times that of the next most popular nationality, French.<sup>14</sup> Previous research in English-speaking countries has also noted this bias.<sup>15</sup> However, the contention perhaps needs some reinterpretation. While family history activity appears primarily to take place in the western world, it is clear that family historians are interested in their family ties regardless of where their heritage takes them. Evidence for this is seen in the number of nationality and/or ethnic based family history societies, particularly in the U.S.A.<sup>16</sup> However, the focus in Australia is still mostly on European ancestors.<sup>17</sup> Part of the explanation for this state may be that the more recent immigrant populations, who constitute the majority of those from non-European backgrounds, are still at the early stages of resettlement. The emergence of Chinese, Lebanese and Italian family history groups (longer term residents) with their interest in earlier arrivals in Australia – grandparent and great grandparent generations, supports the Hansen’s law theory.<sup>18</sup>

Khoo and Lucas in their 2002 study on Australians’ ancestries examined responses to the 2001 Australian Census where the population was asked ‘What is the person’s ancestry?’<sup>19</sup> English was the first on the list of ancestries, with 99% stating an English ancestry captured as the first response. Khoo & Lucas identified Australians as having particularly pronounced connections to English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh ancestry.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See Figure 11, p. 105.

<sup>15</sup> See discussion pp. 29-33.

<sup>16</sup> See discussion pp. 29-33.

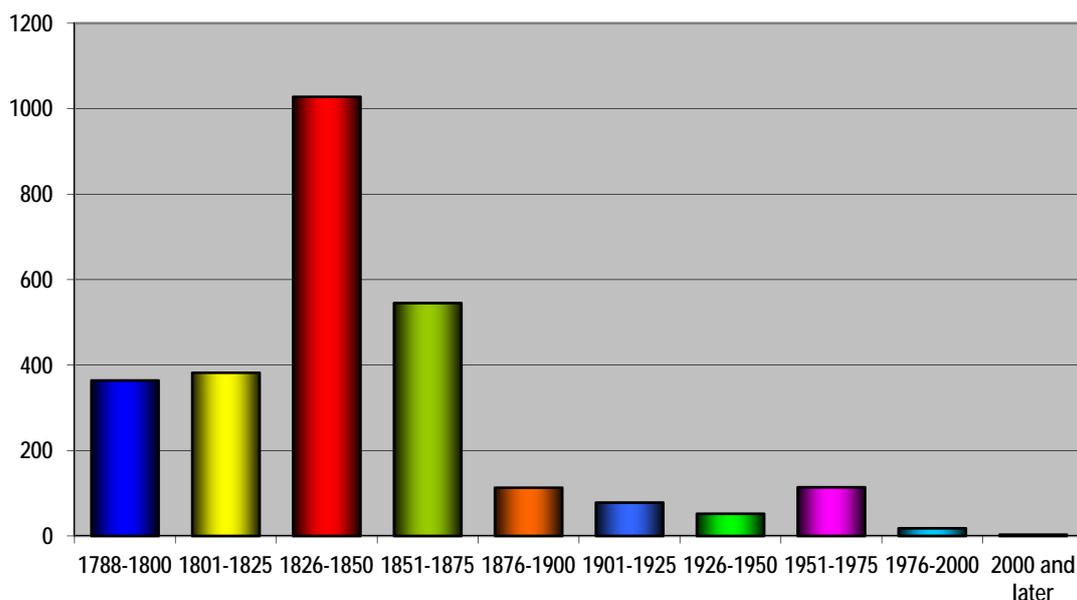
<sup>17</sup> See discussion pp. 29-33.

<sup>18</sup> See discussion p. 31, 66.

<sup>19</sup> Siew-Ean Khoo & David Lucas, *Australian Census Analytic Program Australians’ Ancestries 2001*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, 2004, pp. 9-11.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

The results shown in Figure 11<sup>21</sup> for this survey are then broadly consistent with survey participants nominating a strong incidence of English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh ancestry – even allowing for the wider capacity to nominate places of ancestry when compared to the 2001 Australian Census. A further aspect in the Anglo-Celtic centrality can be discerned through the strong connection with early European settlement and the convict era as the following figure shows.



**Figure 38 - Survey Participants First Ancestor to Arrive in Australia by Time Period**

A significant number of participants indicated their first ancestor to arrive in Australia came prior to 1876, and therefore it is to be expected that their research interest lies in Anglo-Celtic ancestry.

Despite the clear bias towards Anglo-Celtic ancestries in the survey results, the results also showed that Australians now have ancestry from an increasing diversity of origins, and that interest in their ancestors remains important to them regardless of their place of origin. Thus, while various ethnic communities may not have an apparent interest in family history, individuals who have lineage links from these different cultural backgrounds, especially non-English-speaking backgrounds, find the prospect of this heritage of interest to their research. The following is illustrative.

<sup>21</sup> See Figure 11, p. 105.

*I always had an interest in family history and had documented some of my family history. When I got married I wanted to document the backgrounds of both our families. I was a seventh generation Australian and my husband the child of two post WW2 immigrants. My mother-in-law told me that I was Italian now and that the Australians had no customs or cultures, so everything should be done the Italian way. It made my blood boil! She was Lithuanian herself and from the moment she married did everything the Italian way. I wanted to give my children a balanced, rich understanding of all their ancestral heritage and to document the experiences of the first hand immigrants we had with us from the Lithuanian grandparents to my father-in-law an Italian immigrant, so children in future generations would know where the family came from and why families before made the trip to Australia.*

Comments such as this suggest that, as Australia's population further diversifies, family historians will find an increasingly varied trail to follow in their research, diluting the current levels of Anglo-Celtic dominance. It is also true that, while this dilution process occurs, there is a corresponding broadening of the distribution of Anglo-Celtic ancestry as new immigrants intermarry with longer term resident Australians.

The interest shown by some survey participants in their different cultural heritages coupled with the presence of non-Anglo-Celtic descendant websites given to family history, and with pockets of other nationalities pursuing their family history through LDS Family History Centres, points to changes in the present Anglo-Celtic picture.<sup>22</sup> It would seem likely that one catalyst for such change will come with the availability of records. As technology makes possible research from the ease of one's home, it will encourage interest. This budding diversity is already apparent when the research interests of survey participants are examined.

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<sup>22</sup> LDS Family History Centres have easily available access to the vast microfilm resources of the The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

There is a growing spread of national origins among ancestral interests as was shown in the First Arrival/Most Recent Arrival Generations<sup>23</sup> presented earlier and the countries listed as places where ancestors originated.<sup>24</sup> The growing number of countries listed by participants compared to those listed in Van den Bossche's survey demonstrates that there is a growing diversity in the interests of Australian family historians. This would appear to be a reflection of Australia's continuing immigration and immigration policy, especially after World War II. As one respondent explained:

*I have 5 separate waves of immigrating direct ancestors from 1823 to 1924, ie, each of my Australian born ancestors married a migrant. Then I also married a migrant. After my second son was born I thought it was a fascinating journey of discovery to take, to gather and verify the facts and stories, so that my children (and interested others) could understand and take pleasure in the knowledge of how they came to be born in this country, in this family.*

The state by state residence distribution of family historians who participated in the survey coincided with the Australian Bureau of Statistics figures with some minor variances.<sup>25</sup> The NSW and ACT figures for survey participation were slightly higher than the share of population. Much of the explanation for why NSW and ACT figures were higher can be found in 'hometown' factors where the various genealogical distribution channels enthusiastically assisted in providing publicity. Another explanation may lie in the availability of relatively more channels of distribution in NSW for publicity compared to other states. In spite of these factors, the figures for participation suggest that family history interest and activity are broadly consistent with population throughout Australia. Indeed, the family historians represented in the survey do not appear to be concentrated in one state over another.

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<sup>23</sup> See Figure 10, p. 103.

<sup>24</sup> See Figure 11, p. 105.

<sup>25</sup> See Figure 6, p. 99.

When examining the location of survey participants in the categories of city or metropolitan area, regional centre or rural areas, far higher shares of participants appear to live in regional or rural areas than might be expected when looking at population figures. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics figures, 68.6% of Australians in 2009 reside in capital cities and metropolitan areas.<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, these results suggest that non-city areas have more of Australia's family historians per head of population than might be anticipated. Explaining why this should be is more difficult and there are a number of possible explanations. One such explanation may be found in the concentration of immigrant populations in cities and metropolitan areas. Rural and regional centres have a more concentrated 'Anglo-Celtic' presence than the cities and accordingly, more family historians per head of population.

Another possible explanation relates to the aging of population. Regional and rural populations are aging at a faster rate than city and metropolitan centres.<sup>27</sup> Figures from the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey show that those who participate are consistently distributed across the age groups regardless of whether they are located in city, regional or rural locations. Therefore, the idea of aging of the regional and rural populations does not seem to be a factor in the concentration of survey participants in regional and rural Australia.

In considering the religious affiliation of survey participants, there is evidence to support the results of both Van den Bossche and Lambert who noted more participation by 'traditional religions' - Anglicans, Presbyterians and Uniting Church members, compared to their share of the overall population, and under participation by Catholics.<sup>28</sup> This survey also noted that those who nominated 'No Religion' or who 'did not say' were over represented when compared to their share of population when compared to the 2006 Australia Census. Other figures showed over representation by Latter-day Saints and under representation by other religions –

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<sup>26</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2008 – 2009*, Catalogue No. 3218.0.

<sup>27</sup> Anecdotal evidence from press reports suggest that younger adult members of rural communities are moving to urban centres in search of work, thereby increasing the average age of their home communities.

<sup>28</sup> Winsome A. N. Van den Bossche, *Amateur Historical Enquiry in the Tracing of Ancestry: Establishing a Profile of a Genealogist*, Masters thesis, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 1988, p. 23; Ronald D. Lambert, *A Study of Genealogists and Family Historians*, Faculty of Arts, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, 2000, p. 32.

notably Eastern Orthodox, Buddhist and Islamic.<sup>29</sup> However, the sum total of both numbers participating and overall population share, is minor when compared to the 'traditional' populations. Explaining this variance is a matter of speculation. As an example, by observation many immigrants from South American countries are nominally Catholic and this survey did not effectively reach those populations judging by the countries nominated by participants as their countries of origin. Similarly, participation in the survey by those who have emigrated from countries where 'non-traditional' religions predominate, shows that the invitation to participate did not effectively reach them.

From the results of the survey for this thesis, the length of time participants have been engaged in family history showed that there was a continuing attraction for new participants,<sup>30</sup> driven by a number of influences. These new participants were mostly in the 41-60 year age group and of the total of the age group, nearly two thirds were taking up the pursuit as the first generation in their family to do so. This result lends further strength to the idea that having the time and resources to follow an interest in family history influences the taking up of the pastime.

Rounding out the demographic discussion, survey participants showed that the majority were members of at least one family history society, demonstrating that society membership continues to have relevance to family historians. The discussion earlier indicated that this survey is possibly over represented with responses from family history society members.<sup>31</sup> The other alternative is that society membership continues to play a much stronger part in the research practices of survey participants in Australia than it does in the U.K. Such a scenario however, seems unlikely. The fluidity of society membership is one aspect worthy of note. While figures presented earlier about the length of time participants have been members of the society they first joined showed a degree of 'stuck-on' membership, there was a growing presence of those who joined societies for short periods of time.<sup>32</sup> It is further underlined by

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<sup>29</sup> See Figure 8, p. 100.

<sup>30</sup> See Figure 12, p. 106.

<sup>31</sup> See pp. 113-114.

<sup>32</sup> See Figure 23, p. 117.

those in the younger age groups who largely indicated they were not members of a family history society.<sup>33</sup> As society members age and withdraw from membership, fewer younger family historians (as shown by survey participants) will replace them leading to declines in overall membership numbers. Moreover, they will be more inclined to join and leave compared to their older peers. This ‘churn’ of membership will have implications for family history societies as they consider how to maintain membership numbers and income flows to support their operations.

### Summary

Drawing together these demographic characteristics to answer the question as to who the family historians of Australia are, at least as revealed through the survey conducted for this study, leads to the following observations.

Currently, Australia’s family historians are principally Australian-born, more likely to be female and in the pre-retirement age group of 41 – 60 years. They are mainly married, tertiary educated and work in the education, health or government sectors or are involved in home duties. They are in the main interested in Anglo-Celtic ancestry, but are increasingly interested in ancestry from non-Anglo-Celtic countries. Australia’s family historians live across the country in the same proportions as the balance of the Australian population so, in that sense, they are not concentrated in any particular state. Mostly they live in urban areas, but there are higher proportions of family historians in non-urban areas than the population share. Australia’s family historians generally have ‘traditional’ religious associations although growing numbers are dissociating themselves from religious affiliation. They are in the main members of family history societies and first generation researchers and with an average research experience of 14 years.

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<sup>33</sup> See Figure 19, p. 114.

### **Practices**

Previous research into family historians examined demographic and motivational considerations and, in Australia, did so by principally focussing on members of family history societies. Much of family history practice developed around the anchor of a local family history society as individuals worked together in gathering, transcribing and sorting records into usable data bases that could be utilised by society members and the growing numbers of new recruits. This section considers existing practices as revealed through responses to the survey. It looks at how family historians utilise the various venues, their expectations and the effect of these practices.

As reported earlier, family historians who participated in the survey make use of traditional record collecting repositories – societies, libraries, LDS Centres and archives - with family history societies being the most frequented venue.<sup>34</sup> Family history researchers have high expectations about the family history societies they join. Many found those expectations met and also experienced additional benefits that were not part of their original expectations. Whereas society membership was once an essential component of their research, participants in the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey show how significantly that practice has changed with over 70% of participants indicating the on-line world is now their first choice of venue.

The reasons why on-line research has become so popular have already been canvassed.<sup>35</sup> It is worthy to restate, however, that much of the data base information compiled by societies and libraries is now able to be accessed on-line and, increasingly, primary records are also available – superseding the painstakingly compiled indices that were the bread and butter information of family history societies.

So what do these non-on-line venues have to offer that continues to be attractive to family historians and newcomers to the practice? The data gathered through this survey showed that access to records is the major reason researchers utilise these

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<sup>34</sup> See Figure 13, p. 108.

<sup>35</sup> See pp. 43-50.

venues, and that new family historians join societies in order to conduct their research. Where societies, libraries and archives hold records of interest to family historians they will continue to enjoy the patronage of the family history researcher. Survey participants reported that, in the majority of cases they are members of family history societies, with large numbers mentioning that they were members of two societies (55%) and a further (24%) indicating they were members of three or more societies.<sup>36</sup> Figures for younger participants show that they are less likely than their older counterparts to be members of a family history society. They remained members of societies for as long as the reasons for using that venue remained consistent with their research objectives indicating a considerable fluidity in their attachment and membership. The median time they remained members of their first joined society was around 8.5 years.

The age distribution of family history society members indicates that older family historians are more likely to be society members, possibly indicating that there are other factors attracting them to society membership. Aside from records access, it is the secondary benefits that family history societies provide that are powerful attractions for family historians. The fellowship provided in working together, obtaining assistance and advice, education and access to information are critical components in the marketing mix in attracting family historians to their venues.

Family historians have an increasing range of resources and facilities available to them, which will continue to multiply as technology makes it possible. They are increasingly savvy about their use of these resources, making decisions about time, location, cost, convenience, assistance available and above all, the records that are available. Their ability to make choices about venues based on these factors will make family historians increasingly mobile in their choice of the facilities they patronise. The on-line component will continue to rise in importance for family historians since it most powerfully addresses the convenience factor that influences today's researchers. The implication for traditional research venues becomes that of learning how they can become part of the on-line research process.

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<sup>36</sup> See Figures 19 & 20, pp. 114-115.

The willingness and capacity of family historians to share their research is legendary and is fostered by the provision of various on-line facilities to connect with researchers sharing similar familial lines, or to actually publish their research on communal family tree websites. Sites such as *Genes Reunited*, *World Tree Connect*, *Ancestry.com* and *FamilySearch* support this sharing tendency. While many advantages would seem to be available to family historians from such facilities, there are also disadvantages with privacy issues and the all too easy tendency to perpetuate errors in research that may be made by one researcher followed by other researchers who simply copy and incorporate it into their own research, and then publish the result as their own efforts.<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless over 97% of survey participants stated that they share their research and many indicated they would share with anyone who asked. Participants were not asked 'Why' they share or 'Why Not' and this would make a suitable area for future research.

The sharing concept with family historians appears to be very strong and these results demonstrate willingness and openness to sharing, although there is an increasing trend to share 'with those who share with me.' Participant comments support this tendency.

*I prefer to share. There are people who are not willing to share, this annoys me, so I am sometimes not as generous as I could be.*

*I share with those who ask providing they are willing to share and that they acknowledge my research and not pass it off as their own – which has happened in the past.*

*Only if they are willing to share with me.*

*All too often I share and (the) person on the other end will not share their work, so it makes me very wary.*

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<sup>37</sup> Keith Johnson, Councillor and Fellow, Society of Australian Genealogists, Transcript of Interview with Leon Alekna, North Sydney, 10 September 2007, p. 25.

*I usually try to send just a little so that I get some feedback. If they reply I send more in stages.*

This sharing behaviour extends to the desire to preserve the work that individual family historians produce. Participants in the survey indicated a variety of strategies they either have or intend to employ to ensure their research product survives. The majority of strategies revolved around passing the information to other family members. There was also a substantial number who wanted to ensure their research survived by providing their efforts to various family history societies and libraries. It leaves open the idea of these venues actively seeking to gather research from their patrons to hold as a resource if they are not already engaged in the process. Publishing their results also featured strongly in the plans for preservation with electronic publishing options prominent.

Family historians are collaborative in their research. As is evident from the answers provided to the survey questions, the sense gained is that as a means of working together arises, family historians will make use of that medium as it best suits them to further their research. As in other aspects of their research practice, technology related matters appear to have increased the level of cooperation between researchers when compared to earlier times.

### **Summary**

Summarising these 'practice' characteristics, it is apparent that those family historians who participated in the survey have adopted the on-line world as their first choice of research venue. They continue to use the traditional venues of societies, libraries, archives and family history centres, but they are more mobile in their association with those venues. They also have high expectations with their memberships of societies, valuing the benefits of fellowship, advice and assistance, education and access to records not available elsewhere. Today's family historians are happy to share their research, are collaborative, and have considered how to preserve the products of their research.

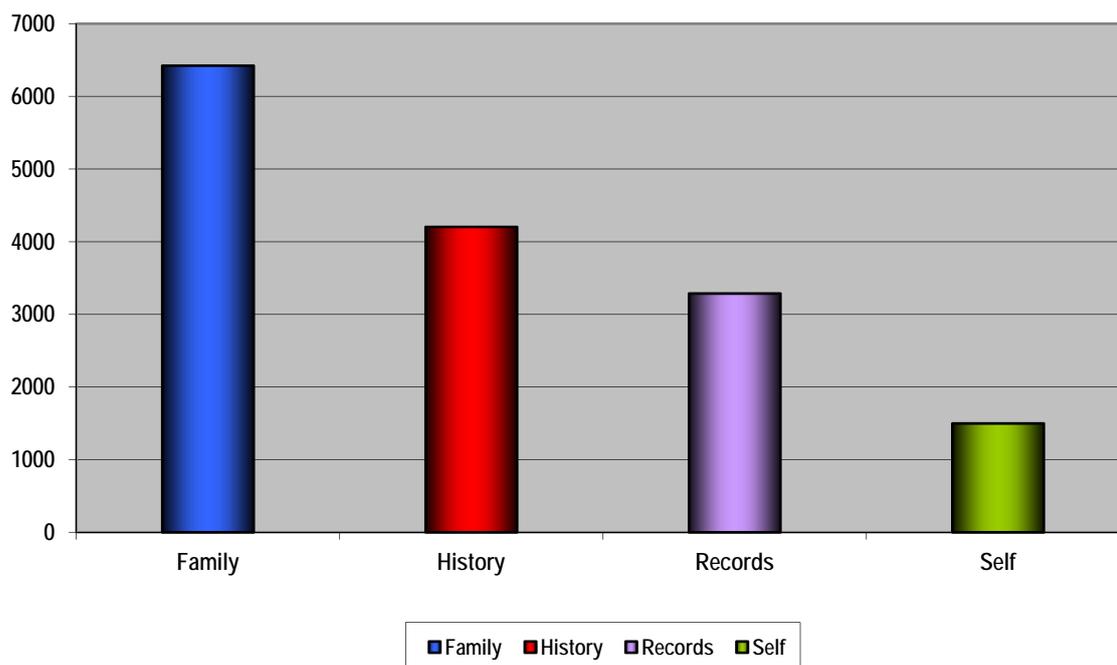
### ***Motivations***

Explaining the growth of family history interest and participation in Australia is largely a function of motivations. While technology, increased mobility, additional leisure time and the investment in records in data bases and venues have been facilitators and enablers of interest, making possible family history research, it is the motivation question that turns a momentary curiosity into an abiding interest. Participants in the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey shared their motivations for beginning and continuing their family research journey, and similarly shared information about the influencers that encouraged their interest.

Examining the information provided by participants shows that there are four general categories of motivations that reveal the underlying trends about motivation to begin family history research.<sup>38</sup> These groups, firstly, centre on motivations that relate to family traditions, stories and personalities – motivations that are of direct concern to the individual. Secondly, there are motivations that relate to accessibility and technology; thirdly, motivations that show an influence by the incidents of history; and, fourthly, motivations that are directly related to the individual and their beliefs or interests. These categories of motivations are shown in the following figure and the central importance that curiosity about ancestors, beginnings and family connections has in providing motivation to begin family history.

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<sup>38</sup> See Table 6, p. 129.



**Figure 39 - Motivations of Survey Participants to Begin Research by Category**

In many cases participants in the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey had a story of their own that demonstrated how their curiosity about the stories that had been related to them by family members and others about their family members induced in them an interest in family history. The following are examples of the stories they shared.

*When I asked my Grandmother about their parents she said we don't talk about that. If she had told me, I might have done the project and forgotten about it, but I wanted to find out what Grandma would not tell me. It took me nearly 50 years to find out the secret. Grandma had married the son of a convict and her well to do family had disowned her.*

*I have had an underlying curiosity about my family history since I was a child. Very little was ever spoken about my grandparents on both sides of my family.*

*Wanting to know the history of my father's family which I had been protected from for many years.*

*My mother always spoke about her ancestors and my father didn't appear to know anything about his, I guess that sparked my interest.*

The stories shared that fell into this category consistently included mentions of earlier generations not wanting to disclose information about some family members, or made mention of a lack of knowledge of family members, or a story told within the family that cried out for verification or more details. Associated with these stories were family events – the passing of a close relative, military involvement by an ancestor(s) and the positive encouragement of family members – especially parents and grandparents.

Closely related to the 'family' category are motivations that centre on history matters and participants strongly listed these as motivations. It is probable that the event of history that provided the motivation for a participant to begin their research is also heavily family member(s) linked. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that an individual who was interested in the history of the country of origin of his/her ancestors would not also have a strong interest in the ancestor(s) who came from that country. It would seem that the question of which motivational interest came first – ancestor or country – is appropriate to consider. The close relationship between the two categories further strengthens the prominence of the 'family' and curiosity as motivators.

For many participants, interests in either Australian history or the history of the places from where their ancestors have come were major influences on their family history research beginnings.

*A personal interest in local history.*

*I have always had an interest in Australian, English and Irish history.*

*In 1970 I visited Whitby in Yorkshire, particularly because of its connections to Captain Cook, as it was 200 years since his voyage to Australia. When an aunt died in 1974, and I received her papers, I was intrigued to find a World War I photo of Whitby after it had been*

*bombed by the Germans. On it was written, “Whitby, where Grandmother came from” – and I was off on my genealogical adventure.*

*I sailed on one of the 1<sup>st</sup> Fleet Re-enactment ships in 1988 and my interest in my ancestors and Australian history developed from there.*

The motivations that the ‘records / technology’ category provide can be seen to be separate and distinct from the other motivational groups. It indicates that family history participation became something to do to channel an interest in computers, the internet and technology generally. Even though participants listed computers and the internet as a motivational force it is apparent that technology is primarily a facilitator and a tool rather than a motivator. Clearly some other factor would be the motivator to begin family history research – the technology simply enabled that individual to act on the motivation.

As an explanation for growth in interest in family history, technology related reasons offer a clear causal link in bringing new participants into the activity, although based on the numbers generated from the survey responses, it is a modest contribution. This category also contained responses about television programs including *Roots*, and books that may have inspired an interest in family history. Even though many participants did mention books and television programs they had seen, they were not identified as major motivational factors to begin family history research. *Roots*, it would now seem, has faded from the influential motivational factor it was once attributed to be. Although not overtly stated, it would seem from the results of questions about how long participants have been engaged in family history and when they began, that the Australian Bicentenary may have had an influence.

As the following comments illustrate, technologies and access to records provided an enabling factor to begin family history research.

*My grandfather was a returned Gallipoli veteran and I did not know anything of his war service. On Remembrance Day in the year 2000, I was browsing the internet on our newly acquired computer and*

*stumbled upon his WWI army service number and details on the Australian War Memorial website. I applied for his service dossier and it was the information contained in that file which triggered my interest in genealogy.*

*The increasing availability of records and indexes online enabled me to pursue an interest that I had long wanted to further. ... Now I can do research whenever I have free time and just make occasional visits to repositories.*

*When my Dad passed away I realised I knew very little about his ancestors. His parents were born in Australia but Dad emigrated to England. When I bought a computer I realised it might be possible to find out more via the internet.*

*Found out about the FamilySearch.org website.*

The 'self' category contains the motivation 'a need to belong.' In an earlier survey, a much stronger motivational effect from those matters related to self was detected, and in particular around the need to belong, and to learn about their personal roots.<sup>39</sup> Earlier writers have suggested that this is a significant motivator,<sup>40</sup> however, results from this survey do not support that view. While a modest number of participants did list this aspect, at 3.7% it does not represent the driving motivation previously attributed to it.

Participants shared some thoughts about their journey of personal discovery.

*My sister commented on the 'need to belong'*

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<sup>39</sup> Ronald D. Lambert, *A Study*, p. 150.

<sup>40</sup> See Graeme Davison; John P. Dulong, *Genealogical Groups in a Changing Organizational Environment: From Lineage to Heritage*, Ph.D. dissertation, Wayne State University, Detroit, 1986, Rachel Eskin Fisher, *A Place in History: Genealogy, Jewish Identity, Modernity*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1999; and 'At Home With the Past: Initial Findings From the Survey,' *Australian Cultural History*, No. 22, 2003.

*A fervent desire to know where I felt an emotional attachment to, other than my place of birth. ... I belong there, despite being born in Melbourne.*

*Having seen when a child, THE family bible with my grandparents siblings birthday dates and a large collection of family photos, then experiencing losing the family bible to an “unknown” relative. The sense of loss of access to this unique link to the past engendered the “need” for me to follow some leads ...*

Examining the reasons for continuing family history research reveals that family centred reasons including curiosity remain the dominant force especially when the technology category is considered in its ‘enabling’ light rather than as a prime motivator. The absence of the earlier history related motivations is the strongest difference between original and ongoing motivations.

The self category was a stronger continuing motivation factor amongst participants who cited ‘satisfaction’ elements in their replies. Their responses included succinct statements such as ‘addictive,’ and ‘addiction to research’ as well as reflections participants had describing their enjoyment of solving puzzles:

Other reasons advanced by participants note that individuals have developed professional interests in family history, or have become participants in teaching ‘How to’ courses in family history.

In the main though, the overall themes emerging from the ‘self’ category were that of personal satisfaction, companionship and service.

Motives for engaging in family history have changed over time. As established in Chapter 1 of this thesis, early Australian family historians were interested in the process for hereditary purposes in order to enhance their status in the colonial setting. Some engaged in family history to link themselves to heroic deeds and/or the great events of national history. In later times it has been suggested that Australians

engaged in family history because it became fashionable to find linkage to colonial convicts – seeking a type of reverse status. What has been demonstrated through the responses to this survey is that the reasons for participating in family history have changed from those of earlier times.

More recently, some writers have suggested that the growing interest in matters of history (and family history particularly) has more to do with challenges to cultural identity and social structure in the context of rapid technological change.<sup>41</sup> Participants responding to the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey wrote that they were interested in knowing about who their ancestors were and where they came from. They wanted to know about family stories and they were influenced by close family members. Does this indicate a need for identity and heritage? Does it indicate a need for self-preservation or memorialisation? Certainly the research activity of family historians ‘uncovers’ the past so that it is known and can be shared within the wider family context. The term ‘need’ rather implies a driving power, something that compels an individual to act to discover who his/her ancestors are. In the majority of responses that ‘need’ as such does not seem to be evident. Rather, the curiosity expressed by respondents seems to be a ‘softer’ motivation (albeit capable of growing to a compulsion for some individuals). Similarly, one may expect that in the ‘self’ category of continuing motivations some evidence of self-preservation or memorialisation may be evident. Yet the answers provided by survey respondents did not reveal such evidence.

Did asking respondents to the survey about their plans for the preservation of their research product reveal evidence about memorialisation or self-preservation? It would be expected that, to meet this criteria the individual family historian would be at the centre of the preservation effort.<sup>42</sup> It may be argued that there is evidence of this behaviour in the action of passing their research onto others – be it family members or to archives and societies. Yet that does not appear to be the intent. Rather the ancestor(s) is the focus of the preservation – having *their* story preserved. A comparison may be made with the publication of other history writings. Would the

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<sup>41</sup> Paul Ashton & Paula Hamilton, *History at the Crossroad – Australians and the Past*, Halstead Press, Ultimo, 2010, p. 18.

<sup>42</sup> See Figure 37, p. 138.

author of such a publication be seeking to memorialise themselves this way? Accordingly, the idea that family historians engage in their work as an act of self-preservation or memorialisation seems strained.

The growth in participation in family history research in Australia has been frequently extolled and commented upon. Measuring both the size and rate of growth is a difficult proposition, and can only really be discerned through the various organisations that provide services to the family history research community – and this is an imperfect measure. Figures obtained from various family history societies around Australia show strong growth in membership through the 70s, 80s and 90s with a tapering in the years following the widespread take-up of internet access for private dwellings.<sup>43</sup> Information provided by commercial family history resource organisations reveals a steady growth in subscribers for their services. Conversations with various government departments and archives reveal the same consistent growth in the number of ‘hits’ their on-line services receive, all of which point to an overall growth picture.

Announcements by organisations of new record series becoming available on-line serve to increase the volume of ‘hits’ experienced by providers. Part of this increase is undoubtedly from ‘existing members’ but, as the volume of ‘hits’ settles into a new pattern over time, the conclusion to be drawn is that there are also ‘new members’ contributing to that pattern. Similarly, family history societies continue to report new members joining, confirming the overall growth story.

Certainly the capacity to undertake family history research from the convenience of one’s own home and the increasing availability of records and information on-line has been a tremendous facilitator of family history activity, changing the dynamic of how research is conducted. In and of itself, this does not explain the growth in interest even though growth in participation is distinctly observable as technological capacities have developed.

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<sup>43</sup> Many of these figures were provided on a confidential basis and so were not available for publication. Some societies chose not to advise their membership figures, making a grand total impractical.

Rather, to explain why growth has occurred one must again look at the question of motivation and the factors that encourage those motivations to flower. In the space of 2 to 3 generations, interest in family backgrounds, identities and stories have changed. From times when the attitude was one of ‘don’t ask, don’t tell,’ current attitudes very much reflect a strong measure of curiosity – a desire to know about matters that may have been suppressed in earlier generations. From shame about the individuals and circumstances of convict generations there now exists a definite pride. Yet this curiosity is wider than those with convict ancestry and this pride in the backgrounds, stories and individuals from all walks of life exists.

A further aspect related to growth is the effect of other family historians in the wider family. While survey participants strongly indicated that they were the first generation to research their family history, this varied dramatically with the age of the respondent, with younger age groups indicating that primarily they were following in the footsteps of their parents or older generation. Clearly the interest of a respected elder member of the family is an effective motivator for a proto-genealogist to begin research, with many in this category commenting that they were ‘carrying on’ the work begun by an older generation. Anecdotally, this ‘taking-up’ of the research responsibility will frequently be actioned by several members of the wider family, with ‘cousins’ from disparate places becoming involved.

### Summary

As the preceding discussion demonstrates, there are many influences and motivations that lead a proto-genealogist into engagement with family history. Family tradition and stories are central in this motivating force suggesting that there is a quality in the way that these traditions and stories are shared which is the key – leading some to engage and yet leaving others uninterested. There appears to be little difference in whether the family relationships are close or otherwise. When the tugs of interest or curiosity are aroused, some individuals will respond and begin to enquire. Are these influences predictable? Is it possible to identify who will be provoked into action? The responses received to the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey do not make that answer plain. Rather the selection process would appear to be random,

## **Discussion of Survey Results**

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largely at the whim of circumstance. Certainly exposure to a trigger would appear to be the key component, be it a travel related experience, loss of a close relative, the natural inquisitiveness being titivated, or a find that touches an emotional cord within. Whatever the experience that ignites the curiosity, once begun, participants find the process consuming.

### Conclusion

Few family historians could have envisaged a century ago that their interest would flower to such an extent that today family history is amongst the most popular leisure time pursuits for Australians. Nor could they have foreseen the complex and rapid changes in access to records, technology, cost and social and cultural conditions that have, at once, encouraged, enabled and facilitated such growth. This discussion of the nature and history of family history enables the paradigm shift that has occurred to be better understood against the background of previous practice.

This thesis has used a survey to explore the contemporary characteristics of family historians, the way they engage in their pastime and the motivations that have led them into the pursuit. Those family historians who participated in the survey have revealed a clearer picture of who they are, dispelling the popular misconceptions that have ‘grown up’ around family history. They have also revealed the shift that has occurred in the way family history is undertaken, showing how the research process has quickly adapted to changes, especially technology, indicating that the research process has moved clearly from being facility dependent to being based in the comfort and convenience of home. In the area of why family historians began their research, their reasons for continuing and the influences they have experienced, significant light has been shone on understanding what family history is about.

Yet, in spite of the increased knowledge that the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey has provided, there are aspects that are open to further investigation.

The *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey achieved substantial participation numbers. While it provided information about characteristics, practices and motivations, the numbers participating did not indicate the extent of the pastime’s popularity. Quantifying the popularity would require a different survey approach involving the total population in a census like survey.

The results from the survey demonstrate that the practice still has a pronounced Anglo-Celtic bias, even though it is changing as the diversity of the population increases. The observation made by Kyle that nowadays it is a rare Australian family that has not a wider ancestry than the traditional Anglo-Saxon or Irish appears to be increasingly accurate.<sup>1</sup> However, the question of whether an interest in family history exists and to what extent it does so among non-Anglo-Celtic communities remains open as does the ways that they go about that interest.

Participation in the survey by younger age groups was noticeably low when compared to earlier research. This raises a number of matters worthy of further exploration. Is interest among younger generations actually declining compared to earlier research populations? What does this tell us about matters of heritage and history for this generation? If the interest and engagement remains similar to 1980s populations, how is that engagement facilitated?

While this survey considered the practices of family historians in conducting their research and how they intended that research product to be used, there is scope to examine how that research product is actually used; whether the gathering of information actually translates into the writing of family histories, and how that process has evolved.

While this thesis has added substantially to the understanding about the motivations that encourage individuals to engage in family history as well as the factors that encourage and facilitate participation, the question of curiosity remains an aspect that may be further probed to understand what lies behind such curiosity. The question of identity and belonging may well underlie this curiosity that has been so strongly identified. Further qualitative research should build on the understanding of motivation and help to explain the drivers behind this still growing pastime. The thought expressed by Laurence Overmire that ‘history remembers only the celebrated, genealogy remembers them all,’ seems to resonate with Australian family historians

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<sup>1</sup> Noeline Kyle, *I Want Some Identity, A Profile of Local Family History Group Members, Their Research and Educational Needs*, School of Behavioural and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, 1987, p. 6.

and expresses their sense of the way family history contributes to understanding history.<sup>2</sup>

Under the motivation banner, the idea that family historians are about identity and heritage remains an unresolved question. Why is it that certain individuals are more likely than others to become family historians? The age old question of ‘Who am I?’ may well underlie the stated curiosity suggested by so many of the participants in the *Who Are the Genealogists of Australia?* survey.

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<sup>2</sup> Laurence Overmire, American poet, playwright and family historian, b. 1957. See *The Poetry of Laurence Overmire*, <http://home.comcast.net/~overmirepoetry/site/?page/Genealogy/>

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## Appendix I – On-line Survey Document

### Information for Participants

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Supervisors: A/Prof Janis Wilton, and A/Prof John Scott

This research is being conducted to gain an insight into the growth and nature of family history in Australia as part of an MA (Hons) thesis by Leon Alekna. The following survey will help to develop a picture of who genealogists and family historians are, why they became interested in researching family history, where they conduct their research and what they hope to achieve. The results of this survey will be of interest to those organisations and individuals that provide resources for family history research as well as to genealogists and family historians themselves.

As a practicing family historian or genealogist, you are invited to participate in this survey.

The survey has four sections and will take about 15 minutes to complete. Each succeeding section will be displayed once the preceding section is completed.

There are no known or anticipated risks from participating in this study. Your participation is entirely voluntary, you may decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer, and you can withdraw from the survey at any time.

Any information you provide will be completely confidential. All data gathered will be summarised for publication and it will not be possible for any individual to be identified from the summarised information. The collected data will only be able to be accessed by the researcher and supervisors named above and will be maintained on a password protected database and archived electronically for a period of 5 years after the research has been completed and submitted.

This project has been reviewed and has received ethics clearance from the University of New England Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval No ..... Valid to .....). If you have any comments or concerns from your participation in this study, please contact

Research Services  
University of New England  
Armidale, NSW 2351  
Telephone: (02) 6773 3449 or Facsimile: (02) 6773 3543

**Completion of your survey will show your consent to take part in this project.**

When the research project has been completed and submitted, the results will be published and available for review at the following <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~ausgensurvey/>. It is expected that this will be \_\_\_\_\_ Individual responses will not be published in any form, only aggregated results will be provided.

[Go to the Survey](#)

**Preliminary**

The survey requires a single response from each participant. To ensure that multiple responses are not included, **would** you please provide your email address so that multiple responses can be filtered from the survey results. Your email address will not be provided to any other person, organisation or party. Once the survey results have been tabulated, all email addresses will be deleted from the data.

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for participating in this research project.

Go to Part 1

**Part 1 – Ancestor Background**

1.1 Do you have Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander ancestors?

- a. Yes
- b. No

1.2 Do you have immigrant ancestors?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If you answered ‘No’ please go to Section 2

1.3 If you have immigrant ancestry, when did your first ancestor arrive in Australia?

Approximate Year?

Country of Origin?

.....

1.4 Please indicate which generation of your ancestors first came to Australia and which generation were the most recent arrivals.

	First to Arrive	Last to Arrive
I am an immigrant		
a parent		
a grandparent		
a great grandparent		
a great, great grandparent		
a great, great, great grandparent		
more than 5 generations ago		

1.5 Places from which your immigrant ancestors **originated** (list of countries – tick all that apply)

1 Austria		2 Bosnia		3 Cambodia	
4 Canada		5 Chile		6 China	
7 Croatia		8 Denmark		9 Egypt	
10 England		11 Finland		12 France	
13 Germany		14 Greece		15 Holland	
16 Hungary		17 India		18 Indonesia	
19 Iraq		20 Iran		21 Ireland	
22 Israel		23 Italy		24 Japan	
25 Korea		26 Latvia		27 Lebanon	
28 Macedonia		29 Malaysia		30 Malta	
31 New Zealand		32 Pakistan		33 Philippines	
34 Poland		35 Portugal		36 Russia	
37 Samoa		38 Scotland		39 Serbia	
40 South Africa		41 Spain		42 Sweden	
43 Switzerland		44 Syria		45 Taiwan	
46 Thailand		47 Turkey		48 Ukraine	
49 USA		51 Vietnam		52 Wales	
53 Other – please specify					

**Part 2 – Your Interests**

2.1 About how many years have you been active in pursuing family history / genealogy?

- c. Under 5 years
- d. 6 to 10 years
- e. 11 to 15 years
- f. 16 to 20 years
- g. 21 to 25 years
- h. 26 to 30 years
- i. More than 31 years

2.2 Which of the following best explain how you became interested?

Please number up to 5 reasons from 1 being most important through to 5.

Access to records	Interest in the history of ancestors country of origin
Adoption issues	Internet
A need to belong	Meeting a relative
Anniversary	Military service of ancestor
Anzac Day	Mother's or Father's Interest
Bicentennial	Passing of a close relative
Book	Pride in heritage
Computers	Professional interest
Curiosity about ancestors / origin / stories	Religious doctrine
DNA / Health related	School
Family involvement in local history	TV Program / Series
Grandparents	Word of mouth
Immigration	Other (please specify)
Interested in Australian history	

2.3 Were there any special circumstances that triggered your interest?

Please briefly tell the story.

2.4 Did a particular book help to stimulate your interest?

- a. Yes
- b. No

2.5 If yes, do you remember the title of the book?

---

2.6 Did a particular television program help to stimulate your interest?

- c. Yes
- d. No

2.7 If yes, do you remember the name of the program?

---

2.8 Are the reasons you continue to research family history the same as when you began?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

If YES – go to Question 2.10.

2.9 Which of the following best describes how your current reasons for researching family history?

Please nominate up to 3 **reasons**.

1	As a reason to travel	2	Cheaper access to records
3	Curiosity	4	Desire to know more about ancestors
5	Earlier generations have passed away	6	Easier access to records
7	Expansion of interests	8	Genealogy gives me a sense of competence
9	I enjoy being the family historian	10	I enjoy the company of other genealogists
11	Improved computer technology	12	Information available on Internet
13	Keep my genealogist partner company	14	Larger scale interests
15	Occupy my spare time	16	On-line research is time efficient
17	Researching overseas	18	Serving on an executive or committee of a genealogical group
19	To meet living relatives	20	Writing / publication / sharing
21	Other – please describe		

2.10 Which members of your family, other than yourself, are actively researching family history / genealogy?

- e. Aunt
- f. Brother
- g. Cousin
- h. Father
- i. Grandfather
- j. Grandmother
- k. Mother
- l. Nieces / nephews
- m. Sister
- n. Uncle
- o. None
- p. Others – please specify

If you answered NONE – go to Question 2.13.

2.11 Do you research in cooperation with other members of your family who are actively involved in family history research?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No,

If you answered ‘No’ – please go to Question 2.13

2.12 How do you research with them? (Please describe on a single line for each way you collaborate)

- 1. -----
- 2. -----
- 3. -----
- 4. -----
- 5. -----

2.13 Did someone suggest family history to you as an activity?

1 Yes

2 No

If you answered 'No' please go to Question 2.15

2.14 If yes – who? - Please select up to 3 choices

j. Aunt,

k. Brother

l. Father

m. Friend

n. Grand parent

o. Mother

p. Sister

q. Teacher

r. Uncle

s. Other (please specify)

2.15 Are you the first generation to research your family history?

1 Yes

2 No

2.16 If you answered 'No', who started the research? Please select from the following.

1 Parents	2 Grandparents
3 Great grandparents	4 Older generations
5 Aunts, Uncles	

2.17 Is there a religious reason behind your research effort?

1. No
2. Yes

If you answered 'No' – please go to Part 3

If you answered 'Yes' - Please Describe

.....

.....

.....

**Part 3 – Your Research Practices**

3.1 Where do you conduct your research? Please number the following in the order of the one you use the most (No 1) to the one you use the least (No 6).

- a) archive repository
- b) at home
- c) family history centre
- d) family history society or group
- e) library
- f) on-line
- g) other (please specify) .....

3.2 Why do you use each of these venues? Please select the most applicable answer from the drop down boxes. If you do not use a particular venue – no answer is required.

- a) Archive
- b) At Home
- c) Family History Centre
- d) Family History Society
- e) Library
- f) On-line
- g) Other – please specify

1	Able to work in my own time	6	Easy to get to	11	Specific resources
2	Access to assistance	7	Familiarity	12	Sufficient for my needs
3	Access to records	8	Fellowship	13	Tradition
4	Convenience	9	Meet distant cousins / relatives	14	Other reasons (please specify)
5	Cost	10	Range of resources		

3.3 What percentage of your research is conducted on-line?

- 1 less than 20%
- 2 21 – 40%

- 3 41 – 60%
- 4 61 – 80%
- 5 more than 80%
- 6 none at all

3.4 Are you a member of one or more family history societies or groups?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

If you answered 'Yes' – please go to Question 3.5.

If you answered 'No' – please go to Question 3.6.

3.5 If you are a member of one or more family history societies, could you list which ones? Please list one society on each line

1 -----  
2 -----  
3 -----  
4 -----  
5 -----  
-----

3.5.1 Why did you join? Please use a single line for each reason.

-----  
-----  
-----  
-----

3.5.2 What advantages does membership provide for **you** specifically?

.....  
1  
.....  
2  
.....  
3  
.....

3.5.3 How long have you been a member of the family history society you joined first?

- a) Less than 5 years
- b) 6 to 10 years
- c) 11 to 15 years
- d) 16 to 20 years
- e) 21 to 25 years
- f) 26 to 30 years
- g) More than 31 years

3.6 If you are not currently a member of one or more family history societies, were you previously a member of a family history society or group?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

If you answered 'No' – please go to Question 3.7

3.6.1 Which one(s)?

.....  
1  
.....  
2  
.....  
3  
.....

3.6.2 Why did you cease your membership(s)? Please indicate the three most relevant reasons.

1	No longer relevant	2	Too costly
3	Lost interest	4	Do my research another way
5	Moved away	6	Research interests have changed
7	Other (please specify)		

3.7 Have you attended courses / training in genealogy or family history?

1 Yes

2 No

If you answered 'No' – please go to Question 3.9.

3.8 What **type** of courses were they? Please select all that apply.

- a) Beginners course
- b) Computer or Software course
- c) Field Visit
- d) On-line Research
- e) Special Interest Group
- f) Specialised Research event or course
- g) Use of Archives, Library Tour
- h) Other (please list)

3.9 Have your research practices – that is the WAY you undertake your research – changed since the time you began your family history research?

a. Yes

b. No

If you answered 'No' – please go to Question 3.11.

3.10 If your research practices have changed, which of the following best describes the changes? Please select up to 5 changes.

1	More on-line	2	Work at home
3	Computerised	4	Use of local resources
5	Use of overseas resources	6	Work at family history society
7	Work at family history centre	8	Relatives more willing to share
9	Other (please specify)		

3.11 Have you taken steps to ensure your research survives?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If you answered 'No' – please go to Question 3.13.

3.12 If you have taken steps to ensure your research survives, which of the following best describes those steps? Please select the 3 most applicable.

- a) publish it
  - b) donate to a local society
  - c) donate to private archive
  - d) pass it on to my children
  - e) donate to a public archive
  - f) pass it on to my grand children
  - g) pass it on to brothers and sisters
  - h) donate to a major genealogical society
  - i) donate a copy to a family history society where my ancestors originated
  - j) other – please describe
-

3.13 Do you share your research?

a) Yes

b) No

If you answered 'No' – please go to Part 4.

3.14 With whom do you share? Please nominate up to 3 choices

1	Cousins, Aunts & Uncles	2	Everyone
3	Family History Society	4	Immediate family
5	Local History Society	6	No one
7	Other researchers	8	Other (Please specify)
9	Those who share with me		

3.15 How do you share your research? Please nominate the 3 most common ways you share your research.

1	Books / Publications	2	Computer files
3	Displays	4	Email
5	Individual pages	6	Lectures and lessons
7	Pictures	8	Pedigrees
9	Reunions	10	Responses to requests
11	Stories	12	Web pages / sites
			Other (please specify)

3.16 In what circumstances do you share your research?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Part 4 – Demographics

4.1 Gender

- 1 Male,
- 2 Female

4.2 How old are you?

- 1 less than 20 years
- 2 21 to 40 years
- 3 41 to 60 years
- 4 61 years and older

4.3 What is the highest level education you have completed?

- a) Primary
- b) Secondary
- c) Tertiary

4.4 Marital Status

- a) Single
- b) Married
- c) Widowed

4.5 Occupation / Profession (**if retired, before retirement**) – please select the category most appropriate to you

- a) Accommodation, Café & Restaurants
- b) Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing
- c) Communication Services
- d) Construction
- e) Cultural & Recreational Services
- f) Education
- g) Electricity, Gas & Water Supply
- h) Finance & Insurance
- i) Government Administration & Defence
- j) Health & Community Services
- k) Home Duties

- l) Manufacturing
- m) Mining
- n) Personal & Other Services
- o) Property & Business Services
- p) Retail
- q) Student
- r) Transport & Storage
- s) Wholesale Trade

4.6 Which State or Territory do you reside?

- a) ACT
- b) NSW
- c) NT
- d) Qld
- e) SA
- f) Tas
- g) Vic
- h) WA

4.7 Residence postcode

4.8 Where do you live?

- a) Capital City or Metropolitan Area
- b) Regional Centre
- c) Rural

4.9 Where were you born?

1 born in Australia

2 Born overseas – where? .....

4.10 Religious denomination - please select from the drop down box

1	Anglican	2	Baptist
3	Buddhism	4	Catholic
5	Eastern Orthodox	6	Hinduism
7	Islam	8	Judaism
9	Latter-day Saint	10	Lutheran
11	No Religion	12	Other Christian
13	Other Non Christian	14	Pentecostal
15	Presbyterian & Reformed	16	Uniting Church
17			

The following question is asked to help the researcher understand where promotion of the survey has been successful. Information gathered from this question will enable judgements to be made over the representativeness of the respondents to the survey.

4.11 Where did you first learn of this survey?

<b>Venue</b>	<b>Name / Location</b>
1 Archive	
2 Email list	
3 Family history society / group	
4 LDS Family History Centre	
5 Library	
6 Personal contact	
7 Web site	
8 Other	

Thank you for participating in this survey. As earlier mentioned the results will be published in due course at <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~ausgensurvey/>.

## Appendix II – Notice of Survey for Societies, Archives & Libraries

# Who are the Genealogists of Australia?

As a part of a Masters program at the University of New England, a survey is to be launched later this year to learn about the motivations of genealogists, how they conduct their research, their interests and who they are.

This research will provide the first comprehensive overview of genealogical research in Australia and will assist in promoting and supporting the work of genealogists.

The survey will be conducted on-line through a specifically designed website over a period of four months – from the beginning of August 2009. Your support is needed to ensure that as many Australian genealogists as possible will take the opportunity to participate in this important initiative.

The project website can be found at:

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~ausgensurvey/>

Results will be published on this website after the survey has concluded.

Please make your members aware of the survey through your publications and research rooms.

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## Appendix III – Places of Birth of Ancestors Nominated by Survey Participants

Abemama Atoll	Armenia	Austria
Barbados	Belgium	Bohemia
Bosnia	Brazil	British Guiana
Burma	Cambodia	Canada
Channel Islands	Chile	China
Cornwall	Croatia	Czechoslovakia
Denmark	Ecuador	Egypt
England	Estonia	Fiji
Finland	Flanders	France
French Polynesia	Germany	Gibraltar
Greece	Holland	Hungary
Iceland	India	Indonesia
Iraq	Iran	Ireland
Isle of Man	Israel	Italy
Jamaica	Japan	Kenya
Kiribati	Korea	Latvia
Lebanon	Lichtenstein	Lithuania
Luxemburg	Macedonia	Madeira
Malaysia	Malta	Mauritius
Newfoundland	New Caledonia	New Zealand
Norway	Orkney Islands	Pakistan
Peru	Philippines	Poland
Portugal	Prussia	Russia
Samoa	Scotland	Serbia
Sicily	Sierra Leone	Singapore
South Africa	Spain	Sri Lanka
St Helena	Sweden	Switzerland
Syria	Taiwan	Thailand
Tonga	Turkey	Ukraine
USA	Vietnam	Wales
West Indies	Zimbabwe	