



## Family Records Centre

Jointly with the General Register Office (GRO), we run the highly successful Family Records Centre (FRC) in central London. Here, family and social history researchers from around the world gain access to information relating to family history.

The material includes the GRO's indexes of births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales from 1837; and microfilms of the decennial censuses of population from 1841 to 1901 – our most popular documents.

The FRC continues to operate close to capacity, and welcomes over 15,000 visits each month.

Following the successful relaunch of the 1901 census website, a complete set of the microfiche was also made available at the FRC in December 2002, in response to customer feedback. This is in addition to the set already held at Kew.

We replaced the microfilm for the whole of the 1841 census and most of 1851, giving FRC users access to higher quality film.

## Family historians

Public records contain many clues that tell us who we are and where we have come from.

The great majority of people visiting the PRO last year did so out of personal interest – researching the history of their own family, a subject of constant appeal, or social history such as the history of their local community.

Our services for these family historians include:

- The Family Records Centre
- Online services for family historians
- Publications for family historians
- Family history events, visits and conferences.

***"As a computer novice, the staff helping with the 1901 census were most helpful. Many thanks."***

Comment from a visitor, made on a *Your Views Matter to Us* form

***"It is an excellent facility – an immense improvement from when I began on family history in the 1960s."***

Comment from a visitor, made on a customer survey form

The family history database of resources has continued to develop, in particular with the addition of hundreds of digitised trade directories.

The FRC's website was launched in September and is continually being developed and expanded. We are now including online exhibitions on the site.

## Displays

The FRC continued its series of displays featuring famous names from the nineteenth century. Subjects included Lewis Carroll, Charles Darwin and Charles Dickens.

In February, staff and volunteers from the Dickens House Museum visited the FRC, bringing with them a selection of objects including pictures and published works. The event proved

extremely popular, with scores of visitors looking at the items on display and taking the opportunity to try writing with a quill pen such as Dickens used.

Following the success of last year's series of free lectures on family history sources, the FRC hosted another ten talks during the summer, most of which were fully subscribed. A third series is planned for 2003.

*"I have never used the internet so did not think I would understand this talk. To my surprise it was understandable and very edifying. Thank you! This will encourage me to do something which I would not have done otherwise"*

Comment from attendee at a lecture on internet databases, made on a feedback questionnaire

*"Most impressive – an encouragement for others to follow your example with their own family tree"*

Comment from a visitor to the Dickens display, made in the comments book

## Online services for family historians

[www.familyrecords.gov.uk](http://www.familyrecords.gov.uk)

The National Archives runs the family history website [www.familyrecords.gov.uk](http://www.familyrecords.gov.uk) on behalf of a consortium of government and other public sector bodies. The Imperial War Museum, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the Scottish Archive Network (SCAN) and Access to Archives have joined the consortium, alongside existing partners The National Archives, the National Archives of Scotland, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, the General Register Office, the General Register Office for Scotland, Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/ National Library of Wales and the British Library Oriental and India Office Collections.

The site – which has received very good feedback from users – now has a new look, with content divided into topics, guides and partner sections. There is also a dedicated section for the Family Records Centre.

The first in a series of case studies went online in January 2003. It featured documents held by the consortium partners about the life of Isaac Rosenberg, the First World War poet.



A visitor to the Charles Dickens event at the Family Records Centre

*"Fabulous site, really helped me with my English ancestors. Very helpful for beginners and those who have been going for a few years too. I have found some new information and am really excited. Thank you very much."*

*"Wonderfully laid out brilliant guides"*

*"Thank you for your informative and intriguing website. I must confess to having been frequently side-tracked by the superb variety of links."*

*"This is not my first visit but I have not been here many times before. Comparing this to many other sites concerning genealogy, this site is fantastic! I have found it much easier to work out where to find information on my ancestors here, than anywhere else"*

Comments made by website visitors on online questionnaire shortly after re-launch



The 1901 Online Census for England and Wales ([www.census.pro.gov.uk](http://www.census.pro.gov.uk)) is continuing to provide family historians with unique online access to details of their ancestors' lives in 1901. Since its return to the internet in August, over 37 million searches have been undertaken on the site.

The site is being developed and improved in line with customer feedback and the addition of an address search system has been welcomed by users.

*"I am in awe of the technology that allows me to sit at a not very new computer, some 70 miles north from Sydney, NSW Australia, to get a print over cyberspace of a 100 and a bit year old document from a repository some 12,000 miles away on the other side of the world in just a minute or so. Thank you PRO – you have been coping with some brick-bats over this but I think a big bouquet is in order now"*

*"It has been easy to use, quick to search and filter the information required. An excellent system"*

*"I was able to access the website this week and was very impressed. I found all the information I had hoped to find and more. It was worth waiting for"*

*"A wonderful resource"*

Comments made by website visitors on the 1901 online census

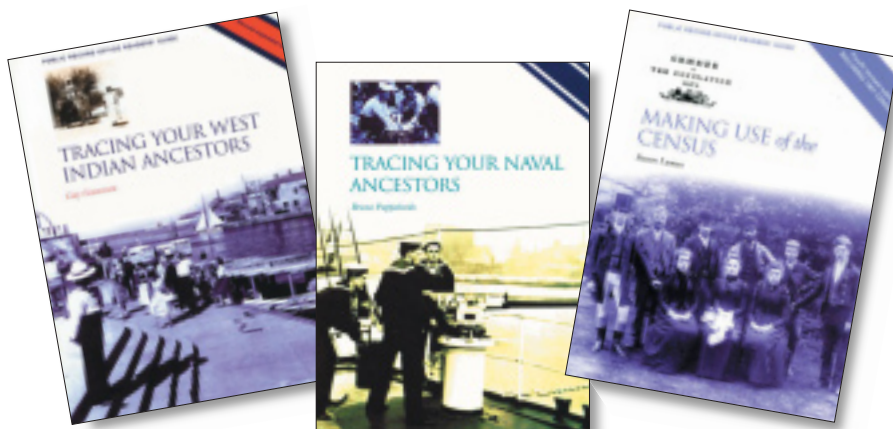
## Publications for family historians

We have continued our tradition of publishing excellent guides for family historians.

A new guide, *Tracing Your Naval Ancestors*, demystifies the wide and diverse range of records and secondary sources which can be used to trace genealogical and career information for those who served from 1660 to modern times.

We also published new editions of two of our most popular titles – *The Family Records Centre: A Users Guide* and *Making Use of the Census*, which was updated to include details of the 1901 census.

Interest in house history has grown considerably in recent years, thanks partly to television programmes such as *House Detectives* and *The 1940s House*. Every property, even a relatively modern one, has a unique story just waiting to be discovered through sources held at The National Archives and elsewhere. Our new *House History Starter*



*Pack* helps readers to plan their research and then record their findings.

*Ancestors*, our bi-monthly family history magazine, published in conjunction with Wharncliffe Publishing, continues to flourish, with subscriber levels growing by over 25% during 2002/03.

This year has seen the introduction of themed issues. An Irish Special included features on Catholic records in Ireland, the Irish Reproductive Loan Fund and a review of the top sites for tracing Irish Ancestry. The Poverty special issue examined the Charles Booth Archive and explored the Old Poor Law records. It also looked at the lives of inmates and administrators of Victorian workhouses in the New Poor Law records and helped readers to locate online resources relating to workhouses and the lives of poor people.

## Family history events, visits and conferences

We have continued our programme of attendance at major family history fairs. As in previous years we have received very positive comments from both organisers and visitors, with invitations to return.

These fairs are a very effective way of getting to meet family historians in the regions, and surveys we run at the fairs provide a regional perspective to compare with the surveys at Kew and the Family Records Centre.



In several cases, staff attending the fairs have also featured on local radio, providing a phone-in question and answer service and generally promoting awareness of The National Archives (PRO) and the records.

A delegation from the PRO travelled to Salt Lake City in May 2002 to visit the Family History Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS). We raised the PRO's profile, exchanged information, networked with the staff and patrons of the Family History Library, and reported back on possible marketing opportunities for us and collaboration with LDS in future years.

During the visit our staff provided four 60 minute talks to Family History Library staff and patrons on *The case: records of English law courts for family historians*; *The American Revolution – an insight into sources held at the Public Record Office, UK*

*Emigration Records to North America*; and *An Introduction to British Isles Genealogy and the Family Records Centre*.

The fourth in our highly successful series of week-long practical Family History Summer Schools attracted over 70 delegates. PRO and FRC staff were the tutors for the four concurrent themes and there was an exhibition of mounted facsimiles of PRO sources. The guest speaker was Dr George Redmonds, whose topic was "Surnames, Genes and Genealogy".

We also ran seven in-depth Family History Induction days at Kew, which included displays of original documents. As ever, they were fully subscribed soon after they were announced.