



It's time to talk to yourself, says Mike J. If you want to build a family tree, that's the way to start. But why would you want to build one in the first place?

The words *fun*, *curiosity*, *interest*, *making friends* and *legacy* cropped up as well as *delight* and *satisfaction of discovery* as [Mike enthused about his long-term hobby. There is the frisson of excitement that you might stumble

across an odd dark family secret in the process.

It is easier nowadays as there is more information available. Some is free and some has to be bought, but you are in charge of the process and costs can be controlled by pacing your research.

Getting started is easy. Interview yourself and write it all down. Keep it simple. Record the basic information on a sheet of paper.

- Family name and all forenames.
- Date of birth and Christening
- Place of Birth / Christening.

[There are forms available that will help you to organize your records.] Then interview as many relatives as you can. It quickly becomes clear that there are some ground rules to follow.

Record FACTS. Record no assumptions unless they are clearly recorded as such. Any uncertainties should be flagged with a view to getting verification at a later date.

WORK in a set way. Use a form and ask the same questions.

A lot of progress can be made without a computer, but one certainly helps. It enables searches to be made of on-line sources; it can help keep your records neat and print them out for your record book.

Ask about old family photographs. Just browsing them can stir memories and there is often vital information written on the back.

Mike talked about how the branches on your tree can multiply rapidly. You have 2 parents; 4 grandparents; 8 great-grandparents. That's 16 people. With your spouse's 16 you have 32. The previous generation will have 64 and it's all a bit too much. Before you get that far you will have to decide which line(s) to follow.

Some cannot be followed and others are perhaps more interesting. The process becomes absorbing. If a direct line of forebears can't be followed any further, a cousin's line might prove fruitful. Families have found long-lost branches in other countries and established regular contact.

When census records and church registers are exhausted (by following birth, death and marriage certificates) you can turn to armed forces records or even prison records. There are societies one can join to share the fun and courses to attend to learn more. Reading old records can sometimes be quite difficult yet fascinating as the language and writing styles have changed over time.

Mike is still enjoying the research and yes, he has found the odd family skeleton, previously unknown.