

[Skip to main content](#)

University links

University links

For staff

- [For Staff](#)
- [Services A-Z](#)
- [Student Education Service](#)

For students

- [Minerva](#)
- [Mobile app](#)
- [For Students](#)

Faculties

- [Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures](#)
- [Faculty of Biological Sciences](#)
- [Faculty of Business](#)
- [Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences](#)
- [Faculty of Environment](#)
- [Faculty of Medicine and Health](#)
- [Faculty of Social Sciences](#)
- [Lifelong Learning Centre](#)
- [Language Centre](#)

Other

- [Staff A-Z](#)
- [Campus map](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Alumni](#)
- [Contacts](#)
- [Library](#)
- [IT](#)
- [VideoLeeds](#)
- [Leeds University Union](#)

Follow us

- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [YouTube](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [Medium](#)
- [Weibo](#)
- [The Conversation](#)
- [RSS news feed](#)

Close quicklinks

Search  Destination

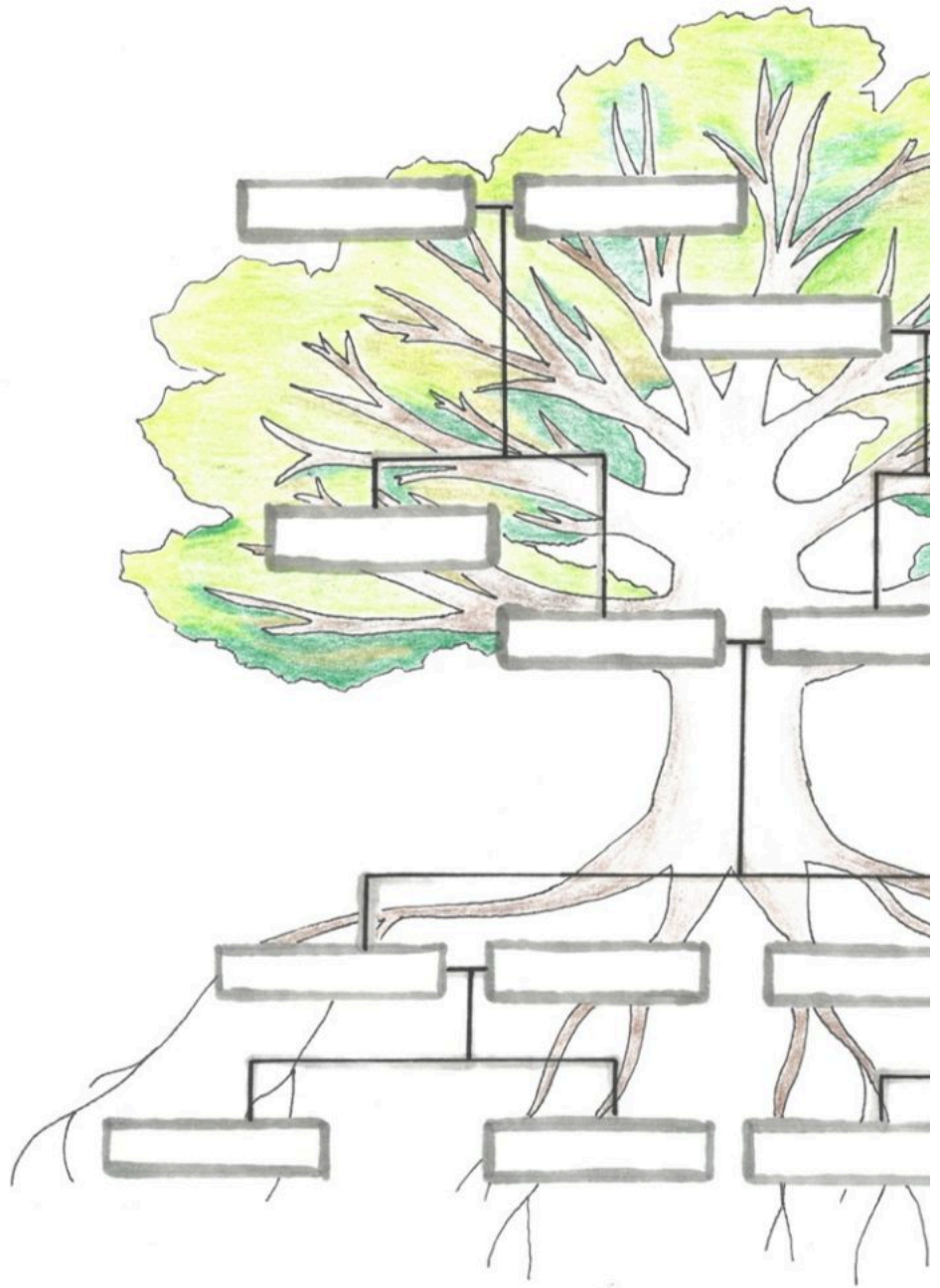
[Living With Dying](#)

- [Home](#)
  - [Home](#)
- [Blog](#)
- [Family Historians](#)
  - [Family Historians](#)
  - [Workshop: Family history and academic history](#)
- [Leeds General Cemetery](#)
- ['Remembrance' Exhibition](#)
  - ['Remembrance' Exhibition](#)
  - [Events Programme](#)
- [The Grief Series](#)

1. [Home](#)
2. [Blog](#)
3. Working Collaboratively with Family Historians

Working Collaboratively with Family Historians

Category



Since May we have been working with a group of Leeds based family historians on the 'living with dying' project. Some of them are already experts, others had done a bit of research before joining the group, and a few are completely new to family history. There are a number reasons why we have built family history research into the project. In the last few years historians have begun to realise the great value of genealogical skills, and there have been some really exciting collaborations between amateur and professional historians. Some of the most successful of these collaborations have taken place in Australia where family history is even more popular than it is in the UK (indeed, August is Australia's annual [Family History Month](#)), and genealogists have been particularly important in demonstrating through their own family trees the prevalence of relationships between pioneers, convicts and Aborigines. In this way they have been able to challenge myths about Australian history.

Tanya Evans - after working with family historians in Australia for her project on illegitimacy between 1750-1850 – wrote that:

"The construction of a family tree, the discovery of manifold secrets and lies, throw into question the solidity not only of the history of family, class relationships and the power relations between men and women but also of the history of nation and empire. Each newly discovered document encourages the historian to add to or question the narrative so far".

You can find Evans' full article [here](#).

In our project we want to think more about the possibilities for collaborative work between academic and family historians. We already have some ideas about what these might be:

- Amateur historians produce detailed and high-quality research and they build up a picture of the life and death of their ancestors. We will be able to use this research to think about a whole range of aspects of death and dying.
- Some of our family historians plan to produce written accounts of their family, and this is of huge value to both historians and local archives. It will give us an insight into family life, how death was experienced in everyday life, and how loved ones have been remembered and commemorated.
- We are also interested in how dying affects the creation and telling of histories and family memories, and how stories are passed down through the generations, which we'll capture through interviews.

- And one of our key themes in this project is considering the relationship between the living and the dead. After all, family history is a way of building an emotional connection between ancestors we may or may not have met. What does that mean to those involved?

## Collaboration

We are already finding that the process of working with our group of family historians is benefiting our research, but for the relationship to be truly collaborative it also needs to be reciprocal. One way that we are supporting the group is by providing training sessions, and so far we have:

- Had a fantastic sessions with Jackie Depelle on ‘discovering family history’. Jackie is a very experienced genealogist and she runs a range of training sessions in Leeds and the surrounding area. You find out more [here](#).
- Ross Horsley gave us an introduction to the [Leeds Central Library, Local and Family History](#) section. Ross and his team are incredibly knowledgeable and helpful, and the Library holds some really useful resources including access to ancestry.com and local newspapers.
- And most recently we have visited the [West Yorkshire Archive](#) at Morley to explore their collections. Vicky Grindrod, one of the fantastic archivists there, showed us a huge range of records, including from parish committees, workhouses, asylums and schools, as well as personal collections of letters, diaries and photographs.

But we don't just want to exchange training opportunities with records of genealogical research. Working collaboratively means that we see our family historians as active participants and partners in the research process. It means that we value their expertise and their interpretations, and that we respect their decisions about the direction their research takes according to what they believe to be interesting or important: we value the story that they want to tell.

We think that as a result of this collaboration we will write better history. At the moment we are keeping an open mind about how that might happen, but we're very much enjoying a sense of collaboration and working together with our group of family historians.

Thank you to Imogen Gerard for the lovely illustration which accompanies this blog.

## Footer navigation

### Site information

- © 2025 University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT
- [Terms and conditions](#)
- [Copyright](#)
- [Accessibility](#)
- [Privacy](#)