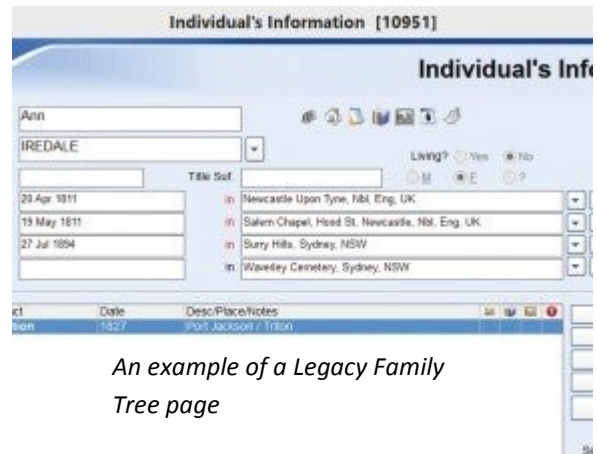# Choosing Family History Software

How to choose the right software for you

Family tree software programs are computer programs, available both online and offline, which are used for creating a family tree. There is a large variety of family tree software programs available. Some of them provide basic family tree templates while others allow you to enter large amounts of family data, including

An example of a Legacy Family Tree page

photos and other documents such as maps, letters, diaries and newspaper articles. The choice of a family tree software program depends on your needs. Therefore, whenever choosing family tree software, it is important that you work out your needs and expectations and then choose the software that best fulfils them.

According to recent surveys, the most popular programs for Windows-based computers are Legacy Family Tree, Family Historian and Family Tree Maker. For those working on a Mac-based system, Family Tree Maker, Reunion and MacFamily Tree are the top three.

First decide *who are your audience*? Just for you, for your family or anyone who might be researching your family in the future. We all have different needs in our research, whether we are researching:

- a direct ancestral line
- direct ancestors plus their side lines
- all the living descendants of a particular couple for a reunion
- all families on-board a specific immigrant ship
- a One Name or One Place Study

As a result we all have different needs for what we need to store and what we need to extract from our work. You will spend a great deal of time keying in information, so make sure you are comfortable with how your chosen program manages your research.

What do you want your software to do?

- Store all of your information for each person
- Produce a family tree/pedigree chart
- Create a DVD that I can share with family
- Create a webpage that includes the family tree and pictures
- Create a family tree book
- Have an app that I can use on my tablet or phone (android or ios)
- Keep my information in the cloud connected to a website that I can search for information/clues - Ancestry, Findmypast, My Heritage and so on.

Another consideration, how much do you want to spend?

Support

- What sort of support do you want for your software?
    - Online
    - Telephone
    - In Person - *rare*
    - Forum where you can ask questions
    - User group that can visit to ask questions and find out more information

Things to look out for

- Do online trees let me add and import or export my data via a gedcom? (*This means that you can export the basic information from one piece of software to another.*)
- Does the online tree let me sync to an offline copy of my tree on my own PC? (*Most important if you don't wish to continue an online subscription but don't want to lose your research as the online tree is no longer accessible*.)
- Is the software compatible with my computer? ie Windows 7, 8, 10 – 32 or 64 bit. Apple Mac OS
- Is the software easily up-graded? (*The major software providers regularly make available updates for their software.)*

Search for website reviews on the internet. Find the most recent reviews that are available. Magazines, websites and forums do new sets of reviews each year.

Look at multiple *independent* reviews to get a good spread of software, some sites only cover a few or are product reviews sponsored by the main family tree software providers.

Check what each software package does against the list of things that you want to do. When you find one that matches your needs, try before you buy. See if there is a free version that you can download and try the software; if you do not like it try another one.

All the major genealogy software providers offer user help and support for beginners, but for most of us nothing beats seeing others use the software. The best way to do this is to join your local family history group or **Genealogy SA** and come along to our *Computer Users Special Interest Group* which meets regularly to discuss and learn more about using software. (*Brochure available for Computer Users Group*).

Useful Links

- Top Ten Reviews 2019 - https://www.toptenreviews.com/best-genealogy-software
- Genealogy Software Reviews - http://www.gensoftreviews.com/
- Wikipedia, Comparison of genealogy software - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_genealogy_software