

## Biographic research for ringers

Ringling has a long and rich history that a significant number of ringers wish to explore. The advice and information presented here is intended to help any ringer (or non-ringer) to find out about the lives and achievements of former ringers, whether for interest, for a family history or as part of a wider project about the history of a band of ringers or a ringing society.

This advice is also available on the Central Council website at: [archive.cccbr.org.uk/services/biographies/advice](http://archive.cccbr.org.uk/services/biographies/advice)

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### Before you start

#### Why do the research

Apart from personal satisfaction, there are three typical reasons for wanting to record the lives of former ringers:

- To preserve their memory
- Because they are a part of a wider story
- To lay down a fuller and more coherent historic record

Typically these reasons align with the interests of:

- Individuals – who knew the subjects, were inspired by them or have some other related interest
- Organisations – ringing societies, tower bands or parishes in which the subject played a significant role
- The ringing community – whose collective history will be of interest to future generations

An example of the latter is the Central Council's biography collection:

[archive.cccbr.org.uk/services/biographies/records/](http://archive.cccbr.org.uk/services/biographies/records/).

Research about ringers may also be of value to the wider (non-ringing) community, since ringing is a significant part of our cultural heritage.

Ringling biographies are most often of deceased subjects – the life story is complete and the subject can neither provide information nor comment on it. Articles about living ringers are sometimes needed, in which case the subject can often provide information, and even if the article is to be a surprise, finding information is likely to be easier – and of course the subject will see (and hopefully approve of) the finished result.

As well as utilitarian reasons for doing research, don't overlook the satisfaction that can be gained by actually doing it. It can be hard work, and at times it can be frustrating when you can't make progress, but it can also be extremely rewarding, especially when you make a breakthrough or uncover something really interesting.

#### When to do the research

When someone has died you may want to preserve his or her memory, but historical information can also make a useful contribution on many other occasions such as centenaries and major anniversaries, where living memories are too short to rely on for information about who was involved and what they did. If you can get a richer picture of the people and events involved, it can turn the bare bones into a really interesting story. The same is true at times of renewal and regeneration, where bringing to life the lives and achievements of our forebears can help people to recall what we have inherited from the past when investing in the future.

You need information ahead of time, and anything that isn't already documented and to hand needs to be researched. Digging up history can be unpredictable. You might strike lucky straight away by tapping into a suitable archive, or you might make little progress before making a useful breakthrough, so it may take quite a while, even with on-line resources and Internet searches. If in doubt, start early.

You don't have to wait for a major anniversary before unearthing your local history though, nor do you have to do it all in one go. There are many occasions where interesting historical stories about ringing or ringers can add interest to ringing newsletters or help to raise the local profile of ringing through Parish Magazines, local papers, village websites, talks and so on. You might think about making a link with your local historians. Do they have any special interests you could relate to? Local History Online: [local-history.co.uk/](http://local-history.co.uk/) lists many history societies.

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## Doing the research

Where to start and how to proceed? A lot depends on how much you already know about the subject(s). If you know a lot, or have access to a lot of relevant sources of information (documents and people) then your main task will be to assemble, check and organise the information into a coherent story. But if you know very little about your subject(s), or there are major gaps in what you know, then a lot more of your effort will be taken up doing the search for information before you can start to assemble it into any kind of story.

If you have an idea of the kind of story that you hope to create, or it is being done for a specific purpose, that will help to steer your research. But try to keep an open mind, especially in the early stages. Too clear a picture may direct you too firmly in a particular direction, and cause you to miss other interesting or more accurate references. It can also tempt you to make the research findings fit the expected story even if they don't. So be open to new ideas. Keep good notes of your sources and don't try to fit too much together until you have an idea of the whole picture.

Doing research is like doing a jigsaw puzzle – building an interconnected network of information to form a complete picture with all the pieces. If you don't have them all then research can be more like a treasure hunt. You start with a few facts that give clues to look for something else or for somewhere else to look, and as you progress you may find new facts and/or new clues for where to look next. Not all leads will prove fruitful, and occasionally you may go down a blind alley. You may sometimes need an inspired guess or a bit of luck to make progress, but overall you should be able to expand the network, gathering a richer picture to put together a more complete story as you do so.

One important thing to remember when joining together disjoint pieces of information is that although they seem to fit, they might not actually go together. You might find information that seems to fill a gap in someone's life, but actually relates to another person, so you need to check that links are credible.

Another thing to bear in mind is that names are sometimes spelled in different ways, or they may be misspelt or mis-transcribed in documents. So you might need to try alternative spellings when doing searches (though that increases the risk of joining together bits of information about different people). Also bear in mind that not all sources are equally reliable, so try to apply a credibility test and/or cross check with other sources, especially on anything that is important or may be contentious.

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## What to look for

You might have a particular theme to guide your search, but in the earlier stages it's worth noting anything that might be relevant or seems interesting. Start by looking for some obvious things and flesh out the details as you go along. There will be aspects of the subject's life of which you were unaware, so as well as your core focus be prepared to explore unexpected avenues too, using what you find as a stepping stone to find out more

There is no set formula. There are standard things you can look for, but the emphasis you put on different aspects will vary with the subject – both the individual and whether the story relates to something wider. Here are some suggestions, but there may be other aspects, and you should be willing to follow any unexpected leads as well.

### Information about people

Look for basic life facts and key life events as a framework around which to hang the rest of the story.

- **Basic identity** – (full name, DoB, DoD, DoM<sup>1</sup>) – You may start with only an initial(s), or one forename with no initials, but the more you can get the more you can narrow the search.
- **Place(s)** – Associating people with places can help separate people with the same name, and also link different aspects of their lives, helping to build a chain of information. For example knowing where they worked may give clues to likely tower and society affiliations, and vice versa.
- **Family** – Family connections help give a rounder picture, and may also provide leads to new information. In particular, if there are other ringers in the subject's family (quite likely) then researching the others might turn up information about your subject that a direct search may miss.
- **Pictures** – Pictures help bring people to life, and can also help to separate people with the same name

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<sup>1</sup> Shorthand for Date of Birth, Date of Death, Date of Marriage.

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who you might find in searches. But be cautious of pictures unless you can authenticate them by cross checking. Pictures found on genealogical websites don't always show the person the purport to.

- **Career(s) and/or hobby(s)** – Ringing is only part of life, even for fanatical ringers. Other things they did can be just as interesting (maybe more interesting) and help to fill in the overall character.
- **Ringing performances** – Peals, quarters, etc, feature strongly in most ringing careers and give a good indication of ringing activity. Because they are well recorded they can also help to provide links to places and people. Quarter peal records can be better than peal records for identifying where people lived. More quarters are rung and more people ring them, and quarters are more likely to be rung in home towers, or at least by local bands, whereas peals are fewer, with ringers often travelling farther to ring them.
- **Ringing roles** – Many ringers have held one or more office in towers or societies (tower captain, ringing master, secretary, president, etc) all of which add to their story and provide potential links to other sources.
- **Ringing related activities** – Many ringers make their mark in an area doing things other than just ringing, for example in composition, teaching, writing or bell restoration.

### Information about organisations

If you are researching the history of a ringing society or tower band you may well have access to minutes and reports that mention members. Societies are likely to have more complete records, and since membership records normally associate members with towers, they may help to identify ringers at a tower that doesn't have its own membership records. Of course you will be interested in more than just people, but they will still be an important part of the story, and with more people, and more lines to follow, reaching a dead end on some of them might be compensated for by more success with others.

### Information about places

Ringers' lives were lived within a community so it can help to find out about what the place was like at the time. Was it urban or rural? What were the dominant occupations? Was this changing? Was it isolated or well connected? Was the population stable, growing or declining? Was it culturally cohesive? Was it affluent? Was life hard or easy? Any of these factors might help to explain what made people the way they were, and to understand the conditions in which ringing took place.

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## Where to look

Where you look will influence what you are likely to find. There are some fairly obvious places, listed below, and it's sensible to start with them. But you might come across other places as you progress, which are also worth exploring. For example if you find out somewhere the subject worked for a period, that could point you towards a local ringing society whose archives could be explored, and whose members might have personal memories. If you discover your subject's employer, then he or she might be mentioned in reports about the company.

### Ringing-specific resources

Systematic information about individuals:

- Biographic records for nearly 1000 deceased ringers, including those who served on the Central Council, are available at: [archive.cccbr.org.uk/services/biographies/records/](http://archive.cccbr.org.uk/services/biographies/records/). Early records contain limited information, but later ones typically have much fuller accounts.
- Many obituaries of ringers have been published in *Bell News* and *The Ringing World*. Those published between 1881 and 2000 are indexed at: [cccbr.org.uk/resources/library/obit-index/](http://cccbr.org.uk/resources/library/obit-index/). There are plans to extend this to 2008.
- Obituaries published in *The Ringing World* from November 2008 until May 2015 are available on-line at: [ringingworld.co.uk/news-articles2/obituaries.html](http://ringingworld.co.uk/news-articles2/obituaries.html).
- Ringers who served on the Central Council, with the dates of their service and the ringing societies that they represented, are listed at: [methods.org.uk/archive/ccmemind.htm](http://methods.org.uk/archive/ccmemind.htm).
- Ringers who served on Central Council committees, with the dates that they served, and whether they

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were chairman/convener are listed at: [methods.org.uk/archive/ctteemem.htm](http://methods.org.uk/archive/ctteemem.htm).

- Rolls of Honour record ringers killed in either of the two World Wars. As well as the books in St Paul's Cathedral, the information is available online at: <https://cccbr.org.uk/resources/roh/>.
- Articles on ringers killed in war published in *The Ringing World* during 2014 – 2018 are available from: <Placeholder>

Sources that may be searched for possible references to individual ringers include:

- Indexes of *The Ringing World*, available from: [ringingworld.co.uk/news-articles2/indexes.html](http://ringingworld.co.uk/news-articles2/indexes.html).
- Back copies of *The Ringing World* since 2001 are online at: <https://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/issues.php>. All issues, and other ringing journals and references to ringing in old newspapers, are available on DVD, see: [cccbr.org.uk/about/workgroups/historical-and-archive/library-publications/](http://cccbr.org.uk/about/workgroups/historical-and-archive/library-publications/).
- Online copies of many of the above from: [cccbr.org.uk/resources/library/online-publications/](http://cccbr.org.uk/resources/library/online-publications/).
- Minutes of Central Council Council meetings, from 1881 onwards at: [archive.cccbr.org.uk/about/minutes/](http://archive.cccbr.org.uk/about/minutes/).
- Many ringing societies have historic records and information about former members. Some have a librarian or archivist, who as well as helping you to access records may have relevant personal knowledge. For contact details see the relevant society website. A quick way to find societies is via the list at: [cccbr.org.uk/about/affiliated-societies/](http://cccbr.org.uk/about/affiliated-societies/).
- Societies that no longer exist may be linked with a current society that inherited their records. There is a list at: This temporary address: <http://jaharrison.me.uk/Temp/RingingSocs.html>, which shows current and former ringing societies with details of when they were formed, changed their name, were absorbed into another society or were wound up.
- The Central Council library has the most comprehensive collection of documents about ringing (more than even the reference libraries). As well as books, it includes: national journals that featured ringing, and the newsletters and annual reports of many ringing societies. For information and access see: [cccbr.org.uk/resources/library/](http://cccbr.org.uk/resources/library/). The catalogue is at: [cccbr.org.uk/resources/library/](http://cccbr.org.uk/resources/library/).
- Records of ringing performances show the sort of things people rang, and who they rang with. There are several online lists, with different pros and cons:
  - Bell Board: [bb.ringingworld.co.uk/](http://bb.ringingworld.co.uk/) has full details of all performances (peals, quarters, etc) in recent years that can be searched and viewed as individual reports.
  - Peals.Co.UK: [peals.co.uk](http://peals.co.uk) has incomplete details of peals since 1985, with references to the corresponding *Ringing World* report (complete and with searching and on-line links for peals from 2005 onwards).
  - Peal Base: [pealbase.co.uk/](http://pealbase.co.uk/) has complete records of all peals since 1948<sup>2</sup>. To use it you need to register – by checking and confirming that its record of the peals you have rung is correct. If you haven't rung any peals then request special access, explaining your need, by contacting: [webmaster@pealbase.co.uk](mailto:webmaster@pealbase.co.uk).
  - Felstead database: [felstead.cccbr.org.uk/](http://felstead.cccbr.org.uk/) doesn't name individual ringers – just place, method & date – but it is the most complete record of peals, and may reveal the existence of peals at significant places, whose details you should be able to track down from other sources, once you know they exist

## Non ringing-specific resources

The following population records should nominally be complete. Records for anyone still alive are not public but the entry states that the details are closed. (See below for how to access them.)

- Census returns (every 10 years: 1841 to 1911). The ages shown are at the census date so subtracting it from the census year only gives the correct birth year for those with a birthday between 1 January and the census date. The 1911 census returns (in the handwriting of the head of house) declared the number of births and number surviving for each mother.
- The 1939 Register was compiled as at September that year and was urgently required for total identity purposes (the 1931 census records had been destroyed by fire). The 1939 Register records name,

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<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing.

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address, occupation, marriage status and actual date of birth for the civilian population of England & Wales. It excludes members of the armed forces stationed in barracks etc, or billeted in homes (including their own) but includes members of armed services on leave, and civilians on military bases at the time.

- Birth records are available up to 2006<sup>3</sup>. For the most recent years the month of registration is shown, otherwise it's the quarter. The actual birth might have happened in the previous quarter. Precise dates may be obtainable elsewhere. From 1912 the maiden name of the Mother is part of the record<sup>4</sup>. The extent of families can be proved by searching with this maiden name.
- Marriage records are available to 2005<sup>5</sup>, with qualifications as above.
- Death records are available to 2006<sup>6</sup>. As with births, these are shown by the month in recent records, but before that were recorded by quarter. The age at death is normally included (but might not be accurate) which gives an indication of birth year if not already known, though with some uncertainty unless the day & month of birth and death are known. From about 1969, the actual date of birth became part of the death record.

There are also partial records of variable completeness:

- County records having searchable files for: baptisms (which show the names of parents and perhaps an exact birth date), banns (often showing the parents of the betrothed), marriages, burials.
- National Schools admissions 1870 – 1914 (often with parent's name, and date of birth).
- England births and baptisms 1538 – 1975 (not too sure of the difference from county records).

Other sources of information include:

- Federation of Family History Societies: [ffhs.org.uk/](http://ffhs.org.uk/) lists around 120 family history societies in England and many elsewhere (rest of UK and overseas), as well as some single name societies.
- British Newspapers on line: [britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/](http://britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/) has well over 20 million pages (and growing) from British newspapers as far back as the 1700s.

## Access to public resources

Many sources of information are freely available on the Web, but others have various access constraints. For example searching the British Newspaper Archive is free but viewing the newspapers is a paid-for service. National records (including census, births, marriages & deaths, and some military records) are available online.

Some records are free to access, for example births, marriages and deaths via:

- Free BMD: [freebmd.org.uk/](http://freebmd.org.uk/)

Most resources are available via one of the family history services, which provide minimal information free, with access to the detail requiring either a subscription or the purchase of 'pay as you go' credits:

- Genes Reunited: <sup>7</sup>[www.genesreunited.co.uk/](http://www.genesreunited.co.uk/)
- Find My Past: [findmypast.co.uk/](http://findmypast.co.uk/)
- Ancestry: [ancestry.co.uk/](http://ancestry.co.uk/)
- My Heritage: [myheritage.com/](http://myheritage.com/)
- Family Search: [familysearch.org/](http://familysearch.org/)

Some local public libraries allow free access to some services that would otherwise be paid for.

Some 'academic' resources have public lists of documents but restrict access to subscribers. Most academic institutions subscribe to these resources so their staff and students can have access. If you need one of these it would be worth thinking whether you know anyone who works or studies in academia.

You can find other genealogical resources, for example via:

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<sup>3</sup> At the time of writing.

<sup>4</sup> It is occasionally included in earlier records as well.

<sup>5</sup> At the time of writing.

<sup>6</sup> At the time of writing.

<sup>7</sup> The 'www' in this address is needed, unlike most websites where it is optional.

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- Online Genealogical Index: [ogindex.org/](http://ogindex.org/)
  - Forebears: [forebears.co.uk/](http://forebears.co.uk/)

There are several directories of resources, including:

- Family Tree Magazine's List of the 25 Best Genealogy Websites for Beginners: [familytreemagazine.com/premium/25-best-genealogy-websites-for-beginners/](http://familytreemagazine.com/premium/25-best-genealogy-websites-for-beginners/)
- Family History Daily's list of 50 Free Genealogy Sites: [familyhistorydaily.com/genealogy-resources/50-free-genealogy-sites/](http://familyhistorydaily.com/genealogy-resources/50-free-genealogy-sites/)
- GEN UKI: [genuki.org.uk/big/eng](http://genuki.org.uk/big/eng)
- Cyndi's List: [cyndislist.com/](http://cyndislist.com/)
- RootsWeb: [home.rootsweb.com/sites/siteDirectory](http://home.rootsweb.com/sites/siteDirectory)

Another possibly useful website is:

- Gravestone Photos: [gravestonephotos.com/](http://gravestonephotos.com/)

## Hard copy

Despite seemingly limitless information available on the Web, a lot is not. Many documents and records were created before the Web became ubiquitous, and although some of them have since been digitised and put online, many only exist as hard copy and/or microfilm in libraries and record offices. Most of which have an on-line catalogue of the documents that they hold so you can check what is available before planning a visit.

There are lists of record offices on several websites:

- The Photographers Resource – [photographers-resource.co.uk/ref/History/Record\\_offices.htm](http://photographers-resource.co.uk/ref/History/Record_offices.htm)
- National Archives - [discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/find-an-archive](http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/find-an-archive)

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## Search techniques

### Searching physical archives

Visually searching documents (and especially microfilms) is tiring on the eyes, so give your eyes a rest occasionally. It is also easy to miss things, and there is a trade-off between scanning rapidly to cover more ground and looking more carefully at every heading and/or through every paragraph. If you know what you are looking for it will help. For example if you are looking for the record of an event in a journal, and you know when it happened then if you miss it on the first scan you may go back and try again, which you would not otherwise do if you are just looking for 'any mention of someone or something' without knowing when or if there is any report. Even if you don't know for sure that a report or article appeared in a publication, you may be able to reduce the search task by getting to know whereabouts in each edition such things normally appear, and focus on that part.

### Searching scanned documents

Increasingly, historic documents are being scanned to produce an image that can be viewed digitally, and in many cases (but not all) the image has also been analysed using OCR (Optical Character Recognition) to generate a digital text file that can be searched electronically for words or phrases. You don't normally see the converted text because it is hidden behind the scanned image of the page. But when you appear to be selecting and copying what you can see, you are actually selecting and copying the corresponding text that is hidden behind the image.

When you search the document digitally you get a match if (and only if) the text you are seeking is in the hidden converted text. If the OCR is perfect, then the hidden text is the same as the image that you see. For the vast majority of scanned words it is – but OCR isn't perfect and occasional characters can be misinterpreted. If a misinterpreted character is in a word you are looking for then the search won't find it because it won't match.

Some real examples are:

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ful! (full), o f (of), cau.se (cause), N e w o a s t l e (Newcastle), WoonPToCK RO'D (Woodstock Road), Sp.ce (Spice), MINEHIAD, 80MERSET (MINEHEAD SOMERSET), practical!y (practically).

Words or phrases that span a line break appear as separate parts that might not be recognised together, especially in a multi-column document if the OCR text isn't structured in corresponding blocks.

The OCR result can be proof read and corrected, but that is expensive so not usually done. OCR software has improved over the years – more recently scanned documents should have far fewer (but not zero) errors.

OCR errors undermine the reliability of digital searches. Finding something means it is there, but not finding it doesn't mean it's not there. It could be there but with one or more corrupted characters.

To improve the chances of a hit you can try using a partial search term, and then visually scan the results to eliminate any that aren't relevant. For example if you are looking for 'Williamson' you could try searching for 'Willia' or 'iamso'. The first will also find 'William', 'Williams' and McWilliam but the latter will probably only find 'Williamson'.

A (real) example of using this technique was searching for Minehead in one pre-war year of *The Ringing World*. The search term 'minehead' gave 28 hits but the search term 'mineh' gave 47 hits (including several 'MINEHIAD', 'MINEHIAO', 'MINEHtAO' and 'MINEHiA').

Modern documents that have been electronically produced don't rely on OCR because the text is normally embedded in the original document. That makes searching more reliable, so (give or take any spelling mistakes) you should be able to find every instance of what you are looking for.

## Searching the Web

There is a huge amount of information on the web – the problem is finding what you want. There are three basic ways to find things:

- If you know the website you need – go straight to it. For example if you are looking for ringers killed in war, go to: [cccbr.org.uk/resources/roh/](http://cccbr.org.uk/resources/roh/).
- If you know where to look but don't know the website – use a directory page, for example: There are links to ringing society websites at: [cccbr.org.uk/about/affiliated-societies/](http://cccbr.org.uk/about/affiliated-societies/) (and for CC affiliated societies details of representatives who may be able to help you). There are links to many other ringing related websites at: [ringing.info/](http://ringing.info/). There are links to family history societies at: [ffhs.org.uk/](http://ffhs.org.uk/).
- If you don't know where to look use a search engine, which gives access to a very big index developed by software that 'crawls' round the web following links between pages and websites.

There are many search engines. Googlesearch is most widely used (often pre-installed on computers) but there are many others. None of them has a complete index of all that exists and they use different rules to sort the results, so the same search may produce different lists of possible hits. They also differ slightly in the tools for you to filter results, and in how much information they record about you and what you are doing.

There is a list of search engines at: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_search\\_engines](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_search_engines).

There is a comparison of many of them at: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison\\_of\\_web\\_search\\_engines](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_web_search_engines).

Whichever search engine you use, how you use it will have a big influence on how quickly you find what you want, or whether you find it at all. Advice on basic web search techniques is available from several places on the Web, for example: [techrepublic.com/blog/10-things/10-tips-for-smarter-more-efficient-internet-searching/](http://techrepublic.com/blog/10-things/10-tips-for-smarter-more-efficient-internet-searching/) or: [universalclass.com/articles/writing/research-skills/how-to-use-internet-search-engines-for-research.htm](http://universalclass.com/articles/writing/research-skills/how-to-use-internet-search-engines-for-research.htm).

One thing to bear in mind is that while the web was originally developed for information sharing between researchers it has since been swamped by commercial interests and mass market usage. Search engines have adapted to this, so what appears high in your search results will be heavily biased towards what other people are interested in and things people are trying to sell. To compensate for that bias you may need a bit of cunning – unless you fancy looking through hundreds or thousands of hits rather than a few dozen.

Success when looking for a person's name depends on how common the name is – some names give millions of hits. Unusual ones give fewer, but even then you may still need a bit of effort to find the right person.

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**Example 1** – Suppose you knew nothing about Hezekiah Briggs other than his name.

Searching for [ hezekiah briggs ] finds around 160,000 results, which you can cut down by adding quotes to get the exact phrase [ "hezekiah briggs" ] but that still gives over 200 results – too many to examine. Limiting the search to the UK brings it down to around 20, which is few enough to scan by eye and go to any that look relevant. In this example several references do in fact relate to the early 19th century Bingley ringer.

If you already knew the Bingley connection then you could have included that in the search. [ "hezekiah briggs" bingley ] gives around 130 hits, and limiting it to UK gives about 10, all of which relate to him. If you didn't already know the Bingley connection then finding it gives you another useful search term.

**Example 2** – Suppose you were looking for John Smith. That would be a lot harder since [ "john smith" ] gives over 20 million hits (about 4 million in UK). You could reduce that by including some ringing related words in the search. For example a UK only search for [ "john smith" bell ringer ] gives around 250,000 and [ "john smith" bell tower ] gives around 50,000.

You might spot references to John Smith clockmakers of Derby, and assuming you don't want them you could eliminate them by using the '-' prefix. [ "john smith" bell tower -clock ] gives around 30,000 hits and [ "john smith" bell ringer tower -clock ] gives around 8,000 hits – still too many to look at more than a few. It may be worth scanning the first few pages of hits, but unless you are lucky you will need more information.

Going a bit further, [ "john smith" "bell ringer" tower -clock ] brings it down to 300, which is just about manageable, but again it would eliminate a lot of ringing pages that don't include the exact phrase "bell ringer".

Using exclusions in a search can be particularly useful if someone famous like a footballer, singer or politician, has the same name as the person you are interested in. You could try excluding words like 'football' or 'singer', but you will probably need to exclude several words to get a useful reduction. It's best to find these by trial and error, keeping the ones that cut the number of hits by a significant amount. Look for a word that appears in several of the unwanted hits. For a singer it might be the name of the group that she sings with. Search again with that word excluded and if she still appears lots of times see if there is another frequent word, maybe the name of a song, that you could also exclude. Repeat the process as long as you can get a useful improvement at each step. When you have suppressed one person you may find another dominates, say a business woman, so repeat the process excluding words that appear a lot with her, like the name of her company or its products.

There is no guarantee that using exclusions will get rid of enough unwanted references, but it should remove a lot of them and increase the chance of finding something useful. But remember that exclusions may remove wanted pages as well. In the example above, excluding 'clock' removes three quarters of the hits, but some of those will not refer to the clock-maker, they might be ringing pages that happen to mention a clock.

You can use place names as filters. That has pros and cons. It increases the chance of finding references to what the subject did while there but makes it less likely to find anything about what he or she did elsewhere. Some ringers spend parts of their lives in different places, and unless you are sure you know them all it can be useful to do some searches without place names, especially after you have found out something else, like a middle name, a spouse's name or some other activity. If that produces any references to a place that you didn't already know about then you can do a more targeted search using that place name.

Bear in mind too that compound place names are often abbreviated, for example Kirkby in Ashfield is often just called Kirkby (but so are several other Kirkbys that are nowhere near it). Upper and Lower Clapton (which are near each other) are commonly just called Clapton. In this case, a search for [ clapton ] will be swamped by references to Eric Clapton. A search for [ "Lower Clapton" ] would avoid those but would also miss many genuine references to Clapton. So using an exclusion [ clapton -eric ] is better in this case.

Bear in mind also that using ringing terms to narrow your searches may help to find ringing related information but will also reduce the chances of finding out about the subject's professional life or other leisure activities, since pages about them are unlikely to contain ringing terms.

Overall, remember that Internet searching is an art. The tools are simple but getting the best results out of them requires quite a bit of skill – something you learn by experience. Each case is different. You might be lucky but more usually you will need patience and the willingness to attack the problem from several angles.



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## Exploiting the results

Having done the research you can draw on it in many ways to get the most benefit from your effort. That benefit may be for the organisation on whose behalf you did the work, for ringing in general, for the wider community outside ringing or for your own satisfaction. Here are some ways you could exploit your work:

- **Write an article(s)** – Magazines, newspapers and newsletters often include articles (from a few hundred to a few thousand words) ideally with pictures. Some local papers run articles on local history. Quite a few magazines have a heritage interest. Newsletters (ringing, local history, family history, ...) usually welcome material of interest to their members. The article must of course fit in with the publication's remit, audience and style, so read some other articles to get a feel for what it is.
- **Write a leaflet or booklet** – Booklets and leaflets on topics of local interest are often available in churches, information centres and visitor centres. They take a bit more effort to produce but they have a longer useful life than an article.
- **Give a talk(s)** – Lots of organisations invite speakers to their meetings. There is guidance on how to find them at: [archive.cccbr.org.uk/services/pr/advice/targets/](http://archive.cccbr.org.uk/services/pr/advice/targets/). Some groups have a specific interest in history but many welcome talks on a wide variety of topics. Typically talks requested are between 45 minutes and an hour, but they may be shorter or longer. If you give a talk on ringing history to non-ringers, remember to preface it with a basic introduction to ringing itself.
- **Write a book** – This is a major undertaking, but may be worth considering if you generate a large body of information. Books typically range from a few dozen to a few hundred pages. Finding a publisher for a specialist book can be difficult but worth exploring. Publishers specialising in ringing books are CC Publications: [cccbr.org.uk/about/workgroups/communications-and-marketing/](http://cccbr.org.uk/about/workgroups/communications-and-marketing/) and The Whiting Society: [whittingsociety.org.uk/](http://whittingsociety.org.uk/). Self publication is an option but with a significant up-front cost (much lower than it used to be). You may be able to get a grant towards the cost, for example from a local civic society. There are several 'Print on Demand' services and/or e-book publishing, which can reduce the initial investment if you do not want to risk a large print run. You might also like to consider professional support for things like indexing and proofreading, see: [indexers.org.uk/sfep.org.uk/](http://indexers.org.uk/sfep.org.uk/)
- **Write a paper** – If the results of your research include new insights whose significance goes beyond the story that you have uncovered, there might be an opportunity to publish it as a paper in a journal – if you can find a suitable one. Many counties have history societies that publish a regular journal. Societies are listed by Local History Online: [local-history.co.uk/](http://local-history.co.uk/).
- **Produce a poster or exhibit** – Posters are a convenient way to 'put a story on a wall'. They can add interest at tower or church open days – around a hall or in the foyer at meetings or conferences. Professional-looking pop-up banners offer a relatively cheap way to produce a large poster that can be stored and re-used. Ringing events are obvious targets but there are many other local events where your story might be of interest to participants.
- **Put it on the Web** – Whether or not you use any of the paper based ways to make your work available, putting it on the web can provide wider accessibility. If you have already produced a booklet or poster, the simplest approach is to make it available for download as a PDF (which can be printed out). The alternative for reading on screen is to use the material to create a web page (or a set of related web pages), which is ideal for browsing, especially if you include links between different parts, and maybe to external sources. Either way you need a website to host it. You may not have your own website, but the organisation for which you did the work probably does. Make sure that the webmaster puts it somewhere that will be easy to find, with appropriate links to/from other pages, and entries in relevant indexes.
- **Provide information** – You may find that once you are known to have done some historical research, other people come to you with questions about people or events. Sharing what you know with them may lead on to something else of interest, and can be satisfying