A Brick Wall Chisel – The Cluster Research Project

Ruth Blair, PLCGS
www.familyhistorysearches.com

You have an ancestor and you know he should be found in that particular parish but he is no where to be found in the registers – now what? You have two people with the same name, age and living to adulthood, how do you distinguish the two? Are they related? This is where a cluster research project can be useful. This lecture will describe how to organize and start a cluster research project to help you breakdown a brickwall in your family history. A case study that is based in England will be used to describe the process.

What is Cluster Research?

Cluster research can take on many definitions and has other names. It is basically researching all available information in one or more areas for a particular person/family to prove family connections. It can be taken a step forward and mean a study of one name in a particular town or township and surrounding areas to see if family connections can be found.

Family reconstruction/reconstitution is researching all available parish records to find all the children of a couple and to find their baptism, marriage and burial records.

Each project is different depending on the family and what is needed to get forward with the research.

What is the scope of your project?

- How many counties/parishes/townships will you cover?
- Have you looked at maps to get a better idea of what counties/parishes/townships are in the area of your scope?
- Do you know what records are available for these areas?
- Are you going to stick with one religious denomination?
- Do you have a list of all spelling variations for the surname(s) being researched?
- Are you going to follow female lines?

How are you going to organize the data?

- A new file in your family tree software
- A spreadsheet program
- A word processing program
- Files and paper
- Other

How are you going to record the information?

- Source citations
- Distinguishing people with the same name
- Set up and naming of database fields
- How are you going to deal with negative results, missing records or gaps in records?
- Are you going to carry a computer or notebook to repositories to record the data?
- How will you organize the data on the computer or in the notebook during the collection process?

How to try to distinguish between two people with the same name

- Marry them off
- Kill them off
- Migration
- Names
- Dates
- Occupation
- Residence and land records
- Kinship

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