



# Getting It Right

## *Starting your Genealogical Journey*

### Part 3 - Searching



Artist unknown : Brownings Pass, Arthurs' Pass. [Punch in Canterbury, 1865].

[Ref: PUBL-0098-01-03-24](#). Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

# Contents

Searching .....	3
Deciphering Handwriting (Palaeography) .....	5
Has it been indexed? .....	5
Searching by Subject.....	5
Computer Transcribing .....	6
Search Tips for newspapers.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Glossary .....	7
Where to next?.....	7

This is part 3 of a 4 part series "Getting Started". These notes should be read in conjunction with the accompanying video which you can find on the [NZSG website](#).

## Photo Credits

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Lieven Willemsz. van Copenol, writing master  
1910-0001-1/23-80 Te Papa [collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/36185](https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/36185)  
Amsterdam writing master Lieven Willemsz van Copenol (1588-1667) in his study, working on his calligraphy, with his grandson, Antinious, reading over his shoulder.

A woman shouting into a man's ear-trumpet. Wood engraving.  
Wellcome Library no. 12120i  
[catalogue.wellcomelibrary.org/record=b1160286](https://catalogue.wellcomelibrary.org/record=b1160286)



Reading room of the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.  
Ref: 1/1-003844-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington,  
New Zealand. [/records/22414730](https://records/22414730)

Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

Reading room of the Alexander Turnbull Library, 11 Bowen Street, Wellington, during the 1930s. Photographer unidentified.

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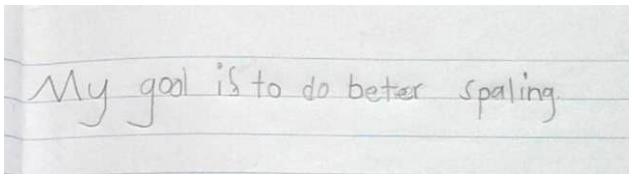


# Searching

The internet has given us unprecedented access to records on our family. We can find original images online. We can order records from the other side of the world. We can find where physical records are held. But finding these records involves searching.

All searches use transcriptions of the original document - this means someone has typed the information from a paper based record into a computer. There are 3 potential issues that can cause problems with the transcription and impede finding your family's records:

## Spelling



The idea of "correct spelling" is a fairly modern one. Do not assume that because a name is spelt differently that it's not your family. There was not always consistent spelling.

Finding the children of George and Elizabeth Cates from East Clandon in Surrey was complicated by the spelling of Cates. Three children turned up in the search, but another 5 were found looking through the parish register images. Surname spellings included: Cates, Cate, Catte and Ceate.

## Writing

The people recording the records often wrote what they heard. Sometimes either party were not locals and their interpretations can be very interesting! This may be especially true for Irish records (as recorded by the English) and for the records of Māori and other non-British people recorded by Pākehā here in New Zealand.

The Maw family from Norfolk have also been recorded as More/Moore/Moor, which is not unexpected. They have also been recorded as Moy.....



## Reading

Handwriting varies from beautiful to the spider crawled out of the inkpot. Those transcribing may not have read it the same way you would. You may find it easier to spot your family name than they did!

BIRTHS IN THE	
CHILD.	
When and where born.	Name of Child, and whether present or not.
1904 June 2	Lorne May
50 Dean Street	Not present

Bad transcription is not limited to ancient documents. This snippet of a birth certificate from 1904 has provided transcription problems.

How would you transcribe the first name of this child?

In the index, she's Lorne.

In real life, she's Lorna.

## Overcoming these problems

- Be aware of the spelling variations of your family's names.
- Always read the search help before you use a website for the first time. It may not be easy to find, but have a look around.
- Most genealogical websites allow spelling variations to be turned on and off. Play with both options.
- Use "fuzzy" searching.
  - [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soundex](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soundex) - Soundex
  - [www.nypl.org/blog/2011/02/22/what-boolean-search](http://www.nypl.org/blog/2011/02/22/what-boolean-search) - Boolean searching
- Be aware that some record sets are on multiple databases which may have:
  - different search options.
  - been transcribed by different people.
- Browse through the records where you can.



## ***Deciphering Handwriting (Palaeography)***

You may need some help deciphering documents. Here are some tutorials:

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/reading-old-documents/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/reading-old-documents/)

## ***Has it been indexed?***

Not all original images available on internet have been indexed. Records with images will fall into one of three categories:

- indexed and linked to the image - to access, click on the link
- indexed but not linked to the image
- not indexed but image available

For these last two, you will need to browse through the records until you find the record you need. If it has been indexed, it will be quicker to find as you will know where in the records to look. Browsing the records can find things that have been mis-transcribed or that you didn't know you didn't know.

## **Searching by Subject**



There a **lots** of records out there which have not been indexed by people's names.

You need to then search by subject. These can include:

- ship name
- occupation
- location
- school
- military unit

These records may not have information about your family member by name.

However, they can provide information about the times and events that shaped their lives. They may also provide inspiration to find other records.



# Computer Transcribing

Many sources, including books and newspapers are "transcribed" by Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software. The computer has transcribed the text and no human eyes have played a part.

This results in two potential problems. Firstly, the quality of the originals will determine which text is transcribed - newspapers are particularly problematic in this area. Secondly, OCR text is not put into fields (such as first name, last name, birth date etc) so you are search ALL the text, not a particular area of it.

For more specific tips, see the *Getting It Right* on [Searching Newspapers](#).

## Summary

- When you search, you are relying on someone (or a computer) having taken information from paper records and put in on a computer.
- These can result in problems from both the original documents and the transcription process.
- Many records have not been indexed, so don't assume you will find everything in a search.
- Searching by subject can find general and specific information relevant to your family.



# Glossary

Terms used in this presentation:

**Images** - in the context of genealogy, these are usually digital scans of original documents such as parish records, wills, census returns, newspapers etc.

**Index** - something that guides you to a record. Examples include the alphabetical listing at the back of a book, or what can be found in an online search.

**Optical Character Recognition (OCR)** - when a document (such as a newspaper) is scanned, the process to read the text by the computer. This converts the printed text to electronic text which is used to index the content of the document.

**Records** - something that provides evidence about the past, kept in writing or some other permanent form.

## Where to next?

You have completed Part 3 of the *Starting Your Genealogical Journey* series of Getting It Right. Part 4 covers [New Zealand Sources](#)

For the other Getting It Right resources, see [genealogy.org.nz/Getting-It-Right/10915/](http://genealogy.org.nz/Getting-It-Right/10915/)

### Getting It Right:

#### - Starting Your Genealogical Journey

1. Where to Start
2. Keeping Organised (includes Computer Software)
- 3. Searching**
4. New Zealand Sources

#### - Effective Research

#### - Sharing Your Family History

