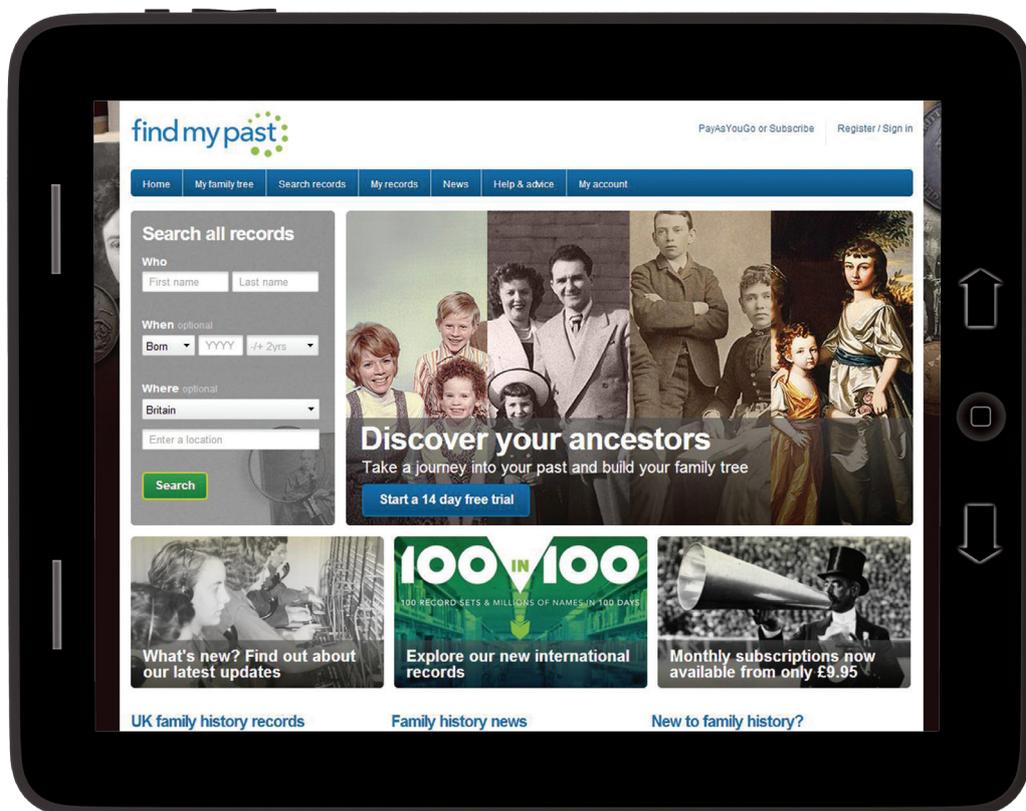


findmypast guide

If you would like some tips on how to use the new findmypast site, we hope that our guide by genealogist **Mary Evans** will help you understand how to search the site most effectively and highlight some of the pointers to watch out for.

Improvements
Obviously continuous improvements are being made on findmypast, which you can keep abreast of best via findmypast.co.uk. See either the feedback forum or the weekly update blogs from findmypast CEO Annelies van den Belt.



You can make a wide-ranging search from the home page. The new search system provides filters for you to apply to narrow down the number of results to a manageable amount.

While I can't pretend that the new findmypast website is intuitive, I believe it is worth spending time experimenting with the search options.

The new site is much more flexible and, while this is one of its strengths, it is part of the problem too, as there are various routes you can take, even for simple birth, marriage and death (BMD) or census searches. You can

end up with long lists of results until you get used to applying filters or choosing a particular option in the first place.

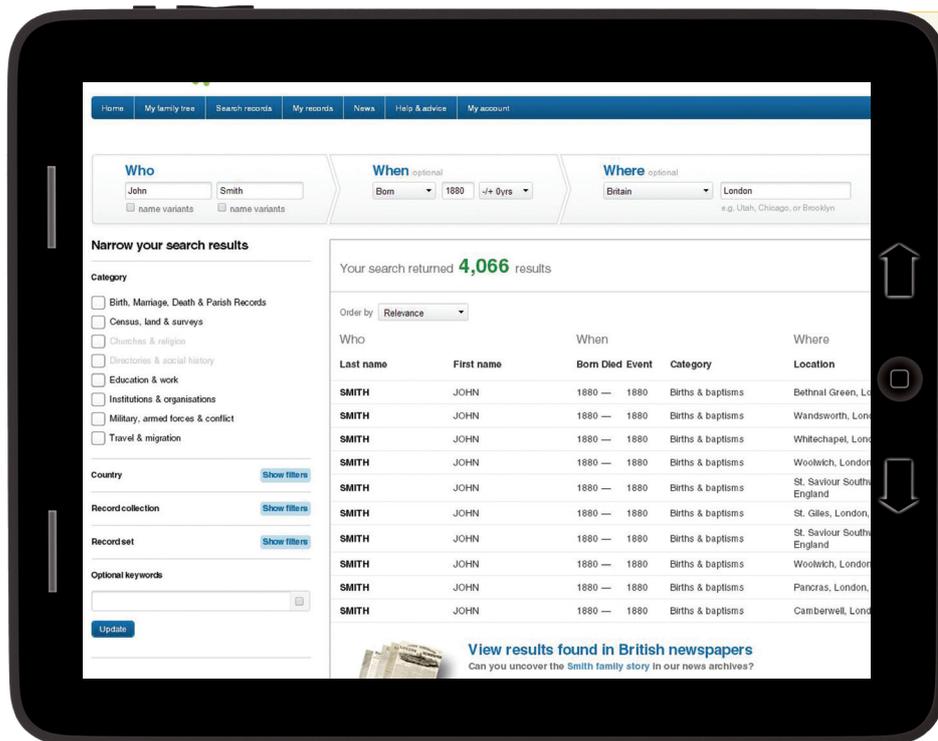
How can you search?

There are three different ways of searching. You can search by using the 'Search all records' option, a specific search from the drop-down list under the 'Search records' tab or the A-Z listing. Different routes might require

different input and can therefore produce different results.

1. Using 'Search all records'

You can do a general search across all the records from either the home page or from the boxes at the top of the 'Search all records' page accessed under the 'Search records' tab. This can be useful with an unusual name but if you use John Smith with no variants, born 1880, place London,



If your ancestor has a common name you are likely to be faced with a very large number of results. You may prefer to start with a more specific search in this instance to make best use of your research time.

you'll get over 4,000 records. This can be whittled down using the filters on the left of the results page but it usually makes sense to opt for a more specific search.

The 'Search all records' page itself offers a tidy list of the record sets available and by clicking on these you can drill down to the sets within each and search from there. It is particularly useful for the Special Collections and also provides a straightforward overview of what is available. Be aware, though, that at the time of writing some links are not working: Births and baptisms, for example, and the British India Office Collection, so you will have to access these using another approach.

Useful things to know

- You can search just one record set, a few sets at the same time or even across all sets. You can search on just one field or you can fill in some or all of the boxes. You no longer have to enter a surname.
- Because the initial search can be wide-ranging you might have to narrow it down. The new site uses a range of drop-down boxes, filters and browse options.
- There is the option to 'Browse' lists such as Counties or Record sets. Tick the box or boxes you want to search then remember to 'Apply filters'. If the list is a long one start typing the word you want in the 'Search filters' box within the panel or in the box on the search form itself and then click on the result you want when it pops up. You don't always need to know the exact form in which FMP has entered it - 'St Mary' will bring up Elland St Mary and Luddenden St Mary and 'India' will bring up the British India Office sets, for example. But only when this is a set in its own right. To find a Shropshire parish you must type in 'Shropshire' to get the Shropshire Collection sets then within these you can start to type in the parish.
- When you tick and apply a filter or click a typed option, it is disconcerting

to find that it doesn't appear in the box but in a box underneath. However, this makes sense: when you have chosen multiple options you see them all neatly displayed instead of disappearing beyond the ends of the typing box.

- When you click on 'Search ...' you sometimes end up with a great many results but there is a useful drop-down box top right above the list. This allows you to change the order of your results. It defaults to Relevance but you can choose, for example, to order by first or last name or age. It defaults to 'ascending' but the box then offers 'descending' for that option.
- When you have the results list you can opt for a transcription or image. You can also select the image from the transcription page. This image can be slow to load and is quite small, though you can enlarge it, and the print icon doesn't always work. To copy and paste into your records and to get a good full-page print click on the 'Download' icon bottom right then 'Open' to get a useable version.
- The Newspapers and periodicals option has a different search page but works in a similar way, although there is not currently a 'download' or 'print' icon.

2. Using the drop-down list

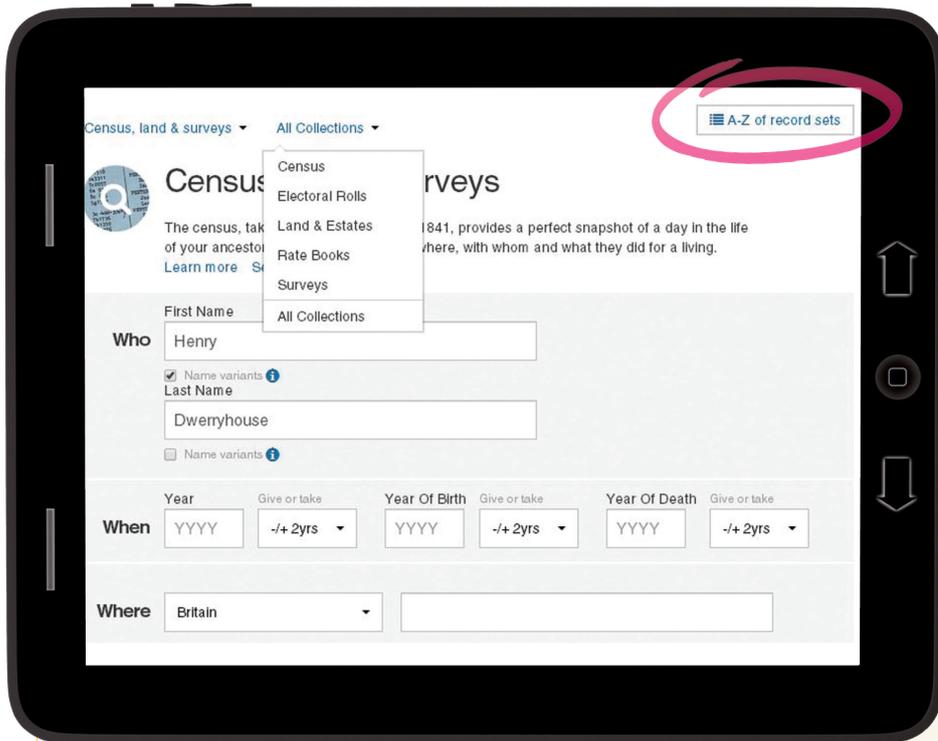
This is the probably the option most of us choose. You select one general set such as Birth, Marriage, Death and Parish records or Census, land and surveys and use the search facilities within the set. But there are twists and turns even within these: see the specific BMD and Census sections below.

3. Using the A-Z list

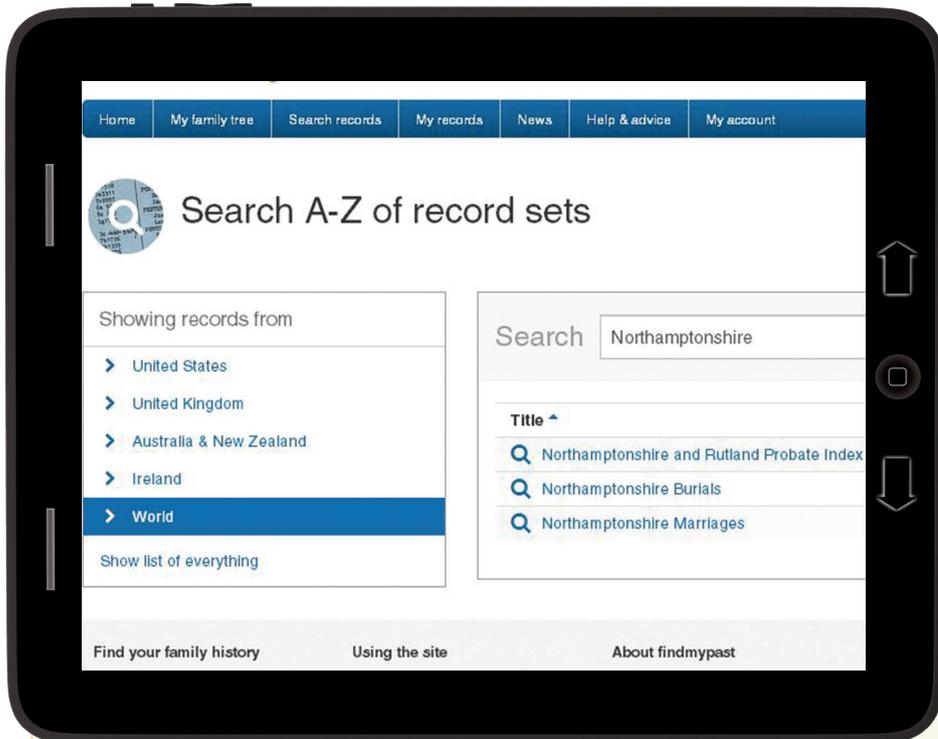
This is exactly what it says: an A-Z list of all the record sets. You can access it either from the 'Search records' tab or from the A-Z link which appears at the top right corner of search pages. This is a good way of getting a search-specific form.

Using the specific Birth, Marriage, Death and Parish Records link

Click on the 'Search records' tab and select Birth, Marriage, Death & Parish Records. This will bring up a general search form which can search across all these records, though strangely there is no box for date of marriage. There is no option on this form for specific information relating to an event. You can choose one or more record collections/sets from the 'Browse' options and this will ensure that you



Searching on a specific set will usually provide you with a customised search form for that set, making the form quicker and clearer to fill in.



An alternative way to display a search specific form is to go to the 'Search records' tab and then choose a record set from the A-Z link (seen upper right of the top screen).

only search these sets but it will not change the basic form.

To improve your options, click on the 'Search records' tab, select Birth, Marriage, Death & Parish Records as before but now go to 'All collections' to the right. When you

choose a specific set from this drop-down list you will get a search form for that set. So, for example, the Births and Baptisms search will include mother's maiden name and the marriage form will include spouse's first name and surname. There will

Some of the problems

- Because the website is now so flexible the search can seem cumbersome and confusing.
- The search form is awkward to use because of the over-large font and wide spacing between lines. You often have to scroll down to complete the form and it's easy to miss often useful links towards the bottom. The results pages have the same problems and you can no longer quickly scan the list.
- If you forget to apply the filters in the more general searches you can end up with a bewildering array of results.
- Although the census household transcription has been amended to a neat one-page spread with household members in household order and the target person included, it still does not include birthplace or occupation.
- Boxes on the search form can be puzzling. What do you put in the 'Where' box in a census search: where born? where living? Some census search forms offer birth place/town/city and it can be difficult to know what to put in and into which box.
- Some of the 'Browse' options are puzzling, especially on the census forms. Browsing birthplace on the 1891 census form offers, among other things, A B Leith, A Foundling and even A Grand WC!!
- 'Wills and Probate' no longer appears in the drop-down list – it's hidden in the Birth, Marriage, Death & Parish Records.
- If you like to 'tab' between boxes you have to remember to tab twice between the first name and the surname as the first tab just takes you to the variants box.
- The address search on some censuses still doesn't seem to work properly.
- Printing from newspapers still seems to be causing problems.
- FMP says you have worldwide records at your fingertips. You can indeed select United States, Australia/ New Zealand, Ireland or World instead of Britain and you will get results but you won't get transcriptions or images unless you have a worldwide subscription.

The filters you've chosen to search on will be listed below the search field. With such flexible search filters it can be hard to keep track of the search variations you've made, but you could consider taking screengrabs to record the ways in which you've searched.

also be an 'Optional Keywords' box, useful perhaps for a parent's name in a parish record? Interestingly, 'All collections' will also bring up a search for Wills and Probate though there is nothing to indicate beforehand that this is where this record set is hidden!

Using the Census, land and surveys link

Again there is more than one option here. From the 'Search records' tab select Census, land and surveys. This will bring up another general form which will search across all these sets. It's also why there is a 'When +/-' box: it doesn't make sense with a census but does with a land record. You can opt for one or more record collections and sets so that you search only these but again this won't change the search form. There are very few census-specific options here but note that you do have that ever-so-useful 'Other household member' box and an 'Optional Keywords' box.

Choosing Census, land and surveys and then using 'All collections' links will give you a more search-specific form for that search.

If you want a very detailed search form for a particular census, right down to folio and page number, then

you need to select the appropriate census from either the A-Z list or the 'Search all records' options. But be aware that you do not get the 'Other household member' option with this, nor an 'Optional Keywords' box which might have served a similar purpose.

Other sections

Some sections such as Churches and Religion have little available while others such as Education and Work have many useful records. All except Newspapers and Periodicals work to the same pattern so look at the various search form options.

Newspapers and periodicals searches need a name and/or a place then you filter using the left-hand options for newspaper and date range. The place/county/newspaper/article filters have useful A-Z links to narrow your options. Clicking on the page or image icon highlights the relevant section of the paper which you can enlarge or make full screen. At the moment, though, printing doesn't seem to be an option.

Conclusion

It's not easy but with patience and practice you really can get the new FMP to work to your advantage.

7 tips to help you search

- 1 Be prepared to spend time getting to know your way round and trying out the various options.
- 2 Before you search, think carefully about the options available. Sometimes a broad search gradually filtered down can be useful but at other times it is better to head straight for a specific search.
- 3 Remember that different search options can offer different input options so be prepared for results to vary accordingly.
- 4 After clicking on 'image', it can be slow to appear. It can actually be quicker to click on the download icon and open the full image.
- 5 If you are trying to work out what to put into the birth place/town/city in a census search, try typing in the place name and seeing whether it comes up as an option. If it is included in the list it will pop up. This can help you in instances where you are unsure of the sort of place details that a census page includes.
- 6 There are masses of record sets from the popular BMD indexes and census records to small ones such as Elmton, Derbyshire records. Take time to browse the A-Z listing so that you're not missing anything. Likewise keep an eye on the News sections so that you don't miss recently uploaded records. Note that some records, which might not have transferred to the new site, should be added in the weeks to come.
- 7 Make use of the 'Optional Keywords' box which appears on some search forms.

About the authors

Mary Evans has been researching her family tree for more than 30 years, contributed to research on TV series 'Who Do You Think You Are?' and Julian Fellowes' 'Great Houses', and is a regular contributor to *FT* and our forum, where she especially enjoys tackling brickwalls.

