

# 10 Tips on How to Get Past that Brick Wall



# Tip 1: Get Yourself Organised.

- By keeping your information organised, it will allow you to spend more time on research and less time looking for things, figuring out where you left off or determining what to do next.
- A simple way to do this is to create a file for all the “brick walls” you come across. This will then allow you to pick up from where you left off by containing all the information you have on that particular “brick wall”.
- Some suggestions for sections within the file could be: Researched Information, Sources, Information to Research, Research Log, Photos and Newspaper Clips.
- These, of course, are just suggestions and can be modified to suit your needs and requirements.

## Tip 2: Determine what your issue is.

- Before you even begin to think about tackling your “Brick Wall”, you need to know what your brick wall is.
- Be clear, precise and specific on what you want to find.
- You can always widen your search at a later date.

## Tip 3: Review what you know.

- Review all your research related to the specific problem you defined in Step 2. You may have overlooked, misinterpreted or simply did not understand something at the time you last saw it.
- Reprint or create all forms and charts for the “brick wall” ancestor.
- By creating and printing forms and charts it should make it easier for you to see where the blanks are, spot any mistakes and refresh your memory on what you have already learned.
- Reintroduce yourself to the problem by re-examining the information you have.
- Start with the descendants. Comb through what you know about children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews till you find the brick-wall ancestor. You never know, you may be able to obtain the information from siblings to the brick wall ancestor.

## Tip 4: Develop yourself a Hypothesis.

- Once you feel comfortable that you have a thorough understanding of what data you have and what it is that you are missing, try and develop a hypothesis of what you think may have happened to your ancestor.
- Then using the following tips and, letting the sourced facts guide you, try and prove your hypothesis true or false.
- If your hypothesis is proven correct by the facts great, you would have most likely found your ancestor. If not, don't give up, re-evaluate all the info you have and come up with a new and improved hypothesis.
- Hopefully, this should help you get to a stage where you find the answer you are looking for.

## Tip 5: Research the whole family and the community they lived in.

- As our ancestors, for the most part, were not hermits, but a part of a larger community, there is a very good chance that they may appear in documents as witnesses, marriage partners into other families, Church baptisms, BDM records or local group/organisation members. If they fell foul of the law, they may also appear in court/legal documentation.
- Check in local Newspapers and Bulletins, Church and Court records along with Wills and Probates as a starting place. You could also check local land records if there is a chance they owned or worked on the land.
- Also look for records of your ancestor's siblings, cousins, friends, neighbors, coworkers and any-one else you may think is relevant and might mention your ancestor.

## Tip 6: Map out the bigger picture.

- It is a well known fact that people rarely stray from their usual paths and/or habits and so by plotting a map of all known ancestor locations and movements you are very likely to see patterns emerging.
- Add to this the historical and social events, the geographical boundaries and the migration patterns of your ancestor's time and you are well on your way to finding clues in areas and locations that you had not considered previously.
- For example. If your ancestor has appeared to have disappeared from a town or parish and you see that many of your ancestors community have migrated or moved somewhere at the time your ancestor lived there, then there is a good chance he/she moved with them. You could then start looking at the destination location for any sign of your missing ancestor.

## Tip 7: Look at the local Social History

- This tip ties in nicely with Tip 5 but takes the principle a little further...
- Try and understand the world that your ancestor belonged to.
- Did they suffer through wars, revolution, civil/religious unrest, famine, industrialisation, mass migrations or protests?
- If you find something like this had happened to your ancestor then there may be documentation that contains info on them. It would just mean determining what that is and where you can access it from.



## Tip 8: Search for Alternate Spellings

- Spelling variations in an ancestors name is extremely common and can occur for a number of reasons such as varying local accents or poor education and writing skills by the person doing the documenting. It could even be as simple as people writing down a name as they hear it.
- To get around this issue, when you do your search, you can use wildcards (symbols used in place of unknown letters) when you think there could be another variation.
- Two common wildcards which come in handy for this purpose are:
  - the asterisk (\*) for zero to five characters and
  - the question mark (?) for only one character.
- For example: if you didn't know whether a name was spelled "Stephenson" or "Stevenson", you could substitute the "ph" or "v" with a asterix (\*). ie "Ste\*enson" when you are conducting the search.

## Tip 9: Create a Timeline

- To try and keep everything fresh and easy to read and understand create your ancestor a individual timeline.
- This timeline could then give you a more complete picture of your ancestors life and, with a bit of luck, point you in a direction they were heading that you were not even aware of.
- This in turn could lead to a whole new area to research which, hopefully, results in the major break through that you were looking for.

## Tip 10: Ask For Help

- If all else fails, you can always ask for help. A fresh pair of eyes may notice clues you didn't, and offer you some new suggestions that you hadn't thought of. They may also be aware of and have access to, resources that you do not or, never knew existed.

Some people you can ask for help from include:

- Other Family Members,
  - Fellow Family Historians,
  - Family History Forums,
  - Family History Societies,
  - Professional Genealogists
- 
- If at all possible, when engaging Family History Societies and Professional Genealogists, find one that lives in the same location and country your ancestor lived in.



*"Please let me know of any other tips you are aware of in the Comments Below"*

[www.warwicksgenealogyservices.com.au](http://www.warwicksgenealogyservices.com.au)

Music by [bensound.com](http://bensound.com)