



SoG welcomes your research!

Introduction

One of the great strengths of the Society, as members will know, is its document and special collections of original material collected since the Library first opened its doors in 1911. There are a number of major collections donated by amateur and professional genealogists over nearly ninety years, as well as many small donations made by members of their researches. Larger collections of papers, called the special collections are largely be found in the archive area of the Lower Library. Small donations of material, individual GRO certificates or wills for example, have been microfiched since 1992 and then added to the document collection. Earlier deposits can still be found in the Document Collection in the Lower Library. Pedigree rolls and some special collections however are kept behind the scenes, mainly for reasons of space, and readers have to ask staff and volunteers in the Lower Library if they want to see this material.

Pedigree rolls are family trees that have been extracted from the other collections and rolled to preserve them. They vary greatly in size from an A3 sheet of paper to rolls many feet in length.

The document collection is arranged by surname and is thus fairly easy to use. It can however be more difficult to find what you want in the special collections. There is a card index in the Lower Library to families, with more than three generations in the male line, to be found in the special collections and pedigree rolls. This card index also contains a description of each of these collections. Introductory notes to the collections are kept at the Middle and Lower Library enquiry counters and can sometimes be found in the collections themselves. They give more information about the origins and contents of the collection. Staff and volunteers in the Lower Library will happily point people in the right direction.

A growing resource

The Society is keen to build up these collections. The Library and Records Committee recently agreed a new collections policy which said that the Society should collect "original work and papers of genealogists and family historians as well as material primarily of genealogical interest which other archives are not interested in."

Members and readers are asked to consider depositing their research with the Society. Your donation will be a permanent and practical memorial to the hard work and success in tracing your family tree. Doing so will help other researchers for generations to come

Of course family history research is never complete. There's always more to do and other avenues to follow up. But there may come a time when you are unable or unwilling to do more. This is when you might consider giving your research to the Society. Alternatively, many members prefer to give us their work a bit at a time when it has been completed. Eventually, to be blunt, the grim reaper will the Society At the very least you must make it clear to relatives and friends what you wish done with your papers. A form of words to go into a will can be found at the end of the article.

The SoG would obviously much prefer the donation of material without any strings attached. Indeed we ask donors to sign an affidavit transferring ownership and copyright to the Society. This is in order to prevent potential, and costly, misunderstandings at a later stage. Under certain circumstances we will however take collections on loan for an agreed period of time or accept certain restrictions on access by readers.

The SoG cannot however take material which does not meet the collections policy outlined above. We are happy however to give advice on which record office to approach. These collections of course cost the Society money to catalogue and clean and to store. If you are considering depositing your papers we would very much welcome a legacy to help meet these costs. For more information please contact the Librarian Sue Gibbons. Of course we will happily take material with or without any money attached.

Keeping spick and span

Few collections when they arrive at the SoG are ready to go on the shelves. They need work to ensure that they can easily be used by readers and that the documents themselves are preserved in good order. We rely on volunteers to do this work and there is a considerable backlog of collections requiring attention. It would help us if donors could observe the following guidance. But don't worry if your research isn't neat and tidy, we will still take it!

1. Please label notebooks, folders etc with your name and a simple description of the contents, i.e. Simon Fowler 'Belcher notes'
2. Please keep loose notes together in clearly labelled folders, rather than in envelopes or boxes.
3. Do not use sellotape, paper clips or staples to keep paper together. They will ultimately decay or rust to leave a nasty mess which may take a considerable time to repair. Papers should be unfolded and kept flat so far as is possible.
4. We are only interested in original research. In order to maximise precious space obviously duplicate material will be thrown away. Published leaflets, booklets etc will be removed and either added to the Society's holdings or sold.
5. We would appreciate a short introduction to the collection and a list of what is coming to the Society and you will be required to complete a Special Collections Genealogical Deposit Agreement. This can be of considerable help to both the people sorting the material and the users.

If you would like more guidance about keeping your family papers safe and sound see Simon Fowler, "Preserving your family archives" *Family History Monthly* (no 47) August 1999.

Computer generated research

Many genealogists now keep track of their research using one or more of the various family history software packages. From 1 January 2000 the Society will be willing and able to take in your researches on computer disk. We ask potential donors to sign a similar agreement regarding the deposit of disks similar to that for paper collections. As with the traditional collections there are various dos and don'ts which will help us to make your researches quickly available. They include

1. Clearly labelling each disk with your name, the software program and what it contains (including date and geographical location), i.e. Simon Fowler Family Tree Maker v3 Belcher pedigree 1680-1880 Leicestershire.
2. 3.5 inch disks using a PC standard format (i.e. MS-DOS) Word processor files should be in ASCII or Rich Text Formats, Database files in ASCII comma/tab separated format or, for family history software packages, GEDCOM version 4 or higher. Spreadsheet files are not usually accepted.
3. Hard copy text explaining what is on the disk(s), including details of: field names and order, non-standard GEDCOM tags, and an explanation of non-standard codes and abbreviations used.
4. We are unable to take material which has been downloaded from the Internet or other sources. In addition we ask donors to delete the details of anybody still living from databases and the like.

Further details are contained in a article in *Computers in Genealogy Vol.7 No.2*. A simple leaflet is available explaining in more detail how the Society would like the files.

Conclusion

Recently a lady unexpectedly turned up with her Aunt's papers. She said that she was pleased to hand them over "for family history and the Society in particular, had given her relation many happy hours of pleasure" and she wanted to give something in return. The Society's holdings of original material, both paper and electronic, can be extremely useful for the family historian. I hope that you will consider deposited your research now or at some stage in the future. Surely there is no better monument to your family than to be able to help a genealogist in perhaps two or three hundred years.

Appendix

Codicil to a member's will for the purpose of bequests to the Society

I give to the Society of Genealogists of 14 Charterhouse Buildings, Goswell Road, London EC1M 7BA (a charity incorporated with limited liability) absolutely and free of all taxes and duties payable by reason of my death

a) the sum ofpounds (£.....)

b) all those of my genealogical and family history books, papers and other like records, including any that may be in electronic or digital form, together with all my property and intellectual rights therein and the right for the said Society (either itself or in association with any other body or person) to record or reproduce the material in any form whatsoever including forms not yet invented whether for archival or commercial purposes and with full power to transfer all or any thereof to other libraries or repositories or to otherwise dispose of any which are in the unfettered opinion of the said Society already represented in its collections, adequately recorded elsewhere or otherwise unsuitable for retention by the said Society or for study by its members

c) the copyright in all my genealogical writings

Text by Else Churchill Dec 2002 based on an article by Simon Fowler in Genealogists Magazine Vol.26 No.8 Dec 1999

Copyright 2006 Society of Genealogists