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‘Putting the flesh on the bones’: Evidencing and imagining genealogical connections with family historians in Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear.

Martyn J. Hurst

### **Abstract**

This thesis is concerned with the exploration of genealogical connections by family historians in Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear, and what this tells us about contemporary reckonings of kinship and relatedness. After situating my research within the wider context of kinship studies in anthropology I demonstrate that the digital and genetic technologies play a pivotal role in the ways that genealogical connections are both evidenced and imagined. Ethnographic engagement with online historic census records and commercial genetic ancestry tracing products reveals the integration of hard fact on the one hand and narrative elaboration on the other as part of family history research. It is then shown that in order to facilitate and add depth to their genealogical explorations family historians rely heavily upon personal reminiscences that are entwined within folk idioms of inheritance. Key to this is the convergence of biological and social explanations of connectedness that manifest as part of the analysis of surnames and in the application and use of selected genetic kin terms. It is demonstrated that the establishment and maintenance of contemporary social interaction constitutes a key feature of genealogical research. Moreover, by focusing on the transmission of genealogical knowledge it is also shown that imaginings of the future remain significant to the thoughts and actions of the contemporary family historian. The fundamental findings of this thesis thus demonstrate that through the active evidencing and imagining of genealogical connections family historians are developing novel ways of understanding how it is that they are connected to one another, the past, and the future.

‘Putting the flesh on the bones’: Evidencing and imagining  
genealogical connections with family historians in  
Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Anthropology

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## List of Abbreviations

BMD	Birth, Marriage, and Death
BFHG	Belmont Family History Group
BGRG	Blyth Genealogy Resource Group
NDFHS	Northumberland and Durham Family History Society
NDOML	Northumberland and Durham Online Family History Mailing List
NTLSC	North Tyneside Local Studies Centre
mtDNA	Mitochondrial DNA
MRCA	Most Recent Common Ancestor
NRY	Non-recombining portion of the Y chromosome
PCA	Paternal Common Ancestor
SNP	Single Nucleotide Polymorphism
STR	Short Tandem Repeat
YCC	Y Chromosome Consortium
yDNA	Y Chromosomal DNA



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For Taylor, Chloe, Ava, and the next generation.

## Chapter 1. Introduction

*And then suddenly there was a frenzy of joy in his soul, and he had to stop for a minute to catch his breath. The past, he realized, was linked to the present by an unbroken chain of events, which flowed from one into another. And it seemed to him that he had just seen both ends of this chain; he had touched one end and the other had moved (Chekov 1894).*

### 1.1 Family History Research

‘Are you back again?’ This enquiry was aimed at me as Arthur made his way towards the main reception desk at the Northumberland and Durham Family History Society (NDFHS) resource centre whilst I sat trawling through ancestral records on microfiche in an adjoining room. I nodded and replied ‘yeah, still looking thanks’. Arthur smiled knowingly and continued on his way; once one has made an initial commitment to exploring their genealogy it is rarely a one-time occurrence. Following this exchange a lady sitting at a nearby table introduced herself as Sarah and asked me: ‘are you hooked yet?’ In reply I explained that I was ‘just getting started’ by investigating my paternal lineage as part of a wider anthropological study of family historians, genealogical research methods, and kinship. Sarah offered her assistance as a potential research participant and went on to say that ‘it [family history research] can be very addictive’ when discovering ‘new’ revelations about one’s past. As an example Sarah began to explain how, when researching her husband’s family history, she had ‘uncovered evidence’ that pointed towards the existence of two aunts, previously unknown to her husband and now sadly deceased. She described how her husband had been ‘extremely surprised’ by this revelation as it ‘contradicted what he had always been told about his family’. In this instance, the great surprise that arose following Sarah’s revelations about ‘new’ genealogical connections had forced her husband to reconsider that which he had been told about his family by known relations in the light of what he was now learning through his wife’s research endeavours. This had not dissuaded either Sarah or her husband from wanting to continue, but rather appeared to have encouraged further research in the hope of locating other previously unknown genealogical connections. Here, the

commitment to conducting family history research thus also reveals a commitment towards exploring kinship: how it works and what it means.

With strict commitment comes strict method and for the family historians that I interacted with there was an established ‘proper way’ of conducting genealogical research. This included making the best possible use of available resources and ‘double-checking’ all evidence. ‘Don’t just believe what someone else tells you, find it out for yourself’ was said to me in the early stages of my research and became a sort of mantra that was repeated to me across differing field-site locations. The implicit message here was that family history research is a serious practice that when done in the ‘proper way’ is able to yield significant and meaningful results. After all, family history research both answers and addresses ‘quite a lot of questions’ I was told, with the types of questions being posed largely concerning connections of blood and affinity between people both living and dead. Far from representing a purely narcissistic pursuit (Segalen and Michelat, 1991) that incorporates aspects of genetic ancestry testing as ‘largely play’ (Pálsson, 2012: S193), family history research, as a meaningful practice, falls into the category of Stebbins’ (1980, 1982, 2001) ‘serious leisure’ concept (Fulton 2009) in that it requires a strong commitment to be made in order for valuable personal insight to be gained.

The recent popularity and growth of BBC television documentary series like *Who Do You Think You Are?*, *Heir Hunters*, and *Meet the Izzards* demonstrates that the methods and results of genealogical research commands a growing audience. One interest that these programmes convey is the integration of digital and genetic technologies in the practice of genealogical research. By presenting these technologies within the field of genealogical exploration, family historians and casual viewers alike, are able to witness a specific form of twenty-first century, Euro-American, kinship ‘magic’ (Viveiros de Castro 2009; Sahlins 2011a, 2011b). I recorded on numerous occasions research participants who were eager to point out that computers and the Internet had both ‘helped’ and ‘changed things’ for contemporary family historians. Moreover, I found that these very same family historians also wished ‘to learn more’ about emerging genetic techniques of genealogical investigation, and that through watching television and browsing the Internet some of their inquiries could be met. As Cannell’s (2011: 474) ethnography

notes however, genealogical foci via television and the Internet ‘only fed existing groundswell interest’ to a phenomenon that actually predates such recent attention. Likewise, the types of genealogical questions that family historians are turning to digital and genetic technologies in order to address are often grounded in assumptions and preconceptions that predate such technical development. Consequently, just as Edwards drew upon ‘some of the ways in which Bacup residents deploy what they know from their own experiences of kinship to shed light on unfamiliar territory such as NRT’ (2000: 204) my thesis focuses upon the ways in which family historians in Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear incorporate their own experience and knowledge of kinship and relatedness in order to explore the impact of specific digital and genetic technologies of genealogical reckoning. In so doing, genealogical research in this context presents itself as a worthwhile object of anthropological study.

Family historians, as practitioners of genealogy working predominantly within contemporary Euro-American societies, have attracted the attentions of ethnographers and related social researchers in recent decades. Edwards (2012) observes that family historians in the northwest of England are as interested in exploring the social lives of their ancestors as they are in collating pedigrees, whereby the positioning of an ancestor in terms of English class identity becomes as important as their specific location on a family tree diagram. Moreover, as part of this process Edwards suggests that English class thinking is as duplex as Strathern’s (1981) English kinship thinking in that the two can be reckoned as a combination of what is fixed and what is forged. Cannell (2011) records that family historians in East Anglia also demonstrate a deep interest in the social lives of their ancestors which goes so far as to result in the moral obligation to care for the dead through the reestablishment, or remaking, of lost and/or forgotten kinship connections. These ethnographic examples add qualitative credence to the proposition of Nash that ‘[g]enealogy is thus not simply descriptive but generative of kinship connections’ (2003: 199). This latter theme is expanded upon within this thesis by exploring the impact of specific digital and genetic genealogical tools upon indigenous reckonings of inheritance and contemporary relatedness in Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear.

Edwards (2000) has demonstrated how specific past and present genealogical relations can act as mediators when establishing connections with distant places and people. Similarly, family historians in my study area often recognised and emphasised particular ancestors, and/or living relations, in terms of them representing an occurrence, or reoccurrence, of identifiable genealogical markers. Moreover, in such instances these markers were largely reckoned in folk terms of blood and affinity, typically glossed as biological or fixed and social or mutable. Consequently, the identification of previously unknown ancestors and living relatives presents to family historians a means of making connections with the physical lives of people and places whereby genes, jobs, homes, and health, among other things, are reconfigured as part of a methodological process that is essentially concerned with concepts of inheritance. As Edwards has shown '[w]hat is left behind, and how, are central elements in kinship thinking' (2000: 213). For the family historians whom I met, that which is left behind was reckoned in terms of physical symptoms of health, everyday mannerisms, the undertaking of specific hobbies and occupations, and fascinations for certain geographic locales. Moreover, by incorporating digital and genetic technologies into the mix family historians are able to go some way towards unraveling the 'complexity of inheritance' (*ibid.*: 214), by developing tangible genealogical links to people and their lives, both linearly and laterally.

## **1.2 Genealogical Evidencing**

My fieldwork largely consisted of traveling to meetings with family historians throughout Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear and from the first day of my ethnographic fieldwork I carried with me tools of the anthropologist's trade. These included a notebook, pen, and digital audio recorder. Quickly adopting an inclination of my research participants, I also began to carry with me an A4 plastic wallet containing genealogical diagrams, lists of familiar names and dates, copies of historic census returns, yDNA test results, important website URL's and other genealogical paraphernalia. The folder grew in thickness as my fieldwork progressed. It is routine for family historians to produce and display aspects of genealogical evidence when interacting with fellow researchers at meetings. I lost count of the number of times a research participant was to show me a downloaded historic census return, either via a monitor screen or paper printout, when explaining their

genealogical relationship with an ancestor or describing a particular event in an ancestor's life. Moreover, those family historians that had utilised genetic ancestry testing as part of their research either carried with them documentation that detailed their genetic haplotype and its link to a certain haplogroup or made public such information via online databases and message boards. Through the use of emerging digital and genetic technologies family historians are therefore able to acquire and collate bodies of genealogical evidence upon which connections to people are established and biographies of lives formulated. In so doing, the reckoning of kinship and relatedness becomes situated somewhere between folk idiom and empirical fact, whereby family stories and memories are used in conjunction with the social and genetic demographic documentary records of the census and commercial genetic ancestry tracing companies when detailing and communicating genealogical connection. 'Everything tells a story', I was frequently told; the evidence is able to inform.

Within the context of this thesis, ethnographic focus has been directed towards the digital online access and use of historic census records as an important source of genealogical evidence popular with family historians. In his book *The Progressive Patriot*, the urban folk musician Billy Bragg argues that the 'availability of records on the Internet has contributed to a democratization of the past, allowing anyone to research their own family tree and discover facts about their ancestors that add new facets to their identity' (2006: 83). Moreover, what this 'democratization of the past' indicates is that contemporary digital access to such information is also changing the ways in which people are able to trace, establish, and interpret genealogical connection. Concerning the science of genealogy by genetics, Johnston and Thomas declared that '[a]nthropology has a new tool' (2003: 103), while the Oxford Ancestors commercial genetic ancestry tracing laboratory have more recently suggested that family historians now utilise their products as a 'standard tool' (Oxford Ancestors 2011b). In response to the growing use of direct-to-consumer (DTC) personal genomics by the lay public Lee (2011) has alluded to a growing democratisation of genetics across Euro-American societies as part of which the distribution of, and access to, genetic knowledge is growing and shifting respectively. In a similar fashion to the digital sphere, emerging genetic technologies are therefore altering the ways in which people are able to trace, establish, and interpret



genealogical connection. Tutton suggests that genetic genealogy represents ‘one immediate site in which to explore the potential future impact of population genetics on genealogies and identities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century’ (2004: 117). Consequently, because digital and genetic bodies of genealogical evidence are important in the practice of family history research and its goal of fixing and forging connections, any wider impacts upon reckonings of kinship and relatedness are significant.

Escobar (1994) examined the rise of anthropological interest concerning the digital and biological technologies during the latter decades of the twentieth century. This was in light of what he viewed as ‘[s]ignificant changes ... taking place in both the character of technology and our understanding of it’ (*ibid.*: 211), whereby ‘[c]omputer, information, and biological technologies are bringing about a fundamental transformation in the structure and meaning of modern society and culture’ (*ibid.*). One element of contemporary ‘cyberculture’ is that social interactions within Euro-American society and beyond are seen as increasingly situated between the poles of offline and online communication. This latter mode of social interaction, Paccagnella suggests, has led to the popular concept of ‘virtual communities’ as representing a ‘useful metaphor to indicate the articulated pattern of relationships, roles, norms, institutions, and languages developed on-line’ (1997: 3). As the Internet has continued to gain a foothold in just about every facet of life in the early decades of the twenty-first century, the existence of online groups and virtual communities and their subsequent implications for ethnographic study have also been addressed (Wilson and Peterson, 2002, Beaulieu, 2004). Whether examining historic census records or the results of a genetic ancestry test, digital communications are often essential to family historians. Through the use of online mailing lists, message boards, and databases, family historians are able to share and compare their genealogical evidence and to create alliances and divisions in response. Furthermore, by observing bodies of evidence made public by other researchers, interpretations and assumptions are made regarding potential genealogical connection. As part of this process certain elaborations concerning the genealogical evidence at hand are constructed and applied creating a framework whereby ‘it all adds to the story’ as one research participant described his interpretation of yDNA genetic ancestry tracing results. In short, while genealogical evidence is important as both a point of departure and a point of reference to family historians there also remains a further level of

digital interpretation and presentation that, while adding depth to individual family history research projects, also impacts upon wider reckonings of kinship and relatedness.

In examining everyday instances of genealogical technological investigations and the ways of thinking about connectedness that this allows, questions posed by Bourdieu concerning ‘the social genealogy of genealogy’ (1977: 207) remain relevant:

To make completely explicit the implicit demand which lies behind genealogical inquiry, as it lies behind all inquiries, one would first have to study the social history of the genealogical tool, paying particular attention to the functions which, in the traditions of which anthropologists are the product, have produced and reproduced the need for this instrument, viz. the problems of inheritance and succession. This social genealogy of genealogy would have to extend into a social history of the relationship between the “scientific” uses and the social uses of the instrument. But the most important thing would be to carry out an epistemological study of the mode of investigation which is the precondition for production of the genealogical diagram. This would aim to determine the full significance of the ontological transmutation which learned inquiry brings about simply by virtue of the fact that it demands a quasi-theoretical relation to kinship, implying a break with the practical relation directly oriented towards functions (*ibid.*: 207).

Klapisch-Zuber (1991) and Bouquet (1996) have previously addressed aspects of such a proposition through their respective examinations of the genealogical diagram in family tree form. Moreover, Bamford and Leach (2009b) present in an edited volume a diverse range of recent ethnographic work directly concerned with the genealogical model and its relationship to the development of kinship thinking in anthropology. By addressing specific bodies of genealogical evidence that are of significance to family historians operating within Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear this ‘social genealogy’ is continued. Moreover, in focusing upon genetic and digital means of genealogical investigation this thesis literally examines certain of ‘the “scientific” uses and the social uses of the instrument’ (Bourdieu 1977: 207), as well as specific novice applications.

The collection of, and reliance upon, genealogical evidence by family historians is necessarily integrated within contemporary digital and genetic technologies. There is, however, another process in operation whereby features of genealogical evidence are employed in support of what Nash has termed ‘genealogical imaginings’ (2002: 47). Here, family historians people their genealogical findings in selective biographies and narratives in such a way that simultaneously adds vibrancy and credence to their evidence. This in turn, aids in the actualisation and realisation of genealogical connections. The process of imagining was revealed to me on numerous occasions as one of putting ‘flesh on the bones’ in a genealogical research project.

### **1.3 Genealogical Imagining**

At the outset, the methods of retrieval and interpretation that underlie genealogical investigations can appear rather two-dimensional. However, the ways in which the results of family history research and genetic ancestry tracing pan out with regard to ‘real’ and ‘imagined’ lives are anything but, and it is this observation which is to be kept in mind throughout this discussion.

In the early stages of my ethnographic fieldwork, an experienced family historian who was also the Chairman of the South Shields satellite branch of the NDFHS, offered some useful advice: it would be important to ‘clearly define the difference between genealogy and family history’ when interacting with potential research participants. Fitzhugh, the author of *The Dictionary of Genealogy* (1985), makes the distinction on the basis of accurate empiricism concerning names and dates on the one hand (genealogy), and biography (family history) on the other. In a discussion about genetic ancestry tracing with Francis, a former elected Secretary of the NDFHS, the same distinction was made. Only this time metaphorically, when he suggested that there was ‘no flesh on the bones to it’. The suggestion was that there was little family history (flesh) to be had from the genealogical evidence (bones) at hand. This was Francis’s opinion of the use of genetics in genealogy that on the whole was not representative of the general consensus of family historians that he knew. His method of applying such figurative distinctions to the processes of family history research was, however, more greatly representative. When in email correspondence with a retired professional genealogist who lived on the border of

Northumberland and County Durham I was warned of situations where ‘experienced researchers meet a keen beginner’ and emerge from their discussions with the feeling that ‘he pinned me to the wall with his grandfather’. In this respect the feeling is very much physical, whereby episodes of overenthusiastic relaying of the constituent genealogical body of an ancestor is enough to render a fellow family historian temporarily incapacitated. The dichotomy remains and there is clearly a balance being struck.

When browsing through a North Tyneside Council part-time adult education course brochure that had been delivered through the letterbox of my home in the first quarter of 2012, I was drawn to one particular course title: *Family History – Putting the Flesh on the Bones* (Fig. 1). This attracted my attention due to the fact that, as has been explained above, I had encountered the metaphor on more than one occasion as part of my previous year’s ethnographic fieldwork. Francis, for example, was not alone in viewing the flesh of family history accounts as a feature of genealogical research that invariably represented a ‘good story’. With such stories not only a welcome accompaniment to, but often a natural product of, the ‘gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary’ (Foucault, 1984: 76) bones of genealogical research. This metaphor has also been identified in North American cultural accounts of popular genealogy, particularly when describing the outcome of one’s research endeavours. Consequently, for family historians operating in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, flesh is added to the bones of a ‘pedigree’ through the compilation of biographies for collected ancestors (Bishop, 2005: 997). Similarly, in the northwest of England, Edwards has observed the mobilisation of this idiom amongst family historians (2009b, 2012). Here, it is described as a ‘process of fleshing out’ (2012: 74) which acts as a means for extrapolating and communicating the social and classed histories of those people who are engrained within genealogical data. Such understandings bring to mind images of construction and composition, or rather reconstruction and recomposition; with the suggestion being that genealogical data (bones) presents the family historian with something to build upon in narrative (flesh) which ultimately leads towards the formation of a more rounded and locally comprehensible version of genealogical connection, kinship, and relatedness.

☎ Under Pressure? Positive Steps to a Balanced Lifestyle	11 Jun	Mon	1.00pm - 3.00pm	3
<b>History, Humanities and Law</b>				
☎ Family History Beginners	1 May	Tue	7:00pm - 9:00pm	5
☎ Family History – Putting the Flesh on the Bones	2 May	Wed	1:00pm - 3:00pm	5
☎ Family History – Putting the Flesh on the Bones	3 May	Thu	9:30am - 11:30am	5
☎ History and Literature	2 May	Wed	9:30am - 11:30am	5
☎ History – The Medieval World (1300-1500)	4 May	Fri	9:30am - 11:30am	5
☎ Local History	30 Apr	Mon	7:00pm - 9:00pm	5
☎ Recording Your Family History	1 May	Tue	9:30am - 11:30am	5
<b>Languages and Literature</b>				
☎ Chinese Beginners	30 Apr	Mon	6:30pm - 8:30pm	5
☎ Creative Writing Mixed Ability	4 May	Fri	10:00am - 12:00pm	5

Figure 1: Extract from North Tyneside Council part-time adult education course brochure (2012)

The flesh on the bones metaphor is also, I argue, redolent of something more than the acknowledgment and maintenance of distinctions between input and output, data and description, while it also stretches beyond notions of layered stratification. It speaks of the physical bodies and associated natural essences that connect people (be they living, dead, or still to be conceived and born) as much as it does their socio-cultural interactions. It represents particular folk interpretations that are based upon indigenous idioms of relatedness, as well as specific bodies of empirical genealogical data that are grounded in statistical accountability and scientific discourse. The key point to emphasise is that there is constant interaction, with one mode able to inform the other; thus resulting in greater clarity and efficiency concerning availability of the raw data of the ‘bones’, together with subsequent new forms of folk knowledge emerging as part of the ‘flesh’. Here, the ways in which family historians continually interact, back and forth, between flesh (selective stories and narrative imaginings) and bones (both documentary-based and genetic-based genealogical evidence), is of particular significance. In this respect, the metaphor acts as an analogy for Strathern’s observation and explication of indigenous English kinship as an exemplar of human

interactions and associations that are to be addressed and understood ‘after nature’ (1992); in part thanks to its discernability ‘as a kaleidoscope of connected cultural contexts, rather than as a layering of discourses upon a solid foundation of immutable connexions’ (Simpson, 1994: 833). In genealogical research it is not axiomatic that flesh will always follow bones, or to use Astuti’s terms, the ‘facts of biology’ always precede ‘the facts of sociality’ (2009: 220). ‘I haven’t proven him [and subsequently the story] yet’ was a phrase Francis used in order to demonstrate the presence of flesh without any bones, although it was explicitly revealed in conversation that upon location of the ‘right’ genealogical evidence the ancestor in question, flesh and bones alike, could become part of Francis’s personal family history. The threads of a story can lead to further data collection and evidencing, which in turn expands upon the original story further. Contrastingly, genealogical evidence can spark a story that is able to present new avenues of data collection. The key point remains, however, that in such respects these interactions impact upon how contemporary family historians conceptualise, and subsequently, demonstrate agency in their everyday social relationships with the living and the dead. Despite the early advice offered to me, the terms family history research/family historian and genealogical research/genealogist are used interchangeably within this thesis as it was my experience that the two went hand in hand; there was no flesh without bones, nor bones without flesh.

This thesis is concerned with the digital and genetic technologies that are used by family historians when collating and interpreting genealogical information and their interrelationship with contemporary folk reckonings of kinship and episodes of relatedness. In both respects it is concerned with the flesh and the bones. It therefore continues a line of investigation whereby ethnography is employed in order to address and investigate the specific features that characterise the practice of an indigenous English kinship (Frankenberg, 1990 [1957], Strathern, 1981, Strathern, 1992, Strathern, 1996, Edwards and Strathern, 2000, Edwards, 2000, Edwards, 2009, Edwards, 2005, Simpson, 1994, Rapport, 1993).

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

The work of family historians is motivated by a desire to address specific research questions about one’s self in relation to one’s past. George, a lifelong resident of

Blyth, Northumberland, described his entry into genealogical research as stemming ‘basically from a great lack of knowledge of my family’. There were ‘unanswered questions’ George explained, research questions of his own, and particularly these began with his grandfather: ‘I don’t know how he didn’t get called up for the First World War; they had a business but that didn’t stop people getting called up, so I’m just wondering how he got away with that one’. Using online historic census data George had been able to establish that his grandfather was of conscription age and that he ran his own business during the Great War. However, in light of this valuable genealogical information it remained important for George to address the context of this ancestor’s non-conscription. George’s inference was that there was ‘something else going on here’, which through committed family history research, he aimed to better understand. The key point being that like the numerous genealogical projects I observed as part of my fieldwork this thesis is also predicated upon specific research questions. Moreover, these research questions are situated in order to collectively address the underlying ‘something else’ that is contained within the integration, application, and interpretation of digital and genetic technologies by family historians in my study area. While George’s focus stemmed from hints of an ancestor feigning injury or illness in order to avoid conscription, and were implicated within notions of an earlier kinship not properly told, my focus in this thesis is on the evidencing and imagining of genealogical connections and the associated impact upon reckonings of kinship and instances of contemporary relatedness that ensues.

Before identifying my research questions it is necessary to spell out the difference between my own endeavours as an anthropologist and those of my research participants. Ultimately, we are all interested in research and finding answers. Both George and I demonstrate an important feature of social enquiry by starting our ‘given research project[s] with a question’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003: 53), or more accurately, a series of questions. However, George, as a family historian, and I, as an anthropologist, do not look for, or ask, the same set of key research questions. Hammersley and Atkinson suggest that ‘research always begins with some ... set of issues’ (1983: 28) and that these are consistent with certain ‘foreshadowed problems’ (*ibid.*; Malinowski, 1922). De Munk and Sobo tell us that ‘[t]heory spurs research questions’ (1998: 25) and Bernard mirrors this view by stating that ‘research questions depend crucially on theory’ (2011: 61). Hammersley and Atkinson also

argue that '[m]ost ethnographic research has been concerned with developing theories rather than merely testing existing hypotheses' (1983: 29). These observations aid in further highlighting the distinction that exists between the types and means of research that is undertaken by family historians and by me as an anthropologist. To elaborate, George in the above example, is testing his hypothesis that there is 'something else' to be unveiled regarding his grandfather's non-conscription, and that, by locating this 'something else' via genealogical research, a more accurate picture can be drawn of what is a historically significant period of his ancestor's life story. On the other hand, by formulating a series of research questions, in conjunction with ethnographic enquiry, I aim to locate the specific practices of family historians regarding digital and genetic technologies within the broader field of theorisation about Euro-American kinship. In both instances research is being undertaken, but with different goals in mind and from alternate perspectives.

Research Question 1: To what extent has the availability and use of digitised historic census records online impacted upon the ways in which family historians evidence and imagine genealogical connections?

Research Question 2: To what extent has the commercial availability and presentation of genetic ancestry tracing products impacted upon the ways in which family historians evidence and imagine genealogical connections?

Research Question 3: How significant is the digital and genetic evidencing and imagining of genealogical connections to the integration of personal reminiscences and folk idioms of inheritance amongst family historians?

Research Question 4: How significant is the digital and genetic evidencing and imagining of genealogical connections to the formation and maintenance of social interactions between kin (contemporary episodes of relatedness) amongst family historians?



By addressing these research questions my aim is to converge towards a thesis that is able to offer original insight into the field of anthropological investigation directly concerned with the exploration of kinship and relatedness in Euro-American, and more particularly, indigenous English societies. In examining the ways in which family historians in Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear are interpreting and applying digital and genetic modes of genealogical evidence in association with contemporary genealogical explorations, imaginings, and social interactions new ethnographic observations are presented in order to demonstrate a hybrid form of kinship thinking not dissimilar to Edwards' (2000) 'Born and Bred' perspective on kinship. For instance, blood and/or genes can be, in Schneiderian (1984) terms, 'thicker than water' but cultural affinity and associated narrative also loom equally large.

## **1.5 Thesis Plan**

My general thesis is that family historians apply genetic and digital technological tools to their trade and integrate these together with their own imaginings in order to identify and explore genealogical connections to ancestors and contemporary relations in the past, present, and future. The thesis is structured across 8 interrelated chapters.

This introduction (Chapter 1) has set the scene for the reader by presenting the specific research themes of the thesis together with its associated key research questions. The current thesis plan aims to set out a clear structure for the thesis whereby coherence of argument and presentation of ethnographic evidence can be followed methodically, leaving plausible conclusions to be reached.

Chapter 2 constitutes a genealogical review of anthropological thinking surrounding kinship and relatedness. Here, the question of kinship is shown to be a perennial theme in social anthropology, and moreover a theme that is peopled by consensus and dissent (including research participants and ethnographers alike). Consequently, the review is peopled with the voices of those ethnographers and kinship theorists who have played an active role in the development of kinship thinking across the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. Admittedly, the genealogy is

tailored, in part, to fit in with the research goals of this thesis and is not a complete historical review. It is, however, sufficient to provide context for the research questions introduced above. Furthermore, as a selective genealogy filled with voices from both the past and the present, it aims to build a clearer picture of how the work of this thesis remains relevant within what is fast becoming a deep and extended lineage of anthropological thinking and research.

Chapter 3 demonstrates the methodological approach taken in the research. Initially the geographic region of ethnographic study is outlined with individual field-site locations introduced and described. Following this, the techniques of investigation used to acquire my research data are presented and discussed. Ethnography was the main method of engagement with research participants drawing on participant observation, semi-structured interviewing, and online observation. A short questionnaire represented the only quantitative element of the research and this is also justified as part of my methodology. The latter sections of this chapter are used to introduce the mini-biographies of six key research participants who appear and reappear at varying stages within the subsequent ethnographic chapters as well as to briefly reflect on the group dynamics of the family historians with which I engaged. In particular, these key research participants represent importantly distinct voices, amongst numerous others, that combine to contribute both qualitative insight and individual character to the thesis as a whole.

Research Question 1 is primarily addressed in Chapter 4 through an ethnographic analysis of the ways in which family historians interact with and make use of digitised historic census data available online. Here, ethnographic observation and analysis demonstrates that digitised historic census data acts as a valuable source of genealogical evidence for family historians when tracing and fixing genealogical connections. In such instances, experienced family historians are able to navigate their online resources at the third or fourth stage of removal from the original (that is, Internet, from microfiche, from enumerator documentation, from household return) in order to then map genealogical connections of consanguinity (e.g. in the 1861 census so-and-so is shown as the father of so-and-so who is actually my paternal grandfather), and simultaneously as a means for exploring ties of affinity through the places where people were born, the houses in which they lived, the occupations they

endured, and at what age, etc.. More than this, however, through the application of particular strategies of transcription and interpretation family historians strongly utilise narrative, which leads to a process whereby they are simultaneously discovering and constructing kinship connections with the people of the past. Consequently, family historians engaging with online historic census data do so with the dual aim of discovering genealogical evidence, and constructing genealogical imaginings, which interact directly with contemporary reckonings of kinship and relatedness.

In chapter 5 the Oxford Ancestors commercial genetic ancestry tracing laboratory is used as ethnographic focus in order to address Research Question 2. Through in-depth analysis of the information that one receives following yDNA testing using specialist laboratory services, it is demonstrated that the commercial presentation and communication of personal genetic data differs greatly from its academic counterparts. Moreover, it is argued that Oxford Ancestors apply certain strategies of interpretation and transcription when divulging both discovered and constructed genetic genealogical connections to their consumers. Particularly, the incorporation of genetic ‘clans’ and archetypal ‘clan fathers’ by Oxford Ancestors into the presentation of the results of personal yDNA testing reveals a process whereby genealogical evidence can be rhetorically applied in order to communicate an unbroken genetic lineage that culminates in an essentialised connection to an imagined biography of a single ancestor who lived many thousands of years ago. In this instance, Oxford Ancestors are appealing to the sensibilities of family historians by presenting genetic-based genealogical evidence to them in a way that includes an acknowledgment to both the flesh and the bones of any, and all, subsequently revealed kinship connections. Moreover, by engaging directly with commercial genetic ancestry testing and Oxford Ancestors I have been able to establish a series of differing, yet related, ethnographic relationships. These relationships are presented in the latter stages of chapter 5.

Ethnographic data collected through interactions with family historians is used in chapter 6 in order to address Research Question 3. Here, it is demonstrated that family historians are integrating aspects of genealogical evidence acquired through digital and genetic technological means with preexisting indigenous ‘folk’ idioms of

inheritance. As part of this process the interrelationship between reminiscence and inheritance is significant, particularly in relation to the ways in which family historians interpret those genealogical ties of blood and affinity that have been both revealed in evidence, and imagined through narrative. It is also identified that the inheritance of surnames is used as a valuable resource for family historians and, more importantly, one which helps to signify that concepts of cultural and genetic inheritance interweave in the thickening of genealogical connections. This chapter is rounded-off using a global family history case study that fuses the elements of digital and genetic genealogical evidencing and imagining together with complexities of inheritance and contemporary kin connection, which is suggestive of a mode of kinship thinking that is essentially multivocal in nature.

Chapter 7 is concerned with Research Question 4. Here, ethnographic data is analysed in order to assess how a distinctly biosocial account of kinship impacts upon instances of contemporary relatedness. Ethnographic examples are drawn from family historians who have established and maintained social interactions with contemporary kin through the aid of digital and genetic technologies, and it is shown that in doing so selectivity and choice play a large role. This latter point is exemplified through an in-depth analysis of the varying potential kin ties and terminologies that genetics is able to present in the twenty-first century. Here, the concept of ‘genetic cousins’ is significant as both a classificatory and role-designating aspect of contemporary kinship thinking for family historians. In the final stages of this chapter ethnography is used to demonstrate the continuum of family history research in the northeast of England whereby the transmission of genealogical knowledge across a genealogy is interpreted as a means of premeditating interactions with one’s future descendents.

The conclusions that are drawn in chapter 8 are framed within a review that details how the research questions of this thesis have been addressed and how such answers interact with the wider anthropological themes that have been developed as part of the overall thesis. Furthermore the position and trajectory of the flesh and bones of kinship, as it is outlined in this thesis, is reflected upon once more in light of its relationship to contemporary Euro-American anthropological kinship thinking. The final section looks forwards to suggest that the combined digitisation and geneticisation of Euro-American society is an ongoing process and one that will

continue to impact upon past, present, and future reckonings of kinship and relatedness. Moreover, it is argued that as digital and genetic technologies develop and progress in the coming decades, so too will the study of kinship in anthropology as a key aspect of its scholarship and identity as a discipline.

## **Chapter 2. Kinship and Relatedness in Anthropology: a genealogy**

In this chapter I present a substantial review of the study of kinship in anthropology. Here, the formation of early dichotomies surrounding nature and culture, typically dichotomised as the biological and the social, are shown to have contributed towards contrasting ethnographic interpretations of kinship and relatedness from antiquity to the present. In tandem with the nature/culture distinction a longstanding propensity towards genealogical modes of theory and praxis is also identifiable throughout the history of kinship studies in anthropology. Although genealogically this history begins with a strict focus upon kinship, a sequence of insightful reappraisals within the field of social anthropology can be seen to have directed such a focus more towards the study of relatedness. In so doing, it can be argued that we begin to go some way towards defining kinship for what it actually does, with regard to the particular group and/or society that is of ethnographic attention. This review is therefore a genealogy of sorts: beginning with the formation of early nature/culture dichotomies, through marriage, to reappraisals of ethnocentrism, and subsequent processual interpretations. Within the latter stages of this genealogy, relatedness in the twenty-first century is addressed with particular focus upon the influence of genetics on kinship reckoning. As a parting shot, one recent all-encompassing definition of kinship is introduced in an effort towards demonstrating the current state-of-play regarding kinship studies in anthropology prior to the elucidation of my own contribution to the field. Kinship studies in anthropology have generated a number of important voices throughout the preceding 150 years and consequently this genealogical review contains the words and opinions of those who have contributed most greatly to the field as well as to the particular lineage of thinking upon which my present research is able to rest.

### **2.1 Early dichotomies**

Schneider demonstrated as part of *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (1984) that certain dichotomies were persistent within anthropological kinship thinking from the nineteenth through to the late-twentieth centuries. Using the self-explanatory distinctions in anthropology of ‘physical and social or cultural kinship’ (*ibid.*: 97), it

is made clear that between the approximate period of 1870 to 1970 ‘the term *kinship* is used to refer to both the biological system of relations, quite apart from any sociocultural aspects, and also to the sociocultural aspects’ (Schneider 1984: 97). In short, kinship was implicated within a long-running nature/culture debate. The main problem with this definition of kinship, for Schneider, concerned ‘whether the sociocultural aspects can be set apart entirely from the biological aspects or whether any concern for the sociocultural aspects necessarily implicates the biological aspects’ (*ibid.*). In addressing such concerns Schneider then applied these questions to the theses and methods of the main proponents of anthropological kinship thinking operating in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

Leaving Schneider’s analyses aside for the moment, but with the aid of his ‘historical review’ (*ibid.*), we can begin to sketch out a genealogical overview of the study of kinship and relatedness in anthropology. In *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* Lewis Henry Morgan (1870) presents the descriptive classification of relations through the commonality of shared blood as representative of an important ‘natural’ stage in human development. Here, it is proposed that a ‘formal arrangement of the more immediate blood kindred into lines of descent, with the adoption of some method to distinguish one relative from another, and to express the value of the relationship, would be one of the earliest acts of human intelligence’ (Morgan 1870: 10, quoted in Schneider 1984: 97). Such a line of thinking is indicative of Morgan’s affinity for genealogical logic with regard to the interpretation and description of all forms of kinship reckoning (Read and Behrens 1990). Even in cultures where such a descriptive system appeared unsatisfactory (i.e. specific indigenous North American societies) due to the fact that any awareness and acknowledgement of direct biological lines of descent (parentage) is irrelevant with regard to certain kin classifications: ‘for Morgan, the mode of classification of kinsmen derives from and describes the peoples’ own knowledge of how they are actually, or most probably, biologically related to each other’ and this ‘knowledge depends on their form of marriage’ (Schneider 1984: 98). Regardless of the ethnographic area of focus then, at this period Morgan addressed the study of kinship ‘as primarily a biological relationship with the cultural aspect the mere recognition of its existence with other features trailing along in second place’ (Schneider 1984: 99).

Radcliffe-Brown (1952) continued this paradigm of thought, viewing ‘a system of kinship and marriage as a set of interrelated social usages which were based upon the recognition of certain biological relationships for social purposes’ (Kuper 1996: 56). Extending Morgan’s analytical perspective Radcliffe-Brown worked from the premise that ‘[e]very classificatory system operated with some combination of three basic principles’ (Kuper 1996: 57), whereby unity could be traced among siblings, lineages, and/or alternate generations. The identification of distinct familial principles that could mirror ‘underlying social conditions of great generality’, to Radcliffe-Brown, would ‘inform the various systems of kinship terminology’ (Kuper 1996: 57-58). Although, developing that which Morgan had started, the theory remained contained within a physically rooted structure, paying little heed to the fact that such ‘systems were essentially systems of social relationships’ (Kuper 1996: 58). There were proponents of this latter more socially oriented view, however, prior to Radcliffe-Brown’s development of classificatory systems of kinship terminology.

Schneider offers Emile Durkheim as such a proponent, and presents the case for the latter’s rejection of ‘Morgan’s assertion that kinship terms mark true biological relations’ (Schneider 1984: 99). Here, examples are drawn from Durkheim’s (1898) analysis of Omaha and Choctaw native North American cultures. Concerning such cultures, Durkheim recorded that one’s totem delineates kin, which for Schneider indicates that ‘[i]t is therefore this social convention of their kinship, not their actual blood relationship, that defines them as kin and that therefore defines kinship’ (1984: 100). Furthermore, it becomes evident that Durkheim challenged Morgan’s earlier affirmation that a genealogical conceptualisation of kinship is a natural human condition through the exemplar of domestic rights and moral obligations as representative of the ties that bond kin together over and above the sharing and closeness of blood. Schneider thus presents Durkheim’s thesis as being constituted on the premise that ‘the earliest forms of kinship group or family were almost totally independent of consanguineal ties, these having only more recently been assigned social significance’ (1984: 100). Schneider also introduces Van Genep (1906) as a further advocate for reckoning kinship in more social or cultural terms at this period but criticised him, together with Durkheim, for failing ‘to provide a positive definition of kinship free of biological referents’ (Schneider 1984: 101).



With such a rigid dichotomy in place it seems of little surprise that elements of the debate have extended into the twenty-first century (Shapiro, 2012). However, there were also early efforts towards distilling the divide and to address kinship with both physical and social concerns in mind, rather than as an either/or case. That is, kinship should not be viewed as solely a physical or social phenomenon, as there was evidence of both instances in the ethnographic record. In anthropology W. H. R. Rivers is probably most famous for his advocacy and formulation of the ‘genealogical method’ (1910) that when applied to the study of kinship made it possible, in his view, to ‘investigate abstract problems on a purely concrete basis’ (*ibid.*: 107). In doing so, Rivers’ method was viewed as a ‘scientifically sound’ technique whereby the collection of pedigrees could help to reveal ‘indigenous forms of sociality’ (Bamford and Leach, 2009a: 6-7), as dictated by non-Western kinship traditions. Genealogy was key, and whether kinship could be conceptualised as social or physical ‘[t]he genealogical mode, therefore is that which furnishes the most exact and convenient method of defining kinship’ as ‘[k]inship may be defined as relationship which can be determined and described by means of genealogies’ (Rivers 1915: 701, quoted in Schneider 1984: 106). Genealogies were useful in Rivers’ eyes, not because they could demonstrate kinship as a social order crafted on top of consanguineal ties, but because it could separate and represent the two individually, using a single method.

In Schneider’s view, while a ‘fertile’ endeavour, Rivers’ work did little towards dispelling the physical/social dichotomies of kinship and rather ‘created confusion’ (Schneider 1984: 107) that would go on for the following 80 to 90 years. More recently, Astuti has argued along similar lines, stating:

Rivers’s method, in other words, was not only predicated on the assumption that everywhere kinship categories have a biological referent, but also on the assumption that everywhere people draw a principled distinction between biological and social relations. In the opinion of many, this latter assumption has been as fundamental to kinship theorizing as it has been fatal (2009: 216).

In short, the earlier either/or dichotomised perspective remained, in that by acknowledging that differing physical and social kinship systems could be scrutinized

and analysed using one particular method or technique of investigation, the preempted assertion was that indigenous idioms of reckoning kinship relations would, regardless, genealogically align within one of the two modes.

E. E. Evans-Pritchard applied genealogical methods when investigating Nuer lineage systems (1940: 192-248) and utilised genealogical diagrams in order to represent Nuer clan segmentation and bifurcation into maximal, major, and minor lineages. It is acknowledged that the Nuer do not 'figure a lineage system' (*ibid.*: 202) with the same arboreal conceptions (see Bouquet, 1996, Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) as conveyed by traditional Euro-American genealogical diagrams. Rather than displaying Evans-Pritchard's symmetrically bifurcated genealogical representation, the Nuer opted for a 'number of lines running at angles from a common point' (1940: 202), indicating evidence of elements of ethnocentric kinship reckoning within the early ethnographic record. However, such in-depth analysis paved the way for exploring further the social intricacies of particular non-Western kinship systems whereby political structures intertwined with domestic obligations, thus presenting the 'dual context of kinship groups' (Kuper 1996: 92). At this stage genealogical reckoning was playing a pivotal role in the understanding of both physical and social aspects of diverse kinship systems, while certain significant bifurcations were also present within opposing sides of the original dichotomy. And in such instances the case of marriage was often implicated.

## **2.2 The Union of Marriage**

Claude Lévi-Strauss maintained the nature/culture dichotomy within his structural analyses of kinship (1963, 1969). Using blood and marriage as the point of departure, Lévi-Strauss associates 'consanguinity with nature and affinity with society' (Viveiros de Castro, 2009: 252) as part of an 'alliance theory of kinship' (Kuper 1996: 163). Here, particular focus concerns the rules of reciprocity through marriage exchange as a means of addressing and acting upon the first rule of the 'incest taboo' (Lévi-Strauss 1969). That is, whom one should and should not marry according to the social conventions of one's cultural group. In so doing, the strict rules of marriage that were observed across many societies (i.e. those designated within an elementary structure of kinship) would also often be seen to correlate with specific kinship

terminologies. For example a man should marry his mother's brother's daughter if this is the norm in his group, or 'he must take a woman from a group which traditionally supplies wives to men of his group' (Kuper 1996: 162). Instances where such rules could be seen to be in place were termed a 'simple kinship system', as society dictated both whom one could and could not marry. The alternative to this was a 'complex kinship system' (*ibid.*: 162), whereby society dictated only whom one could not marry. In short, for Lévi-Strauss kinship systems inherently acknowledged and explicitly paid heed to both physical and social aspects of relatedness, which was exemplified through the imposition of strict marriage rules. For Viveiros de Castro, however, 'Lévi-Strauss's alliance theory amounts to a conception of kinship in which affinity is as much given as consanguinity' (2009: 252). As we shall see, however, the case of marriage is also able to demonstrate certain bifurcations within the social systems that predicate it.

This novel acknowledgement of the social intricacy and complexity of specific marriage rules fuelled attention in the British school of anthropology (Kuper 1996), but it was another French anthropologist who was to draw from the ethnographic record further associations between marriage practices and systems of kinship. Pierre Bourdieu, using extensive ethnographic data collected in Kabylia (Algeria), focused upon the opposing social strategies of affinity (official and practical), whereby it is argued that through the use of genealogical diagrams the anthropologist can only access 'the official representation of the social structures' (Bourdieu, 1977: 34). Here, it is proposed that '[m]arriage provides a good opportunity for observing what in practice separates official kinship, single and immutable, defined once and for all by the norms of genealogical protocol, from practical kinship, whose boundaries and definitions are as many and as varied as its users and the occasions on which it is used' (*ibid.*). Furthermore, that '[i]t is practical kin who make marriages; it is official kin who celebrate them' (*ibid.*). Bourdieu's point is that while previous attempts at exploring the social elements of kinship had correctly observed the interrelationship between it and certain jural and moral obligations within families and groups, in fact that which constitutes what is jural and what is moral can also be analysed as further individualised elements (i.e. official kinship and practical kinship). Moreover, this bifurcation offers differing kinship connotations across Kabilyian society:

Thus to schematize, official kinship is opposed to practical kinship in terms of the official as opposed to the non-official (which includes the unofficial and the scandalous); the collective as opposed to the individual; the public, explicitly codified in a magical or quasi-juridical formalism, as opposed to the private, kept in an implicit, even hidden state (Bourdieu, 1977: 35).

The case of marriage is therefore viewed here as being representative of kinship as a social system, itself composed of strict rules that extend across both domestic and political realms.

Schneider's cultural account of *American Kinship* (1980) demonstrated that sexual reproduction within the union of marriage is able to reveal a symbolic system that intertwines biological and social aspects of reckoning kinship. For Schneider, this entails reliance upon notions of 'enduring solidarity', from which, we are presented with a kinship system that is concerned with 'code' on the one hand and 'substance' on the other. In this formulation, however, the two are so closely interrelated they become one and the same thing; that is, American kinship. This kinship, in the words of Bamford and Leach is 'biology with culture put on top. It has to do with the social regulation of biological givens' (2009a: 8-9). Moreover, while cleverly implicated within a unifying symbolism a certain dichotomy remains.

So far we have traced a story in the study of kinship in anthropology that has encompassed debate surrounding dichotomies of the physical or biological and the social or cultural, with further distinctions, or bifurcations, having been made within subsequently identified social or cultural systems. It was the acknowledgement of this inherent practice of continually dichotomising the physical and social elements of kinship and assuming them as human universals (an extension of Euro-American ethnocentrism) that at first threatened to put an end to the study of kinship in anthropology, but which in turn proved to be the basis for a revitalisation of the field. This led to novel and progressive ideas of how relatedness can be conceived, realised, and understood, and it is towards such a reappraisal that we now turn.

### 2.3 A Reappraisal

Schneider's *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (1984) offered more than a historical review of what had come before concerning the study of kinship in anthropology, it provided a whole new formulation of what kinship meant, if it meant anything at all. His questioning of the 'fundamental assumption' that 'Blood Is Thicker Than Water' (*ibid.*: 165) created reservations concerning most, if not all, of the thinking and analysis that social anthropology had previously directed towards the study of kinship. For Schneider, '[w]ithout this assumption much that has been written about kinship simply does not make sense ... [and] it is difficult to understand why so many have written so much at such great length' (*ibid.*). Essentially, his thesis was that the *blood is thicker than water* assumption is 'largely implicit' and 'often taken for granted' (*ibid.*: 166) representing a 'very significant premise in European culture' (Schneider 1984: 194). Accordingly, this premise had been carried within anthropology, and by Euro-American anthropologists focusing on the study of kinship, across space and time to such an extent that 'kinship has been defined by European social scientists' who in turn 'use their own folk culture as the source of many, if not all, of their ways of formulating and understanding the world about them' (Schneider 1984: 193). Thus, Schneider was demonstrating those 'Euro-centric assumptions that lay at the heart of the anthropological study of kinship' (Carsten, 2000b: 8) which indicated that, as an ethnographic enterprise, the study of kinship was in fact a misnomer as '[l]ike was not being compared with like' (Bamford and Leach 2009a: 9).

What did Schneider suggest should be done about this problem, and in which direction did the study of kinship in anthropology take following *A Critique in the study of Kinship*? One suggestion was that when attempting to understand the 'presumed kinship relations' of a non-European culture or society 'the genealogical grid cannot be assumed but only held as a possible hypothesis' (Schneider 1984: 200). In-depth ethnographic investigation and analysis must first be rigorously applied before labeling what is perceived to be a mother-child relationship. In conclusion, it is postulated that '[k]inship might then become a special custom distinctive of European culture, an interesting oddity at worst' and that 'such a way of dealing with kinship would teach us a great deal' (*ibid.*: 201). In the 30 years since

the publication of what is arguably Schneider's most seminal work this postulation has yet to be proved, but rather has arguably been disproved, judging by the vast body of anthropological research surrounding kinship that has emerged in this time. One thing is for certain, however, and this is that Schneider's observations have been greatly influential to anthropologists since, meaning that the story of the study of kinship in anthropology does not end in 1984, but instead continues taking on some new and important directions along the way.

#### **2.4 Post Schneiderian Indigenous Kinship**

Despite Schneider's observations and concerns the discipline of anthropology was not willing to dispense with the study of kinship and, through investigating new avenues of research, grew to 'adopt a far wider definition of the concept than had been used in previous discussions' (Bamford and Leach 2009a: 10). Consequently, a sort of paradigm shift in thinking around the subject of kinship took place with a somewhat greater processual perspective assumed (see Strathern, 1992). Here, a concept of 'relatedness' (see Carsten, 2000a) moved to the fore in an attempt 'to define kinship as a 'process' rather than a state of being' (Bamford and Leach 2009a: 10). In so doing, Schneider's concerns were tackled head-on with such a redefinition of kinship offering 'redemption for the topic by understanding it to be a varied and locally constituted process, not dependent upon Western notions of procreation as the defining element relating persons to one another' (Bamford and Leach 2009a: 10).

It may be argued that Marilyn Strathern, openly inspired by Schneider, set the processual ball rolling in this respect. In her seminal work *After Nature* (1992) Strathern addresses English kinship in the late twentieth century with regard to the long-standing dichotomies of the biological and the social. She demonstrates that rather than culture simply being the social representation of natural biological facts, culture in fact plays a pivotal role in shaping what we come to think of as 'nature'. Here, it is concluded that '[n]atural selection is reinvented as auto-enabling choice' (Strathern 1992: 198), with such a concept impacting upon aspects of indigenous English kinship reckoning, as characterised by the growth of new reproductive technologies (NRT) at this period (Edwards 1993). With the aid of the biomedical sciences, aspects of preconceived natural kinship can emerge as cultural choice. A

case in point here being direct-to-consumer personal genomics and genetic ancestry testing products of the twenty-first century which reveal aspects of kinship as a commodity in itself.

Such themes tie in with Rabinow's (1992a, 1992b) ideas on the interaction between genetics and culture in the 1990's:

In the future the new genetics will cease to be a biological metaphor for modern society and become a circulation network of identity terms and restriction loci, around which and through which a truly new type of auto-production will emerge: let's call it 'bio-sociality'. If socio-biology is culture constructed on the basis of a metaphor of nature, then in bio-sociality, nature will be modelled on culture understood as practice; it will be known and remade through technique, nature will finally become artificial, just as culture becomes natural (Rabinow 1992b: 10).

Significantly, such a concept has implications for how kinship is to be understood and addressed. The suggestion being that the scientific progress and development of new genetic technologies would undoubtedly be influential concerning novel forms of kinship reckoning. In this regard we are heading towards 'science as culture', to use Franklin's (1995) terms.

It was not only developments in the realm of science and technology that became a focus for kinship theorists in anthropology, however, with specific changes in social and cultural attitudes towards marriage in Euro-American society also addressed. Identifying divorce as a rapidly growing phenomenon of everyday life across Britain in the latter decades of the twentieth century, Simpson argued that such practice is 'generating new and complex variations in the ordering of kinship relations' (1994: 832). Moreover, he proposed that the women and men who experience divorce 'find themselves at the centre of extensive kindreds based as much on the negative affinities of divorce, as on the positive relationships one normally attributes to relations between kin' (*ibid.*). Simpson calls this emerging familial framework the 'unclear' family, in contrast to the more traditional, and common, 'nuclear' family structure. By then focusing upon the kinship consequences associated with the

breakdown of the traditional family unit, Simpson maintained the processual trajectory of reckoning kinship at this time by acknowledging a required shift in attention to that which is ‘beyond the family’ (*ibid.*: 847; Robertson 1991).

Focusing specifically on a non-Western context Carsten (1995) presents indigenous kinship for Malays ‘as a process of becoming’ (*ibid.*: 223). In this example Malays establish kinship through the sharing of living space and food. Here, it is demonstrated that while blood is the ‘core substance of kinship in local perceptions ... the major contribution to blood is food’ (*ibid.*: 224) and consequently ‘[b]lood is always mutable and fluid – as is kinship itself’ (Carsten 1995: 224). Carsten therefore continued the processual theme of redefining kinship by distancing it from earlier dichotomies of the social and the biological through the observation that as both food and blood are intrinsic to Malay conceptions of kinship ‘[i]t makes little sense in indigenous terms to label some of these activities [procreation, living, and eating] as social and others as biological’ (*ibid.*: 236). Furthermore, the fact that we cannot answer the question as to whether kinship, as understood as both gestation in the uterus and eating with others in a house after birth, can be termed biological or social ‘merely underlies the unsatisfactory nature of the distinction’ (Carsten 1995: 237)’.

Prior to addressing the state of anthropological kinship study in the twenty-first century, following such changes in perspective, one final example is presented that directly addresses certain Eurocentric symbolic practices of envisioning. Bouquet (1996) presented the image of the family tree and its relationship to the genealogical diagram as being integral to the development and presentation of anthropological knowledge. This is significant, in that with regard to the genealogical diagram ‘its fundamental vision of kinship remains arboreal’ (Bouquet 1996: 62), which as Deleuze and Guattari have indicated may not be the greatest representation of social and/or biological phenomena: ‘Thought is not arborescent, and the brain is not a rooted or ramified matter’ (1987: 17). Bouquet demonstrates that genealogical diagrams do not afford neutrality in that they are often distinctly gendered across both anthropological and earlier biblical accounts (1996: 61). The guise of Euro-American ethnocentrism rears its head once more here within the visual records and diagrammatic representations that are most often applied to the study of kinship in anthropology. ‘The genealogical diagram charts kinship within ethnographic time,



but owes its moral tone and visual clout to sacred, scientific and secular forerunners' (*ibid.*: 43). It therefore does not necessarily represent relatedness and kinship classifications within the extended family, lineage, or clan of study, but rather the perceived structure of such bodies as influenced by a millennia of Western thought traditions. Not only when thinking about and discussing kinship and relatedness must the anthropologist be wary of imparting particular ethnocentric assumptions, but also when communicating specific ideas in diagrammatic form. In Foucauldian (1972) style (1972) Bouquet (1996) presents us with an archaeology of the genealogical diagram, concluding with the caution that its application without proper care and attention, can, has, and will, impact upon aspects of kinship reckoning in anthropology.

## **2.5 Kinship and Relatedness in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The study of indigenous kinship in anthropology responded to the concerns and reappraisals that were raised against it, with a direct consequence of this shift in perspective leading to novel observations of relatedness emerging within the ethnographic record. As part of this process, some anthropologists have chosen to focus specifically upon Euro-American, or more specifically British and English kinship, as it stands at the turn of the second Millennium. Edwards (1993, 2000) is one such proponent, suggesting that '[e]thnography of Britain has the potential both to add to an understanding of the social milieu it studies and to reveal preoccupations that inform a British tradition of anthropology', which in so doing 'implicates rather than ignores the richness and complexity of everyday life' (Edwards 2000: 10). In short, '[f]ieldwork in whatever part of the world, allows glimpses of lives lived' (*ibid.*: 13), and it is through such 'glimpses' of the lives of Bacup (a town in northwestern England) residents that has aided Edwards in the identification and description of what it is to be *Born and Bred*. Here, '[i]dentity and belonging, to both people and places, are aspects of persons which mobilize, and are mobilized by, kinship thinking' (*ibid.*: 26), whereby the reckoning of relatedness encompasses both 'the realm of the biological and the realm of the social ... both given and forged elements' (*ibid.*: 28). This representation is clearly in stark contrast to the stratified forms of kinship thinking that had come before. Consequently, what Edwards's Bacup case demonstrates is that '[t]o be born and bred is to be constituted of

relationships that are both affective ties *and* abstract connections between persons' (*ibid.*: 29, emphasis in original text) and that such connections may, or may not, include conceptions associated with blood, substance, and/or genes. This example of English kinship represents 'hybridity, whereby the implication of 'idioms of relatedness ... connects people to, and disconnects them from, places, pasts, and each other' (*ibid.*: 248). And this continues within in a mode which, as Strathern argues, is enterprising (Strathern 1992).

Carsten (2000a, 2000b) introduces the notion of 'cultures of relatedness' as a means to summarise the arguments that critique essentialist definitions of kinship that begin from biology and reproduction. She begins by 'exploring local cultures of relatedness in comparative context' (2000b: 1) with the aim of illustrating 'the implications and the lived experiences of relatedness in local contexts' (*ibid.*). Moreover, certain Euro-American ethnocentric assumptions regarding what kinship was, is, or may come to be, are explicitly under-privileged in order to 'offer new possibilities of understanding how relatedness may be composed of various components – substance, feeding, living together, procreation, emotion – elements which are themselves not necessarily bounded entities but may overflow or contain parts of each other or take new forms' (Carsten 2000b: 34). Following this approach enables us to continue with a view of kinship as encompassing a complex set of relations that can include, but also drastically extend beyond traditional perceptions of what it means to be related to another individual and/or group.

Edwards and Strathern (2000) make a contribution to Carsten's (2000a) edited volume using the English as their focus once more. Here, residents of Alltown, Lancashire, can be seen to use their own particular idioms of relatedness as intermediaries in the creation or severance of connections to various forms of attachment; be it 'belonging to a family, or to a place, various kinds of ownership, names, biological ties, etc' (*ibid.*: 28). In this instance, the creation of kin ties through varying connectors, or 'links' is suggestive of their position as one part of a wider network whereby 'they may also work as links or mediators or nodes themselves' (Edwards and Strathern 2000: 161). The suggestion put forward is that Alltown idioms of relatedness are one part of a wider British social milieu in which the 'interdigitation' of the biological and the social is key, and where the forging of

connections is as significant as truncation. This latter point is of fundamental importance to the general theme of my thesis as the exploration and interpretation of specific genetic and cultural genealogical connections by family historians in Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear also represents another ethnographic example of this 'British social milieu' (*ibid.*).

In an attempt to gain new insight into the study of kinship in anthropology Franklin and McKinnon assembled an edited volume titled *Relative Values* (2001b) in which to 'look both forward and back' (2001a: 1). We are told that '[k]inship study takes on an altered significance in the context of the Human Genome Project or genetic screening programs ... [and its associated] empirical and theoretical challenges' (*ibid.*). Science and technology are on the agenda once more, with the suggestion being that new developments in the field of genetics, and particularly the kinds of things that genes can reveal about connections between people, can be both disruptive and progressive where kinship and relatedness are concerned.

The title of Jonathan Marks (2001) contribution to this volume, "*We're Going to Tell These People Who They Really Are*", is taken from the mouth of a spokesman for the Human Genome Diversity Project (HGDP). Marks indicates that the primary aim of the HDGP is to reveal 'the ultimate biological history of our species ... with the highest level of genetic resolution' (2001: 368). This suggests the notion of establishing a genetic kinship of *Homo sapiens* whereby specific non-genetic conceptions of identity and descent would be contradicted. Immediately this is revealed as an issue of contention, as we learn that in response to the words of the HGDP spokesman above 'a Native American activist responded from the audience: "I know who I really am. Shall I tell you who *you* really are?"' (*ibid.*: 355, emphasis in original). The use of scientific and empirical methods of reckoning kinship and relatedness may then only be of interest to those cultures and societies that rely upon empiricism and scientific validity to structure their cosmologies. This is fundamental to Marks' argument, together with the key point that it is less than constructive, and can even be 'humiliating and disorienting' to take 'people's notions of who and what they are' (*ibid.*: 380) and to try and use ones own cultural mores to tell them otherwise (see also Egorova 2009). In short, the communication of new genetic discoveries from Euro-American societies to other regions of the world could be seen

as a further case of cultural hegemony whereby the fixing of biogenetic connections between persons (past and present) is paramount in the creation of kinship knowledge.

The potential pitfalls of applying genetic knowledge to questions of kinship also raise concerns when ethnographic focus is upon Euro-American societies where empiricism and science are strongly represented in culture. At the beginning of the twenty-first century Simpson acknowledged that aspects of genetic knowledge were becoming increasingly integrated within contemporary culture, whereby the '[a]ssimilation into everyday understanding of 'facts' about projects involving the human genome have important implications for notions of origins, linkage and identity' (Simpson 2000: 3). Moreover the 'narratives, concepts and terms' central to the communication of genetic knowledge between expert (professional geneticists) and lay fields (wider society) 'become woven into popular discourses surrounding human behaviour and interaction' which presents certain potential consequences of anthropological interest (*ibid.*). Fundamentally, it is the growing significance of DNA within society, when viewed as the primary signifier of 'human similarity and difference', that opens up possibilities for the 'essentialization of ethnicity' (*ibid.*) that is of concern to Simpson. Advancing Anderson's (1983) notion of 'imagined communities' Simpson offers up the concept of 'imagined genetic communities, that is, communities in which the language concepts and techniques of modern genetic medicine play their part in shaping identity, its boundaries and what is believed to lie beyond' (Simpson 2000: 6). In so doing, the advancement and development of genetic technologies, and their associated integration into wider society, acts as much as a means for promoting distinction between persons as it does in generating senses of similitude. Simpson (2000) and Marks (2001) both present their arguments with the shadow of twentieth century eugenics in mind, imploring caution with regard to the integration of new genetic knowledge within Western and non-Western cultures alike. The primary concern they express is that the ways in which people reckon kinship and relatedness could be negative as well as positive.

Anthropological research that has addressed the phenomenon of directly applying genetic technologies in order to trace and map personal genealogical connections has been particularly influential to my thesis. Anthropological discussion surrounding

Iceland's Biogenetic Project (Pálsson and Rabinow 1999, Pálsson and Harðardóttir 2002) led me to consider the implications of commercial genetic ancestry tracing to contemporary family history research and the ways in which family historians integrate this knowledge within the evidencing and imagining of genealogical connections. Moreover, as the Internet and digital technologies have grown in significance concerning the communication and navigation of genetic and genealogical knowledge in Iceland, associated indigenous kinship connotations have emerged (Pálsson 2009, 2012). Just what the implications arising from the integration of the genetic and digital spheres were for English kinship emerged as a question which I felt required addressing. Related research and discussion by Tutton (2004) and Nash (2004) has also helped me to clarify the importance of further investigating the role that genetic genealogy has to play in the development of Euro-American kinship reckoning as part of both everyday society and anthropological thinking.

Pálsson and Harðardóttir (2002) are interested in the Biogenetic Project in Iceland, which attempted to combine the medical records, genetic information, and family histories of both deceased and living Icelanders into a potentially marketable commodity. The balance here swung between proponents of the project who 'emphasize the opportunities it provides in terms of medical advances work, entrepreneurship, and private initiative, in the age of the challenging "new economy"', and the opposition, which 'emphasizes ethical concerns, particularly those of consent and protection of privacy, as well as concerns with ownership and control' (*ibid.*: 281). This is presented as an especially Icelandic case using comparisons with recent national debates around fisheries. Here, the argument is made that the commodity opportunities that biogenetic databases present can be largely understood in relation to the importance of fishing upon the national economy. Furthermore, it is suggested that the complexities of fisheries policy in Iceland 'may illustrate the options, dangers, and opportunities of alternative property regimes with respect to the human genome and other potential biomedical "resources"' (Pálsson and Harðardóttir 2002: 285). Key to the use and application of biogenetic data in this context is the issue of consent, and it is here where the 'topography' of the 'moral landscape' is formed for Pálsson and Harðardóttir (2002: 271). In essence, the authors are enquiring about questions of reciprocity. For example: Is it morally acceptable for aspects of individual genetic and genealogical

data to be distributed and shared for the benefit of a nation on medical and economic grounds? This is presented as a complex question to answer; however, it is acknowledged that anthropology does have a role to play in its exploration. Furthermore, the impact upon kinship that the sharing of such information can have, for Pálsson and Harðardóttir, is never far from view.

Tutton's (2004) research focuses on the interrelationship between population genetics and family genealogy with regard to the exploration of Orcadian identity and relatedness. In this context, Tutton also raises the theme of reciprocity whereby the sharing of personal genetic information is done so with the intention of seeing some form of valuable return. In this instance, the expected return is not medical or economic, but rather knowledge and evidence of personal origin. Tutton observes that participants were 'donating a blood sample at least partly in expectation of receiving information in return about their ancestry' (2004: 109). He goes on to suggest that amongst research participants in Orkney there was an 'understanding of genetic research as being similar to family genealogical research in that it could provide such highly individualised information' (*ibid.*: 110). In one particular instance a blood donor was hoping to confirm her Northumberland ancestry despite having been informed that the study was intended to prove or disprove Norse phylogenies. Here, the admixture of folk and empirical idioms when interpreting knowledge of genetic inheritance is clearly demonstrated. Tutton elaborates on this latter point with the aid of M'charek (2002) by suggesting that genealogists and population geneticists work on differing scales, and in alternate directions: One begins from the point of departure of a single individual and moves back in time to incorporate as many related people as possible; while the other starts with a large number of DNA sequences and 'seeks to reduce through time the number of sequences until a most recent common ancestral sequence has been identified' (Tutton 2004: 113). It is therefore suggested that '[t]he varying ways that respondents in the study in Orkney relate their participation to questions of their family genealogies demonstrate this important difference between the perspective of family genealogists and population geneticists'. Moreover, the discussion advances through the observation that '[t]hese different perspectives are also linked to how representations of genealogical relationships are produced by population geneticists and family genealogists' (*ibid.*). Such observations are significant within the context of my thesis as I am largely concerned with how people

are finding new ways of bringing the insights of population genetics, as marketable features of genealogical interest, to the interests of contemporary family historians. The conclusions that Tutton draws suggest that people who donated blood for this particular genetic study did so with the expectation of receiving personal feedback. Significantly, however, this feedback was not viewed in expectation of it revealing naturalised Orcadian identity, but rather to do with the personal positioning of ones' genetic genealogy within a wider global network. Participants were thus interested in the exploration of relatedness on a grand scale indeed. Consequently, Tutton proposes that previous cautionary discussion surrounding exclusivity and distinction (as described above) with regard to the new genetics may not be wholly representative of the current state-of-play. As such, it is suggested that 'we need to consider the specific social and cultural contexts in which genetic knowledge is embedded and the way that it interacts with different kinds of knowledge' (Tutton 2004: 116). It is acknowledged that Tutton's research project is unable to clarify whether genetic knowledge would take precedence over genealogical knowledge acquired through traditional family history research methods and consequently '[r]esearch into the impact of population genetics on genealogies and identities highlights key issues about the position of genetic knowledge in contemporary society and its influence on the way that people see themselves and others'. For Tutton, in order to investigate this question further 'an important focus of investigation should be the uptake of genetic ancestry tests by people who research their family genealogies' (2004: 117). This is precisely the line of enquiry that my research is aiming to address, in that it focuses upon the integration of genealogical knowledge, concerning both genetic and cultural affinity, by family historians in Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear and its subsequent impact upon how they think about and act out kinship and relatedness.

In *Genetic Kinship*, Nash (2004) investigates those practices of commercial genetic ancestry tracing which intentionally concentrate upon strictly maternal and/or paternal lineages. Concerning the usefulness and appropriateness of applying such tests to questions of identity and relatedness Elliot and Brodwin have previously acknowledged that the following of specific lineages 'will trace only two genetic lines on a family tree in which branches double with each preceding generation' (2002: 1469-1470). When tracing the paternal line from ego via the Y chromosome

back 14 generations Elliot and Brodwin thus demonstrate that ego will still only be connected to one man in the fourteenth generation, thus excluding 16,383 other ancestors in the same generation to whom ego 'is also related in equal measure' (2002: 1470). The inference is that these genetic tests can indicate 'a slender thread on which to hang identity' (*ibid.*). Nash terms the nature of this process 'geneticized genealogy' whereby '[t]he findings of population geneticists tracing the history and geography of the origins, movement and interaction of prehistoric populations are being converted into genetic commodities that offer to situate individuals within global patterns of human genetic diversity as well as sort out true biological relatedness from practised kinship' (2004: 1-2). Furthermore, this hybrid nature of genetic genealogical investigation is significant in light of its integration into everyday examples of exploring kinship, whereby '[a]s genetics is commodified and consumed within popular genealogy, the globalized rhetoric of technoscience meets the intimacy of personal genealogies, identities and family relatedness' (*ibid.*). In essence, folk ideologies meet with empirical discourse, and in so doing the idiom of kinship looms large, which is also key to the research questions I aim to address.

Nash argues that the discourse of family relatedness surrounding genetic ancestry tracing enforces and imparts essentialised notions of meaning upon the results of the tests that certain companies offer, while simultaneously providing 'a grammar for translating the complexities of the new genetics into public culture' (2004: 25). Moreover, Nash suggests that this version of geneticised genealogy 'produces new versions of genetic kinship, in the form of Y-chromosome genetic brotherhood, mtDNA clan membership and global genetic kinship' (*ibid.*). In such instances, Nash therefore views 'cultural work' as integral to the process of 'making genetic meaning' (2004: 3), whereby '[t]he 'truth' of genetics is supported by the status of science as rational, objective, disinterested and authoritative, yet its communication within and beyond the laboratory must make use of narrative, analogy, metaphor and imagination' (*ibid.*: 3), with the outcome being the solidification of outmoded forms of reckoning kinship. Nash's observations and analyses have been influential to my work; however, as part of the flesh and bones of kinship I suggest that in fact the cultural work that is essential to the communication and interpretation of genetic ancestry data goes some way to undermining the authority of the science at hand. And in so doing, we see less the solidification of an outmoded form of kinship and more



the persistence of a contemporary enterprising relatedness that in turn questions certain preconceived assumptions concerning what Euro-American kinship is, was, and/or does.

More recently, Pálsson (2012) has addressed the impact of direct-to-consumer genetic ancestry testing whereby online communities meet and interact in order to present and share their genetic affiliations. In such instances Pálsson suggests that ‘up to a point, personal genomics has democratized genomic discourse’ (*ibid.*: S185) and that the boundaries between expert and lay practitioners have become less clear-cut. Hierarchies remain however, even between consumers themselves, which in turn have contributed towards differing modes of reckoning genomic relatedness and personhood. Additionally, the direct agency of consumers concerning their active part within the process of building biogenetic databases, and thus extending upon wider bodies of genetic knowledge, is addressed by Pálsson as ‘biosocial relations of production, the labor processes and hierarchies associated with emergent biocapital’ (2012: S192). Pálsson makes a distinction between the application of personal genomics services regarding questions of ancestry, which are described as ‘largely play’, and those for investigating disease, but does not believe that any lingering issues of accuracy and/or reliability will interfere with what is presented as ‘the narcissistic pleasures involved in the exploration of ancestry and the genetics of health ... given the central place of the human body in late modernity’ (*ibid.*: S193). Consequently, Pálsson presents this research as a unique area of enquiry expected ‘to expand, realigning experts and consumers, institutions and disciplines, including genomic anthropology’ (2012: S193). The inference here is that, as far as the contemporary is concerned, across its various guises commercial genetic ancestry tracing remains an anthropological concern, whereby the investigation and interpretation of relatedness using knowledge of genetics and health are implicated.

## **2.6 A Persistence in Genealogical Thinking**

In the previous section it has been observed how questions relating to the new genetics can be seen to impact upon the ways that kinship is studied with particular reference to how people are measuring relatedness with others, both living and dead. In such instances the theory and practice of genealogy together with specific modes

of genealogical thinking are rarely far removed, and as a consequence these issues impact upon wider reckonings of kinship and relatedness. Nash addresses this latter point by acknowledging that ‘[d]oing genealogy can map flows and contaminations, rather than confirm pure identities and fixed locations’ (2002: 48), and that furthermore ‘[t]he genealogical language of biological inheritance often coexists with, and is challenged by, more complex genealogical imaginations’ (*ibid.*: 47). Rather than genealogical imaginings leading to fixed and essentialised versions of relatedness and connection, however, they can alternately lead towards wider fluid networks of association. Edwards describes this as a tendency to ‘militate against fixity and ‘rootedness’’, in that it highlights another ‘side’ to the genealogical imagination: a side less pure than its stereotypical image would have us believe and full of interconnection, contamination and complexity’ (2009: 138-139). A century on from the publication of Rivers’ *The Genealogical Method of Anthropological Enquiry* (1910) and genealogy can still be seen to occupy debate within the study of kinship in anthropology. As Bamford and Leach point out ‘the genealogical model has proven to have a remarkable tenacity in the discipline’ (2009: 2), which even within a period when kinship study has attempted to distance itself from any form of rigid and limiting structure towards more processual ‘modes of relating’ (*ibid.*: 3) can still act as a useful focal point in understanding just how we got where we are. And furthermore, just how genealogical models of reckoning have permeated beyond traditional themes of investigating kinship and relatedness by making explicit previous confusion relating to certain etic and emic constructions of genealogy, that is, anthropologists analytical usages in contrast with people’s practical uses.

The first contribution to Bamford and Leach’s (2009b) edited volume *Kinship and Beyond: The Genealogical Model Reconsidered* comes from Cassidy who focuses upon the formation and use of racehorse pedigrees as ‘an argument for suspicion of any kind of genealogy constructed without consideration of the particular way of knowing it might produce’ (2009: 25). For Cassidy, ‘merely producing a written pedigree transforms the manner in which knowledge about people (and horses) is envisaged’ and she exemplifies this point by focusing on ‘nineteenth century Bedouin and English thoroughbred horse breeding practices’ (*ibid.*). In this context, while the written pedigrees of English thoroughbred horse breeders seek to provide an evidence-base for the domestic development and progress of their horses, the

Bedouin purposely avoid written pedigrees as a means to preserve the purity of the original ‘Arab horse’ upon which their breed can trace its ancestry. By avoiding written genealogical evidence the Bedouin also aim to avoid highlighting any potential ‘contaminations’ (Nash 2002: 48) that may be inherent within a lineage and thus put unwanted distance between contemporary horses and their archetypal genitor. This Bedouin method, together with the successful creation of the first cloned horse *Prometea*, Cassidy argues, ‘threaten the capacity of the pedigree to record the improvement of a domesticated animal at the hands of its human keepers’ (2009: 45). More significantly, with regard to the cloned horse, this actually questions the applicability of the genealogical model altogether as both a metaphorical and/or documenting tool. In genealogical terms, through the example of *Prometea* we see lateral movement where there should be linear, revealing that thoroughbred breeders who were ‘once at the cutting edge are now out of step’ (*ibid.*: 46). In this example we can observe how Western conceptions and representations of genealogical connections in the animal kingdom are in the first instance in direct contrast to certain non-Western counterparts, while also being called into question by advances in the new genetics. As a consequence then it reaffirms those calls to look for alternative methods of reckoning connectedness and relatedness outside of the genealogical paradigm of thought. While horses are not of central interest to my thesis, what is of interest are the contrasting modes of genealogical thinking by the breeders, whereby the reckoning of relatedness through differing ‘folk’ idioms of inheritance remain key to their understandings of genealogical connection.

In an attempt towards breaking from genealogical representations of kinship Pálsson opts for a notion of *The Web of Kin*, which is presented as being the product of integrated ‘digital genealogies’ (2009: 84). The suggestion made is that ‘digital genealogies, a by-product of experimental biomedical projects, can be usefully regarded as machines as vehicles for generating connections and histories and for changing existing notions of kinship and belonging’ (*ibid.*). Through continual online scrutiny and maintenance of the *Book of Icelanders*, Pálsson argues that the ‘public, then, has been both busily fine-tuning the machine, ensuring that it runs smoothly and accurately – and, at the same time, reflecting upon relatedness and redefining community’ (2009: 104). In essence, for Pálsson the navigation, cross-referencing, and correction of genealogical connections online is done so within a structure that is

not strictly genealogical, but rhizomatic, where lateral and linear connections interweave towards a ‘complex, tight-knit web, more like subterranean fibres than trees’ (*ibid.*: 107). Consequently, Icelanders are therefore able to explore ancestry and relatedness using a novel method that, while relying upon genealogical information, is done so using methods that lie outside of any genealogical framework.

Edwards also addresses questions pertaining to the ubiquity of fixed genealogical reckonings of relatedness in Euro-American contexts. In doing so she tells us that ‘if we look at ethnographic examples from England, it is not clear that English folk everywhere and always draw on genealogy to reckon kin, and when they do genealogical links are not necessarily as fixed and uncompromising as the model might suggest’ (2009a: 138). There is a ‘trickiness’ involved, as one of Edwards research participants puts it, concerning the limits of the genealogical model and the ways in which ‘actual and lived relationships cut across it’ (*ibid.*: 139), with regard to thinking about kinship and relatedness in light of new reproductive technologies. By exploring attitudes concerning the donation of sperm from a father to a son Edwards records how Alltown residents explicitly demonstrate an awareness of the complexities of the ‘doubling-up of classificatory relatedness’ that would result from such a process, both biologically and culturally (2009a: 145). The key point is that a father donating sperm on behalf of his son would potentially reveal non-genealogical results. For example, the donor becomes at once a *natural* (biological) father and *nurturing* (cultural) grandfather, while the donee simultaneously represents a *natural* half-brother and *nurturing* father to any resulting offspring. Moreover, the wife of the donor ‘is related additionally and differently to the child though her husband’s contribution to its conception’ (*ibid.*:152). In this instance, both genealogical ties and affective ties become intricately interlinked, and are in a sense inseparable. When reckoning relatedness through ‘family traits’ Edwards also demonstrates that Alltowners are able to forge connections that elude a rigid genealogical framework. The acquisition, or non-acquisition of certain lived experiences are thus able to connect attributes of kin of the same lateral generation (brothers) to differing members of preceding generations (parents and grandparents) in positive and negative ways. Consequently:

The examples from Alltown indicate that genealogical thinking is more than the reductive or essentialist exercise that its stereotype would have us believe. Genealogical links are gendered, they come in different strengths, they ‘skip’ generations: genealogy is enlisted (laterally integrated) into the complex ways in which belonging to families, communities, social classes and so on, both past and future, are imagined (Edwards 2009a: 152).

Such observations thus suggest a possible reevaluation of notions of general Euro-American folk models of interpreting and understanding kinship and relatedness, whereby specific perceived dichotomies inherent within genealogical models of thought may not be so generally accepted, or practised, across all Western societies.

Taking the genealogical model and its association with ‘vertically integrated’ classificatory knowledge as the point of departure, Ingold argues that such representations provide ‘an inadequate and unrealistic account of how human beings come to know what they do’ (2009: 197). Knowledge of connection between people is not classificatory as the genealogical model dictates, Ingold suggests, but ‘is rather *storied*’ (*ibid.*, emphasis in original). In a novel way of demonstrating the inflexibility, and thus unrepresentative nature, of the genealogical model for reckoning relatedness it is argued that while classifications are inherently divisive in nature, stories are more inclusive and encourage connection. Ingold proposes that stories are fluid, ‘identified not by fixed attributes but by their paths of movement in an unfolding field of relations’, whereby it is the occurrence of new things, rather than their pre-existence, that is of significance to everyday living and interaction (2009: 199). Moreover, it is the meeting of ‘things’ (people) that results in the subsequent binding of stories, whereby:

Every such binding is a place or topic. It is in this binding that knowledge is generated. To know someone or something is to know their story, and to be able to join that story to one’s own. Yet, of course, people grow in knowledge not only through direct encounters with others, but also through hearing their stories told. ... Making their way from place to place in the company of others more knowledgeable than themselves, and hearing their stories, novices learn to connect the events and experiences of their own lives to the

lives of predecessors, recursively picking up the strands of these past lives in the process of spinning out their own (*ibid.*: 200).

For Ingold then, due to the ‘open-ended’ nature of ‘storied knowledge’, it therefore lies beyond essentialist idioms of transmission that are curtailed within the genealogical model. ‘[E]ach story will take us so far, until we come across another that will take us further’ with knowledge being carried on amongst peoples through ‘trail-following’ or ‘wayfaring, not transmission’ (2009: 203). Rather than presenting a network or web as a representation for the interaction of wayfared stories, Ingold presents ‘storied knowledge’ as fundamentally ‘meshworked’, whereby ‘the lines of the meshwork are not connectors but rather the paths *along* which life is lived and knowledge integrated’ (*ibid.*:206). In making this distinction it is therefore asserted that ‘people grow into knowledge’ thus circumventing the genealogical concept of the direct transmission of knowledge between people as simply hereditary (Ingold 2009: 211). This line of thinking is significant in that it demonstrates the potential for people to grow into new forms of relatedness, and vice versa, through the wayfaring of stories as part of lived lives. Ingold’s observations are significant with regard to my thesis as the integration of genealogical knowledge emerges as a process whereby story and narrative shows itself to be as significant as factual evidence when family historians are reckoning relatedness and establishing and maintaining kinship connections.

In the final chapter of *Kinship and Beyond* Viveiros de Castro offers a four-pronged analysis of the ‘consanguinity/affinity dichotomy’ (2009: 254) conceptualised in Western kinship theory and praxis. In the first instance – *The Standard Model* – ‘[c]onsanguinity is the province of the given ... [a]ffinity is active construction’, and in the second – *The Constitutive Model* – ‘both dimensions are seen as given, the first naturally (and thence socially, once sanctioned by culture), the second socially (but also in a sense naturally, since it evinces the essence of human sociality’ (*ibid.*: 254-256). Thirdly – *The Constructive Model* – ‘[b]oth dimensions are treated here as the result of socio-practical processes of relating; that is, they are conceptualized as equally constructed by human agency’, while in the final example – *The Amazonian Model* – ‘we find affinity as a given, internal and constitutive relation, and consanguinity as constructed, external and regulative’ (*ibid.*: 257-259). Although the

initial purpose of Viveiros de Castro's argument is to realign elements of anthropological interpretation surrounding kinship with concepts of the gift and magic in order to demonstrate its significance within the discipline, the parallels that are drawn between the standard and constructive models are also significant with regard to the modal exploration of genealogical thinking and relatedness. For example, Viveiros de Castro takes 'the constructive model to be a particularly strong version ... of the standard model, since it does 'no more' than extend to consanguinity the constructed status given to affinity in modern Western kinship ideology' (2009: 261). No longer can this be observed as part of the contemporary phenomenon of choosing, through acknowledgement, both kinship and relatedness. Thus meaning that '[w]e can now offer ourselves the luxury of two *entirely* different genealogies, one consisting of (biological) relatives without (social) relatedness, the other relatedness without relatives' (*ibid.*, emphasis in original). Furthermore, the vehicle of choice in the majority of such instances lies in new technologies (reproductive, genetic, etc.) and this, for Viveiros de Castro, indicates that '[k]inship still has its magic' (2009: 261). However, there still remains a force of the genealogical model in this present state of kinship analysis:

Relatedness is about what people do on the back of their biological being.  
Relatedness is culture. Processes of relatedness then are construction; process is flexibility, choice and creativity. But it is not constitution, and one can discern here the persistence of thinking in the mode of the genealogical model (Leach 2009: 185).

Essentially, it seems, even within the most processual modes of reckoning kinship and relatedness in anthropology, there remains a genealogical, and biological, undercurrent.

In this chapter I have traced a trajectory in kinship thinking across the discipline of anthropology within which the nature/culture dichotomy has been addressed together with genealogy as a theory and method. As part of this discussion distinctions between scientific and folk idioms of reckoning kinship and relatedness have been key. Through the presentation of the flesh and the bones of the genealogical story of the study of kinship in anthropology, or part of it at least, it has been the intention that

the contribution of my thesis can be clearly and relevantly positioned within it. It has not therefore been the intention to say outright what kinship or relatedness is, or is not, and if the review has achieved anything it may well be that it has demonstrated the difficulty in making any such outright universal statements regarding kinship. This does not mean that others have not tried, however, and prior to introducing my contribution to the field I will introduce one such recent attempt.

## 2.7 What is Kinship?

Advancing upon the ontological connections that Viveiros de Castro (2009) proposed regarding kinship, gift exchange and magic, Sahlins has presented us with that ‘specific quality’ of ‘what kinship is’ (2011a, 2011b); and more recently, also ‘what kinship is not’ (Sahlins, 2013b). Thus, Sahlins proposes kinship as “‘mutuality of being’”: kinfolk are persons who participate intrinsically in each other’s existence; they are members of one another’ (2013b: *ix*), and this ‘applies as well to the constitution of kinship by social construction as by procreation’ (*ibid.*). In this sense, Sahlins argues that the ethnographic record ‘tells repeatedly of such co-presence of kinsmen and the corollaries thereof in the transpersonal unities of bodies, feelings, and experience’ (2011a: 11; 2013b: 21), suggesting that kinship may after all represent a universal feature of human life and living and not simply a Euro-centric phenomenon to be imposed upon all and sundry. Kinship is about that which is shared, and this accounts for ‘common substances to common sufferings’ as well as the ‘wide variety of practices distinctive to people so related’ (Sahlins 2011b: 230). It is here that the notion of relatedness becomes so important to kinship as ‘where being is mutual, experience itself is transpersonal: it is not simply or exclusively an individual function’ (*ibid.*: 231; 2013b 44), in that active positioning and interaction between specific groups of people accounts for both one, and all. Sahlins suggests that generally ‘mutuality of being among kinfolk declines in proportion to spatially and/or genealogically reckoned distance’ (2011b: 234; 2013b: 53), thus implying that forms of intrinsic boundary reckoning remain in place concerning kinship. This latter point is significant in light of new digital and genetic technologies whereby spatial and genealogical distance can be overcome allowing for mutuality of being to extend beyond such preordained boundaries. In essence, Sahlins presents kinship as mutuality of being with the aim of reaffirming its place within anthropological



discourse and this is done by focusing upon the transpersonal nature of the practice and its ontological parallel with magic; in short, kinship is culture not biology (Sahlins, 2013b). This is a useful exercise in that it combines a great deal of what has been said before regarding the subject and packages it within a framework that demonstrates both clarity and credibility. Whether this represents the final attempt towards defining kinship in anthropology is doubtful, especially when keeping in mind Edwards' suggestion that 'more might have been said about the Euro in Euro American' (2013: 285) kinship, for example. However, it does represent a useful place to halt the current genealogy prior to an illustration of just how my current research is able to contribute to the field.

## **2.8 The Contribution of the Present Thesis**

By focusing ethnographically upon family historians in Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear, as well as the largest genetic ancestry tracing company in the UK (Oxford Ancestors), it has been possible to observe and evaluate the significant interrelationships that exist in the practices of evidencing and imagining genealogical connections. In so doing, contemporary indigenous understandings of kinship and relatedness can be seen to span elements of the social and the biological.

When thinking about kinship in this way, specific folk idioms of inheritance are important to family historians, and these can be seen to both overlap and contrast with wider empirical and scientific examples. In so doing there is a blurring of boundaries between experts and lay practitioners. The methods by which family historians explore their genealogical connections is also key, in that the Internet and digital communications of technology play a part in the kinds of evidence that can be accessed and the ways in which it can be communicated and interpreted.

Furthermore, genetic techniques of ancestral exploration are now able to inform family historians about their ancestral roots in temporally deeper and geographically wider terms than ever before. As a consequence, this information, together with the folk interpretations that are often afforded to it, is seen to impact directly upon genealogical imaginings as well as contemporary social interactions between kin.

Essentially, the digital and genetic technologies are able to present new possibilities in the exploration and understanding of kinship and relatedness for contemporary family historians. Whether it is through the communication of genetic facts and stories via online mailing lists and message boards or in the investigation and transcription of online digitised historic census records, the evidencing and imagining of genealogical connections maintains a constant presence.

For family historians across these three northeastern English counties genealogical research is about exploring connections through genes, occupations, surnames, documentary records, places, and epochs, and these connections are presented and communicated using stories, narratives, biographies, autobiographies, reminiscences, diagrams, facts, images, and myths. To them, in sum, this represents the flesh and bones of kinship, a hybrid form of reckoning relatedness between people that stands true whether evidencing and imagining genealogical connections between the living and the dead, the living and the living, and/or, the living and their future descendents.

By identifying the ways in which family historians go about their work, and just what they get from doing it, I am therefore able to offer anthropological insight into a specific mode of Euro-American, and particularly indigenous English, kinship thinking that can be seen to incorporate aspects of the past, present, and future, and which contributes to and develops the genealogy that has been outlined within this chapter.

## Chapter 3. Location and Method

This chapter introduces the wider geographic area of focus for this thesis, together with an account of significant field-site locations and the people therein. The chapter also serves to describe the research methodologies and techniques of investigation that were used in the collection and dissemination of ethnographic data.

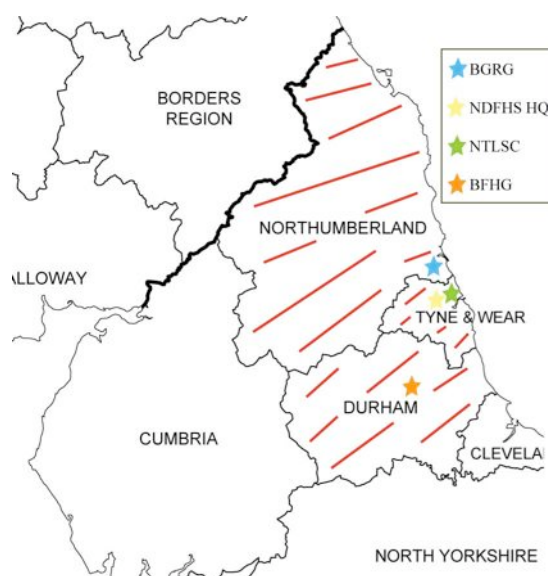


Figure 2: Map showing Geographic Locale and Field-sites

### 3.1 Geographic locale

Established in 1975, and with a membership of 3500 in September 2010, the Northumberland and Durham Family History Society (NDFHS) acts as an exemplar of the longstanding popularity of family history research in the northeast of England. In the early stages of research I was informed that the NDFHS is actually an ‘umbrella’ organisation that, despite having its central headquarters and resource

centre in Newcastle upon Tyne, actually incorporates a collection of smaller satellite 'branches'. Moreover, I was told that these 'branches' were 'situated in differing socio-economic areas' that include Tynedale, South Tyneside, Sunderland, Gateshead, Newcastle, North and South East Northumberland, and Durham. In research terms the notion of a wider 'umbrella' area, within which smaller field-sites and individuals could be identified and investigated, presented itself as a useful and practical conceptual framework in which to operate. Geographically, I therefore set my research boundaries as those defined by the counties of Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear, and identified specific field-sites and individual researchers within this area (see Fig. 2). The locale was also reflected in the research focus of the online family history mailing list (NDOML) that I monitored as part of the research. In the words of the list's moderator: 'All posts to this list must relate specifically to genealogy or local history in the counties of Northumberland or County Durham'. The boundary definitions used by the NDFHS and the online mailing list respectively apply to pre-1974 county interpretations that incorporate present-day Tyne and Wear.

A contact at the North Tyneside Local Studies Centre (NTLSC) was able to further demonstrate the popularity of genealogical research in the northeast of England by providing me with visitor numbers for the period starting January 2010 to the end of January 2011. Here, it was explained that approximately 9500 visitors had lodged a similar number of enquiries within this period and that 'most of our customers are researching their family trees'. Moreover, the 3300 online messages that were archived from the online family history mailing list between November 2009 and September 2011 revealed a proportionally large and active online community of family historians operating within the locale. The geographic locale of fieldwork was to a point 'constructed' (Amit 2000a, 2000b) by my research participants. Consequently, 'it was not a taken-for-granted space' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 2), but one in which longstanding cultural boundaries had already been set. As such, and even as a 'native' (see Messerschmidt 1981, Narayan 1993, Ohnuki-Tierney 1994) – I was born and have always lived in Tyne and Wear – I had to be both introduced and guided throughout. In short, by focusing upon family historians within these three English northeastern counties the overall aim is to present an ethnographic example of the indigenous English that will provide useful comparative and collaborative

research to previous related studies (Frankenberg 1990 [1957], Strathern 1981, Rapport 1993, Edwards 2000).

## **3.2 Field-sites**

Within the wider geographic locale introduced above a number of localised field-sites were identified and pursued as foci for ethnographic research. These sites incorporate geographic areas and buildings, individuals, and online communities. The individual field-sites are all interconnected and resemble those ethnographic vectors and matrices conceived by Strauss that act ‘as something of a hermeneutic device which can help us to visualize, describe and understand the shape-shifting locations in which cosmopolitan ethnography takes place’ (2000: 168).

### **3.2.1 Blyth Genealogy Resource Group (BGRG)**

During the summer of 2010 I became aware that a family history research group were meeting regularly in a council funded, community oriented, building in Blyth, Northumberland. My primary assumption was that the group represented the Blyth branch of the NDFHS. However, following my introduction I quickly learned that they were more of an autonomous collective composed of retirees, each embroiled within their own personal genealogical project. At my first visit the group told me that they held meetings every Monday afternoon and had done so for the past 12 years. During my period of ethnographic contact the group consisted of six long-term members (three female and three male). The group was eager to demonstrate that, despite their individual family history research objectives, they had also completed a number of local history research projects. One such project included the transcription and digitisation of the record-book for a recently demolished local school that more than one member of the group had attended as a student, and one had attended as both student and teacher. This particular research project, the group informed me, had since been lodged in the public archives at Woodhorn Colliery Museum near Ashington, Northumberland. As part of this story I was presented with a photocopy of a local newspaper article that had celebrated their endeavours regarding this particular project, dubbing them ‘the history masters’ (Black, 2010).

I felt that the relatively small size of this long-established group would present me with the opportunity to get to know all members equally well and that its balanced gender distinction would offer a good representative example. The group members used computers and the Internet regularly as part of their meetings while one man (Bill) also revealed that he had direct experience of genetic ancestry tracing. Consequently, I felt that ethnographic research with this group would present an excellent opportunity to learn about the internal processes of family history research in Northumberland and its association with digital and genetic technologies. As part of my social integration into the group I was also able to share and collect partial life histories. Elizabeth Francis suggests that a life story represents ‘artificiality’ in that it ‘is an intellectual construct whose structure and content reflect the priorities of the researcher and the images the informant projects back into the past, as much as tangible realities’ (1992: 93). However, I found that the communication of lived experiences between group members strengthened overall rapport and aided in the ‘tangible realities’ of the ethnographic experience. Following fieldwork I received an email from George explaining that the group had collectively enjoyed my presence, which gave me the distinct impression that they took as much from my story as I did from theirs. Of the six group members, five had been born and raised in Northumberland, with four of them living in Blyth for their entire lives. Only one of the members did not originate from northeast England, although he had lived in Northumberland for a number of years and had always lived in the north of England. The long-standing regional composition of the group’s members represented a further research draw concerning an examination of the interrelationship between indigenous notions of kinship and the collection and interpretation of genealogical research data.

Fortunately, the group members seemed as interested in me as I was in them and said that I was welcome to attend their meetings for as long as I pleased. I did so for 12 months, attending 28 meetings in total, and digitally recording pre-arranged semi-structured interviews with five of its six members. The BGRG represented a key field-site that continued as a rich source of ethnographic data throughout my period of fieldwork.

### **3.2.2 Northumberland and Durham Family History Society (NDFHS)**

Initial contact with the NDFHS was established via e-mail correspondence with the Chairman of one of the numerous satellite branches that the society incorporates. This contact directed me towards the society headquarters and resource centre that was situated within Bolbec Hall, Newcastle upon Tyne, explaining that ‘it may be useful to join the society as I suspect you may get a better reception as a member than dare I say an outsider’. It was explained that society membership involves an annual subscription fee that entitles members to the receipt of a quarterly journal together with free admission to, and use of, the resource centre. I received a complimentary copy of the society journal in the mail prior to my first visit to the NDFHS headquarters.

I had decided to seek permission to post a call for volunteers on the notice board at Bolbec Hall and to spend some time in the resource centre to interact with its users. Both requests were granted and my research presence was also advertised via the NDFHS online message board. I had been informed that family historians from across Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear regularly made use of the genealogical resources at Bolbec Hall indicating that there would be a useful cross-section of researchers to interact with ethnographically. At the NDFHS resource centre I spoke with staff, volunteers, and visitors, and made notes on themes of genetic ancestry tracing, the then upcoming release of 1911 census data, online documentary archives, contemporary kin connection, and the compulsive nature of family history research. As part of this engagement I also listened to numerous personal family and local history stories and narratives. In many instances these were explicitly identified as being of primary significance to the family history process.

It soon became clear that visitors to the NDFHS resource centre viewed their research time as extremely valuable and I occasionally got the sense that my interruptions containing most likely lines of naïve and novice questioning were not wholly appreciated. I was able to make use of the society’s resources as part of my paternal genealogical investigations that formed part of my research methodology (explained in greater detail below) with visitors and staff alike always keen to offer advice and guidance on the matter. There was some disruption when the society headquarters and

resource centre moved premises in 2011 although it remained in Newcastle upon Tyne.

The NDFHS headquarters and resource centre proved to be a valuable field-site in which to carry out participant observation, informal discussions, and unstructured interviews. Moreover, it represented a physical and virtual space in which I was able to forge connections with other family historians both within the region and beyond. For example, a number of researchers had viewed my call for volunteers on the NDFHS online message board and made contact via e-mail due to the fact that they were unable to visit the resource centre with any regularity. The NDFHS resource centre was therefore a useful hub that offered the opportunity to engage ethnographically with researchers both face-to-face and digitally while also opening up connections away from its Newcastle base.

### **3.2.3 Belmont Family History Group (BFHG)**

One such connection was established with a family history group based in Belmont, County Durham. Both the 'events-coordinator' of the Belmont group, and I, were in contact with a long-standing member and volunteer of the NDFHS who was able to mediate our connection. During the period of my fieldwork the BFHG represented an independent collective that met monthly in a local community centre. The group was composed of 21 members (8 male and 13 female), organising and approaching its meetings with a mix of formality and casualness. Minutes were taken and distributed amongst the group with external speakers also invited to regularly attend meetings. Time was always allowed for informal discussions to take place so that group members could discuss and address problems and breakthroughs in their individual family history research projects. Towards the latter stages of my fieldwork period an affiliation with the NDFHS was in its final stages of confirmation whereby the group were to become another of the society's satellite branches.

My presence was welcomed with the same level of openness and intrigue as it had been in Blyth, with all members eager to tell me about their research and to help with my enquiries. Due to the group size, structure, and limited number of meetings there was less time and opportunity to interact personally with every group member.



However, across the six-month period of contact I was able to record valuable fieldwork notes based upon in-depth discussions with certain group members. Such discussions were rich in tales of relatives, both living and dead, and their direct association with the storyteller, that at times bordered on the grounds of ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973). In the main, this engagement with family historians and their stories aided in demonstrating the importance of acknowledging a ‘biographical perspective’ (Miller, 2000: 21) when attending meetings. In so doing, I was able to record and interpret narratives that incorporated themes surrounding distinctions in the interpretation and presentation of genealogical evidence, concepts of inheritance, and contemporary kin connection. This aided my analysis by demonstrating aspects of the implicit and explicit processes in play when individuals and groups are investigating and interpreting family history research. It also offered a valuable point of comparison with other field-sites. The group was larger in size and more formally constituted than the BGRG, and at the time of my fieldwork was officially unaffiliated with the NDFHS.

#### **3.2.4 North Tyneside Local Studies Centre (NTLSC)**

During my period of fieldwork the North Tyneside Local Studies Centre was located within North Shields Library in Tyne and Wear. Despite rebranding to *Discover North Tyneside* in 2013, the NTLSC remains a publicly funded resource centre that between 2010 and 2011 was receiving anything from 600 to 1400 visitors per month. I was informed that many of these visitors come to conduct research for family and local history projects, with a great deal of community interaction evident between centre users and staff. I decided to make contact with NTLSC in order to widen my presence, and establish further contacts, within the family history research community of the region. On my first visit to the NTLSC I met Dianne, the head librarian. Once I had explained my research Dianne offered to give assistance wherever possible and immediately suggested that there would be some ‘regulars’ that would likely be willing to meet with me. I remained in regular email contact with Dianne and by the time of my second visit she had already helped to establish contact with an experienced family historian and key research participant (James) who had direct experience of genetic ancestry tracing. Furthermore, Dianne also introduced

my research to the project manager of a local memory club (Kath) also run from the NTLSC.

Contact with Kath was extremely useful in that I was able to learn more about the *memoriesnorthtyne* project ([www.memoriesnorthtyne.org.uk](http://www.memoriesnorthtyne.org.uk)) whereby local people regularly meet to share their memories of Tyneside before archiving them online. This memory archive intrigued me, and although its focus was primarily local history I could immediately observe parallels between this group and the family history researchers that I was interacting with concurrently, concerning the ways in which memories are communicated, interpreted, and stored. This memory club is an established local community project with the structure, function, and sociality of the club discussed in print by Kath and Dianne (Smith et al., 2006). Through my contact with Kath I was also invited to attend a one-day workshop with *Living History North East*, a community-based oral history project situated in Sunderland, Tyne and Wear. This workshop was extremely interesting and incorporated the practicalities of undertaking oral history interviews as well as the ethical and social implications of doing so. I was struck by certain similarities between the oral history movement and the family history process, not least when one workshop member used the familiar ‘flesh on the bones’ metaphor. Furthermore, this engagement highlighted that certain methods of investigation employed in oral history interviews are also reminiscent of the ‘techniques of life histories and family histories’ often used in wider social research practices (Miller, 2000: ix).

Not all family history researchers are members of organised societies and groups, choosing rather to work independently using venues such as the NTLSC to undertake their archival research. Consequently, interactions with the NTLSC also enabled me to establish contact with independent family historians I would otherwise not have met – one of whom became a key research participant (explained in greater detail below). Moreover, the connections that I was able to build with local oral history and reminiscence projects helped greatly in the development of my research regarding the interaction of genealogical evidence with both memory and narrative. While affording face-to-face contact with research participants and offering a valuable field-site for participant observation and interviewing, the NTLSC also introduced me to the presence of a globally networked family history group that has a strong online

presence (this group is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6). The NTLSC therefore presented a field-site that acted as both a place to engage everyday ethnographic enquiries with researchers at the library but also to extend contact and research focus to related external agencies and online communities. Although not a family historian herself Dianne acted as an extremely important node within the network of contacts that I established from the NTLSC.

### **3.2.5 Independent Researchers**

I established contact with a number of independent family historians as part of my ethnographic fieldwork with both informal and formally recorded semi-structured interviews conducted across varying locations. Those interviews conducted face-to-face were largely with research participants with whom I had forged connections through one of the field-sites described above. Occasionally however, friends and/or family would introduce me to an individual often described as a 'keen' family historian who was willing to aid me in my research. Regardless of how a connection was established, these independent family historians were all alike in that they undertook the majority of their research alone, using personal computer and Internet access with only an occasional foray into the NDFHS or NTLSC. Some were 'paid-up' members of the NDFHS, monitoring progress and development from afar via the quarterly journal and/or online message board. I met and interviewed some independent researchers in person while others remained faceless with only e-mail correspondence possible. In such instances this was largely due to a researcher no longer living in the study area, but one who had established and maintained their genealogical focus on the region. Online research participants of this type aided my research by e-mailing detailed written responses to pre-set questions. Despite the limits of this form of correspondence these research participants often took it upon themselves to elaborate on particular narratives concerning how and why they became involved in family history research and the stories and relationships that had emerged as a consequence. Whether face-to-face, or screen-to-screen, family historians displayed a passion for sharing their research motivations and findings and its impact upon contemporary everyday lives and relationships.

A common reason stated for conducting independent research was the ease with which certain records could be accessed online and from the comfort of one's home. Moreover, some researchers felt that paying for a subscription to Ancestry ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)) or Findmypast ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk)) was akin to paying an annual membership to a local society like the NDFHS. These researchers often 'floated' around field-sites, maintaining physical and digital connections with certain individuals and groups, but conducted the majority of their research independently. One such independent researcher (Raymond) showed me a whole host of software programs for creating a family tree and publishing it online and also allowed me to use his personal account with Ancestry in order to peruse and navigate online census records. The key aspect of engaging with independent researchers meant that I could gain greater insight into the significance of digital technologies for family history researchers and the growing reliance that was being placed upon digitised historic records online. There was also a practical element of interest here, with one researcher informing me that she preferred to conduct genealogical research online because it meant that she did not have to drive in Newcastle upon Tyne city centre *en route* to the NDFHS resource centre. This latter observation provides some insight into the increasingly preferred means and methods of societal communication and networking that are in action in the early twenty-first century.

### **3.2.6 Northumberland and Durham Online Family History Mailing List (NDOML)**

The significance of digital technologies and the Internet to varying elements of contemporary family history research has been previously identified (Edwards 2012, Fulton 2009, Bishop 2008, Tutton 2004, Yakel 2004, Nash 2002). My general premise here is that in order to investigate the role of digital technologies amongst family historians in my study area adequately some form of online presence was necessary. Consequently, I began my initial research investigations prior to any ethnographic contact by monitoring an online family history mailing list concerned with the Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear geographic locale. Due to the richness of the information that I was gathering through subscription to the mailing list I continued to monitor it until my period of active fieldwork had ceased. In total, I archived 3300 items of correspondence logged across a 22-month period.

One interesting feature of the NDOML was the number of contributors that ‘signed-off’ their mailing list posts with a geographical location of their own which situated them outside of the spatial list boundaries. This was significant in that it demonstrated that the mailing list, despite its strict genealogical research focus concerning Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear, clearly encompassed a wider national and international distribution of contributors. In short, the strict and fairly small geographic area that bounds the mailing list research foci is not wholly representative of the location of its subscribers and contributors. All list contributors – those that post messages – must demonstrate some research interest in the strict list research zone, but this can be done from any location across the globe with a functioning Internet connection. This observation raises important issues concerning bounded geographic locales and field-sites. As with the written accounts that I received from family historians that have their roots in my study area, but who no longer live in the region, the online mailing list demonstrates that my ethnography encompasses both family historians who were physically conducting their research within the region, and those who were carrying out their investigations from afar. Moreover, some family historians geographically situated within the region also demonstrate research interests that lie outside of the region. These observations may appear fairly obvious with past and present migration and emigration a feature of every region; however, it remains an issue that must be addressed, understood, and sufficiently interpreted in order to best frame my research findings regarding particular indigenous reckonings of kinship and relatedness.

Using the geographic information that many mailing list subscribers voluntarily contributed as part of their correspondence (which represented only a sample of the overall number of subscribers) I recorded and plotted the wider UK and global distribution of list contributors (see Figs. 3 & 4). Individual geographic locations are plotted only once even if more than one list contributor designated the same geographic location. In plotting the geographic locations and dispersal of mailing list contributors in this way I was interested to observe UK and international geographic variation with regard to the list research foci boundaries. In total there were 11 different locations plotted within the geographic list focus of Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear. However, 28 separate UK locations were

recorded outside of the focal geographic list boundaries (Fig. 3) suggesting in this instance that these three northeastern counties of England represent an important genealogical research focus for family historians situated across mainland Britain. When analysing the global distribution pattern of list contributors geographic dispersal can be seen to spread further still (Fig. 4). Here, 43 different geographic locations are evident outside of the UK. 23 of these geographic location points are situated across North America with 14 in the USA (including Hawaii), 8 in Canada, and 1 in Bermuda. 13 are situated within the Australasia region, encompassing Australia (8), Tasmania (1), and New Zealand (4). Southern Asia is represented through 1 geographic location point in Sri Lanka, while the 3 geographic locations recorded across the Middle East include Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. Finally, individual geographic location points in Spain, Sweden, and Greece represent Western Europe respectively. This global sample further indicates the propensity for family history research across Western and/or Euro-American societies.

Strauss (2000) has addressed the concept of the bounded field-site in relation to contemporary transnational ethnographic fieldwork. What the results of the mailing list distribution analysis demonstrate is that by incorporating a necessary online element to my research, pre-set field-site boundaries have become compromised. However, interaction between list subscribers within and outside of the geographic locale were observed whereby regional inhabitants would visit and photograph archives and cemeteries, for example, for non-regional inhabitants. Through the online mailing list and the establishment of relationships with list member's, those living outside of the region were able to conduct physical genealogical research within the region without actually leaving the comfort of their own homes, towns, countries, and/or continents. In short, due to the combination of the Internet, digital technologies, and human social interaction any geographically bounded research area could become externally accessible.



Figure 3: Map showing NDOML subscriber UK distribution (sample)



Figure 4: Map showing NDOML subscriber global distribution (sample)

### **3.3 Fieldwork and Techniques of Investigation**

Ethnographic fieldwork consisted of engaging closely with family historians within the geographic locale and associated field-sites introduced above. Principally this was undertaken within a period of one year from October 2010 to October 2011.

Monitoring correspondence via the online mailing list ran from November 2009 to October 2011. A number of research methodologies were applied in the completion of this research project, but as a ‘situated activity that locates the observer in the world’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 3) qualitative research, by means of ethnography, represents the primary means of enquiry within this thesis.

#### **3.3.1 Participant Observation**

Spradley acknowledges that ‘[t]he participant observer comes to a social situation with two purposes: (1) to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and (2) to observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation’ (1980: 54). By utilising a dual-purpose approach such as this the skilled participant observer is therefore able to gain access to a wider range of socio-cultural processes in a given social situation than a standard participant. I simplify, of course, but this is the basic premise of ethnographic enquiry and as such participant observation represented the main method of data collection during my period of fieldwork. As part of this I introduced myself and interacted closely with a number of family history research groups and organisations, as well as individual researchers, located within the Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear area. My engagement involved in-depth discussions about family history research, whereby the motivations, methods, and results of genealogical explorations were explained and described. Participant observation therefore helped as a means for demonstrating the practicalities of ‘doing genealogy’ (Nash 2002). Many of the discussions that arose through participant observation involved the exploration and sharing of biographical and autobiographical data whereby particular facets of personal information would be presented and reflected upon. As with Edwards, I was therefore able to use the personal narratives put forward by my research participants in close conversations in order to identify key points of interest: ‘the bits of the past, like the bits of social identity, which get selected as relevant’ (2000: 17). Whereas Edward’s Bacup



residents were using ‘autobiographical detail’ because it was ‘integral to, and made up the background for, what people wanted to say about, amongst other things, the town, its people, its services, and NRT’ (*ibid.*: 17) my research participants included personal life-histories in order to say something about genealogical connection, kinship and relatedness. While such interaction was essential to my research there was an explicit requirement from my research participants that if I wanted to know about them I had to in a sense be like them, and this meant undertaking some family history research of my own. If it was a possibility that I may be viewed as an ‘outsider’ by NDFHS members for not joining the society itself, as one contact forewarned, it was clear that I would remain an ‘outsider’ without looking into at least one line of my genealogy. In this respect I fully engaged with what Spradley has termed ‘the insider/outsider experience’ (1980: 56).

Highlighting genetic ancestry tracing as a burgeoning technique of investigation now open to family historians, and keeping in mind the acknowledged link between surnames and the y chromosome (Sykes and Irven, 2000, Redmonds et al., 2011), I chose to conduct ‘insider’ genealogical investigations by exploring my direct paternal lineage as a useful starting point. A number of my research participants agreed with this decision suggesting that it would be a useful and necessary genealogical base from which to conduct further family history research at a later date. The fact that an uncle had already completed substantial family history research along the maternal side of my family also aided this decision. I did not want to needlessly repeat work that had been done or appear to step on his toes as the family’s self-appointed family historian.

In order to explore the practice first-hand I spent time on microfiche machines at the NDFHS resource centre and made use of numerous online sources like FreeBMD ([www.freebmd.org.uk](http://www.freebmd.org.uk)), FreeCEN ([www.freecen.org.uk](http://www.freecen.org.uk)), Ancestry, Findmypast, and the Lancashire OnLine Parish Clerk project ([www.lan-opc.org.uk](http://www.lan-opc.org.uk)). This practical experience undoubtedly helped in building rapport with my research participants, and I found that some family historians became more open, and talked with greater freedom, when meeting with a fellow researcher [me] that had also experienced problems locating an ancestor within the 1861 census returns, for example. The very nature of family history research is also altruistic (Cannell 2011, Edwards 2009b,

Fulton 2009, Bishop 2008) and researchers like to aid each other in their ancestral quests. As such a number of research participants readily assisted me when searching through birth, marriage, and death (BMD) and census records for my paternal ancestors. Often this assistance led to a large number of potential marriages and baptisms being identified, which as can often be the case in genealogical research, usually led to a dead-end. The sharing of information is also a key aspect to genealogical research (Fulton, 2009, Bishop, 2008) and I certainly found it helpful to be able to trade ancestral stories, narratives, and facts, as part of my ethnographic interactions at family history meetings.

To undertake personal research as a facet of participant observation is not common, especially with those who have chosen to focus upon family historians from an anthropological perspective (Bishop 2008, Cannell 2011, Edwards, 2009b; 2012). In making this decision I did so with a view to building rapport with my research participants by showing that I was able to view and understand the process from their perspective, while I also aimed to engage experientially with the process and act on Spradley's advice by increasing 'introspectiveness' (1980: 57). My aim was to grasp with greater ease insights regarding the role of digital and genetic technologies, folk concepts of inheritance, and associated reckonings of kinship. Consequently, I use actual examples taken from the experiences and results of my own family history research as part of the ethnographic descriptions in this thesis. This is done, not in an attempt to present what the findings say about my ancestry, or myself for that matter, but rather to demonstrate what the doing of genealogy in this region reveals about its practitioners and the ways in which they integrate aspects of genealogical knowledge when exploring connections between past, present, and future kin. Although approached from a differing perspective, Combs suggests that 'ethnography' represents a more suitable metaphorical exemplar for genealogy over 'science', and this aspect of my research certainly displays a unique aspect of applying 'genealogy as an ethnographic enterprise' (Combs 2003: 252).

As well as developing experience with the digital tools of genealogical research, I also felt that gaining personal experience with genetic ancestry tracing would represent a useful methodological tool that would also be beneficial to my research findings. I had met research participants who had undertaken genetic ancestry testing

as part of their family history research and decided that by undergoing yDNA analysis I would have a valuable comparative body of genealogical evidence to go alongside the documentary-based genealogical work I had thus far completed. Moreover, by generating experiential insight into genetic ancestry tracing I felt that it would be a useful tool to use when discussing and comparing results with key research participants who had genetic results of their own. For Bruyn the ‘participant observer initially seeks to locate particular meanings which people share through communication’ (1966: 200) with it my intention to engage with these digital and genetic genealogical technologies in order to be able to better locate the specific meanings that were being communicated by my research participants as part of their genealogical research.

There are no genetic ancestry tracing laboratories in the region but by making use of the Internet and the postal system it was possible to complete a genetic test and receive the results without having to visit a laboratory. Oxford Ancestors are the largest commercial genetic ancestry tracing company in the UK and offer a unique interpretation and presentation of personal ancestral yDNA and mtDNA analysis. Significantly, Oxford Ancestors do not engage in genetic testing associated with contemporary cases of paternity and non-paternity, which I would place outside the bounds of my present research focus. Moreover, the company was founded and is run by Bryan Sykes, an eminent geneticist who has both published scientific research concerning the use of mitochondrial and y chromosomal DNA for investigating ancestry (1999) and applied his research findings to the realm of popular science (2001, 2006). As the research participant’s that had undergone genetic ancestry tracing had done so using other laboratories, and being particularly interested in Sykes’s use and development of particular names and characters to designate specific genetic haplogroups, and associated genetic kinship groupings, I opted for yDNA analysis with Oxford Ancestors.

The presentation of one’s genetic results by Oxford Ancestors is unique in the field and I have analysed my personal results in detail as part of this thesis (see chapter 5). Analysis of the results of personal yDNA testing undertaken with Oxford Ancestors is presented with a view to finding out what exactly is being said about the nature of interpreting and presenting genetic-based genealogical evidence within the

commercial sphere. Primarily, however, the focus is upon the impact such commoditisation of genetic knowledge has upon contemporary understandings of kinship and relatedness. In becoming a client of the Oxford Ancestors lab one also receives an access code to their online database and message board which was also viewed as an important additional research avenue to pursue.

Following the receipt of my yDNA results from Oxford Ancestors I established contact with the EthnoAncestry genetic company who were offering a number of products that included the reinterpretation of personal yDNA results established elsewhere. In this instance I felt that by taking advantage of the EthnoAncestry product it would be useful to compare the interpretative information offered between them and Oxford Ancestors. Initial enquiries suggested that there would be no problem with reinterpretation so long as I sent my previous results through to them in full, which I did. Following a number of emails and a two-month period of inactivity the company belatedly informed me that they had withdrawn their reinterpretation product and that if I was interested in learning more I could purchase their much more expensive SNP testing product. At this point I was approaching the end of my fieldwork period and further testing was not an option. I was left disappointed with this interaction as I felt that I had supplied EthnoAncestry with my personal yDNA genetic data, as requested, and received nothing in return. Essentially, I had entered into a basic system of exchange that was not reciprocated.

The 2011 census of England and Wales was conducted during my period of fieldwork and I secured a five-week temporary work contract with the Office of National Statistics as part of this. The institution of the census, and the records that it produces and archives, reemerged as a constant theme of discussion at family history group meetings, in online correspondence, and when talking with individual researchers (see chapter 4). Moreover, I learnt first-hand the significance of historic census records to family historians when compiling my paternal genealogy. The genealogical content of historic census data was not the only focus for the family historians with which I interacted, however, with questions pertaining to the capabilities and competences of the census collectors and enumerators of old, also commonplace.

The 2011 census then offered a unique opportunity to participate in the workings of a contemporary census by observing how aspects of data are collected and how the regional public responded to this. I carried out my census duties in North Tyneside and openly declared my research interest as part of the recruitment process and with my work colleagues and team coordinator. Although the role that I performed differed from that of the census enumerators of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries my experience has allowed me to present a brief, yet unique, ethnographic account of a contemporary working census, the results of which can be seen to triangulate observations recorded in chapter 4 concerning the use and interpretation of digitised historic census records online. Moreover, when I discussed the role with key research participants I was reassured by their genuine interest in what I was doing, and in some cases, insistence that being part of the of the 2011 census was entirely relevant if I was to better understand the processes of family history research in the region and its relationship to kinship. Discussions at family history meetings surrounding the release of 1911 census data from its 100-year data protection embargo were usually accompanied with reference to the then upcoming 2011 census with the two events viewed as contemporary happenings that would represent temporally distinct genealogical data sets.

The observations that I have been able to record as part of my involvement with the 2011 census have aided me to form contextual interpretations with regard to the collection of past census data, and have also helped in framing a better understanding of how such bodies of genealogical knowledge are constructed contemporarily, together with their socio-cultural implications and consequences upon English kinship thinking.

### **3.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews**

Crane and Angrosino suggest that ‘[n]o single approach to the collection of data in the field is foolproof’ meaning the ‘anthropologist builds up a knowledge of a culture by asking the same questions in a variety of ways’ (1992 [1974]: 55). Consequently, the proposition is made ‘that interviewing informants is a central part of the field experience’ (*ibid.*). In addition to making notes of conversations that arose regularly through participant observation I also carried out a series of pre-arranged semi-

structured interviews. This method of enquiry was chosen in order to create an organised framework of questions from which to work in an attempt to direct conversation back towards the themes that I was particularly interested in if necessary. As mentioned in the Introduction, experienced researchers had forewarned me on numerous occasions as to the likelihood that I would become overwhelmed by the number of ancestral stories that research participants would relate to me. Edwards also appears to have experienced similar attitudes in this regard by being informed: “get them started and you can’t shut them up” (2012: 72). I certainly did not want to dampen the narrative enthusiasm of my research participants, but I did feel that in certain circumstances it would be useful to have some semi-structured response. By then following the advice of Bernard (2002) all such interviews were recorded, formulated, and approached with an interview guide in mind. I digitally recorded a number of these interviews and transcribed them at a later date, while in cases where the audio recorder was not used extensive notes were taken during the interview. I found that research participants followed my line of questioning without problem and did so without avoiding the type of biographical and autobiographical narratives that had emerged in more informal conversations. In such instances, however, certain autobiographical offerings could be correlated directly to a specific enquiry which was not always as easy to access through fieldwork notes.

The interview process was something that the BGRG members, in particular, responded to positively offering detailed responses to questions while elucidating certain points of interest to their own research and what they felt would be interesting to my own. Over the weeks in which I carried out the interviews with the BGRG they became a point of intrigue and suspense to the group. Here, members excitedly asked questions like ‘who’s turn is it this week then?’, while those that had already been interviewed jokingly warned other members to ‘watch out’ for certain questions. These responses help to demonstrate that ‘[o]nce people agree to be interviewed, they have a personal stake in the process’ (Bernard 2000: 236), and furthermore, that interviewees are clearly aware that it is the researcher’s own ‘representation of their lives that is finally fixed in print’ (Collins, 1998: 8). In addition to data collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviewing provided a useful body of data that could be navigated and analysed with relative ease and which I was

confident represented a clearer picture of the thoughts and lives of some of my key research participants.

### **3.3.3 Online Monitoring**

As already described the NDOML presented a valuable virtual element to my ethnographic research. This was, however, an entirely observational enterprise whereby I did not offer any correspondence to the list following initial subscription. It was not a prerequisite of list subscribers to either contribute, or introduce oneself, as an observer or online 'lurker' (Marvin, 1995) and there were a number of correspondents who stated that they had been subscribers to the list for a number of months and/or years before actually raising a point or asking a question in open correspondence. Furthermore, any recorded admission regarding a list subscribers' previous 'lurking' habits were never met with any consternation, and it appeared an implicit acceptance that the list could demonstrate a far larger number of overall subscribers than actual open contributors. My reasons for 'lurking' were simple. My interests concerned the implication of digital and genetic technologies in family history research to contemporary reckonings of kinship and relatedness. The list moderator made it clear on numerous occasions to all subscribers that list correspondence should be limited to direct genealogical, family history, and social history queries and observations in Northumberland and County Durham. Any diversion from this was always met with great concern by the list moderator and often those involved were involuntarily unsubscribed from the list altogether. It was also a rule of the list that queries relating to living persons and families were not permitted, and as such any inquiries that I may of wished to have made concerning contemporary kinship networks would have been entirely inappropriate with regard to list rules. I did not want to risk being ejected from the list by making any perceived inappropriate anthropological enquiries and thus remained a covert researcher in this instance. I was also able to observe and interpret the correspondence practice of list members through analysis of the message threads that emerged without being part of the conversation at hand. Due to the open nature of the list I do not have any ethical issues with the covert nature of my research in this instance. Moreover, in the 22-month period that I did subscribe I did not receive any messages asking why I had not made any open contribution to the list.

Analysis of correspondence on the list provided a rich source of data that both interacts well with the information collected through participant observation and semi-structured interviewing, and also acts as a means of inclusiveness with regard to representing the vast scope of family historians in the region. Moreover, this online focus contributes to growing contemporary themes concerning the relationship between twenty-first century modes of social communication and networks, the Internet, ethnography, and anthropology (Escobar 1994, Wittel 2000, Wilson and Peterson 2002, Beaulieu 2004, Teli et al. 2007).

### **3.3.4 Questionnaire**

A small quantitative research element was also employed in my research through the formulation of a short questionnaire that was distributed across county-specific field-sites. Although representative of only one small line of enquiry the combination of qualitative and quantitative research elements is significant as ‘directive and non-directive questioning are likely to provide different kinds of data, and thus will be useful at different stages of the enquiry’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 116).

The questionnaire was introduced in an attempt to access family historians with whom I was unable to make face-to-face or online interactions and/or interview contact. The questions were deliberately kept short and closed with the results intended to form quantitative data to solidify or contradict those qualitative ethnographic observations recorded during fieldwork. The questions are characterised across four themes that relate directly to contemporary kinship connection, genetic ancestry tracing, family history research experience, and the specific demographics of the individual involved. These themes form a reflection of certain ethnographic observations that had been recorded using qualitative methods and, upon which, more information was to be gained. There were 35 completed questionnaires returned across a two-month period where they were left to be voluntarily completed at the NDFHS resource centre and NTLSC. Those members of the BFHG that were present on my last visit also completed a questionnaire, with an initial pilot tested on the BGRG researchers. I included my contact details on the questionnaire together with a brief synopsis of my research interests. No anonymous respondent contacted me with enquiries concerning the questionnaire.



Asking members of the BFHG to complete the questionnaire helped to spark valuable discussion surrounding the theme of kinship and relatedness. I requested that BFHG members completed a questionnaire due to the relative sparseness of the groups meetings, which coupled with the way they were organised, meant that I was not always able to speak in detail with all group members. By introducing the questionnaire to the BFHG I felt I would gain additional information from those individuals whom I had not had the chance to talk with. Moreover, I was also hoping to make each member feel that they were contributing, in some regard, to my research. I was clearly conscious that I did not want to appear to be favouring or excluding certain members by having prolonged discussions with some and not others, and I therefore viewed the questionnaire as an inclusive exercise. I explained that any individual that did not wish to complete the questionnaire was able to abstain, however, each group member present at my last visit did return a completed form.

There was always the chance, as one of my supervisors often reiterated to me, that certain claims of discovery and connection could simply represent part of the general discourse that family historians purvey to anyone willing to listen regarding their research exploits – ‘long-lost cousins’ being discovered etc. – in a form reminiscent of strategising responses to common questions (Gregory and Altman, 1989). Regardless of this possibility, however, I felt that I should investigate and monitor the theme further. Moreover, there could always be the argument that the instances that I recorded detailing a family history researcher reconnecting with a cousin following decades of non-contact, and/or establishing contact with and visiting previously unknown relatives in Northern Ireland, for example, would represent an isolated episode that could happen to any individual regardless of any involvement with the family history research process. By asking closed direct questions concerning such themes the aim was to assess such instances quantitatively.

Specific questioning and response percentages are indicated below (Fig. 5) with the results integrated into wider ethnographic discussion offered in chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7.

### Family History Questionnaire

**1a.** Has undertaking Family History research led you to find previously unknown living relatives? For example, individuals that you did not know existed as part of your extended family.

- Yes **31/35 = 88.6%**
- No **4/35 = 11.4%**

**1b.** If you answered **Yes** to question **1a** above, have you established contact with these newly discovered relatives?

- Yes **20/31 = 64.5%**
- No **11/31 = 35.5%**

**1c.** If you answered **Yes** to question **1b** above, have you maintained contact with these newly discovered relatives?

- Yes **15/20 = 75.0%**
- No **5/20 = 25.0%**

**2.** Has undertaking Family History research helped you to establish contact with any extended family members that you did know existed, but whom you had not previously met or had communications with?

- Yes **19/35 = 54.3%**
- No **16/35 = 45.7%**

**3.** Has undertaking Family History research helped you to reconnect with living relatives whom you may have lost contact with since youth?

- Yes **21/35 = 60.0%**
- No **14/35 = 40.0%**

**4.** Do you have any knowledge of genetic ancestry tracing (the use of DNA to learn more about ancient ancestry)? Please tick one option below.

- I have no knowledge of it **9/35 = 25.7%**
- I have knowledge of it but know nothing more **14/35 = 40.0%**
- I have knowledge of it and know a little **11/35 = 31.4%**
- I have knowledge of it and understand it well **1/35 = 2.9%**

**5.** Do you have any experience of genetic ancestry tracing?

- Yes **2/35 = 5.7%**
- No **33/35 = 94.3%**

**6.** Would you ever consider using genetic ancestry tracing as part of your Family History research?

- Yes **18/35 = 51.4%**                      Maybe. **3/35 = 8.6%**
- No **14/35 = 40.0%**

7. Which particular ancestral lines have you traced as part of your own Family History research? Please tick all that apply.

- Fathers' fathers' direct line **34/35 = 97.1%**
- Fathers' mothers' direct line **32/35 = 91.4%**
- Mothers' fathers' direct line **34/35 = 97.1%**
- Mothers' mothers' direct line **32/35 = 91.4%**

8. How long have you been undertaking Family History research?

- 1 year or less **1/35 = 2.9%**
- 1-5 years **5/35 = 14.3%**
- 5-10 years **6/35 = 17.1%**
- 10 years or more **23/35 = 65.7%**

9. Age?

- Below 40 **0/35 = 0.0%**
- 40 – 50 **2/35 = 5.7%**
- 50 – 60 **2/35 = 5.7%**
- 60 – 70 **13/35 = 37.2%**
- Above 70 **18/35 = 51.4%**

10. Gender?

- Male **14/35 = 40.0%**
- Female **21/35 = 60.0%**

Figure 5: Copy of Questionnaire (questions and results)

### 3.4 Key research participants

When reflecting on the fieldwork process, Lockwood describes how he established differing relationships with his research participants and that these relationships often stemmed from the fact that one 'is bound to get on better with some people than others' (1992: 171). This is a feature of fieldwork that is interpreted in a positive rather than negative light and is viewed by Lockwood as being 'of major importance in the collection of qualitative information' (*ibid.*). Essentially, by creating, or failing to create, affinities with certain people as part of ethnographic research one is able to gain access to varying levels of data, which is in itself revealing about the social worlds under scrutiny.

Bernard suggests that ‘informants [research participants] tell you *what they think you need to know* about their culture’ (2011: 149, emphasis in original text) and that these individuals fall into two distinct categories: ‘key informants’ and ‘specialized informants’ (*ibid.* :150). For Bernard, ‘[k]ey informants are people who know a lot about their culture and are, for reasons of their own, willing to share all their knowledge with you’ (2011: 150). One significant feature of this specific group of research participants is that there is often a more balanced and reciprocal relationship in place between ethnographer and informant; in Bernard’s words: ‘They and you choose each other, over time’. Consequently, the ‘key informant approach is one of the most important research methods for social anthropologists’ (Marshall, 1996: 93), in that it offers the opportunity for the researcher to get at the very crux of ethnographic enquiry. Which is that ‘fieldwork stands or falls on building mutually supportive relations with a few key people’ (Bernard, 2011: 152). In contrast to key informants Bernard suggests that ‘[s]pecialized informants have particular competence in some cultural domain’ (*ibid.*: 150), which is important when you require someone to ‘speak knowledgeably’ about certain things. In such exchanges the ethnographer largely identifies and chooses these research participants, with the resulting transfer of knowledge often then viewed as the end of the relationship.

As part of my fieldwork such distinctions between research participants were evident, although there were also observable overlaps. For example, the six key research participants that are introduced below could display great competence in their particular cultural domain, but this did not necessarily mark them apart from their peers (it being a prerequisite of family historians to ‘know their stuff’). What was distinctive about them, however, was that they offered a unique fusion of styles: they were at once interested and informative. And it was this very admixture that afforded them a different research status to the many other people that I engaged with during fieldwork. George, Raymond, Bill, Mary, James, and Bridget had an interest both in my research and in me as a person, and this mirrored aspects of my own interest in their genealogical research and in them. As such, they fully engaged in the ethnographic process by means of an ongoing relationship and actively tried to progress it along the way. ‘How can we help you today?’, and ‘what can we do to make this clearer?’ representing two oft-repeated questions that George would pose to me and the BGRG respectively at most gatherings.

As my research developed it became clear that there were people whose voices and stories appeared more prominently within my ethnographic observations and descriptions. This was a direct result of the relationships that had emerged throughout fieldwork, and consequently the characters that reappear most often within subsequent chapters represent, in Bernard's sense, 'key' research participants. Partial biographies for these six individuals are thus presented in order to familiarise the reader with them.

### **3.4.1 George**

George is a retired fireman and life-long resident of Blyth, Northumberland. Motivated by a desire to learn more about his parents, who both died before he was 10 years old, George had been conducting family history research for over 20 years when we met. He helped to found the BGRG in 1998 and, during my period of ethnographic contact, assumed the role of unelected leader and spokesperson for the group. George had an annual subscription with Ancestry and was also a 'paid-up' member of the NDFHS, as well as family history societies in Yorkshire and Norfolk. At BGRG meetings George conducted the majority of his family history research over the Internet. In such instances he was particularly savvy at navigating historic census records online and applied particular strategies in order to glean the maximum amount of genealogical information possible from these digital online archives. In light of his experience and skill George was highly respected amongst the other members of the BGRG who often turned to him for guidance and advice when addressing and solving genealogical problems. He was also always keen to aid me with my research goals and was highly informative both in answering my questions about the figuring of genealogical connections and when demonstrating the more practical aspects of family history research. George had traveled to Manchester and parts of Yorkshire as part of his family history research and at the time of my fieldwork had future genealogical excursions planned in Orkney and Italy. He had established contact and maintained social connections with previously unknown living relatives in Yorkshire and America as a direct result of family history research. George displayed an interest in genetic ancestry tracing but had no direct experience, feeling that it is still an expensive luxury for most family historians in the region.

Thanks to a combination of deep local knowledge and vast genealogical experience George remained a key research participant throughout my period of fieldwork.

### **3.4.2 Raymond**

Raymond is a retired town-planner and life-long resident of North Tyneside. Inspired through early experiences as a local history enthusiast Raymond gradually began conducting family history research in 1991, with his endeavours intensifying more greatly following retirement. Raymond described himself predominantly as an independent researcher making use of home access to digital resources via the Internet that included a subscription to Ancestry. He had an annual subscription with the NDFHS, and another with a family history society in Cleveland, and made intermittent use of the NDFHS resource centre and NTLSC. Raymond told me he enjoyed sharing his genealogical research findings with his close family ‘whether they like it or not’ and had traced his maternal and paternal lineages back to the seventeenth century. Raymond had also forged connections with previously unknown living relatives in Swaledale and Reading and reconnected with a cousin whom he had not spoken to since youth as a direct result of his genealogical research. He traveled to varying locations across the north of England in order to photograph extant sites that had proved significant to his family history research. Raymond did not have any direct experience of applying genetic techniques of investigation to his family history research, being of the opinion that the results such commercial products offer are still too vague for his genealogical interests. Raymond displayed immense pride in his ‘North East’ origins and enjoyed strengthening regional ties through the combined use of genealogical evidencing and imagining. Like George, the continual combination of deep local knowledge and vast genealogical experience meant that Raymond remained a key research participant throughout my period of fieldwork.

### **3.4.3 Bill**

Bill served in the RAF, worked as a Rugby League physiotherapist, and spent many years as a St. John’s Ambulance volunteer. Although born and raised in North Yorkshire he had lived in Northumberland for over 20 years when we met. Bill was a

member of the BGRG and had been conducting family history research for 11 years. He made regular use of his online subscription with Ancestry and told me that he was also a former subscriber to a family history society in Wakefield. Bill was particularly focused upon using computer software in order to construct his family tree so that it would display photographs of his ancestors from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was also in the process of compiling family history portfolios to pass on to his offspring. Bill had not traveled further than Sheffield as part of his genealogical research but had discovered previously unknown living relatives online using Ancestry and often explained how his family history research had helped him to reconnect with a sister and great-nephew who lived on the English south coast. Bill had direct experience of genetic ancestry testing after volunteering to take part in a yDNA and surnames study directed from the University of Leicester. During my period of fieldwork I spent a great deal of time listening to Bill talk about his family history research findings and subsequent narrative interpretations. Frequently this entailed reference to his relationship with his grandfather as a child, whereby he would combine lived memories with genealogical findings when describing certain folk concepts of inheritance. As a constant source of rich autobiographical data, coupled with his experience of genetic techniques of genealogical investigation, Bill remained a key research participant throughout my period of fieldwork.

#### **3.4.4 Mary**

Mary is a nurse with mixed English and Polish heritage and is a life-long resident of the Northumberland and County Durham locales. Mary had five years worth of experience as a family historian when we met, and being below retirement age, was a rarity in comparison with the majority of family historians that I interacted with. She described herself as an independent researcher and did not maintain a subscription with any family history society. Mary undertook regular volunteer work transcribing historic census records for online free publication via the FreeCEN website. The provision of free online access to digital records was important to Mary's interpretation of what family history research 'is all about', while she admitted that transcribing historic census records from an area in which she knows her ancestors were born had helped in the progression of her own genealogical investigations. Mary had traveled as far as Poland as a direct result of her family history research and had

consequently discovered previously unknown living relatives in Central Europe. She told me that she had also maintained contact with a newfound Polish cousin. Mary was interested in trying to explore her ancestry using genetic techniques of investigation but held the opinion that it was currently ‘too expensive’. Mary was particularly insightful with regard to interpreting the motivations that underlie the ‘doing’ of family history research, and openly forged explicit correlations between ‘reaching a certain age’ and ‘wanting to find out more’ about both one’s origins and contemporary personal and collective identities as part of our discussions. Due to Mary’s census transcription experience and her often deeply reflexive perspective regarding the interpretation of genealogical information Mary represented a key research participant.

### **3.4.5 James**

James is a retired Tyne River Pilot who also spent many years in the Merchant Navy. Aside from his time at sea James was a life-long resident of North Tyneside and had traced his paternal lineage of the eighteenth century ‘across the river to South Shields’. James represented an experienced family historian who conducted his research independently but made regular use of the NTLSC. James had discovered previously unknown living relatives in Canada and Orkney and had maintained social contact with them. James was particularly interested in tracing paternal genealogical connections through occupations, whereby he used a folk interpretation of inherited kinship that was associated directly with ‘hard work’. He had experience of genetic ancestry tracing, gained when volunteering for a genetic study aimed at investigating contemporary ‘Viking genetics’ in the north east of England. While the results suggested that he was not a genetic Viking James told me he was surprised to learn of his relatively rare (in terms of the British population as a whole) paternal genetic affiliation that is more common in Central and Eastern Europe. James viewed all aspects of genealogical evidence, whether cultural or genetic, as useful to building an interesting and representative family history story and organised his research accordingly. Due to his experience of genetic ancestry tracing and close association with the NTLSC James represented a key research participant.



### **3.4.6 Bridget**

Bridget is a retired clerical secretary with mixed Norwegian and English ancestry and is a life-long resident of Blyth, Northumberland. She was an experienced family historian with over 20 years experience when we met, and is the co-founder of the BGRG. Bridget had an annual subscription with the NDFHS and spent her genealogical research time exploring both British and Norwegian digital archives. Bridget stated that she wanted to find out more about her ‘family stories’, which represented her key motivation in pursuing family history research. She also told me that she was keen on sharing her research findings with varying family members. Bridget had discovered previously unknown living relatives as part of her genealogical research and had maintained contact with one such local relative. Although she had not traveled as a direct result of her research findings Bridget was encouraged to take language classes in Norwegian as part of her ancestral explorations. Bridget also used her genealogical research findings as a means to exploring and understanding her medical history and applied her own ideas about inheritance when doing so. This, she explained, had impacted upon the ways in which she now understood her genealogical connections with her ancestors. Due to her valuable local knowledge and vast genealogical experience, coupled with her particular fascination with family history research and health, Bridget remained a key research participant throughout my period of fieldwork.

### **3.5 Group Dynamics and Sociality**

In social research – ethnographic or otherwise – that has chosen to focus on family historians and their genealogical methods, it has been a common observation that interaction as part of a group constitutes an important feature of the process (Bishop, 2008; Cannell, 2011; Combs, 2003; Edwards, 2009b, 2012; Fulton, 2009; Nash 2002). When attending family history group meetings, monitoring online correspondence, and/or meeting up with individual researchers for face-to-face interviews and discussions I engaged in what Carrithers would refer to as the ‘innate human propensity for mutual engagement and mutual responsiveness’ (1992: 55). Through this very basic sociality it was possible to gain some insight into the ways in

which certain groups and individuals went about their family history research, and what it was that they could take from it regarding their own sense of community.

The BGRG meetings that I attended certainly represented an important weekly social occasion for all group members. Upon arrival group members exchanged pleasantries as one would expect, but the group did not always get straight down to work. Regularly, they would sit together and have a communal chat about their families, personal health issues, local Blyth news, and events associated with the community building where they met. The group always made an effort to include me in these discussions, and often Bob, George, or Elizabeth would look to make space for me by rearranging chairs and inviting me to sit closer. It was usually the case that these wider social discussions would incorporate some aspect of family history research and that the combinative nature of such interactions (the switching between work and leisure) could be linked to the length of time that the group had been meeting as well as their collective Blyth affinity. For example, when I asked BGRG members about the benefits of conducting family history research in a group setting notions of friendship and community interlinked with the practicalities of research:

I've made some great friends, you know, coming here and doing the courses. We've built up a friendship and have been together now over ten years in this group; and yeah, you help each other. I've found it a fascinating subject and I've got the wife hooked now as well (George).

For George, social interactions with other family historians have contributed to a prolonged interest in, and enjoyment of, the genealogical enterprise and this is something that he has also been able to share with his contemporary kin. Bridget echoed such views when she told me how fascinating she found BGRG discussions. Moreover, she also added that these social interactions often reflected a form of community spirit that she associated more with her memories of the history of Blyth:

It's amazing, with us being sort of local, how one person connects with another; seeing who connects with who ... how all these coincidences crop up. So Blyth isn't really such a big place. But it started off, you know, where everybody knew everybody at one time; nowadays it's more the elderly

people that know everybody, but it depends on how many groups you're in and whether you drink, or not, in different clubs and pubs (Bridget).

Here the sociality demonstrated between BGRG members, together with their collective interest in the evidencing and imagining of genealogical connections, combines to prolong and maintain an ethos of community that Bridget views as being otherwise hard to find in contemporary Blyth. By talking about and documenting family histories in and around the Blyth locale, the BGRG were then able to explore ideas related to a collective past in ways that most members could participate in. This strength of community togetherness was further illustrated by Gwen when she told me in an interview that she was still 'a newcomer ... the newest to the crowd out there', despite living in Blyth and having attended BGRG meetings for 4 years. Gwen was not being negative with her use of this comment but was rather attempting to illustrate just how tightly knit the group is and how this togetherness and local affinity had been able to aid them in their collective family and/or local history projects, and thus to preserve an important past aspect of Blyth.

Elizabeth continued a similar line of thought to that explored above as part of a discussion between us at one meeting:

I like the group activities, I like the interchange of ideas and I like listening to peoples' pasts and joining things up. ... I feel as if there's a pride in our group, of what we've done, you know, everyone has done things to the best of their ability (Elizabeth).

Elizabeth clearly had great respect for her BGRG affiliates and this respect was borne out of the individual and collective efforts that were applied to group meetings and associated social interactions, as well as the fact that each member could contribute to the communal work of the group by incorporating their own pasts and to share in one another's. This, for Elizabeth, was also then of great benefit when experiencing communal relationships in the present.

Ideas about sociality, community, and sharing also emerged in discussions with independent family historians. Mary told me she felt that 'we need to feel part of a

community' and it was clear that Mary sought this community through the enterprise of family history research (see chapters 4 and 6). Raymond, on the other hand, viewed the vast numbers of volunteers that can be found at the NDFHS 'who are only too keen to help' as an example of the significant ethos of sharing that exists amongst family historians. This sharing feature of family history research has been observed elsewhere (Cannell, 2011; Edwards, 2009; Fulton, 2009). It was also reflected when monitoring correspondence via the NDOML:

To all those who have responded with information ... I thank you! I have attempted to thank each of you personally, but I want to express to the list my appreciation of your collective helpfulness. There is no way I could find this information on my own. Your willingness to share is phenomenal! (NDOML subscriber).

This willingness to share information often extended beyond the realm of family history research data, as was evident in the group discussions that occupied the early minutes of the BGRG meetings. Consequently, NDOML subscribers often elaborated their correspondence to include all manner of related topics and this was interpreted as a positive aspect of online social interaction:

What a wonderful List this is! It's great that you can discuss things which are not strictly speaking Genealogy. . . . I've been on some Lists when such veering off topic is strictly discouraged. . . . It's been fascinating reading about the old buildings and goings-on (NDOML Subscriber).

Exploring social history was sometimes used as a means for family historians to reflect on aspects of community and to form and create imaginings between the past and the present. Elizabeth, for example, informed me: 'the older I get ... I can empathise much better with the early and the hard, you know, way of the life, and the political situation, but I'll not talk about politics'. Such imaginings of past hardships were not uncommon (see chapter 4), but I did note that the narratives that associated these genealogical reflections rarely involved contemporary political and/or class inferences. In fact, as Elizabeth's comment above suggests, the family historians that

I interacted with often made a case to avoid politics in their genealogical imaginings, while past reflections of social class experience were explored from the emic perspective of an ancestors' day-to-day quality of life rather than any etic analysis of wider societal structure.

The sharing practice that emerged through group dynamics was a way for the family historians with whom I engaged to explicitly promote their genealogical enterprises and to demonstrate how their research could lead to valuable results. More so, however, it offered family historians the opportunity to talk about their research and to integrate it within a series of interconnected narratives. Here it was observed that the exploration of connections – genealogical or otherwise – between researchers in both digital and face-to-face settings was used in the formation and maintenance of contemporary social relationships, as well as in the reinvigoration of a community spirit that was increasingly viewed as in decline. Carrithers argues that ‘narrative thought lies at the heart of sociality’ (1992: 74) and it is such narrative thought and storied interaction that allows family historians in the northeast of England to co-construct their sense of kinship. By participating in the group dynamics of family historians it was thus possible to observe how the sociality of genealogical research shaped kinship thinking and practice. This latter point is explored in greater detail as part of the ethnographic descriptions and analyses that follow through chapters 4 to 7.

### **3.6 Summary**

This chapter has introduced and outlined the wider geographic locale and associated internal field-sites that are the focus of this thesis. It has addressed the necessary online element of my fieldwork as a representative feature of research that also raises important questions regarding the geographical bounding of any twenty-first century research project that incorporates the Internet and digital communications. The primary methodological techniques of investigation have been outlined and discussed with ethnography, via participant observation, the principal method. The use of personal documentary-based and genetic-based genealogical research as an important element of my participant observation is justified as a valuable experiential tool for aligning family history research with anthropological questions of kinship and relatedness, as well as being used as a method for the building of rapport and

expansion of relationships with research participants. The use of semi-structured interviewing and online correspondence analysis is presented here as an essential accompaniment to the modes of participant observation that have been introduced. A small quantitative element, by means of a questionnaire, is justified through its aim of complementing the wider body of qualitative data. This thus helps to offer a greater range of research data from which to draw valuable conclusions. The mini-biographies of key research participants that are introduced towards the end of this chapter are used as a means to tangibly access the backgrounds of some of the important names, voices, and personalities that people this thesis as well as to highlight the importance of the 'key informant' to ethnographic enquiry. Finally, observations relating to the group dynamics of genealogical research illustrate how sociality can be utilised as a means to aid in the kinship thinking and practices of many family historians.

## Chapter 4. Evidencing and Imagining with the Census

One November afternoon I arrived at the scheduled BGRG meeting to find Bridget and George huddled around a computer screen and deep in conversation. George was logged on to Ancestry and told me he was trawling the nineteenth century census returns in an attempt to ‘break down a brick-wall’ that Bridget was experiencing with her family history research. Bridget described how she had encountered some problems when trying to attain copies of both her grandfather’s and her great aunts’ birth certificates. Using online archives Bridget had been able to locate these ancestors within the 1881 and 1901 historic census returns but was having great difficulties with the 1891 census. For the majority of the meeting George sat at the computer inputting variations of surname spellings into the search field option. Following numerous failed attempts George suddenly announced that he had ‘cracked it’ and pointed to what he considered three different transcription errors as representing the major obstacles to locating Bridget’s grandfather and great aunt. Bridget was visibly pleased by George’s findings, describing it as ‘a Eureka moment’. A printout of the 1891 census return was immediately produced with George also saving a digital version on the communal group memory-stick. Bridget then began to make some notes regarding her newfound information before embarking on a tangential story concerning the grandfather in question and the curious fact that he had ‘two birthdays’. ‘You could be fined if a birth wasn’t registered in time so my great grandmother made his [Bridget’s grandfather] birth date a week later than it actually was’ Bridget explained. Her great grandmother had escaped the fine, we were told, with the result being that her grandfather therefore had a ‘real birthday’ and an ‘official one’. Another group member jovially suggested that this was a bit like the queen, but Bill took a more serious attitude suggesting that ‘they don’t think about the problems they cause us, the ancestors’. Bill’s inference was that such anomalies in the public record are problematic for family historians when evidencing and imagining genealogical connections and that accordingly certain discrepancies must be kept in mind and acted upon when navigating historic census records online.

## 4.1 Outline

The following chapter considers the practical application of digitised historic census data by family historians. I provide an ethnographic description and analysis in order to focus upon the ways in which they both evidence and imagine their personal genealogies using online census records. The purpose of this exercise is to highlight the significance of digital census data to kinship thinking. The investigation initially addresses historic census data from both demographic and genealogical perspectives. This includes observations concerning the enumeration and legal protection of census data together with personal reflections regarding its ability to better inform genealogical perception. The transcription of historic census data from its original handwritten paper form into digitised online archives is addressed by presenting the practical experiences and ancestral motivations of Mary, a local family historian turned volunteer census transcriber. This feature of documentary-based genealogical research raises questions pertaining to the quality and accuracy of past census records and it is shown that this does not impose upon the utilisation of such data when fixing and forging genealogical connections. Here, attention is focused upon the specific strategies that are employed by family historians when distilling certain enumeration inconsistencies in order to maintain the validity of their evidence and to sustain imaginative genealogical narratives. An ethnographic account of the 2011 census is introduced as a means of demonstrating the wider social significance that surrounds the collection of contemporary genealogical data and how this relates to shared notions of community-based relatedness. By focusing upon the workings of both past and present censuses, the contextual power of historic census data is also assessed in light of its ability to frame social snapshots of the past while simultaneously impacting upon contemporary genealogical imaginings. The methods by which family historians are able to maximise the authority of their evidence through the use of contextual narrative translation (story) are also assessed. This latter feature is presented as an important additional strategy whereby family historians are able to account for the temporal issues of incorporating historic census data within practices of the contemporary. In short, this chapter demonstrates ethnographically the analytical and interpretive work that family historians are applying to digitised census data in order to reveal the flesh and the bones of their associated kinship reckonings.



## 4.2 Census Data

A census, through its unique means of data collection, monitors social, economic, and demographic information relating to a society. This information can be sub-divided into groupings associated with specific regions, local authority boroughs, and/or enumeration districts; however, the primary objective remains to achieve ‘a comprehensive coverage of the entire population and a set of data referring to a specific point in time’ (Dewdney 1981: 3). The application of digitised historic census data as a documentary evidence-base for the investigation and interpretation of personal genealogies by family historians is therefore in contrast to the initial aims of an official census. The individual names, ages, occupations, and places of birth that are of secondary importance to the statistician, for example, thus represent official indicators which are used to detail the lives and lifestyles of ancestors in the hands and minds of the family historian. Census data therefore constitute distinct public and private practical significance to the social demographer and family historian respectively.

Nineteenth and early twentieth century censuses typically revealed detailed information concerning nuclear and extended family constitution, habitation, occupation, and domestic migration patterns. In contrast, late twentieth and early twenty-first century censuses concentrated upon questions relating to housing (including the number of available habitable rooms in a house, its structural composition, and date of construction), ethnicity, and religion. Consequently, all manner of contemporary socio-cultural peculiarities are identified and reported upon following a modern census. For example, regional and national statistics concerning aspects of the 2011 census are now beginning to be reported in certain media outlets, with overall percentage figures detailing contrasts between the disproportionate numbers of recorded Jedi Knights over Jews in the North East (ChronicleLive 2013) an unanticipated, and unusual, finding. Much of the detailed individual contemporary information that will be of interest to future family historians will not, however, be available for general public attention until the late twenty-first and early twenty-second centuries due to strict data protection laws. The digitised historic census records currently available for analysis by family historians represent those for which the 100-year period of embargo has expired. In light of this, one significant feature of

the census as it presently stands in England and Wales is that the collection of each contemporary decennial census is also accompanied by the release of census data for the corresponding survey which occurred 100 years previously (i.e. the undertaking of the 2011 census was concurrent with the release of the census data of 1911 from its legal data protection restrictions). In discussions with research participants and through observations via the online mailing list it was revealed that such events are closely monitored, and eagerly awaited, by family historians. Each census period thus offers the opportunity both to ensure further attainment of valuable genealogical evidence and to deposit equally valuable genealogical evidence for the potential use of future generations. Ethnographic observations revealed that this was an event family historians viewed positively, as it afforded them the opportunity to record their own lives within the documentary record for future generations to then explore. The BGRG members, in particular, discussed the then upcoming 2011 census in this way, making explicit their anticipation of receiving, completing, and archiving the 2011 census form. Such observations demonstrate the temporal potentiality of historic census data regarding genealogical recording and interpretation within the present and beyond. The genealogical imaginings of family historians in Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear thus extended forward in time as well as back.

When employed as part of the 2011 census, experience in the field and the completion of various training courses demonstrated that coordinators and enumerators should record comprehensive and accurate data in order to best reflect a genuine representation of a society at the time of census survey completion. This is not always a straightforward experience, however, with individuals not staying at home on census night in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, or failing to complete their forms accurately in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The result is that certain individuals and households can remain unaccounted for in both the historic and contemporary census record. Keeping such points in mind, I was able to observe that family historians in my study area were aware of this feature of the census and that they demonstrated strict ground-rules concerning accuracy and precision with regard to the accumulation and assembly of their digitally accessed documentary-based genealogical evidence.

The construction of family trees and their associated narratives leads to the unveiling of genealogical facts in the form of recorded baptismal and marriage names, together with associated dates and locations of births, marriages, and deaths. When making initial genealogical enquiries into my paternal ancestry I was told that one must ensure, as a reliable family historian, to ‘get it right’, with all available data ‘checked and checked again’ across ‘two or three independent sources’. For my research participants, this would invariably include the cross-referencing of digitised information acquired from differing nineteenth and early twentieth century census surveys to be formulated into a coherent narrative that could fit within local idioms of genealogical connection: the flesh and the bones. I was thus regularly presented with, and/or encouraged to utilise, digital historic census data as part of the paternal family history research that I undertook throughout fieldwork. In so doing, it was suggested that I would be able to ‘get to know’ my ancestors and ‘their stories’ just as my research participant’s had theirs.

I sat with George and watched as he used a computer to enter his details onto the Ancestry login page. Following another click or two of the mouse, the computer screen then revealed a search box where one is able to input personal details in order to begin a genealogical exploration of the historic census records. As George explained: ‘It’s pretty easy really, you just enter the name there [pointing to one part of the box] and choose which census to search [pointing once more] and see what comes up’. I tried this using the name of one of my ancestors and there were hundreds of results in the 1881 census records. George smiled and told me that it helped to know roughly ‘their date and place of birth’ as this would narrow the results further. I tried again, guessing a date, which one parameter of the search function widened plus or minus 5 years. This revealed fewer possibilities, but still too many for my liking, especially as at this point I only had a vague idea of a place of birth. ‘I’ll show you how it’s done’ said George while entering the full name and place and date of birth of one of his ancestors. When the results page appeared he scrolled down the screen a little, stopped, and told me: ‘that’s him’. Before I’d had a chance to look the screen changed again, this time showing a summary page listing a particular household and its inhabitants. From here George downloaded a digital image of a nineteenth century enumerator report detailing five or six households and their inhabitants all living on a Blyth street in 1881. George was able to trace genealogical

connections to all of the inhabitants of one of these households, which the census data had helped with by displaying individual ages and occupations for these people in 1881, as well as their original places of birth. Moreover, George told me that this information had been helpful when tracing deeper genealogical links to the forebears of the head of this household. I immediately figured that George had visited this street, the household, and its inhabitants, many times using online digital census records, and it became clear that as long as you know how and where to look for them, ancestral relatives have the potential to reveal themselves on a monitor screen following the click of a few buttons.

In the ensuing months that followed these early genealogical experiences I was able, with the aid of George and other research participants, to trace my direct paternal ancestry through to the seventh generation. This achievement – as I viewed it at least – was based largely upon genealogical evidence acquired from within the 1901, 1891, 1881, 1871, 1861, 1851, and 1841 online census records. Using census data, it was also possible to create a previously unknown narrative, for my paternal family, beginning in the nineteenth and extending into the early twentieth centuries. Here, I discovered that my great-great grandfather, John William Hurst, was born and raised in Bedford, Lancashire – now part of Leigh, Greater Manchester – and had relocated with his brother James to the North East (Walker, Northumberland, now part of Tyne and Wear) at some point between the censuses of 1891 and 1901. Historic census data also indicated that it is likely this migration occurred in order for my great-great grandfather and great-great granduncle to continue in their occupations as coal miners following marriage. This inference arose due to the fact that both brothers were recorded as coal miners in the 1891 census while living with their parents – my great-great-great paternal grandparents – and 8 siblings in Leigh. While in contrast to this, the 1901 census shows both men living as married, coal mining, neighbours, situated on a street in Walker over 200 miles northeast of the original family home.

These findings are introduced in order to demonstrate how data contained within digitised historic census records, is able to both fix genealogical connections and forge genealogical imaginings whereby new reckonings of kinship and relatedness can, and do, develop. Moreover, this distinct feature of the process is shared explicitly between family historians in Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne

and Wear, in that specific local idioms of relatedness are employed when communicating genealogical findings and thus describing one's kinship. 'You know, I've lost a few twigs and branches in the past two or three years' Elizabeth told me when explaining how recent deaths in her family had curtailed her genealogical research. The rest of the group knew what Elizabeth meant, even if I, at first, did not. The tracing of genealogical connections with the past had been as much about maintaining links in the present with the loss of these 'twigs and branches' also implying a loss of shared kinship with the past. For Bill, however, the knowledge that there are 'other people on ancestry' researching some of the same genealogical lines as he (such information being provided to its annual subscribers) was enough to maintain this notion of a shared kinship with the past. In a similar fashion the personal genealogical information that I was able to acquire from online census records was integrated (shared) with the small amount of genealogical information that I had learned through social interactions with family members. In this way I was able to develop a narrative based upon new genealogical evidence that resulted in new imaginings of a shared kinship with people in the past.

As a child I was aware that prior to marrying and raising a family in Newcastle upon Tyne my paternal grandfather was born and raised in London and evacuated to Wales during the Second World War. My paternal geographic affiliation with the northeast of England, I believed at this point, stretched only two generations (through my father and myself), with any deeper geographic paternal roots traceable to southeast England. Genealogical evidence recorded in historic census records indicates, however, that my paternal great grandfather was in fact born and raised in Walker, Northumberland, being part of the progeny of the incoming coal mining migrations to northeast England in the early twentieth century. With this knowledge I was therefore able to re-reckon a shared kinship with the region, as well as with northwest England – my early Victorian paternal origins being traceable to Lancashire – through the deepening and widening of revealed genealogical connections. By combining the observations of my research participants with experiential genealogical research it is shown that the forging and fixing of genealogical links to, and from, people and places is significant, in that it aids in the creation of genealogical imaginings that are directly associated to a shared kinship with the past.

By entering into this mode of kinship thinking I also discovered that my interactions with research participants became more balanced. Just by using phrases such as ‘I’ve found through comparisons with the 1871 and 1881 census records that I can trace a shared connection to ...’, research participants would immediately offer their own experiences, infusing aspects of genealogical evidence, imagining, and local idioms of relatedness. When explaining what she considered to be the ‘positives’ of family history research as part of one such conversation Mary offered the following insightful comment:

I’ve been to houses that I’ve found addresses for in the census that my family have lived in, and that building becomes more meaningful and things. So you just have more meaning in your life, and more knowledge about where you come from and who you are. And, you’re engaging with the wider world and connecting with people, and I think that as a human being you need that. It’s part of our psychology, I think we need to feel part of a community (Mary).

This need to ‘feel part of a community’ is representative of the notion of a shared kinship with the past, whereby engagements with, and connections to, people and places figure greatly. It can even be said that digitised historic census records help in ‘rendering connections tangible’ (Edwards 2000: 209). As an evidence-based practice there are further methodological processes of achieving this, however, with the transcription of historic census records being one such approach.

### **4.3 Transcribing and Translating**

In the recent past, trawling archival records stored on microfiche was the norm for family history researchers. Among my research participants, the use of computers and the Internet was extensive, enabling the family historian to access, view, print, and hold a copy of any transcribed historic census record dating from 1841 to 1911. The ease of access to digital technologies has thus enhanced the speed and efficiency with which genealogical lineages can be traced and recorded, and kinship reckoned. One clear consequence of the change that digital technologies have brought is to be seen in the fact that microfiche machines, once essential to family historians, were largely unused whenever I visited the NDFHS resource centre in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Computers, on the other hand, were usually either reserved or occupied. That is not to say that records stored on microfiche are now obsolete. They are still relevant, and were integral to the initial stages of investigation associated with my paternal ancestry. Edwards' image of the *Ancestor in the Machine* (2009b) is very apt, with the contemporary 'machine' better represented through the form of a computer, laptop, or tablet as opposed to that of a microfiche reader. Due to this reality, coupled with the growth of a whole host of public and private genealogical websites, it is now possible to construct an ancestral lineage without the need for public space or institutions. However, free and easy access to digital and online resources alone will not necessarily make for a successful family history research project, as the ability to demonstrate particular strategies based upon experience, intuition, and applied logic are also fundamental to the process. The implementation of such strategies becomes necessary in those instances where family historians discover that certain households and individuals can appear to be unaccounted for within a particular historic census record. This represents a complex feature of digitised historic census data as these instances of unaccountability can be attributed to errors on behalf of contemporary transcribers as much as they can to the original enumerators.

The subsequent wealth of experience that some researchers have acquired in navigating archival resources, together with their ability to remedy potentially problematic transcription errors demonstrates a level of expertise that Edwards (2009b) and Fulton (2009) have also noted in family history circles. George, applying over 20 years of genealogical experience, kindly assisted me in the detection of an ancestor that I had experienced trouble locating within the 1861 census records, and whom I was starting to believe was 'missing' from this particular survey. Detecting 'missing' persons and the bridging of 'gaps' in evidence are thus two important skill sets that, with sufficient experience, family historians develop somewhat akin to those of an amateur sleuth.

In a rapidly freezing December I made my way to the usual Monday afternoon meeting with the BGRG. On arrival I was greeted by George, who then proceeded to show me that he had undertaken some extra research concerning the 'Hurst' lineage with which I had been experiencing such a 'gap' in the genealogical evidence. Within the 1851, 1871, 1881, and 1891 census records I had recovered evidence of my

ancestor Thomas Hurst, born Eccles – father of the coal miners John William Hurst and James Hurst introduced earlier. However, I had thus far failed to find him in the 1861 census. Often when an ancestor appears ‘missing’ from a particular census record it can indicate their death between surveys. There was no question of Thomas having died between 1851 and 1861 however, as I had previously located his presence within census records post-1861. This absence was therefore puzzling. Through analysis of the online historic census records George demonstrated that he had finally located Thomas Hurst, born Eccles, within the 1861 census. George’s investigative success regarding the location of Thomas in the 1861 census record was a welcome discovery as it meant that an unsatisfying and unhelpful ‘gap’ in the genealogical evidence could at last be filled. In this example, George demonstrated a number of important strategies integral to the evidencing and imagining of genealogical connections as part of the family history process. The first being the ability to circumvent potential problems (gaps in the evidence) as they emerge, in order that they are not then able to interfere, or contradict, with any subsequent narrative interpretations. The second being the desire to present such expertise in a way that is helpful to others seeking genealogical knowledge (in this instance, me).

‘It was a transcription error’ that had hindered my previous efforts at locating Thomas, George explained. The main problem, he suggested, was that the transcribed census summary page had listed Thomas with the incorrect surname (‘Hursh’) together with an inconsistent age of 46 (the 1851 and 1871 census records show Thomas aged 6 and 26 respectively). The transcribed surname variation and age anomaly displayed on the summary page in this instance had not discouraged George from viewing the associated original 1861 census record image in order to verify the results. ‘It’s a good job I did check it too’ George told me, before producing a printed copy of the original handwritten census records for us to examine (Figs. 6, 7, 8, & 9). When I looked at the printout it quickly became clear that George’s analysis was correct. We both read Thomas Hurst, age 16, not the wrongly transcribed version of Thomas Hursh, age 46 that had appeared in the summary page. We both agreed that the transcription errors were most likely linked to issues of handwriting legibility on the original form and the misinterpretation of specific enumeration markings (large cross-shaped subsequent annotations) which had led to inaccurate interpretation by the modern-day transcriber (Figs. 6 & 7). Here, the annotations traverse the correct









No. of House, including Subdivisions	Name of Street, Place, or Road, and Name or No. of House	Name and Surname of the person who abode in the house, on the Night of the 30th March, 1851	Relationship to Head of Family	Condition	Sex	
					Male	Female
		Matthew Lench	Son		6	
46	Grange	Thomas Green	Head	Mar	77	2
		Susan D.	Wife	Mar		75
		Sibyl Hurst	Daughter	Mar		76
		William D.	Gr Son		10	
		Thomas D.	Gr Son		6	
		Harriet Green	Gr Daughter			16
47	Grange	Isabel Green	Head	Mar	34	
		Lane D.	Wife	Mar		29
48	Man Side	John Wood	Head	Mar	31	
		Isaac D.	Son		8	
		Elizabeth D.	Daughter			5
		Therese D.	Son		3	
		Ann D.	Daughter			9

Figure 9: 1851 Census Return (detail)

Once I had identified an association between the skillful circumvention of genealogical ‘gaps’ in the evidence and the maintenance of genealogical imaginings, I was eager to learn more about the digital transcription of historic census data. In an early meeting with Mary she told me that she was involved in undertaking transcription work for a free online nineteenth century census archive (FreeCEN). As part of this discussion Mary also hinted that census transcription work had been helpful and beneficial to certain aspects of her family history research and we organised to meet the following week in order to talk about this further. At this subsequent meeting I therefore conducted and recorded a semi-structured interview with Mary around the subject of her family history research and related census transcription work.

Mary began the interview by describing her initial disappointment at the level of complete historic census records on some of the free-to-view websites that she had utilised in the beginning stages of her family history research. This disappointment at the incompleteness of records can be attributed to resources not living up to the ideals

of the family historian, whereby levels of accuracy and expertise are held in such high regard. For example, FreeCEN, as I learnt from Mary, is ‘very limited to certain areas, and not complete by any stretch of the imagination’. Consequently, the archive had been unable to provide Mary with fully transcribed historic census records for the geographic area that was her genealogical focus. Rather than being discouraged by this anomaly, Mary explained that she decided to respond to an advertisement for transcription volunteers posted on the FreeCEN website in order to help complete their archive. Mary explained that volunteers usually receive 8 pages of a particular census to transcribe at any one time, with the added bonus being that one can choose to transcribe census records from any incomplete geographic area. Mary therefore chose an area where she had learned anecdotally that some of her ancestors had lived during the nineteenth century. The purpose in doing this was, in her words, to ‘come across them’ (identify and locate her ancestors within the historic census records), which she deemed, ‘would be really interesting’. Moreover, she explained that she had expected this to be a ‘good thing’ for her research as it would help in locating evidence of ‘where’ and ‘how’ her ancestors had lived, as well as ‘who the neighbours were and everything like that’.

The documentary-based genealogical evidence that Mary deciphered as part of her digital transcription work, and associated family history research, undoubtedly represented an enjoyable and informative experience. For example, she stated on more than one occasion: ‘I find it really, really interesting’. Here, the ‘it’ represents the active investigation of genealogical evidence that is contained within historic census records and which is able to unveil facts about the everyday lives of past ancestors together with wider insight into aspects of historic family structures and interactions. Mary described how, through the processes of transcription, she had been particularly surprised to learn of the extent to which nineteenth century census records would indicate evidence of family structures and living patterns more commonly associated with the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries:

It’s amazing how far and wide people traveled in those days. I was really surprised. It’s not only these days that we’re so mobile. And all the stepchildren and enhanced families [*sic*], people remarrying and all this; we

didn't invent that, it's been around for a long time. I was quite surprised about that too (Mary).

In essence, the social lives of ancestral kin and the communities in which they interacted are of great relevance to Mary, which through her census transcription work she is able to greatly satisfy. I took this to be a reflection of how Mary also viewed the contemporary, as the lives and stories of her present-day social and geographic affiliates were often integrated into our genealogical discussions.

Mary was also eager to point out that in undertaking census transcription work for FreeCEN she was aiding fellow researchers with their own ancestral trails by making it possible for others to investigate the nineteenth century census records of certain geographic areas, free-of-charge, via the Internet. This democratisation of genealogical information, through its availability via new communities on the Internet at no extra cost to the everyday family historian, is clearly a movement that Mary supports, and can be interpreted as another of the motivating factors which drew her to volunteer transcription work. This point is further demonstrable through Mary's insistence that she 'was helping people to be able to look at areas free on the Internet; and why shouldn't they, you know?' The rhetorical question that forms the second element of this statement draws comparisons with Fulton's (2009) research concerning family historians and their associated information sharing practices, which was also a feature that I observed through the active sharing of information via the NDOML. This is information that concerns 'their' (the family historians) ancestors, which as part of a lineage is also information about 'them' and thus raises potential issues concerning cultural and intellectual property rights. However, the common understanding is that in cases where family historians are voluntarily transcribing historic census records, the least that should be accorded in return, is similar free-of-charge online access. This, of course, is clearly the aim of websites such as FreeCEN, and further demonstrates the great significance that is accorded to the documentary-based genealogical data that is contained within digitised historic census records. Mary's argument thus follows the rubric that one should not have to pay, financially, in order to acquire personal genealogical evidence concerning ones kin, with her transcription work employed as a strategy towards attaining this. FreeCEN's use of contemporary family historians to complete their transcription

work also draws parallels with Pálsson's observations concerning the Book Of Icelander's in that '[t]he public, then, has been both busily fine-tuning the machine, ensuring that it runs smoothly and accurately – and at the same time, reflecting upon relatedness and redefining community' (2009: 104).

When progressing our discussion towards the logistics of transcription, Mary described to me how if a transcriber has the suspicion a name has been spelled incorrectly, or that an error by the original census enumerator is identifiable in the census record, information must regardless be transcribed directly as it reads. It is permitted in such instances, I was told, for a transcriber to attach a note to any potentially problematic transcription stating what is believed to be the correct interpretation. Rather unexpectedly, Mary went on to suggest that the census enumerators of the nineteenth century may not have been completely literate on account of the spelling variations and perceived errors that she has encountered as part of her volunteer work and research. The quality and validity of genealogical evidence returns as a theme here, and Mary was not the only family historian I encountered who was to raise the issue of genealogical accuracy within specific historic census records (both in their original, and transcribed guises). 'Our relatives lie to us, and our ancestors lied to vicars, registrars, and enumerators' was the opinion of a contributor to the NDOML. 'This lot specialised in telling whoppers' was another more flippant reference to the phenomenon as part of the same online discussion. These apparent flaws and inconsistencies concerning aspects of genealogical evidence, do not have the impact of discrediting the family history process. Rather, such potential inaccuracies are viewed as an opportunity to better hone ones investigative skills through the accurate cross-referencing of evidence, together with the application of acquired expert experience as demonstrated by George and the 1861 census record earlier. In short, those potential inaccuracies in genealogical evidence, whether brought about, or identified, in transcription, are viewed as a challenge to the family historian and represent a chance to employ particular research strategies in their work.

A temporal element is also identifiable here, whereby contemporary knowledge and experience is able to better inform present-day family historians about the genealogical past, and vice versa. Consequently, the formation of ancestral

knowledge through genealogical evidence compiled within historic census data can be viewed on differing levels. Mary demonstrated a vested interest in transcribing the census records that she chose as accurately and clearly as possible due to its importance to her family history research goals, while her expert ‘indigenous knowledge’ (Sillitoe 1998) of the geographic area in question allowed her to apply acquired logic and intellect when deciphering known place and street names that other non-natives would struggle to transcribe accurately. ‘Now because I come from round that area I can guess some of the birthplaces ... or otherwise I’ll just write it the way it is, and put a little note and say what I think it should be’, Mary told me. Here, Mary’s specialised knowledge of both the family history process and the geographic area in question combine, with the end result being greater accuracy in the genealogical record. This was a fact that Bridget, of Blyth, raised when complaining to the group about the use of prison inmates regarding the transcription of part of the 1901 census. ‘You’re not going to tell me that they [prison inmates] did the right thing, they weren’t going to be bothered, they were just filling in their time, they could have put Mickey Mouse on every single line’, was Bridget’s opinion. She then went on to tell me that a number of fellow family historians had asked: ‘why didn’t they get the local history societies to do the [transcription] job?’. When I asked her to elaborate on this Bridget went on to say that she meant ‘people that have the interest, because if you were local you would probably know those people, or the surnames, and you wouldn’t need to sort of struggle deciphering the handwriting’. In essence, it was the opinion of many of my research participants that in having family historians transcribe historic census records, the documentary-based genealogical evidence therefore legitimises itself.

Conversely, the ‘lies’ and ‘errors’ of evidence contained within historic census records can aid in illustrating subversive intentions and motivations of specific individuals identifiable through the nineteenth and early twentieth century censuses. With the release of historic census data from 1911 the NDOML was particularly concerned with the issue of an ‘organised type protest throughout the whole country’ that had occurred in support of the ‘Suffragettes “Votes For Women campaign”’. Here, it was believed that the event would have implications concerning the quality of genealogical evidence that would be available to contemporary family historians upon release of the 1911 census data. One mailing list contributor attempted to

remedy such concerns by reminding others that ‘people refusing to fill in the census, both men and women, happened every year on an individual basis from 1841 to 2001 and doubtless will happen again’, with the implicit suggestion being that family historians must be aware of such anomalies in the evidence and apply their expertise and strategy in order to counteract this.

This acknowledgment by family historians that the census is, in essence, a social phenomenon that transcends time in varying ways is also significant with regard to the workings of a contemporary census.

#### **4.4 A Contemporary Census**

As part of my ethnographic fieldwork I was able to secure temporary employment in Tyne and Wear as a Census Collector for the 2011 census. Here, my interactions with historic census data through family historians in the North East was a feature that I was able to incorporate into my initial application and subsequent telephone interview. At my first team meeting I also learned that I was not the only census collector to have been drawn to the workings of a contemporary census through a shared interest in its historic counterparts. A fellow colleague informed the team that he had decided to ‘get involved’ with the 2011 census as a direct result of having observed the significance that historic census records held to his father’s genealogical research. The coincidence of the 2011 census with my fieldwork year appeared to me as one of those ethnographic opportunities that must be grasped and explored fully.

The 2011 census was unique, in that householders were afforded the option to complete their form online. This meant that the information they supplied would forever reside within the digital realm. Many chose this method of completion, with others opting to post their completed form before census day itself (the forms having been initially dispatched at the beginning of March 2011) or before the allotted deadline, which followed a 10-day return period of grace commencing on Census Day (27<sup>th</sup> March 2011). As a result, the majority of households did not have to interact with census collectors and/or enumerators at their homes. However, there were those that did, with Census Collector’s mobilised in order to encourage those households that had failed to complete and return their census forms that they do so



as quickly as possible. If this initial reminder failed I was then obliged, upon subsequent visits, to add that ‘a census return is required by law’ and that ‘failure to comply could result in a potential fine of £1000’. If required, Census Collector’s were also able to assist in the completion of a household form.

Most of the people whom I encountered within the 5-week period that I was employed in this role were friendly and cooperative, offering credible excuses as to why their household had not yet completed and returned the form. Such reasoning ranged from simply misplacing the original, not having yet found the time to post the completed form – which I could also assist with if this was the case – or having moved into the current property following Census Day. There were instances when individuals were not so forthcoming with their excuses, however, choosing rather to firmly question my appearance and enquiry at their door. To my surprise, many of these individuals also informed me that they were completely unaware a national census was currently in progress, this despite the strong advertising campaign. More astonishingly, a number of these householders pleaded ignorance to the knowledge of a census having occurred at any point in their lifetime or beyond. I was also acutely aware when householders appeared to be telling ‘white lies’ regarding their reasons for failing to return a census return. Many householders claimed to have completed their form ‘weeks ago’ and told me that they could not understand why they were still on our list. Invariably, these households would disappear from the regularly updated uncompleted forms list within a week or two of my visit, which suggested either a backlog in the processing system, or that they were unwilling to admit that they were yet to complete the form, but did so following my visit. Alternatively, some households were never removed from the uncompleted forms list, suggesting subversion of some kind, in that records continued to show that the form had not been completed and returned as required. In such instances, I was certain that the householder in question was simply saying that they had already completed and returned their form in a bid to move me from their doorstep. In discussions with colleagues at team meetings this emerged as a common theme amongst fellow census collectors. As long as a household remained on the uncompleted forms list, however, collectors were obliged to regularly revisit the household until the system had logged the reception and completion of the relevant census form. Similarly, in cases where a householder ensured that they would complete their form ‘tonight’ and get it ‘straight

in the post tomorrow', for example, it was often the case that I would have to return the following week with another reminder.

The majority of households completed and returned their census forms as required, but the manner of some of the people that I encountered suggested that the completion and return of their census form was not a major priority as part of their daily lives. In these cases the intention to not complete and return a census form actually appeared as the priority. Subsequently, certain households could not be relied upon to return, or accurately complete, a census form, despite constant reminders of their legal obligation to do so. As the NDOML correspondent alluded to earlier, this is unlikely to represent a contemporary anomaly, and thus poses the question as to how accurate aspects of past census data can ever actually ever be. This is, of course, one of the reasons why family historians have integrated certain strategies when evidencing and imagining genealogical connections with the aid of census data. As part of the 2011 census, however, a further unique strategy was proposed in order to aid potential family historians of the future. Here, one NDOML subscriber suggested that contemporary family historians should complete and file census forms for individual family households across a lifespan in order to ensure that 'your descendents will have your information, even if records are lost'. Fellow online mailing list contributors roundly welcomed this suggestion with one respondent stating that they 'had planned to make a copy of the 2011 census form and pop it in the archive box'. Another contributor declared: 'Your idea to do a census record for each family member sounds great . . . we do seem to take it for granted that all information is included for everyone'. By following these recommendations, the safeguarding of accurate genealogical evidence can be seen to be in place for the future research benefits of ones continued lineage. Moreover, in such instances the 2011 census data of an individual and/or household would therefore exist within a private family archive, due to its completion by an elderly family history researcher as per the above suggestion, regardless of whether a younger family member had failed to complete their form. The intention here was to eradicate future 'gaps' in the genealogical record before they are given the chance to emerge. In this instance, family historians are shutting the stable door *before* the horse has bolted.

Due to the extended period that census collectors are in the field, and the fact that households were often visited two to three times per week, certain individuals living and working within the enumeration district in which I was employed quickly recognised my repeated presence. Questions such as ‘are you back again?’ and ‘are we still on your list mister?’ were light-heartedly directed at me across the street on more than one occasion. Other individuals informed me that the census was a ‘government thing’ that they ‘did not believe in’ or ‘agree with’ and, with no sense of anger or irritation, explained that they had ‘no intention’ of completing or returning their household form. My response that all data was independently safeguarded and that the government was unable to isolate individual personal details from any specific household form was usually greeted with a disbelieving smile and shake of the head. Contrastingly, there were those who chose not to hide their disappointment at my return visits, with welcoming smiles turning to frowns on sight of my identification card. There were also numerous instances of neighbours asking each other ‘have you sent your form off yet?’ when walking past me in the street and thinking that I was out of earshot. At one particular visit, a householder and his highly energetic and curious dog, were accompanied by two friends who lived in a neighbouring enumeration district. As part of this encounter one of the friends ironically suggested that I had been allocated the ‘nice areas’ when I told him, after being asked, that I was working within the neighbourhoods of Wallsend and North Shields. This was a light-hearted exchange that began because he claimed that I was ‘much nicer’ than the census collector that had been ‘hammering’ on his front door in Whitley Bay earlier in the week. I introduce this vignette, not in an attempt to demonstrate my skills as a considerate and friendly census collector, but rather, to highlight the particular social interactions that occur when undertaking a census, and which unwittingly play an integral, yet often invisible role, in the making of genealogical evidence, which one day inevitably comes to be part of the historical record.

Regardless of the scenario it is also significant to note my accepted presence, as census collector, within these small and often socially enclosed communities (all consisted of convoluted networks of streets and housing blocks that represented longstanding social housing). The human element, which is undoubtedly at the core of any census, is thus demonstrated. It is not just the decennial request for specific

pieces of personal data concerning households that is required, but also the tolerance (in some cases reluctant, but in most largely friendly and welcoming) of outsiders entering into the midst of such insulated communities. The social concessions that individuals and communities must concede, no matter how large or small, with regard to the undertaking of a census thus representative of a key feature of the census that is difficult to access through analysis of historic data alone. Moreover, the very being of the census, and all that it entails, becomes interlinked and engrained in the thoughts, discussions, and practices of members of a community for the limited period of time that it is in operation, or at least when the census collector is within the midst of an enumeration district. Whether it be staying in all night (which was necessary in past censuses), completing a form within a particular timeframe, and/or accepting the presence of strangers and ‘outsiders’ within one’s community, and onto one’s doorstep, in order to access certain private information, significant social interactions are clearly in action and thus become inseparable from the very data at hand. Those unwilling to comply viewed the presence of a compulsory census form on their doormat followed by repeated reminders regarding their duty to complete and return the form as a mode of ‘governmentality’ (Rose 1989), or ‘subjectivation’: ‘the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made into subjects’ (Foucault 1982: 777). Here, genealogical evidencing and imagining acquire a different level of meaning, with the information within a completed census form imagined as evidence that has potentially negative connotations.

While undertaking my duties I could not help but consider how the census enumerators of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were received when appearing in communities and presenting themselves at households on allotted census nights. My sense was that they would have encountered many of the same issues as I did and that experiences would be comparable to a degree. Enumeration issues (i.e. errors and oversights) identifiable within the historic record could be indicative of those contextual social interactions that feature in the undertaking and completion of all censuses. Moreover, when family historians analyse and translate historic census data into specific genealogical accounts, these social interactions may also be seen to transcend time as with those instances of deliberate ancestral subversion that were discussed earlier.

Ethnographic reflections on the 2011 census therefore demonstrate how the process of collecting contemporary census data generates community and kinship within certain enumeration districts in Tyne and Wear. Whether people ‘believe’ in the census or not its processes impact upon everyday lives with the ways in which householders react to, and interact with it, able to say something about community and shared aspects of relatedness. Failure and/or refusal to complete a census form in 2011 may well lead to ‘gaps’ in the genealogical evidence for future family historians but these acts of defiance paint a picture in their own right. For example, comparisons may be drawn with past examples of census subversion (like those involved in the Suffragette movement), with the two temporally distinct acts suggestive of a mode of shared experience. As we have already heard ‘our ancestors lied to ... enumerators’ for their own reasons and it seems that some of the contemporary ancestors of tomorrow are following suit. The interest and acceptance of census collectors as ‘outsiders’ within these enumeration districts also demonstrates a sense of collective spirit that people can relate to, and which, reverberate within and between households and streets. As a census collector I was a figure of the state and not one of them, albeit a slightly ‘nicer’ version than one particular fellow collector working within a neighbouring district. With this community aspect able to correlate and contrast with the evidencing and imagining of genealogical connections via digitised historic census records. As Edwards has shown, ‘a particular kind of kinship thinking informs the generative possibilities of community. It is both an entity and a set of relations; it is both fixed and fluid’ (2000: 247-248) and it is my assertion that interactions between people and the census (both historic and contemporary) represents a mode of kinship reckoning that imbues ideas of ‘fixed and fluid’, flesh and bones, evidencing and imagining.

#### **4.5 Help Tomorrow Take Shape**

‘Help tomorrow take shape’ was a phrase employed as part of the marketing campaign regarding the 2011 census. The use of such rhetoric is indicative of the temporal significance of census data. One distinctive feature of the census is that data associated with an individual survey represents the potential to span, chronologically, individual instances of the same extended family lineage, or genealogy. Of course, census data remains specific to the time of collection. Flesh can be added to these

bones by employing certain strategies that fill or circumvent the ‘gaps’ by applying local knowledge to transcriptions. In order to develop their genealogical imaginings, however, family historians repeatedly turn to narrative translations of their evidence. As part of this process, historic census data is reappraised in the light of contemporary knowledge.

Just as Sykes (2006) argues that the statistical analysis and subsequent numerical illustration of personal genetics is wholly unsuitable for the best representation of individual persons within their associated ancestral ‘clan’ groupings, an individual ancestor can also be obscured through official statistical analysis of census data. The census records of a household and its inhabitants for 7<sup>th</sup> April 1861, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1901, or 27<sup>th</sup> March 2011, for example, signify direct data concerning specific people living at a particular period in time. Through analysis, the intention is to produce a clear contemporary snapshot of those households, streets, boroughs, towns, cities, counties, and regions, which constitute the fabric of a nation and its society. As Dewdney acknowledges, ‘[t]he modern census also involves much more than a mere counting of heads’ (1981: 3), with the Office for National Statistics solidifying this point further in their literature surrounding the 2011 census:

The information obtained in a census is used by government, local authorities, health providers, commercial businesses and other users to develop their policies and plan services effectively. As billions of pounds of public money is distributed using census figures it is vital that every individual is reached and engaged with. If, for example, people are missed, there may not be enough funds allocated for health care or education in a particular area (Office for National Statistics 2011: 9).

However, these apparently static episodes in time become relevant outside of the present for family historians. The compilation of genealogical evidence acquired from historic census records demonstrates one part of this process. The second part of this process is the subsequent narrative translation of the data. Here, accepted and reinterpreted historic facts are rejuvenated within family history stories that reconstruct the lives and lifestyles of particular ancestors while simultaneously positioning them in direct relation to the contemporary family historian.

Consequently, ancestors receive both a fixed and imagined position within a genealogical narrative in the present, through the interpretation of information that they supplied in the past. This is significant because contemporary descendants of individuals recorded within the historic census records can reassign, and qualify, their ancestors' positions within extended genealogical lineages. The temporal translations and contextual narratives thus construed by contemporary family historians, therefore rejuvenates that which could previously be viewed as 'a spatially and temporally disconnected set of islands of kinship' (Bourdieu 1977: 105). Getting to know the flesh and the bones of an ancestor is a means to getting to know kinship. Moreover, there is agency involved, which is indicative of the making of relationships in Euro-American kinship.

Translation, through the genealogical imagination, can also inform contextualisation. Reflections of historic census data often resulted in common responses by research participants concerning 'how lucky we are' to be living in our contemporary age. Raymond elaborated on this point when recounting the migration of some of his ancestors from Ireland to Middlesbrough. 'A lot of them came from farming backgrounds and it must have been horrendous, suddenly going to this new town, with all these new industries, and living in fairly squalid conditions', he explained, before adding the caveat: 'But people got on with it, I mean, I've got a lot of admiration for how they used to survive, you know, ten kids, as well as living in a hovel'. Raymond's conception of, and associated empathy for, the difficult life choices and unpleasant living conditions that many of his ancestors endured demonstrates an ability to temporarily displace the social in order to reflect upon the favourable circumstances of his present-day standard of living. Moreover, comparisons between his own life and the lives of his nineteenth and early twentieth century ancestors are made on the strength of what is revealed in the historic census record. Raymond also demonstrated that he is aware of his own position within this genealogical narrative when acknowledging the persistence of these socially constructed lineages: 'It makes you wonder how any of us are still here'. Through narrative translation, temporally displaced genealogical evidence taken from the 'here and now' can be better understood within a coherent genealogical account. Moreover, this accounting represents one of the main ways in which family historians are bringing the flesh and bones of kinship together.

In applying imaginative strategies family historians construct narratives that detail their conceptions of the social constraints that their ancestors operated within. As such, comparisons between ancestors concerning relative tales of hard-luck and good-fortune were common. Raymond also demonstrated that he had traced a genealogical connection to Wensleydale, North Yorkshire, explaining that this distant line of his extended family had lived in an elegant Manor House for 200 years. I was informed in this account that Raymond's ancestors had worked as tenant farmers for 'the Lord of the Manor' over many generations, before eventually taking the house over in their own right and establishing it as their extended family residence. This is clearly a story of success and represents an example whereby Raymond's ancestors have been fortunate to avoid the social hardships of their extended kin (this narrative is in contrast to the squalid living conditions Raymond's Irish migrant ancestors had experienced). Such instances therefore suggest that the arguments of Bottero (2011), regarding the inability of many family historians to be able to separately situate their ancestors laterally in terms of social class does not take account of specific strategies that include active contextualisation and the formulation of narrative translations when addressing historic census data.

The translation of historic census data can also unveil genealogical facts that have been deliberately 'swept under the carpet', in the words of one research participant, usually so that ancestors could maintain credible social standing within their communities. Raymond described how analysis of genealogical evidence had shown that his grandfather (born 1885) was one of three children conceived out of wedlock on account of 'improper relations' between his great grandfather and a housekeeper. This was a tale not to be told 'in a good Catholic family like the one we had' Raymond assured me. When I asked if any elder family members had ever alluded to such past infidelities, Raymond described how an uncle whom he had quizzed for family history information had written a letter which included an implicit reference to this 'scandal', but had not admitted it outright. 'I've analysed his letter and it's very cleverly worded, so it was obviously something they didn't talk about too much in the family', Raymond elaborated, before stating that genealogical discussions with an elderly aunt would also have been unlikely to unearth such facts: 'I just couldn't imagine her ever bringing herself to discussing that'. Through analysis of historic census data and subsequent narrative translation Raymond was able to confirm and



clarify this previously shrouded ancestral event, and has necessarily had to alter his genealogical imaginings regarding this particular lineage. Moreover, the construction of this narrative has impacted upon Raymond's contemporary kin relations. When discussing the interrelationship between contemporary kinship and genealogical evidence taken from digitised historic census records Raymond explained that 'it helps with existing ones [family relations], because whether family enjoy it or not they're going to be told about all these stories when they come to the family get-togethers'. 'Quite a few of the family are genuinely interested', Raymond assured me, before adding 'especially when there's some scandal involved'. Raymond was adamant that such narrative translations – particularly scandalous ones – represent 'the main thing that people are interested in'. Here, shock and emotion concerning family structure thus transcends time through its rejuvenation in the present, which once more demonstrates the significance that the narrative translation of genealogical evidence can bring when connecting temporally displaced genealogical evidence with the present. Thus kinship appears as simultaneously malleable and fixable.

Fred, an elderly family history researcher in Newcastle upon Tyne, was resolute in his opinion that certain discrepancies in historic census data were directly attributable to the deliberate deception of the census enumerator by his ancestors. When describing concealment from the census records of the birth of an illegitimate child by one of Fred's ancestors I was told: 'They wanted to save face'. Fred explained that in such instances, newly born children were often officially recorded in census records as the sibling to an elder single female family member, when in reality the two represented unmarried mother and child. Due to the inaccurate recording of this genealogical event in the census record, Fred informed me that he had 'hit a brick-wall' with this particular lineage as he could not factually account for certain inconsistencies in the evidence. Any evidence-based genealogical research of this lineage therefore represented a 'dead-end'. Through narrative translation of this particular absence of evidence, however, an imagined account of the lineage had been constructed and sustained through the repeated telling of the tale. Paradoxically, this episode of kinship reckoning had been constructed and fixed through a lack of sufficient genealogical evidence. Following this account Fred, supported by a fellow researcher (David) who had been listening in to our conversation, began to explain that when interpreting evidence within historic census records it is important to 'think sideways,

as people do not lead normal lives'. Such 'sideways' thinking represents a further strategy implemented by family historians when engaging with temporal discrepancies and inconsistencies in historic census records. In this regard, the strategy requires an imaginative contextual awareness of the specific era in question, and its significance, through story, to individuals and families in the present.

Family historians also employ street and house names that are recorded within historic census records as forms of genealogical evidence in order to establish temporal connections to specific geographic locales. In such instances, genealogical imaginings become integrated within contemporary experiences. When recounting the history of an ancestor recorded as a reverend living in Hetton-le-hole, County Durham in the 1901 census, Raymond explained how this individual would not be present in the later 1911 census due to his untimely and unfortunate death in 1903 (he died while asleep in bed following the collapse of the roof of his house). This event has survived into the present through a story that has been invigorated by Raymond's desire to visit the scene of the accident:

So I went to Hetton-le-hole and managed to find his grave and managed to find the church he was at, and actually found the house he was killed in as well. And I took a photograph of where the chimney probably would have been, the one that fell through the roof and killed him (Raymond).

This genealogical line of research was a collaborative effort between Raymond and an extended relation who could both trace the reverend to a branch of their respective family trees. Raymond had learned of the accident through newspaper cuttings and combined this information, together with census data, in order to make his pilgrimage. The contemporary visit added to his imaginings of the event and reinforced his sense of relatedness, not only with the dead reverend but also the distant relation with whom he was conducting the research.

When discussing how significant the translation of isolated aspects of genealogical evidence is to the development and understanding of one's family history George told me that narrative translation of the evidence (imaginings) 'just, you know, adds to it'. There was also the suggestion that another level of genealogical understanding can

also be realised, as exemplified through George's statement that 'the extra little bits, it makes it so much more interesting than just, you know, somebody was born, somebody was married, somebody died; there's definitely fun in there too'. These 'extra little bits' and 'fun' represent an enjoyable and entertaining aspect of the family history process whereby genealogical imaginings generated and utilised in order to explore the lives and experiences of one's ancestors introduces past kin through shared relatedness. As part of their imaginings family historians regularly referred to an ancestor as 'just like our [so-and so]', or their experiences in the light of 'things haven't changed that much, you know', thus inferring shared kinship across and between past and present lineages.

#### **4.6 Summary and Link**

This chapter has shown how information gained from digitised historic census records represents a significant source of evidence for family historians when tracing genealogical connections. In response to specific inconsistencies and inaccuracies regarding aspects of this data it has also been observed that family historians implement and apply a wide array of mitigating strategies in order to ensure that their genealogical accounts achieve sufficient validity and credibility. In such genealogical evidencing, kinship is explored and activated through notions of shared and collective experience, association, and community. This observation has been further illuminated through an ethnographic account of my work as a contemporary census collector. The worth of genealogical imaginings to family historians when putting the flesh on the bones of their research has also been addressed in this chapter showing that the use and interpretation of digitised historic census records is able to inform both the family historian, and ethnographer, about indigenous modes of kinship reckoning. Online census data is thus seen to act as the source for genealogical imaginings, forming a basis for sharing through the collectivisation of experience. In short, it is the way that the bones of digitally based family history research is brought together with the flesh of narrative history.

The findings of this chapter provide a stepping-off point for a consideration of genetic-based genealogical evidence by genetic ancestry tracing companies. Transcription, translation, and genealogical imagining all represent identifiable

strategies that are employed by Oxford Ancestors concerning the packaging, distribution, and interpretation of evidence-based genetics. Furthermore, the marketing drive of this company is largely directed towards attracting family historians to make use of their products as a useful addition to standard digital documentary-based (historic census data) research. The flesh and bones of kinship is as relevant to genetic genealogical research as it is to genealogical investigations associated with digitally orientated historic census data.

## Chapter 5. Evidencing and Imagining with Oxford Ancestors

In an early interview over cups of tea and chocolate biscuits Raymond told me that he had no experience of genetic ancestry tracing and that he was unsure as to whether it would be helpful to his current family history research. He had his own ideas about what it was that genetic technologies were able to tell us about kinship. For Raymond, such information was fairly ‘vague’:

As I say I think going back that far is a little bit, you know, it’s a bit like if you keep going back far enough you get to Adam and Eve. So it’s interesting but it’s not something that’s going to occupy me I don’t think (Raymond).

As part of this interchange I explained to Raymond a little about the passage and spread of yDNA and mtDNA across the modern human species and how commercial genetic ancestry tracing laboratories like Oxford Ancestors are targeting family historians in order to promote and sell their products. ‘It’s interesting but it’s not mind changing’ Raymond maintained, before adding: ‘I don’t think I would be too bothered knowing either way because Man is supposed to have originated somewhere around Ethiopia anyway’. The fundamentals of genetic ancestry tracing represented something of interest but not necessarily importance to his genealogical investigations. Interestingly, however, Raymond used this discussion to incorporate what he knew of the Roman influence on the history of Britain:

When you go back to the Roman period in this country you don’t realise how many different parts of the world people came from at one stage or another. And most of them have stopped and just intermarried with the local populations anyway so there’s a good chance we might have come from Africa originally, but it may only be two thousand years ago as opposed to, you know, sort of ten thousand years ago. And the invasion of the Romans and all the other tribes, you know, whether they’ve come from different directions as well. But best of luck to anybody who wants to try and work that one out (Raymond).

In this response Raymond implicitly suggests that he has already imagined his genetic origins as potentially being influenced by one or other of the many military invasions that have occurred across the past two thousand years of British history. Moreover, he imagines this as representing a facet of his family history research that would be difficult to fathom further through genealogical evidence. This exchange suggests an integration of genealogical evidencing and imagining when genetic technologies are brought into family history research.

## **5.1 Outline**

Paternal Y chromosomal DNA (yDNA) analysis is a relatively new genetic technique available to family historians. In this chapter I focus on the work of Oxford Ancestors commercial genetic ancestry tracing laboratory that offers yDNA testing as one of its primary products. As part of my paternal genealogical investigations I underwent yDNA analysis with the laboratory. My own genetic ancestral journey was taken in an effort to better understand the genetic journeys of my research participants. An examination of the information that accompanies the results of yDNA testing with Oxford Ancestors is used to show how the integration of genetic technologies by family historians can offer insight into contemporary Euro-American reckonings of kinship and relatedness. Here, I compare the language and imagery in which yDNA results are interpreted and expressed by Oxford Ancestors with the information content, nomenclature, and language used in academic publications of the same topic. This exercise is undertaken in order to frame the argument that flesh must be added to the bones of personal genetic data in order for it to function as a useful ‘tool’ for family historians when evidencing and imagining genealogical connections. As part of this comparison two modes of genetic discourse (primary and secondary) have been identified that illustrate the contrasting ways in which genetic variation is described, named, and interpreted depending upon the target audience (expert geneticist or everyday family historian). Just how the language of primary discourse maps on to secondary discourse is referred to as ‘lateral transcription’, a phrase that indicates a particular set of relationships between numbers, names, structures, and narratives. Both discourses rely upon the same genetic information with secondary genetic discourse scrutinised more closely as a means for exploring the kinship potentialities that are inherent within this mode of communication.

## 5.2 Genetic Ancestry Tracing

Among family historians genetic genealogical evidencing is still in its infancy, with technical knowledge and understanding of the process limited. I used a questionnaire to ask a selection of family historians across my field-sites whether they ‘have any knowledge of genetic ancestry tracing (the use of DNA analysis to inform one about ancient ancestry)’. There were 35 respondents, to which 9 (25.7%) said that they ‘have no knowledge’; 14 of the 35 (40.0%) said that they ‘have knowledge but know nothing more’; 11 of the 35 (31.4%) claimed that they ‘have knowledge and know a little’; while only 1 respondent (2.9%) of the overall return, said that they ‘have knowledge and understood it well’. When asked about direct ‘experience of genetic ancestry tracing’ the results were fairly conclusive, with 2 of the 35 respondents (5.7%) stating that they had experience of genetic ancestry tracing as part of their family history research. However, this lack of participation should not be interpreted as an inherent lack of interest. The questionnaire asked research participants: ‘would you ever consider using genetic ancestry tracing as part of your family history research?’. In response to this question 18 of the 35 respondents (51.4%) stated ‘yes’, and 14 of the 35 (40.0%) stated ‘no’, while 3 of the 35 (8.6%) were undecided on the matter and replied with ‘maybe’. The inference is that, in the majority, family historians in my study area were open to the notion of integrating genetic genealogical evidence and imagining within their wider ancestral research projects.

Genetic ancestry tracing is therefore emerging as a unique technique of genealogical investigation available to family historians. Initially, it presents itself as another available body of genealogical evidence, being primarily concerned with the transmission of identifiably inherited genetic markers and genes across distinct female and male lineages. However, burgeoning commercial interest shows that it not only presents family historians with a new form of genealogical data, but also a method in which the novel imagining of genealogical connections can proliferate.

Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) exists external to the cell nucleus within anaerobic molecules known as mitochondria. mtDNA is unique, in that it is non-recombining and therefore not ‘reshuffled during reproduction’ (Jones 2001). This is largely a consequence of the fact that mtDNA is inherited solely from one’s mother. This

instance of natural asymmetry in reproduction thus denotes that the mtDNA of any one individual can be directly traced across their maternal genealogical lineage towards a single founding genetic ancestor. Over time natural mutations occur in mtDNA giving the impression of a 'molecular clock' (Sykes 2001: 77), which plays a role in giving a relative calibration of time through the assumption of a constant rate of change in these genetic mutations. Consequently, specific genetic variations have been genealogically mapped within the history of the entire maternal lineage of the modern human species. This has aided in the identification of 42 distinct mtDNA global population groupings that can be genetically traced to one single maternal ancestor. This woman is known commonly as 'Mitochondrial Eve' and approximately represents the great grandmother 65000 times removed of every living human on Earth.

Y chromosomal DNA (yDNA) exists within the Y chromosome and is inherited from father to son alone. Y-chromosomes are unique among the nuclear chromosomes in that they 'are not shuffled at each generation' (Sykes 2006: 195), meaning that distinct genetic markers can be traced unchanged across numerous paternal generations. This non-recombining portion of the Y chromosome is commonly referred to as the NRY (YCC 2002). Over time natural mutations do occur, and these SNP's or other biallelic markers can be used to trace the genealogy of the entire paternal lineage of the modern human species. This has enabled the identification of 21 distinct yDNA population groupings that can all be genetically traced to one single paternal ancestor. This man is known commonly as 'Y Chromosome Adam' and approximately represents the great grandfather 2500 times removed of every living human on Earth.

There are a number of national and international commercial laboratories that offer direct-to-consumer personal genetic ancestry tracing analysis of mtDNA, yDNA, and in a few cases autosomal DNA. Oxford Ancestors, founded by the eminent geneticist, turned popular science author, Professor Bryan Sykes, represents the largest such company in the United Kingdom. Due to its association with Sykes' varied genetic works (1999, 2000, 2001, 2006) the company provides a unique form of interpretation to personal mtDNA and yDNA analysis results. When a potential client receives, as I did, an Information Pack prior to ordering a product they are told that



‘Oxford Ancestors will help you explore your genetic roots and bring your personal ancestry to life’ (Oxford Ancestors 2011b). With two products in particular (Y-Clan and MatriLine) advertised as offering such an opportunity to genetically invigorate one’s personal ancestry. Moreover, the Information Pack informs any potential consumer that the Y-Clan service is able to ‘establish the link between you and your ancient paternal clan’ (*ibid.*), while the MatriLine service ‘traces the link between you and your ancestral clan mother’ (*ibid.*). Here, it is explained that both male and female customers can provide a DNA sample, and have their mtDNA analysed using the MatriLine service, in order to investigate their ‘matrilineal roots’. In contrast, it is advised that the Y-Clan service strictly requires a male DNA sample, due to its direct association with the Y chromosome. In this instance, it is explained that the Y-Clan service is not strictly exclusive to male customers, however; with it advised that ‘women wishing to investigate their patrilineal ancestry need only find a direct male relative who is willing to provide a sample’ (*ibid.*). The Information Pack clearly states that the Y-Clan service ‘is ideal for exploring relatively recent ancestry (the last 1000 years) and is now a standard tool for genealogists, surname associations, clan societies and family history researchers’ (*ibid.*). This was a claim that I was necessarily keen to explore as part of my ethnography.

By making personal use of the Oxford Ancestors Y-Clan service I would be able to expand my ongoing paternal genealogical investigations and explore the quality of experience and understanding that comes from engaging with genetic technologies as a component piece of family history research. Moreover, this experience would help in the exploration of relationships between family historians who do have direct experience of genetic ancestry tracing and those and that do not. Key to all of this is an examination of its function as a ‘standard tool’ for family historians in the evidencing and imagining of genealogical connections and when putting the flesh on the bones of kinship reckonings.

### **5.3 The Oxford Ancestors ‘Y-Clan’ Product**

Once payment had been processed I received an Oxford Ancestors DNA sampling kit in the mail. This included a sterile DNA collection package with two surgical swabs, a consent form, and return envelope. As per the instructions, I first rinsed my mouth

with water, removed one of the swabs from its packet – taking care to handle the non-cotton end in order to avoid possible contamination – and briskly and firmly scraped the inside of my cheek for 20 strokes. Upon doing this, the first swab was placed back inside the packet before the entire process was repeated with the second swab. On completion of both swab samples the packet was securely sealed and, together with a signed consent form, was reposted to the Oxford Ancestors laboratory using the return envelope. Five weeks later the results of my yDNA analysis were returned within a folder that included a personalised Y-Clan certificate (Fig. 10).

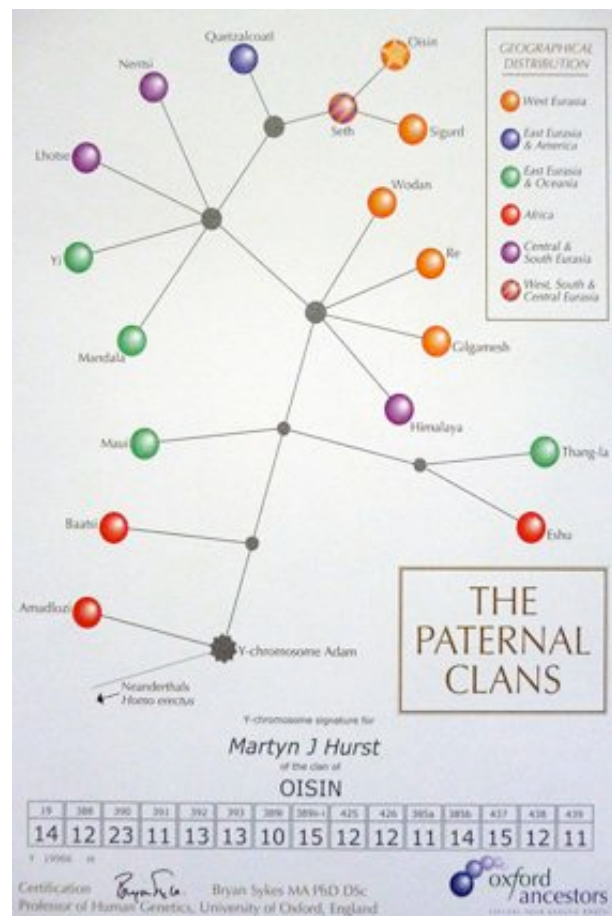


Figure 10: *Oxford Ancestors* Personalised Y-Clan Certificate

The Y-Clan certificate, and associated interpretation booklet, represents the principal form by which yDNA analysis results are presented to Oxford Ancestors customers. Using an arboreal image familiar to family historians, that itself boasts a rich and complex genealogy (Klapisch-Zuber 1991; Bouquet 1996), customers receive their results within a species-wide phylogenetic representation that requires a specific

mode of interpretation in order to situate it alongside an individualised family genealogy. In essence, the customer must compartmentalise their previous paternal genealogical research within one of the 17 clans (identifiable as coloured nodes on the tree) and accordingly identify the Y-Clan ‘father’ that represents the genetic ancestor from which all male members of their paternal lineage can be traced. From here, one is also able to trace a genetic genealogical connection to ‘Y Chromosome Adam’. The personification of each of these clans to an archetypal Y-Clan ‘father’ indicative of a process of adding flesh to the bones of genetic-based genealogical evidence. For example, the tree above has a gold star situated over the clan-node of Oisín that directly indicates another ancestor to be formulated within the family history of my paternal ancestral lineage.

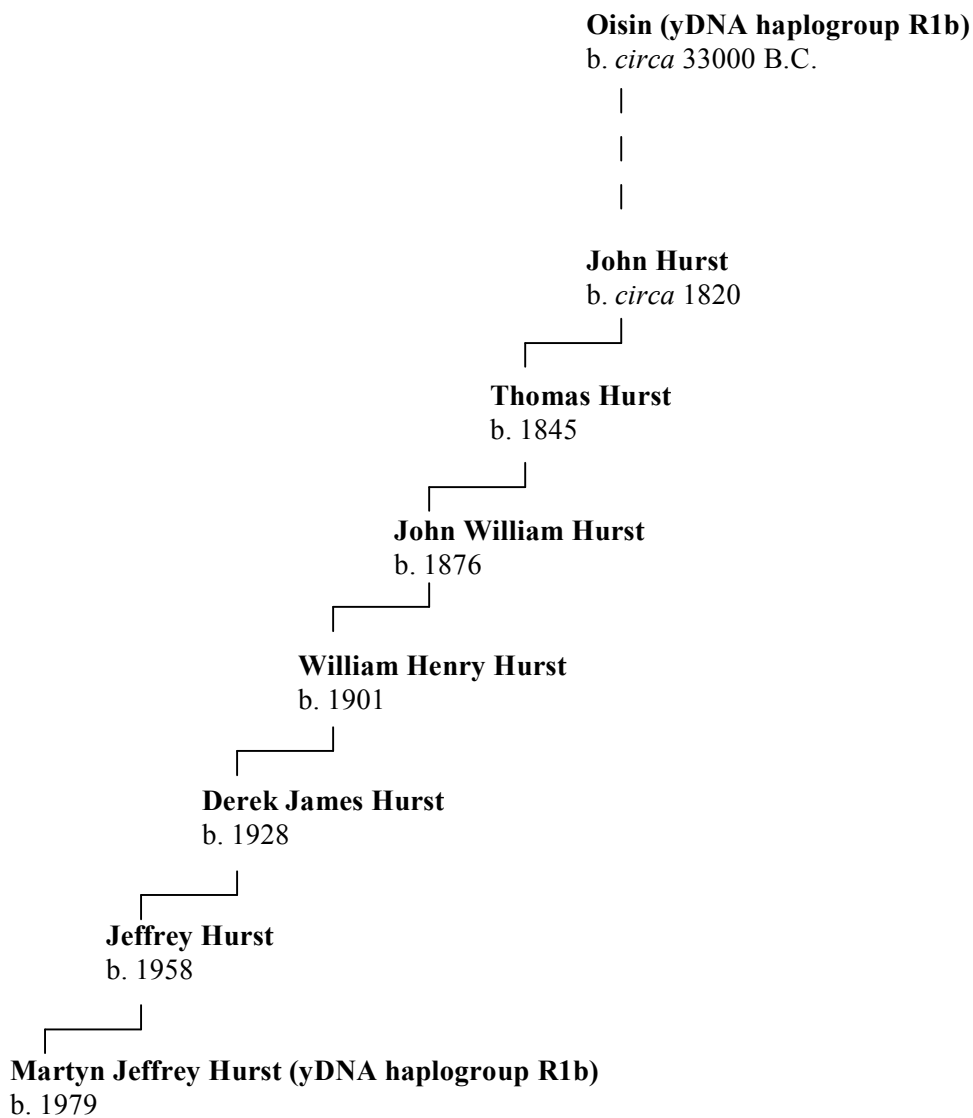


Figure 11: Incomplete paternal Hurst/R1b genealogical lineage

By tracing the transmission of the above lineage of the Hurst surname – one of several regional variations of the surname Herst first recorded in the Domesday Book of 1066 (Reaney and Wilson 1997) – through historic documentary records each instance of inheritance reveals its own unique image. In narrative form it can be said that of the 8 men recorded in this lineage one did not live with his wife and two children within a period of time when this would very much have represented a social taboo, that another crossed the country west to east with his elder brother in order to continue work in the coal mining industry, and that one had been listed on the books of Walker Celtic, Derby County, and Queen’s Park Rangers football clubs respectively. Moreover, there is a World War 2 evacuee amongst this group, as well as a divorcee with a passion for jazz-fusion guitar, and a PhD student. The eldest of these individuals does not share the Hurst surname but by tracing the transmission of yDNA, and more specifically the R1b haplogroup across the lineage, and applying Oxford Ancestors narrative interpretations, a 300 year-old warrior and keen composer of poetry and song, once bewitched by the daughter of an underworld king, can also be added to this diverse genealogical grouping. With its integration of genealogical evidencing and imagining the representation of my paternal lineage in this instance represents the flesh and the bones of genetic genealogical connection.

In addition to the Y-Clan certificate and Interpretation booklet I also received a ‘Tribes of Britain’ interpretation sheet (Fig. 12). This document is provided to customers who are able to previously demonstrate paternal and/or maternal ancestry within Britain or Ireland. Here, genetic information relevant to both Y-Clan and MatriLine service users is presented in order to suggest affiliations between one’s genetic ‘clan’ and any one of five ethnic ‘tribes’ that bear significance within the narrative, and genetic, histories of the British Isles. The ‘Paternal Clans’ graphic in the lower portion of the sheet is of relevance to my yDNA results. As I could trace – using documentary-based genealogical evidence – recent paternal ancestry within England, and the results of my yDNA analysis revealed genetic-based genealogical evidence that established an affiliation with the clan of Oisín, Oxford Ancestors suggest that personal historic ‘tribal’ connections can be inferred from the graphic. As a result, the ‘Tribes of Britain’ information sheet implies a 75% level of probability that my historic ‘tribal’ paternal ancestry is Celtic, and a 25% level of probability that it is either Anglo-Saxon or Danish Viking. The consistent use of terminologies such

as ‘clan’ and ‘tribe’ here, coupled with the symbolic reference to historically significant ethnic groupings such as the ‘Celts’ and ‘Vikings’, is indicative of the attempts by Oxford Ancestors at individualising genetic-based genealogical evidence.



Figure 12: Oxford Ancestors ‘Tribes of Britain’ interpretation sheet

In a discussion about genetic ancestry tracing and family history research Bridget described to me how she had been extremely eager to take part in a volunteer-led genetic study in the northeast of England that was trying to trace, as she put it, ‘the relatives of Vikings’. Bridget’s desire had turned to disappointment when learning that the study was centred around yDNA analysis, however; explaining that ‘I did want to do it but they didn’t take women, it was always the male line that they wanted to do’. ‘I do have the direct line to an ex-Norwegian’, Bridget assured me, before elaborating about her previous failed attempts at learning the Norwegian language. This Scandinavian, and more specifically Viking ancestral identity was a key motivation to Bridget’s family history research, which had also led to the analysis of

Norwegian online historic census records. A number of other research participants were also quick to refer to Viking ancestry when discussing the potentialities of genetic ancestry tracing within the realm of family history research. On the one hand, these symbolic references to clans and tribes are demonstrative of both personal and relational social concepts that can be integrated within a traditional family history narrative in a way that alphanumeric haplogroup nomenclatures cannot. However, on the other hand, in an imagined contemporary mode this inclusion of genetic-based tribal documentation mirrors ‘colonial practices of making tribes naturalized and fixed community identity as tribal *and* as descent-based by documenting and authenticating – on paper – the link between blood and territory’ (Holmes 2009: 59). The implications of this process, as Nash has argued, can be linked to ‘the politics of ‘race’ and national belonging’ (2004: 1).

One line of correspondence on the NDOML attempted to integrate yDNA testing, patrilineal surnames, and nationality within a contemporary context. Here, the subscriber posted about their research goal of aligning inheritors of the ‘Hedley’ surname to haplogroup I2b1a, which they described as ‘a marker for the indigenous population of the British Isles, including the Picts in modern day Scotland’. Following this claim an open enquiry was raised as to whether ‘any Hedley’s would be interested in joining a DNA project’. Research concerning patrilineal surnames is in keeping with the tenets of traditional genealogical investigation, while the mapping of associations between surnames and the Y chromosome has grown in prominence since yDNA testing indicated a ‘single surname founder for extant Sykes males, even though written sources had predicted multiple origins’ (Sykes and Irven 2000: 1417). For this mailing list subscriber the genealogical potentialities inherent in genetic surname research were great: ‘a lot of us have hit those proverbial brick walls and DNA is one way to try and find those invisible connections’. With yDNA test results then viewed as a reliable evidence-base upon which to construct imagined tribal associations between the Picts and contemporary Scotland. It has been argued that ‘[w]here a surname acts as a cultural marker of common ancestry, the Y chromosome should act as a biological marker’ (Redmonds et al. 2011: 156) with each able to contribute valuable information regarding the other. In separately alternating cases, for example, ‘[s]ometimes, the genetic evidence points to a single-family origin for a surname when the historical evidence is not clear-cut’ (*ibid.*: 186), and/or, ‘historical

evidence in the case confirmed the genetics, rather than the other way round' (Redmonds et al. 2011: 187). In short, some contemporary family historians can be seen to be turning towards genetic surname studies in order to attempt to address genealogical questions pertaining to both regionalism and nationality.

As part of my ethnography I observed that the integration of DNA analysis with family history research was not a universal given. In direct reply to the above 'Hedley' post, the mailing list moderator responded with frank derision to its claims, suggesting that 'the relevance of DNA studies to genealogy is tangential at best' and that the most a family historian can hope for from such results is to be able to 'wax lyrical about the route that their prehistoric ancestors took from East Africa'. Moreover, he was highly skeptical as to whether any kind of genealogical brick wall could in fact be overcome via DNA analysis. The effectiveness and suitability of particular genealogical techniques of investigation, in his view, should therefore be viewed in relation to the exploratory aims and methodological preferences of the individual family historian. The key point to be taken from this particular example, however, resides in the emerging detail that one can in fact 'wax lyrical' about matters of genetic ancestry from differing perspectives. Furthermore, any assumed perspective is largely dependent upon the style and type of discourse that is employed. In essence, not only are the methods of DNA analysis within the horizons of family historians in my study area, but they also make their own meanings of them; and these meanings are intrinsically linked to the bones and flesh of genealogical evidencing and imagining. Keeping this point in mind the following section explores in greater detail the ways in which the Oxford Ancestors laboratory make their own meanings when implementing strategies for the presentation and interpretation of genetic-based information as a useful 'standard tool' for family historians.

#### **5.4 Genetic Discourse**

Discourse in academic yDNA research and analysis like that of the Y Chromosome Consortium (YCC) is very different from that of commercial genetic ancestry tracing companies like Oxford Ancestors. The latter, though based on the modern spatial distribution of genomic markers, develop a narrative focus upon mythically created

archetypal figureheads rather than genomic variants. yDNA haplogroups are interpreted as representing genetic ‘clans’ with associated founding ancestral ‘clan fathers’. Oxford Ancestors present these ‘clans’ and ‘clan fathers’ within elaborative narratives of ancestry that are to be integrated into pre-established family history accounts. In contrast, the YCC formulated ‘a nomenclature system for the tree of human Y-chromosomal binary haplogroups’, in order to standardise and simplify the existing diversity of nomenclatures in the ‘hope that the nomenclature presented . . . will be adopted by the community at large and will improve communication in this highly interdisciplinary field’ (2002: 339). The manner of communication of research and analysis associated with the YCC and other studies in the field (Su et al. 1999; Jobling and Tyler-Smith 2000; Semino et al. 2000; Underhill et al. 2000; Capelli et al. 2001; Hammer et al. 2001; Karafet et al. 2001; Myres et al. 2011) is to be termed as ‘primary genetic discourse’, while the narrative interpretations of Oxford Ancestors and Bryan Sykes (2001, 2006) is to be termed as ‘secondary genetic discourse’.

‘The YCC is a collaborative group involved in an effort to detect and study genetic variation on the human NRY [the nonrecombining portion of the Y chromosome]’ (2002: 345). It does not represent a commercial genetic venture. Diagrammatic and interpretative representations of paternal modern human yDNA haplogroup variation differ greatly between the YCC and Oxford Ancestors despite their reliance upon the same base of genetic data. Both the Oxford Ancestors Y-clan tree (Fig. 10) and YCC diagram (Fig. 13) demonstrate the distribution and relative mutational distance of yDNA across the paternal genealogy of the modern human species (*Homo sapiens sapiens*). However, whereas the YCC figure presents its empirical genetic data within an objective format, analysis of the Oxford Ancestors Y-Clan certificate demonstrates a document that presents a combination of empirical genetic data and elaborate lateral transcriptions, whereby specific Y-Clan’s and Y-Clan father’s are utilised in order to present genetic-based genealogical information in a usable form to its consumers. In this instance, ‘[t]he family tree continues its evolutionary course in the age of molecular biology, bioinformatics and digital design, where the abstract diagram is the focus of intensive visual experimenting for the purpose of economizing and packing information in an appealing and readable form’ (Pálsson 2009: 89-90).



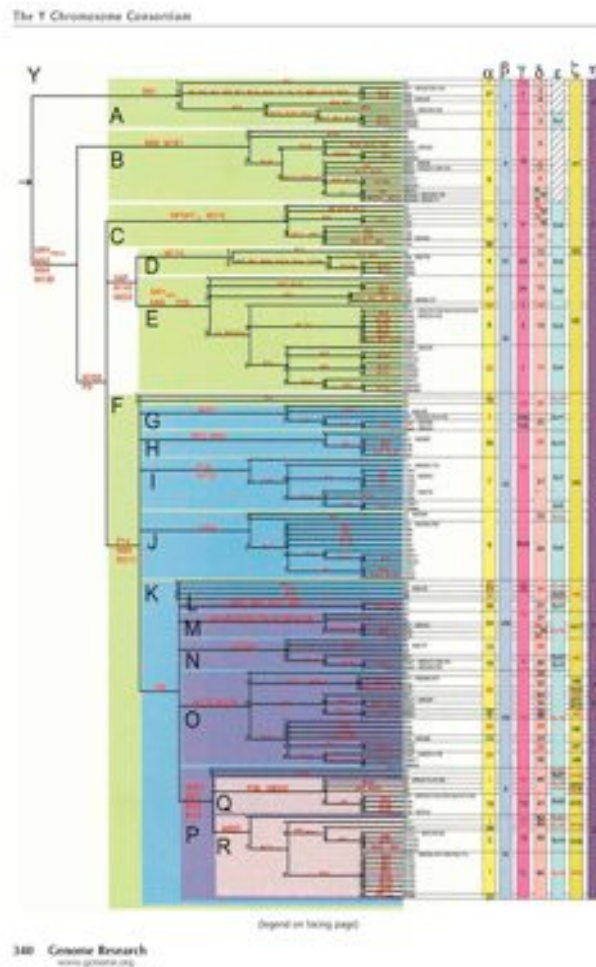


Figure 13: YCC phylogenetic tree detailing the origin and spread of paternal modern human yDNA haplogroups

Personal genetic affiliation to the ‘clan of Oisín’ (founded by, and traceable to, the archetypal clan father ‘Oisín’), for example, represents a fundamental re-imagining of the genetic data within a conceptually individualised narrative that is distinct to the nomenclature system of the YCC. The YCC would analyse my yDNA results as bearing genetic markers that are associated with the R1b sub-clade of the larger R haplogroup. This represents one of the more recent mutational divergences within the collectivised modern human paternal genetic genealogical lineage. In essence, the drive towards establishing genetic ancestry tracing analysis as a ‘standard tool’ of use for family historians has led to the interpretation and presentation of yDNA analysis from collectivised to individual genealogical perspectives.

Two exemplary texts that address the origin and dispersal of European male modern human genetic lineages further illustrate the primary/secondary distinction. The first text represents primary genetic discourse and is taken from the Myres et al (2011) article ‘A major Y-chromosome haplogroup R1b Holocene era founder effect in Central and Western Europe’, published in the *European Journal of Human Genetics*:

The complex pattern of European Y-chromosome diversity has been ascribed to anatomically modern human dispersals, incorporating the combined heritage of initial upper Paleolithic colonization, secondary post-glacial Mesolithic re-expansions and the Neolithic era demic diffusion of agriculturalists from the Near East. . . .

Although haploid genealogies capture only a narrow ancestry spectrum of the history of a population’s gene pool, they afford a relatively uncomplicated and unique approach to disentangle and investigate complexities created by the superimposition of later gene flow patterns onto preexisting substrates, revealing population formation and affinities as well as insights into gender-related levels of reproductive success. Using the conventional Y-chromosome haplogroup nomenclature, the majority of lineages observed in contemporary European populations fall into the following main haplogroups: E, G, I, J, N and R. Typically, > 50% of men in Europe are affiliated with haplogroup R. Members of Haplogroup R are also widespread in Western, Central and Southern Asia as well as some parts of the Sahel region of Africa. In Europe, essentially all R associates belong to its sub-clade R1 defined by M173. Two R1 sub-clades show distinctive geographic distributions where Germany represents a major differentiation zone. R1a-M420 varieties are most frequent in the East and the R1b-M343 sub-clade is more common in the West. A further sub-clade of R1b, defined by the mutation M269, is the most common Y-chromosome haplogroup throughout Western Europe (Myres et al. 2011: 95).

In the above extract, the YCC nomenclature system is applied throughout and informative SNP’s referenced when dealing with the most common yDNA haplogroups identifiable within Western Europe. Groups derived from these SNP’s are named using the conventional terminologies of ‘haplogroup’ and ‘sub-clade’. Archaeological period names are also applied when describing the prehistoric

dispersal pattern of modern human male lineages across Europe. To understand this extract, the reader must have some expert knowledge of the vocabulary and processes of population genomics and archaeological and geological periods. The text is very informative, but it is exclusive, and is to be accepted within an empirical idiom that does not intimate any further underlying symbolic and/or mythical connotations. It is also observable that the data is directly concerned with understanding and explaining genetic mutation markers in relation to their significance as part of global paternal modern human origin and dispersal patterns. Significantly then, the information contained within this extract is not individualised and thus represents an etic genetic perspective regarding the presentation and interpretation of modern human yDNA variants.

The second extract represents secondary genetic discourse and is taken from the Oxford Ancestors *Interpreting Your Y-Clan Certificate* booklet that accompanied my yDNA analysis results. Here, the subject matter discussed is based upon the same genetic information introduced in the Myres et al. (2011) article, but is done so from an alternative emic perspective and with a different audience as its focus:

The great majority of native Europeans are members of seven major clans:  
Seth, Oisin, Sigurd, Wodan, Re, Gilgamesh, Eshu and Nentsi.

### **Seth, Sigurd and Oisin (Clades R1, R1a and R1b)**

Thanks to recent scientific research involving, among others, Oxford Ancestors customers, it is now clear that these three clans are related to each other and together form a 'super-clan' that is found over a wide area of Europe and Asia. The most ancient of the three clans was founded by Seth who lived in the Middle East about 50,000 years ago. His direct patrilineal descendents form the clan bearing his name and are now found in an arc extending from the Middle East to Iran, Afghanistan and the Indian subcontinent. Regional research projects have found the clan of Seth in the Punjab (42%), Kyrgyzstan (35%), Uzbekistan (15%), the Kazan Tatars (17%), the Kazbegi of Georgia (10%), Iraq (17%), and Iran (5%).

Other descendents of Seth traveled west into Europe where they formed the clans of Oisín (R1b) and Sigurd (R1a). The clan of Oisín (pronounced O'Sheen) is very prominent in Western Europe and is reckoned to be about 35,000 years old. In the far West of Ireland, almost 100% of men with Gaelic surnames are in the clan of Oisín and the proportions are also very high in Wales (83%) and Scotland (73%). Even in England, 64% of men are in the clan. The very high proportion of clan members found in Iberia (70%), particularly among the Basques, was the first indication of the genetic continuity between Iberia and the Celtic west of Britain and Ireland which was later confirmed by detailed Y-chromosome fingerprinting. This emphasises the importance for the colonisation of Britain and Ireland of ancient maritime migrations along the Atlantic coast of Iberia, France and Brittany during the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods beginning 7000 years ago (Oxford Ancestors 2011a: 5-6).

The dominant feature of this extract is its narrative, whereby distinct genealogical imaginings come to the fore as both an alternative and an addition to the scientific nomenclatures identifiable in the first text. Oxford Ancestors have added flesh to the bones of the genealogical data. Although, the YCC nomenclature system is used as a reference to the R haplogroup and its associated sub-clades (R1b, R1a) the characteristic of individually identifiable genetic 'clans' and their archetypal founding 'clan fathers' (Seth, Oisín, Sigurd) is the primary focus. This application of 'clan' terminology – more usually associated with traditional social anthropological ethnographies (Kuper 1996) in contrast to evolutionary genetic studies – thus demonstrating the explicit effort of Oxford Ancestors towards presenting complex genetic-based genealogical information within a socially relatable idiom. Moreover, the reference to Celtic, Gaelic, and Basque ethnic groupings suggests an effort to further incorporate individualised characteristics to the interpretation of the genetic data at hand. The introduction of genetically identifiable founding 'clan fathers' is employed as a strategy that is twofold in its aims. Firstly, it is used as a means of circumventing the expert oriented alphanumeric coding that is associated with specific yDNA haplogroups and genetic mutation markers as a means of lateral transcription (see Table 1) whereby symbolic genealogical re-imaginings become possible. Moreover, by implementing socially relatable features into the mix the intricacies of genetic-based evidence appear to become more accessible. Secondly,

the attribution of recognisable names and ethnic affiliations to the genetic data demonstrates a personifying aspect that aims to appeal towards the sensibilities of practicing family historians. Specifically this concerns the identification and collation of directly related individuals within extended personal genealogical lineages. Information to be found on the Oxford Ancestors website elaborates this point further:

To emphasise that they were real individuals, we have given them all names and, using archaeological and other evidence, we have reconstructed their imagined lives (Oxford Ancestors 2010).

This demonstrates the individualised emic perspective of secondary genetic discourse, which is noticeably a shift in trajectory from the collectivised etic considerations of primary genetic discourse. Furthermore, the information contained with the Oxford Ancestors extract is clearly directed towards a non-expert audience and uses a narrative idiom that greatly intimates underlying symbolic and/or mythical connotations. The most significant observation here, however, can be related to the names that have been attributed to the clan's and clan father's themselves. For example, it is stated by Oxford Ancestors that 'Oisín is named after Oisín MacFinn, the son of Fionn MacCumhail – pronounced Finn MacCool – one of the greatest of all Irish, semi-mythical heroes' and customers are also informed that 'in the far west of Ireland, almost 100% of men with Gaelic surnames are in the clan of Oisín and the proportions are also very high in Wales (83%) and Scotland (73%)' (2011a: 6). The Oisín clan therefore appears to be so named in order to infer a symbolic association with the history of Ireland and Celtic Britain. However, the genetic history of the R1b haplogroup extends beyond Ireland to Iberia originally. It is acknowledged by Oxford Ancestors 'that there are high proportions of clan members found in Iberia (70%), particularly among the Basques' with such results indicative of the 'genetic continuity between Iberia and the Celtic west of Ireland' (*ibid.*). Despite its deeper genetic links to Iberia the R1b haplogroup is granted a Celtic clan name and clan father demonstrating a distinct genealogical imagining of the genetic data whereby selectivity and choice loom large. To a certain extent kinship is being enterprised here (Strathern 1992) as Oxford Ancestors apply 'mechanisms by which possible lines of relation are brought into being or erased by foregrounding and backgrounding various

substantial connections and cultural codings’ (Franklin and McKinnon 2001a: 12). They have to make their pitch this way, however, as otherwise the name of the ‘clan father’ would have little, or no, symbolic resonance for people to whom it is expected to convey some ancestral and relational meaning in the present (family historians in Britain). It is therefore commercially advantageous for Oxford Ancestors to construct an association between this haplogroup and Celticness.

The narrative strategies that are employed by Oxford Ancestors also mirror some of the themes that emerged in observations of family historians interacting with online historic census data. Here, transcription takes the form of converting alphanumeric nomenclatures into personally identifiable names with translation apparent through the creation of biographies for the founding Y-Clan fathers. Here, such strategies are necessary as a means of dealing with the vast time-scales that exist between the mythical lives of the Y-clan fathers and their contemporary genetic descendents and are thus implicated through the integration of historic myth and contemporarily identifiable characteristics and sensibilities.

## **5.5 Lateral transcription**

It is suggested that Oxford Ancestors use a form of lateral transcription across genetic discourses in order to release their data from the shackles of ‘scientization’ (Habermas 1971). Here, family historians, as consumers, are enlisted to expand and communicate new modes of genetic information across Euro-American societies through the mode of secondary genetic discourse:

Journals of abstracts and reports are the first step in the direction of a process of translation that transforms and refines the raw material of original information. A number of journals serve the same purpose of communication between scientists of differing disciplines who need an interpreter to be able to employ important information in neighboring fields for their own work. The more specialized research becomes, the greater the distances that important information must traverse in order to enter the work of another expert (Habermas 1971: 77).

Moreover, this appears as a feature that is mutually beneficial to all parties involved:

Given a high degree of division of labor, the lay public often provides the shortest path of internal understanding between mutually estranged specialists. But this necessity for the translation of scientific information, which grows out of the needs of the research process itself, also benefits the endangered communication between scientists and the general public in the political sphere (Habermas 1971: 77-78).

Primary Genetic Discourse			Secondary Genetic Discourse
1. yDNA mutation marker references	2. Haplogroup alphanumeric codes prior to YCC	3. YCC nomenclature system	4. Oxford Ancestors Y-clan Archetypes
M91	I	A	Amadlozi
M60,	II	B	Baatsi
RPS4Y <sub>711</sub>	10, V, 1F, 16, Eu6, C	C	Mau
M174	IV, 11	D	Thang-la
M96	III	E	Eshu
M89	VI, Eu10, H4	F	Gilgamesh
M201	Eu11	G	Gilgamesh
M52, M69	35, Eu12	H	Himalaya
P19	21	I	Wodan
12f2a	9, Med, 23	J	Re
M9	VIII, Eu16, 1U, H5	K	Mandala
M20, M11	28, 27, Eu17	L	Lhotse
M4, M5	24, 37, H17, E	M	Mandala
LLY22g	12	N	Nentsi
M175	VII, 28, I	O	Yi
M3	18, 41, Eu22, H15	Q	Quetzalcoatl
M173	IX, 43, Eu18	R1	Seth
SRY <sub>10831b</sub>	2, 1D, 45	R1a	Sigurd
P25	1L, 44	R1b	Oisín

**Table 1:** Table showing mutation codes, selected NRY haplogroup marker codes and publication references, YCC haplogroup nomenclature system codes, and Oxford Ancestors Y-Clan Archetypes (left to right)

The preceding table clearly demonstrates the visible lateral transcription process that is in operation concerning the succession of primary to secondary genetic discourse. Column 1 represents the key mutation markers through which the entire yDNA phylogeny is based. Column 2 demonstrates the coded outcome of various successful attempts by differing yDNA researchers towards identifying specific yDNA haplogroups and sub-clades concerning these mutation markers. The selection represented in column 2 also shows the variation that existed between alphanumeric coding systems prior to the establishment of the YCC nomenclature system. The primary objective of the YCC was to address, and clarify, any potential confusion surrounding the ‘number of different systems used to name these binary haplogroups’ (2002: 339). Column 3 presents the YCC nomenclature system that was introduced as part of a fluid system that would also be ‘flexible enough to allow the inevitable changes that will result from the discovery of new mutations and NRY lineages’ (*ibid.*). Columns 1-3 therefore signify information that is useful when presenting and discussing genetic findings via the mode of primary genetic discourse. Column 4 represents the mode of secondary genetic discourse and thus displays the archetypal names of the Y-clan fathers that Oxford Ancestors have applied to the YCC nomenclature system and associated genetic-based evidence. This table is therefore representative of the genealogical development of a yDNA-based genetic knowledge system that is used as a mode for communicating information about deep paternal ancestry between expert practitioners and lay consumers respectively.

These acts of lateral data transcription represent a process whereby wider genetic acknowledgement and accessibility is achievable to both expert and lay audiences. The YCC initiated this transcription process through the implementation of their nomenclature system in order to produce a universal classification for the vast amount of data that was emerging. This exercise was directed towards experts within the discipline. Subsequently, Oxford Ancestors have extended this nomenclature system so that it incorporates identifiable ‘persons’. Thus demonstrating a strategy that sits with contemporary notions of disseminating ‘science to a wider public’ (Lee



2011: 23). Furthermore, this genealogy of genetic discourse can be seen to have contributed towards the blurring of boundaries that now exists between expert practitioners and lay users (Pálsson 2012). The identification of ‘persons’ is also significant in relation to how the implementation of secondary genetic discourse reveals contemporary reckonings of kinship and relatedness. As Strathern asserts, ‘[i]t is when persons become visible as individuals that the English feel they ‘relate’ to one another’ (1992: 49) with the personification of genetic information by Oxford Ancestors a means of indicating genetic relatedness between consumers and clan fathers alike. Here, the flesh and bones of ‘persons’, as it is to be understood within the context of this thesis, is thus also key to English kinship.

This transcription of genetic information across discourses also aids in demonstrating the differing collectivised and individualised perspectives that are employed between the two modes. Through the personification of haplogroups the aim of secondary genetic discourse is to highlight direct genealogical connections between contemporary living individuals and their deep paternal ancestors. This individualisation is analogous to the gene genealogies that identify the most recent common ancestor (MRCA) from the present-day distribution of genetic variation. In so doing, this ‘retrospective view gives the impression of *coalescence*’ (Fu & Li 1999: 2), giving rise to the idea of coalescence theory (Kingman 1982a, 1982b). This approach can be used to infer exclusive direct individualised connection between the present and the past. This is in contrast to the ‘divergence of sequences’ (*ibid.*) that are represented when applying the perspective of beginning with an identifiable MRCA in the past and tracing back towards the present, as exemplified in the collectivised considerations of primary genetic discourse. In both instances, the issue of temporal distance between MRCA’s and their living descendents in the present is key. This latter point being important when analysing the narrative translation strategy that emerges from lateral transcription, which includes the creation of biographies for the archetypal Y-clan fathers that have thus far been introduced.

## **5.6 Genetic Biography**

It is important to investigate the biographic translation strategy that is used by Oxford Ancestors following the lateral transcription of raw genetic data. Partial biographies

for their archetypal Y-clan fathers are used in order to demonstrate further the union that exists between genealogical evidencing and imagining. Before embarking upon an analysis of Oisín's partial biography, however, an ethnographic example is introduced that demonstrates the interrelation between concepts of biological relatedness, genealogical evidence, and the need for 'a good story' when investigating ancestry.

During one of my early visits to the NDFHS resource centre I was introduced to Francis, an experienced family historian who also had volunteer responsibilities for monitoring the NDFHS online message board forum. Francis was typically knowledgeable about all aspects of the family history process, which together with bookbinding, he described as one of his 'passions'. Evidently experienced in multitasking, Francis presented an overview of the documentary and digital resources the NDFHS has to offer its members while also keeping an eye on the activity of the online forum. Following this introduction, which included a bit of a 'hard-sell' regarding the benefits of taking up an annual subscription with the NDFHS (something I never quite got around to doing), we sat down and began to talk more directly about family history research and Francis's personal genealogical endeavours to date. When I raised the theme of encountering previously unknown living relatives through direct genealogical investigations Francis recounted his experiences at a recent family history research fair. He told me that when browsing one of the stalls at the fair he had been distracted by a woman inquiring about a family surname that was also of interest and relevance to his ancestral research. Francis described how his gaze had been drawn towards the woman and how he was completely amazed: 'she was my aunt who had been dead for ten years'. The lady bore a close resemblance to his dead aunt, which, together with having shared interests in a particular surname convinced him to strike up a conversation. Francis told me it turned out that this lady and he were in fact distantly related and could be genealogically connected through a particular lineage that was linked to the surname that instigated this unexpected union.

The family resemblance that Francis described as existing between this newly encountered living relative and his dead aunt, together with a traceable genealogical connection to Francis implies the possibility shared of genes. I decided to raise the

subject of genetic ancestry tracing and its relevance to family history research at this point in our discussion. It is my experience that family historians rarely sit on the fence concerning their opinions about such matters. ‘I can’t see the point in it’ Francis declared, before elaborating that in his opinion genetic ancestry tracing offered little evidence of the ‘personal stories’ that constitute the real ‘flesh on the bones of family history research’. This reply appeared slightly contradictory considering the account he had given incorporating Francis, his dead aunt, and a newly discovered living relative, who could all trace their lineages back to a single common ancestor. Moreover, this could be done within a tale that is personal to each of them. Francis continued, describing a recently discovered genealogical example that also constituted a ‘good story’ as part of his family history. Explaining that he had uncovered documentary evidence detailing the decapitation of a male worker as a result of a nineteenth century engineering accident Francis told me he had a ‘hunch’ that this unfortunate individual was in fact a great grandfather of his, although he had so far failed to establish this fact conclusively. ‘I haven’t proven him yet’ Francis explained, before informing me that he was close to doing so, and that the discovery of such ‘personal stories’ represent the type of real life instances that genetic ancestry tracing fails to identify.

It is true that genetic-based genealogical evidence will fail to indicate specific episodes of an eighteenth, nineteenth, or early twentieth century ancestor’s daily life in the same way that documentary-based genealogical evidence will. However, analysis of the mythical biography of the Y-clan father Oisín that is presented by Oxford Ancestors reveals a strategy whereby the use of genealogical imaginings indicate the application of ‘flesh on the bones’ to genetic-based genealogical evidence. Moreover, the ancestral imagery that is presented by Oxford Ancestors when addressing both paternal and maternal lines of genetic descent represents a direct extension of the genealogical imaginings of Bryan Sykes, which for him are able to say something about kinship and relatedness:

DNA is the messenger which illuminates that connection, handed down from generation to generation, carried, literally, in the bodies of my ancestors. Each message traces a journey through time and space, a journey made by the long lines that spring from the ancestral mothers. We will never know all the details of

these journeys over thousands of years and thousands of miles, but we can at least imagine them (Sykes, 2001: 351).

For Francis, the stories fleshed from his research highlighted specific genealogical connections that were of significance to him. For Oxford Ancestors the stories fleshed from genetic data aim to highlight specific genealogical connections that are of significance to their product, their customers (which include some family historians but not all), and Bryan Sykes. Here, the difference between the two cases identifiable is through the evidence-base in question; however the similarity resides in the fact that both cases are concerned with the tracing of relatedness between people in the present and the past.

The lateral transcription of sub-clade R1b into the Y-Clan of Oisín is a useful first-step in the Oxford Ancestors strategy as it directly applies a personal name to the ancestral genetic-based evidence that it represents. As the example of Francis has shown however, the existence of a ‘good story’ with distinct ‘personal’ connotations is also of significance to the family historian when framing ancestors, and oneself, within a genealogical lineage to which they can relate. Consequently, Oisín, together with all other ‘Y-clan fathers’ and mitochondrial ‘clan mothers’ identifiable via Oxford Ancestors DNA analysis, are supported by an individualised narrative biography. This strategy brings ancestors closer to the present in the same way that family historians translate digitised historic census data into a perceived narrative, and it demonstrates similar effects upon specific genealogical imaginings.

The following extract presents the Y-clan father Oisín as both a semi-mythical archetype and a ‘real individual’, who was susceptible to human emotion, and who acted within identifiable social circumstances. By presenting Oisín in this manner, empathy, awe, and romanticism are seamlessly transferred from the distant past and into the contemporary:

The clan of Oisín is named after Oisín MacFinn, the son of Fionn MacCunmhaill – pronounced Finn MacCool – one of the greatest of all Irish, semi-mythical heroes, and with his followers, the Fianna or Fenians, became the prototype for the legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round

Table. Oisín, or Ossian as he is also known, was a great warrior like his father and they shared in many adventures together. However, Oisín's main passion was for poetry – and for women.

As well as fathering the warrior Oscar with his wife Eóibhir (Eve), Oisín fell in love with the fairy princess Niamh when she appeared to him, on horseback, on the banks of Lough Leane in County Kerry. Oisín leapt immediately onto her horse and they returned to the Land of Forever Young, an ageless land of harmony and pleasures normally barred to mere mortals. There, Oisín and Niamh had three children and lived for three hundred years, without getting a day older. Eventually, Oisín came to miss his country and his father Fionn, and begged to return. Even though Niamh warned him that things had changed since they had left the mortal world, Oisín was utterly determined to return. Warned by Niamh that if he must return then he must not set foot on Irish soil, he set off only to find things as she had foretold. His father Fionn had died long before and his castle was in ruins. Oisín's despair made him forgetful and he dismounted to wash at a drinking trough. The moment his foot touched the ground, he aged three hundred years and collapsed, a wizened old man. In some versions of the myth, when Oisín came round, he found himself in the arms of Saint Patrick, who had just arrived in Ireland. St Patrick took care of Oisín, who spent his last years as a famous bard, recounting stories of Fionn and the Fianna, which drew audiences from all over Ireland (Oxford Ancestors 2011: 6).

There is clearly a mythical element to this elaborate narrative, which aims towards associating the archetypal figure of Oisín within conceptions of magic and immortality. The implicit suggestion being made is that there is a fundamental form of kinship 'magic' (Viveiros de Castro 2009; Sahlins 2011a, 2011b) once we begin evidencing and imagining genetic genealogical connections between clan fathers and Oxford Ancestors customers. There are, however, also slightly more mundane aspects incorporated within Oisín's biography whereby contemporary concepts of family responsibility, masculinity, infidelity, and nationalism are used in order to deflect any notion of divinity. In short, Oisín is offered as a great ancestor, maybe even the greatest ancestor that it is possible to identify within a paternal genealogy. However, he is also an accessible character: as a father, and a son, with passions and flaws alike. The combination of such characteristics in this ancestor is required in order to

add flesh to the bones of the genetic data at hand, all in an attempt to make kinship tangible. Moreover, it is a wholly necessary and valuable cultural tool of use in response to the intangible kinship claims of primary discourse which dictate that across 14 generations, 16 383 ancestors are excluded from a genealogy when tracing the route of yDNA alone (Elliot and Brodwin 2002).

The use of myth and legend in order to convey attributes of identifiable descent across a specific genealogy is not unique, and is observable across differing episodes of British history (Wood 1987, James 2001, Sykes 2006). Moreover, the motives and strategies displayed can also be linked to specific power struggles, which in the present case, concerns the distribution and ownership of genetic-based genealogical evidence. Through the application of secondary genetic discourse Oxford Ancestors present a useable and accessible mode of communication that is open to contemporary family historians. It is at once a democratising agent that aids in eradicating the previous gulf between expert and lay users (Lee 2011, Pálsson 2012).

For example, one of my research participants had undertaken personal yDNA analysis as part of a volunteer study led from the University of Leicester and had received their results in a form of correspondence that could be associated with primary genetic discourse. Here, Bill was struggling to make sense of his stated affiliation to the R1b haplogroup and had consequently not yet incorporated his genetic-based genealogical evidence into his family history research interpretations. Using the rubric of secondary genetic discourse I explained to Bill that an alternate interpretation of his results would place him within the genetic Y-Clan of Oisín, indicating that the founders of which (his deep paternal ancestors) had traveled west across Europe in the past 35 000 years, and more specifically, between the Iberian peninsula and Britain, within approximately the last 16 000 years. This information Bill informed me, ‘all adds to the story’; although he was also eager to point out that his family history research thus far, placed his paternal ancestry ‘only in and around the Sheffield area’. The idea that some of Bill’s genes had been transmitted from a founding father to he via a long line of genetically related men appeared to strike a chord and he told me that he now understood the gist of his yDNA results more clearly. For Bill, it became evident that one could trace genetic markers back in time over thousands of years just as one could trace census data over hundred’s and that

the two could equally be used in the formation of meaningful genealogical imaginings.

I received my own yDNA analysis results a few months after this episode and I shared them with Bill at the following BGRG meeting. Upon seeing that we were both affiliated with the R1b haplogroup and/or Y-Clan of Oisín he declared jokingly that ‘maybe we are related at some point’, indicating the possibility that we could share a MRCA who was also a descendent of Oisín. This interchange demonstrates that through the addition of a coherent narrative to his genetic-based evidence Bill was able to integrate new people and places into his contemporary genealogical imaginings: the Iberian peninsular in addition to Sheffield; Oisín and a potential MRCA of he and myself in addition to his known relatives and ancestors. Moreover, this example also reveals a mode of kinship thinking in use by family historians whereby the evidencing and imagining of genealogical connections are able to imply relatedness between people in the past and the present (Oisín and Bill) as well as the present and the present (Bill and I).

Although a number of my research participants appeared unsure as to the usefulness of personal genetic ancestry testing to their ongoing family history research projects what they revealed to me in conversations surrounding the topic offered great insight into the ways in which they were able to reckon their genealogical connections. James informed me that, despite learning of his affiliation to a sub-clade of the ‘I’ haplogroup (Y-Clan of Wodan), he had still ‘expected more from it [yDNA testing]’. This was, in James’s view, due to the uncertainty of the very large time-scales that are involved when researching deep paternal ancestry through genetics. Despite these reservations, James did admit that he was both intrigued and surprised to be affiliated with such a rare paternal genetic grouping in Britain (8% population frequency) and that the associated story linking his deep paternal ancestry to Central Europe certainly represented ‘something else to put in the file’. Here, James’s yDNA results were contributing to his genealogical imaginings through their connections to newfound, and unexpected, periods and places.

## 5.7 Emerging relationships

The fact that, within my study area, I encountered less family historians who had direct experience of genetic ancestry tracing than those without it paints its own picture. Generally, family historians in the northeast of England are not, it seems, rushing out to have their kinship ‘naturalized’, as Nash (2004) would have it, by exploring the genetics of genealogy and the cultural work that is associated with its interpretation and communication. However, that is not to say they ignore it completely. On the contrary, the family historians that I engaged with often took what they could from the potentialities and possibilities of genetic genealogical test results that were paid for and received by others and then incorporated them within their own genealogical imaginings. And consequently, as Raymond’s reflections outlined at the beginning of this chapter demonstrate, family historians used conversations about genetic ancestry tracing in order to say something more about the flesh and bones of kinship. For example, Raymond held the opinion that it was likely genetic testing could reveal genealogical connections to varying possible ancestral populations, but whether this was something that one could ‘work out’ as evidence, or not, was incidental as the complicated genetic narrative surrounding the peopling of the British Isles was already implicated within his own genealogical imaginings.

My own foray into the world of genetic ancestry tracing was, in part, based upon some of the observations outlined above. By undertaking a Y-Clan genetic ancestry test with Oxford Ancestors and then sharing this information with my research participants I have been able to act as an ethnographic bridge between the two parties and this has allowed me insight into a series of differing, yet extremely important, relationships.

The first such relationship is that which exists between Oxford Ancestors and its clients, and particularly the transference and communication of genetic information between the two. It is this relationship between Oxford Ancestors and myself that has enabled an in-depth analysis of the alternate modes of discourse that emerge in the commercial proliferation of ancestral genetic evidence. It is acknowledged that any future purchase and use of Oxford Ancestors products by family historians in my study area is something that must be monitored closely, and consequently the door



remains open regarding further related research. However, by entering into this initial relationship ethnographically, at what is still a relatively early stage in developments between commercial genetic ancestry tracing and traditional family history research, I have been able to present a case that identifies the significance of the relationship to contemporary genealogical evidencing and imagining, and kinship, respectively. Moreover, by engaging with this relationship first-hand I have been able to develop and explore further affiliations with family historians in my study area, and this has helped me to better understand the complex association that exists between genetics and family history research in the northeast of England.

The second relationship is that which exists between those family historians who can demonstrate experience of genetic ancestry tracing and how it is that they are able, or unable, to formulate their genetic results within their wider genealogical imaginings. Here, ethnographic interactions with Bob and James illustrate just how the receipt of unexpected genetic genealogical evidence harbours the potential to add depth to an ancestral story, even if large stretches of time remain unaccounted for and the future trajectory of it is uncertain. Ethnographic observations in chapter 7 concerning the digital sharing, and non-sharing, of commercial test results shows how the application of emerging ancestral genetic knowledge can be used as a ‘tool of culture’ (Egorova, 2009: 171) for those that wish to establish social connections, and those that do not. In short, how relationships between users of genetic genealogical knowledge may be expanded and/or truncated. Furthermore, it is important to note that in such relationships this is for the most part viewed as a politically neutral process, with the forging of connections (genetically and/or socially) taken as a means of expanding relatedness and fleshing out family narratives as opposed to clarifying potential roots that may be linked to race and/or ethnicity (see Nelson 1998).

The third relationship is that which exists between the family historian who has undertaken a commercial genetic ancestry test and the family historian who has not. By ethnographically engaging in this type of relationship it has been possible to explore how family historians without direct experience of genetic ancestry tracing view the process, and more importantly, how they interpret the genetic test results of their peers in light of their own family history stories. For example, Raymond, Bridget, and Mary all employed genetic idioms in their genealogical imaginings

without having, or in fact requiring, the necessary evidence in order to support them. Moreover, simply talking about my own genetic test results often acted as a catalyst from which I could extrapolate further the thoughts and opinions of Raymond, Bridget, and Mary regarding their own genetic ancestries, regardless of the scientific accuracy of their imaginings. This was in contrast to Bill and James who viewed their genetic results as yet another facet of evidence to add to their elaborately evolving personal family history stories. In both perspectives, however, folk idioms of inheritance are significant, which in many cases reflect aspects of genealogical imagining associated with secondary genetic discourses.

The ethnographic element of this chapter has therefore been situated within the context of this series of relationships, which when combined, offers a form of tertiary perspective that is in keeping with the wider body of evidence presented throughout this thesis. Whether it is possible to say that this demonstrates, in Salazar's (2009) terms, that genes are good to think with is still uncertain; however, it does illustrate that scientists, commercial geneticists, family historians, and ethnographers alike are indeed thinking about genes, and they are doing so within a framework that incorporates both the evidencing and imagining of genealogical connections as well as kinship and relatedness. Moreover, rather than viewing, in Nash's terms, a '[n]ewly geneticized genealogy ... enhanced by the modernity and authority of science (2004: 26-27)', the series of relationships that have been outlined above, and which are explored ethnographically throughout this thesis, illustrate that the cultural narratives that become entwined within the genetic and digital technologies of family history research go some way towards questioning the assumed authority of science when reckoning genealogical connection, and thus with it, associated pre-conceived assumptions concerning Euro-American kinship.

## **5.8 Combining the Evidence**

It has been acknowledged that Oxford Ancestors offer their yDNA as a useful 'standard tool' to the genealogical research that is typically undertaken using historic census records. By comparing results taken from the two approaches further insight into the evidencing and imagining of genealogical connections by family historians is possible.

In order to establish direct connections between my coal-mining ancestors identified in online historic census records and the genetically related archetype of Oisín, highly imaginative processes are required. When conceptualising these connections, the gulf of time that exists between them also invites contemplation of a complex geographic journey. I have pondered my potential ancestral connections to the Iberian Peninsula and West of Ireland that the Y-Clan results suggest. This has included considering the probability that my direct paternal lineage has been actively mobile, geographically, across many past generations. As a consequence, conceptions of geographic origin and genus emerge whereby the understanding of my paternal ancestry is implicated in imaginings of both space and time. Here, the ‘roots/routes’ metaphor presented by Basu (2004) in discussions surrounding the Scottish Highland diaspora is relevant in that both geographic and temporal distance demonstrably represent meaning as part of complex genealogical imaginings. Bridget’s desire to genetically secure her conceptions of Viking ancestry, and Bill and James being intrigued by their West Iberian and Central European ancestral affiliations respectively, also demonstrate the spatial and temporal relevance that is afforded to the integration of documentary-based and genetic-based genealogical evidence. In the following chapter certain biological and cultural mediators of kinship are explored further whereby memory and inheritance interact closely in the thickening of genealogical connections.

Evidence of ancestral mobility and origin is also a point of connection when discussing shared genealogies with related kin. When relaying my paternal genealogical findings to my father, for example, he was surprised and interested to learn about both recent and past family history. Moreover, he appeared as keen to discuss our coal-mining pedigree in Lancashire as he was the 75% probability of us sharing a paternal Celtic genetic origin. Presenting this evidence to him sparked discussion and supposition regarding our shared ancestry and initiated discussions that ultimately led to us expanding our collective notions of personal genealogical connection. As Raymond has previously explained: ‘whether family enjoy it or not they’re going to be told about all these stories when they come to the family get-togethers’. The implication is that such information is important to contemporary family social interaction through the very communication of origin narratives and the desire to acquire further evidence in order to support them. This collaborative effort

between comparative forms of genealogical evidence thus indicates an emerging underlying relationship that is in existence between family history research and contemporary active kin connection. This is explored in greater detail in chapter 7.

## **5.9 Summary and Link**

This chapter has presented an ethnographic analysis of the take-up of Oxford Ancestors products among family historians. Particular insight has been gained from my own utilisation of the Y-Clan service offered by the company. In addition to this experiential evidence, the direct opinions and experiences of family historians across Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear have been included in order to demonstrate the interrelationship between the strategies and motives of Oxford Ancestors and contemporary instances of kinship and relatedness reckoning more generally. Through an investigation of the information that Y-Clan customers receive from Oxford Ancestors following yDNA analysis it has been demonstrated that particular strategies of genetic knowledge transference are in place. Two distinct genetic discourses are identified, characterised by alternative modes of interpretation and presentation of genetic genealogies. The strategies employed by Oxford Ancestors to develop and promote secondary genetic discourse to contemporary family historians are similar to themes observed in aspects of digitally focused documentary-based family history research. The concepts of lateral transcription and biographical translation of genetic-based genealogical evidence demonstrate similarities with the transcription and translation practices that have been observed concerning interactions between family historians and digitised historic census records. In both instances the evidencing and imagining of genealogical connections is key for the representation of a particular form of indigenous kinship thinking whereby idioms of flesh and bones aid in the figuring of relatedness. This is significant when taking into account the motivations of Oxford Ancestors and their efforts to promote their Y-Clan product as a ‘standard tool’ of use for contemporary family historians. Furthermore, by acknowledging the series of relationships that emerge amongst family historians who make use of genetic ancestry tracing products and those who do not, as well as the important relationship that exists between Oxford Ancestors and its clients, the data presented within this chapter is able to act as both a mediator, and reference point, to the subsequent ethnographic chapters of

this thesis.

Observation and analysis within this chapter and its preceding counterpart (chapter 4) have demonstrated the significance of digital and genetic technologies when evidencing and imagining genealogical connections. Moreover, they have presented an emerging mode of kinship reckoning evident amongst family historians where both the flesh and the bones of genealogical connections play an integral role. The following two chapters explore the flesh and bones of kinship further with regard to memory and inheritance (Chapter 6) and social interactions between contemporary kin (Chapter 7).

## Chapter 6. Remembering and Inheriting

As the majority of the BGRG members went about collating their research for the Blyth riverside project that they were planning I sat talking to Bill about his most recent family history research. Bill began by making reference to his great grandfather, who often featured prominently in his genealogical imaginings. ‘I can go back to 1854’, Bill explained, which was the year of his great grandfather’s birth. Despite the fact that he was born 80 or so years after his great grandfather it was Bill’s assertion that the vivid memories he still maintained concerning social interactions between them were able to act as tangible connections to the past. ‘I remember walking down the street with my great granddad when I was 4 year old’ Bill told me in an attempt to strengthen his point. The memories, for Bill, were a mediator between his youth (where they originated), his great grandfather’s life (which greatly contributed to them), and the present day (where they were recited and reflected upon). Moreover, Bill explained to me how memories of stories passed on to him by his father and grandfather had also openly contributed, in a hereditary manner, to much of the knowledge that he now had concerning his family history:

I mean I got a bit of history from my granddad and things like that, like during strike, the 1926 strike, when they used to go out into fields around Selby area working for farmers doing a job a day, you know. They used to do a job to get a bit of money and get a few potatoes off the farmer, or a turnip, or something like that. And they lived, they took a tent, my dad and my granddad and they lived in the tent, lived off fat of the land, catch a rabbit and have a few potatoes with it and things like that. And so long as they could send my grandma a few shillings home to keep rest of them. And that’s where I got a lot of the family history from (Bill).

For Bill, family history research is a process of transmitting and inheriting whereby reminiscence is key to genealogical imagining.

## 6.1 Outline

In this chapter I demonstrate the ways in which family historians in Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear use memory and inheritance as a means to thicken genealogical connections. In so doing the 21<sup>st</sup> century societal integration of digital communications and genetics is shown to be a key factor. To begin, the practice of family history research as a later-life pursuit is introduced in order to demonstrate its significance to genealogical reminiscence. Following this, the correspondence practices of the NDOML are examined which reveals that the exploration of memory and reminiscence presents itself as an imaginative exercise that can act as a consequence of, and useful alternative to, hard-line genealogical evidencing. This theme is further explored through my interactions with a regional oral history society and local reminiscence club. Inheritance is then addressed, whereby family historians are shown to incorporate folk idioms that are drawn from the genetic language of transmission as a means for reckoning kinship and relatedness as something that is distinctly biosocial. Finally, the integration of patrilineal surnames into the digital and genetic spheres is discussed as an area where family historians interweave a culture/genetics dual-perspective in the evidencing, imagining, and thickening of genealogical connections.

As Edwards has observed, '[i]dentity is made visible in both bodies and behaviour', which is representative of 'the past a person carries with and in them' (2005: 422). As I go on to demonstrate, my own ethnographic research reveals that by exploring what is carried 'with' them, family historians utilise reminiscences as a means of grounding themselves in their own kinship. Furthermore, it is revealed that when exploring what is 'in' them my research participants often turned to a specific feature of genealogical imagining that was directly linked to folk idioms of inheritance and transmission. In both instances cultural work is integrated with genetic facts as part of a hybrid mode of interpreting genealogical connections that is viewed as an extension of the flesh and bones of kinship thinking.

## 6.2 Setting Things Aside

It was clear from the early stages of my involvement with family historians that they were mostly from an older generation. They were predominantly of pensionable age and in retirement. I did encounter a few exceptions but these were no younger than 50 years of age. Investigating ancestry was mostly a post-career activity that usually occurred after ‘hands-on’ family commitments were over. For my research participants, family history research was a feature of later-life whereby newly discovered genealogical information would continually interact with reminiscences of accumulated, and actual, lived experience.

As part of my ethnographic interactions with the North Tyneside Local Studies Centre I became aware of a Reminiscence Club that met regularly to discuss and digitally archive the memories of its members. The meetings and discussions, I was told, took place within the NTLSC and the group was targeted at pensioners. Kath, the project manager of this community resource, explained to me that the activity of sharing and interpreting memories and reminiscences is particularly important to elderly individuals. In doing so, an opportunity for contemporary self-exploration is provided through the reassessment and reinvigoration of lived experiences. Moreover, it is also an opportunity for summing-up (Cohen 2007; McNees 2009), while directly reminiscing about personal ancestry has been shown to have positive psychological effects and increases intellectual performance (Fischer et al. 2010). Episodes of later-life reflection, in the form of collecting and interpreting genealogical information, might thus be seen as beneficial to its practitioners. This is also a form of what Giddens calls ‘positioning’ that ‘is always closely related to the categorizing of social identity’. Here, the social and the biological ‘mingle’ as part of a ‘social criteria of ageing’ (Giddens 1984: 85).

The very ‘positioning’ of genealogical investigations to periods of later-life was also to be viewed as strategic, with many family historians I met explaining to me that they had specifically ‘set-aside’ their ancestral inquiries for retirement. This deliberate attempt at summing-up in later life calls to mind Jung’s notion of ‘individuation’ as a ‘synthetic process’ associated with ‘the attainment of the self’ (Jung 1968: 106). As Jung stated: ‘environmental influences place all sorts of



insuperable obstacles in the way of individuation' (*ibid.* :166); in later-life, self-exploration of the kind identified in family history research becomes important. Furthermore, any such strategic postponement is resonant of the family historian's unwavering approach towards 'doing a proper job'.

In a continuation of the discussion that opened this chapter, Bill described how vivid childhood memories had instilled the desire to further explore his family history only for 'ordinary life' to get in the way for a number of years.

I've always been interested wondering where my ancestors were from, oh, for a lot of years – I can't say how many years because it's quite a lot. And I knew my great granddad; you wouldn't think so would you? I can still remember him walking to the social centre that was at end of our street, it were like a big community centre and all old folk used to go. Old men used to go and play dominos and cards and things and he used to take me down, and I sat at table, pack of dominos and played with them while they were playing dominos. I can remember his horse and cart – he had a horse and cart – I can remember that going up and down the street. But later on I started wondering about what his dad were like and things like that, you know, and then for a long time because I was so busy in my ordinary life – I was running three jobs at one time – I didn't have a lot of time even thinking about family history (Bill).

The active interrelationship between genealogical enquiry, reminiscence, and individuation is evident within this extract. Here, reminiscences have acted as a catalyst for Bill's family history research, while they also represent an active and ongoing part of them. They are both a means of, and a motivation for, thinking about kinship.

In discussions with Jane, a member of the Belmont Family History Group, some of the reasons underlying her genealogical investigations in later-life were revealed. Jane described how she had been actively involved with family history research for approximately 10 years following the completion of a 'genealogy course' in the community centre where we were meeting that day. Past frictions in Jane's family had led to specific 'aunts, uncles, and cousins' being 'excluded' from all family

occasions I was told. With the names of these relatives even avoided in discussions between parents and grand parents. Consequently, there were ‘unanswered family questions’ that had not been resolved, despite Jane’s attempts as a child to gain knowledge about these extended family members. Jane told me that she had not given up on getting to the bottom of these family secrets and, as such, had purposefully planned to investigate her family history more closely in retirement. Jane explained to me that she had ‘unraveled’ some of the family stories from which she had been deliberately excluded in her youth, and was thus building a more representative picture of her wider genealogy and her place within it. Although now largely forgotten, these historic family frictions did maintain a presence with Jane as part of her ongoing research. Jane described how she often worried that her deceased father could be ‘looking down’ disparagingly on her from above, due to the fact that she was researching family members with whom he did not ‘see eye-to-eye’. Jane’s pleasure at locating her position within a wider genealogy from which she had been excluded for many years was in contrast to her continued identity as a loyal daughter concerned about going against her late father’s wishes. For Jane, family history research in later-life had enabled her to maintain a relationship with her deceased father through her conflicting dedication of piecing together historically fractured genealogical connections.

Jane was not the only family historian to inform me that their present-day research was directly related to longstanding unanswered familial questions. Moreover, while Jane’s experiences demonstrated that specific ‘unanswered family questions’ were formed through the deliberate exclusion of social contact with extended family members in her youth, George’s inquisitiveness stemmed from the early and untimely death of his parents and grandparents. This need to address longstanding genealogical inquiries brings to mind Strathern’s observation that self-knowledge and personal identity are intrinsically linked to ‘knowledge about both birth and parentage’ (1999: 68). When I asked George directly about his motivations for beginning family history research he described how it stemmed from ‘a great lack of knowledge of my family’. When reflecting upon his formative years George explained: ‘Both my parents died before I was 10 years old, so I was brought up by my grandmother, and bless her, she didn’t last that long either’. These were accepted as disastrous episodes in youth that had been carried into adulthood. George told me that later ‘something triggered and I

thought, right, I want to find out'. George subsequently described how his family history research had begun: 'Slowly at first until, funnily enough, a cousin of my father rang up one day and said she had some stuff belonging to my father and would I like it?'. 'Yes please' had been George's reply, 'and from then it just took off'. The exact trigger point to wanting to 'find out more' was never clearly elucidated by George. However, his desire to use family history research in order to create a clearer picture of the lives of his parents, whom he knew only a short while and had only limited memories, demonstrates a mode of genealogical thickening whereby connections between the past and present are both forged and strengthened by looking in the right places over the passage of time.

The above themes emerged in numerous other discussions with family historians, in which, notions of a 'right' age and time for genealogical investigation were often mentioned. Mary, for example, was a family historian who had clearly reflected a great deal upon her genealogical work, concluding that 'I think age has a lot to do with it'. Somewhat ironically, I was told by a number of research participants, that the older one gets the more genealogical questions one has, while the number of people alive who are able to answer these questions goes down. Several of my older research participants commented that I was 'lucky' to be researching my own family history at a younger age (relative to them), as there would be greater numbers of older family members alive to assist in my enquiries. When I quizzed Mary on this point, she described how the genealogical past becomes important in broader philosophical terms:

I think the older you get – now people used to say this to me when I was in my twenties and I thought, well whatever –, but when you get to your middle ages you do change, and your priorities change, and who you are changes. Your perception of who you are is different to when you're in your twenties. It's about forming identity I think, and placing yourself within the context of humanity. I think you start questioning what's the meaning of life and yourself in the context of something else, and I think that's why it's mostly older people (Mary).

I asked Mary whether she saw her exploration of ancestry as a way of answering questions about one's identity, and her answer was resounding: 'Yes, yes, definitely, yeah. I mean half of my family come from Poland and I haven't got much close family in this country at all, so it helps to feel that you have some sort of link with a bigger picture'. To Mary, this 'something else' and 'a bigger picture' are clearly necessary in order to frame her own ideas about who she is and to whom she can relate. Moreover, for Mary the concepts and images that are constructed within this 'bigger picture' are able to gain dynamism when combined with experiential reflection, which gave to her the impression of an ancestral past that was becoming less distant.

When I asked Elizabeth, an ex-teacher who has lived in Blyth, Northumberland for over 80 years, if her perspective of the past had at all altered as a result of family history research she explained that 'the past is more alive to me now'. The growing animation of Elizabeth's ancestral past resulted from her ability to observe and assess genealogical events as integral facets of her own familial 'bigger picture'. As she pointed out: 'The older I'm getting – which is very old – the more I can look back on things and see the reason for them, the proof of what the follow-up was'. The ability to see her ancestry in this way has undoubtedly given Elizabeth great pleasure. She described how a better understanding of her relatives' earlier life-choices, and their genealogical outcomes (reckoned as 'proof' and 'follow-up'), were features of a family history on which she 'could now look back and think: that was a brilliant thing that happened there'. This reflection can also be seen to have impacted upon how she contemplates the lives of her descendents. When discussing how this rejuvenation of the ancestral past can encourage historic and contemporary emotion in equal measure, Elizabeth introduced her relationship with her granddaughter as an example:

I'm putting myself in their role much more than I did originally when I was younger. You have other things filling your mind when you're younger, you know, your life and your family and so forth. I've got a granddaughter, I don't see her very often because she lives in Worcestershire, but she's 17 in 3 months time and we hear about things every so often. I look on things that she's doing now and things that have happened to her, you know, and I think,

‘what did I do when I was 17’, and I try to sort of compare and I think: ‘she’s got the same sort of reactions that I had’ (Elizabeth).

Acknowledging descendants as part of an exercise of genealogical imagining is significant in that family historians are aware of the fact that they are actively positioning themselves within genealogies that maintain fluidity across the past, present, and future. To Mary and Elizabeth, a distinct practice of kinship thinking is evident through the active relationship that exists between their known and remembered genealogies and the ancestors and descendants that constitute them.

### **6.3 Online Reminiscence**

Observations of social interaction on the NDOML demonstrate that family historians are using digital methods of communication in order to help in their explorations of genealogical connections. As part of this process certain genealogical ‘facts’ are collated and clarified through correspondence on the one hand, while on the other, reminiscences linked to ancestry and social history are shared. Checking emails on a daily basis usually revealed that at least one or two new posts had been submitted to the NDOML and substantially more than this if a particular message thread had sparked widespread interest across the list. In cases of straightforward census requests and/or enquiries, mailing list messages were usually titled by surname alone (e.g. Hood, Robson, Stoker, etc.) and tended to receive only a limited number of responses as once the requested genealogical evidence had been divulged and/or clarified the message thread would invariably end. Alternatively, those messages that instilled the sharing of reminiscences were usually titled by a specific place name or topic (e.g. Dowson’s Pickle Factory, Newcastle Pubs, Ice Cream Sellers, etc.) and received a greater number of responses (10 to 20), within which content would be elaborated and expanded as the message thread grew in size. In short, there was a dual-order of correspondence identifiable on the online mailing list whereby reminiscences would figure prominently.

In correspondence concerning the exact whereabouts of a sweet shop that was located in the Newcastle upon Tyne area between the 1930’s and the 1950’s a series of genealogical reminiscences were presented. One mailing list contributor shared with

the list his reminiscences of ‘aunt Margaret’, who worked in the sweet shop, together with ‘a clear childhood memory of black bullets served in newspaper cones’. As was often the case with such correspondence, reminiscences would jump to a related topic, with the old sweetshop in this instance acting as a ‘mediator’ (Edwards and Strathern 2000) towards an ‘old’ cinema that was located on the same street in Newcastle upon Tyne. ‘On another but related subject I recall a cinema (known locally as ‘the lop’) ... can anyone confirm the real name of that picture house?’, the mailing list was asked, in an effort to refresh a partial memory forever connected to aunt Margaret, black bullets, and a long gone sweetshop. One reply from the list moderator provided the ‘real name’ of the cinema together with its official dates of opening and closing, while another respondent (Norman) chose rather to share his own personal family stories regarding the cinema in question:

Very much at a tangent, but regarding a cinema called the “Lop”, my mother remembers well visiting a cinema in Newcastle known locally as the Lopodrome, so named because of the fleas that infested the place. She recalls being able to watch them hop from seat to seat in the light projector, and that it was said that if you went in wearing a cardigan, you came out wearing a jumper. I suspect your “lop” if not the same cinema (sorry, true name unknown) was so nicknamed for a similar reason (Norman).

This shift from genealogical enquiry to personal reminiscence is significant in that it illustrates the dual-natured figuring of genealogical connections within which family historians operate. Moreover, it helps to demonstrate that there is often an explicit sense of striking a necessary ‘balance’ concerning the ways in which connections are recorded and articulated. For example, in an online discussion concerning the scope of genealogical enquiry and interpretation an anonymous list contributor offered the following insight:

I do think that genealogy, while of some interest in itself, being only a list of name, dates and relationships, usually needs a lot of background information to give it life . . . . That is why I often think that the emphasis on entries in censuses, parish registers etc, and all the other stand-bys of genealogy, while necessary to get the relationships right, is nevertheless sometimes overdone if

the local history is ignored. We have to strike a balance (Anonymous mailing list contributor).

It was my experience that the implementation of reminiscences by family historians thus acted as a valuable means of giving 'life' to genealogical research, and the revealing of connections, which also then aided in the striking of such a 'balance'. Moreover, it is not coincidental that past sensory experiences often entered into the reminiscences of mailing list subscribers as a tangible and relatable mode that would also bring added 'life' to their genealogical imaginings. Correspondence surrounding a historic toffee factory exemplifies this point: 'What I do remember is the toffee factory and I can still smell the fragrance to this day', said one list subscriber, while another simply offered 'thanks for the reply and the memories'. In short, reminiscences that bring added 'life' and depth to genealogical connections are seen to act as a form of thickening agent whereby family historians both continue and expand their processes of adding flesh to the bones.

In a mailing list discussion about a historic pickle factory once located in Newcastle upon Tyne, a female list subscriber (Yvette) placed a request for copies of old photographs that pictured the women who worked at the Dowson's pickle factory in the early to mid-twentieth century. This request was framed within the context of a particular childhood memory that involved Yvette going to see her grandmother who worked at the factory during this period. Yvette made public her recollection of 'nana getting dressed up with a big hat to go on a float', and considered the possibility that this event was linked to the 'fleeting glimpse of a float with Dowson's written on the side' that she had recently witnessed as part of a television programme detailing the social history of Newcastle upon Tyne. While Yvette's reminiscences are contained within a call for a social history in which she can locate and position her grandmother and the other factory workers, the overriding theme of the post concerned her personal memories. To elaborate, the list was informed that Dowson's 'made the best pickles ever!!!' before it was added that Yvette 'still can't find a good pickled onion to beat them'. The use of reminiscence, within the framework of genealogical inquiry, in this instance is then used as a means of establishing connections between people and events, past and present, as well as the social interactions and personal sensations that are associated with them. This is a feature that was developed further as the

‘Dowson’s Pickle Factory’ thread continued. One reply to the above post concerned brief advice on how to uncover more genealogical information concerning Yvette’s grandmother, while two other posts offered similar suggestions regarding the history of the factory itself. However, the most comprehensive reply came from Anthony, who, ‘listers’ were informed, had left the North East to move south back in the early sixties. As Anthony explained: ‘I had told all my friends and colleagues about the virtues of Dowson’s pickles and they just didn’t believe me’, before describing how former employment as a Transport Manager had enabled him to distil such doubts in his newfound associates:

One delivery trip I organised for our client put us in the Walker area of Newcastle. . . . So I arranged for the foreman on one of these trips to go into the factory and buy a quantity. He brought back a complete floor-load in a pantehnicon lorry! Pickles were everywhere and the conclusion was made that they were the best pickled onions they had ever tasted. More trips followed but I eventually changed jobs and the pickle run came to an end. . . . For those of you who read this and never had a Dowson’s pickled onion you’ve really missed something. It’s 10am down here in Bromley and my mouth is watering at just the recollection (Anthony).

In this instance, Anthony’s reminiscences concerning his experiences as a pickle trafficker became interlinked with Yvette’s memories of her grandmother in the present while both can also be seen to act as mediators in their respective genealogies. Moreover, Anthony’s reminiscences sparked further related childhood memories for Yvette:

Dowson’s pickles were the best flavour, nothing even compares now. They were crisp and very, very tasty. Even their mixed pickle and beetroot were fantastic! I remember sitting on the pavement when I was about four with two small handfuls of pickles happily chomping away. No Mars bars or Snickers then! Ah! Happy days (Yvette).

Here, remembered individual events (Yvette’s grandmother on the float and Anthony’s pickle run) thicken the imagining of connections between Yvette and her grandmother and Anthony and the North East respectively, in that relationships are



partially reinvigorated through direct sensory experience in the present. Furthermore, the reflections on the past, evident within these biographical snippets represent specific episodes of imagining that once shared amongst group members act as a form of chain-reaction, contributing to extended bases of evidence from which other NDOML users are able to layer and thicken their own personal genealogical connections.

#### **6.4 Talking About the Past**

In discussions with Kath at North Shields Library I was told of the links that exist between oral history and reminiscence. Kath arranged for me to attend an oral history workshop with Living History (North East) Limited who constitute one branch of the wider national network that is associated with the Oral History Society. As part of this workshop Janette (the Project Director who also led the session) described how oral history accounts are linked to contemporary self-exploration, in that they contribute to greater understandings of ‘identity’ and ‘belonging’ for an individual. This concept was expanded within a discussion surrounding the categories of information that can be deconstructed from reminiscences contained within a standard oral history account.

The first category introduced to the class was *Genealogical* information, which comprised specific names, dates, and documented events (marriages, baptisms, deaths, etc.). Such information is viewed as forming the fundamental structure of any oral history account. Significantly, Janette referred to genealogical information as the ‘skeleton’ of a personal oral history narrative. The second category to be addressed was *Autobiographical* information. Here, the life-pattern of an individual can be seen to emerge within an oral history account. It was suggested that this would most likely incorporate aspects of a standard life-trajectory, beginning with early childhood and school, before moving to work, marriage, and parenthood, and concluding with leisure and retirement. The successful identification of a life-pattern represents a skill in itself, we were told, as autobiographical accounts do not always maintain a linear trajectory. Janette described the interpretation of autobiographical information as adding ‘muscle’ to the ‘skeleton’ of genealogical information. One volunteer at the workshop suggested that this ‘muscle’ could also be described as putting ‘flesh on the

bones'. The third category to be introduced was termed *Biographical*, although it represented significant autobiographical elements. Here, it was explained that the personal observations, interpretations, moods, attitudes, and opinions of an individual were also key to any oral history account. There was no immediate metaphorical analogy suggested for this third category but in discussion it was agreed that it represented something rather like the soul. The amalgamation of these three stages of information results in a finished 'piece', which normally takes the form of an audio-visually recorded and archived interview. More significantly however, it represents a celebration of the individual and is a statement about how a life is reckoned, or positioned, within the framework of a family, workplace, town, nation, and/or state.

In oral history accounts genealogical information is layered across these categories. In so doing, reminiscences are used in order to flesh out personal lives and relationships much like they are in family history research. Moreover, recorded oral history accounts of ancestors have been shown to provide a valuable genealogical resource for family historians. In a digital BBC podcast (2011) that was downloaded during my fieldwork Lisa Jardine – a professional historian with previous misgivings as to the value of genealogical research – exemplified this point:

I study the period 1500 to 1800. All those who play a part in the stories I endeavour to reconstruct are long dead. What a thrill then, to encounter the miracle of oral history. Of having a person in front of you, who was actually there. . . . The strong voice of great-aunt Aida has completely converted me to family history. She has put together the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle and given me a real sense of inhabiting my own history as British. We did not wash up on England's shores by chance. In dangerous, prejudiced times Britain welcomed my family not once, but twice, as economic migrants. Like anyone else who has begun to explore their roots I am of course determined to find out more. I will certainly never be disparaging about family history again (Jardine 2011).

Using oral history as a valuable resource, Jardine was thus able to address some of those personal 'bigger picture' questions that Mary made reference to earlier. Moreover, the vitality and invigoration that it has invoked here indicates that listening

to voices from the past induces a similar form of positioning, in genealogical terms, as does the remembering of voices.

The comparisons are not completely universal, however, as family historians often look to establish connections that are based on aspects not directly connected to the spoken words of an ancestor. As a result, I observed that family historians repeatedly turned to folk idioms of inheritance and transmission as a means of genealogical positioning whereby connections between people and the past could be thickened through associations that were linked to the shared transmission of genes and/or culturally acquired aspects of being. In such instances, family historians were seen to address the diversely inherited features of health, hobbies, and surnames within the same interpretative mode.

## **6.5 Folk Inheritance**

Bridget, used folk concepts of genetic inheritance when explaining how she had ‘found the great grandfather that came over, the original Norwegian pure bred’ and what she had received from him genealogically:

I actually suffer from some of his symptoms. So there you go, that can help a bit in the family tree, if there’s a certain strain running through your family, and in my case I got it (Bridget).

In her account, Bridget referred to this individual as the most recent common ancestor to both her ‘pure bred’ Norwegian ancestry and her particular health ‘strain’. I picked up on conflict here as Bridget demonstrated pride in her Norwegian heritage on the one hand but sadness concerning her health related ‘symptoms’ on the other. Bridget continued the theme by explaining that ‘from my granddad and my mother I got other symptoms, you know, so it’s almost like your life’s going to be mapped out for you, just from your genes’. When I asked Bridget directly about how her family history research had affected her she told me ‘well sometimes I understand things more because of it, you know, when you’re looking back, like the health thing I can understand a bit better now’. Here, Bridget thickened her connections to these ancestors by using knowledge about what she believed she had inherited from them

genetically and through the experience of living with certain shared ‘symptoms’ of health. Moreover, a distinction was inferred between what could be construed as good inheritance and bad inheritance in relation to the negative health issues that were implicated within Bridget’s positive Norwegian heritage.

Bridget was not the only research participant to fuse such ideas about inheritance in tandem with genealogical imaginings. In discussions with Bill, for example, I enquired as to whether he felt that family history research had helped him to better understand himself in relation to his genealogical origins, to which he offered the following insightful reply:

Well probably yeah, you know, you pick up a lot. There’s sometimes when I do things that I know my dad used to do – I just do them automatically. And there’s sometimes I feel like my dad, you know, I suppose that’s in your genes, isn’t it? It comes through. And very often I feel: oh my dad used to do that, you know, sometimes when I’m sat at home watching telly I’ll go like that [folded arms across chest] and that’s just how my dad used to do; and a few little things that I do, mannerisms and that, it’s like my dad. I’m interested in history, I like reading history books and things like that, and I watch history programs on telly. And my granddad, he were good at history my granddad, even though he didn’t go to school, but he used to read a lot, you know – fortunately he learned to read and write. But he were good at first-aid and he won some national trophies, like my son that were in Fire Brigade – he’s just finished – he won some national trophies for first-aid, and it were a thing that we all had to do. Yeah, all them things they all run down into you, sort of thing, you know, in your genes, and they’re things that you feel that you’ve got to do (Bill).

In this instance, Bill uses his own concepts of genetic inheritance in order to account for the specific mannerisms, characteristics, and life choices that he has experienced. By combining the transmission of genes with shared lived experiences Bill is able to thicken the genealogical connections that already exist between his grandfather, his father, his son, and he, through a kinship that is based on both flesh and bones. In choosing to look for a foundation upon which he is able to account for the reoccurrence of first-aid skills across his paternal genealogy Bill is actively pursuing

inheritance as a means to fix his genealogical imaginings. Moreover, he does so in a way that ties them directly to what it is that he understands about the power of genes and their influence over both the biological and social aspects of living.

Gwen – a member of the BGRG and lifelong resident of Northumberland and Tyne and Wear – also applied similar folk understandings of genetic inheritance in order to account for certain genealogical continuities that she had observed. As with Bill, it was important for Gwen to be able to trace and account for specific skill-sets and hobbies that were identifiable in her, her ancestors, and her descendents. As part of a discussion where I asked Gwen if it was significant to be able to put faces to the ancestral names that are unearthed in historic census records and birth, marriage, and death certificates she told me that it was important to her; but more so, it was how the genealogical information contained within such records allowed her to ‘wonder’ that was of greater worth:

Maybe they were marriage certificates because they certainly gave occupations on them and that was fascinating because then you began to wonder. Well one was a dressmaker and one was a groom, and then you sort of thought, oh well, you know, I was always quite good at sewing when I was younger, are they in the genes? And then my daughter was always interested in pony trekking, nothing riding or anything like that, you know, and the groomsmen coming down the other side, and you just begin to wonder (Gwen).

Following this description I asked Gwen if she used family history research as a means to explore the origin of personal traits. ‘Yes’, she replied, adding that the process was all about learning ‘where you’re coming from’. For Gwen then, genetic notions of transmission and inheritance must be applied to culturally observable features in order to learn about not just where one is ‘coming from’, but also how one got to where they are, and where they are going via their descendents. Here, the integration of genetic inheritance with cultural aspects of being thus acts as a valuable means of genealogical positioning. Furthermore, the identification of a groomsmen and a dressmaker in the past, and a horse-rider and sewer in the present, has allowed

Gwen to ‘wonder’ with her genes and thus add a further meaningful layer to her complex genealogical imaginings.

Within these accounts it has been shown that folk idioms of inheritance are of significance to family historians as a valuable positioning tool when interpreting the reemergence of specific social and biological features and characteristics across a genealogy. Here, family historians view the reemergence of certain features across a genealogy within a mode that excludes cultural neutrality, in that they are not ‘explained by a model of random copying’ (Smith and Macrauld 2009: 595). In so doing, there is an observable twisting of what can be construed as culturally inherited and what can be construed as genetically inherited, which for family historians correlates with the flesh and bones of kinship thinking and adds depth to the positioning of genealogical connections.

## **6.6 Surnames**

Surnames arguably represent the most clearly identifiable inherited feature within genealogical research. Significantly, surnames also represent genealogical markers whereby the social and the biological, through the combination of cultural meaning and genetic identification, interrelate. Family historians interact with surnames in ways that reflect the themes of reminiscence and inheritance explored above, in that they take what they already know about them, together with what they can learn from genetic technologies, in order to thicken genealogical connections. In the hands and minds of family historians then, surnames demonstrate a valuable means of integrating the flesh and the bones of kinship.

Surnames are significant to genealogical research in Euro-American societies because they appear to be transmitted rather like genetic (or biological) material but are in fact transmitted according to social convention, particularly where patronyms are concerned. The paternal inheritance of surnames has been prevalent in England since the twelfth century A.D. (Reaney and Wilson 1997), beginning and persisting as signifiers of specific modes of social and biological affiliation. Surnames of English origin have therefore been separated into the following 4 categories:

1. Local Surnames.
2. Surnames of Relationship.
3. Surnames of Occupation or Office.
4. Nicknames (*ibid.*: xi).

Traditionally, dictionaries of English surnames have concentrated upon specific socio-cultural characteristics, whereby the aim is to explore and explain ‘the meaning of names, not to treat of genealogy’ (*ibid.*). Despite this focus upon identifiable social ‘meaning’, the paternal inheritance of surnames indicates that the establishment of direct genealogies and lineages extending from known twelfth and thirteenth century surname founders to the present-day is a theoretical possibility. This has largely been considered implausible when applying documentary-based genealogical evidence, in that to establish such connections ‘a fully documented pedigree would be required and very few families can carry back their history so far’ (Reaney and Wilson 1997: xi). The advent and application of Y chromosomal DNA analysis in recent decades has caused a shift in this perspective, leading to proposals that ‘males sharing the same surname might also share the same haplotype in the nonrecombining segment of the Y chromosome’ (Sykes and Irven 2000: 1417). This hypothesis has now been tested, with the result that the application of yDNA analysis to specific surnames is able to demonstrate evidence for episodes of single and/or multiple biological foundation (Sykes and Irven 2000; King and Jobling 2009a, 2009b; Redmonds et al. 2011). The biosocial characteristics of surname inheritance were acknowledged in discussions with my research participants whereby the stories of the lives of ancestors, the meaning of names, and genetics were combined.

One particular component of Bill’s volunteer yDNA analysis was the request that he also participate in a genetic surname study on account of his inheritance of a relatively rare surname. This study was focused upon investigating the specific degrees of coancestry identifiable across 40 British surnames (King and Jobling 2009a). Here, the genetic origin of Bill’s surname (Widdowson), and its related spelling variants (*i.e.* Widderson, Widdeson, Widdison, Widowson), was analysed. In essence, the intention was to establish whether all Widdowson’s are descended from a single male ancestor, or if in fact, there are multiple origins for the name with individually identifiable phylogenetic trees. When I asked Bill about his involvement

with the study he told me that he was not yet familiar with the genetic surname results and had only received his haplotype affiliation (R1b). I therefore offered to investigate the results associated with the Widdowson surname on Bill's behalf. Since Bill's participation the results of the study had been published (King and Jobling 2009a) with precise information concerning all surnames relevant to the study available for participants to examine via the University of Leicester website (<http://www.le.ac.uk/ge/maj4/40Surnames.html>, accessed 29/10/2010). I visited the website and read the journal article before relaying the results to Bill at the following weeks meeting. The results of the genetic surname study demonstrate that there are three independently identifiable genetic founders for the Widdowson surname, which are affiliated with the I, R1a, and R1b haplogroups respectively. The conjecture is that all British Widdowson's are not descended from one single male ancestor identifiable within the period in which surnames have been used in Britain, but three. Reaney and Wilson's *A Dictionary of English Surnames* also presents documentary evidence of three individual 'Widdowson's' living within the fourteenth century (1997: 491). This includes a Richard *Wyduesone* in the Bedfordshire Subsidiary Rolls of 1309, Peter John *la Wydewesone* in the Essex Feet of Fines records of 1326, and William *le Wydusone* in the Staffordshire Subsidiary Rolls of 1332. Unfortunately there is no way of knowing whether the three documented Widdowson's of the fourteenth century represent the same three genetic founders of the name revealed in the 2009 genetic study. It does nevertheless represent an interesting curiosity, which in family history circles could certainly be interpreted as more than mere coincidence.

The primary objective of Reaney and Wilson's surname dictionary is to record the 'meaning' of surnames and Widdowson is indicative of a 'surname of relationship' through its connotations with 'the Widow's son' (1997: 491). Bill informed me that he was aware of the meaning of his surname and explained that he was unsurprised by the genetic evidence that indicated its independent and multiple origins. 'I always suspected that my name was a widow's son' Bill announced, before explaining that he imagined that there would have been a large number of 'widow's sons' in 'times gone by', which would be likely traceable to differing individuals across varying locales. Bill had clearly considered both the meaning and origin of his surname. He displayed an awareness of the social connotations implicated within the genealogy and origin of his surname: 'I don't know who the widow was to start with, but she



certainly had a lot of kids'. In this supposition, Bill focused upon the maternal affiliations that are inherent within the meaning of his surname by speculating upon the hardships that this woman would have endured raising numerous children alone. The inclusion of the widow and mother as a representative of an integral social constituent of the Widdowson surname is as significant to Bill as the son from whom he eventually inherited his surname and associated Y chromosome. In this instance, Bill once more uses his folk ideas about inheritance as cultural work in order to fuse the social and the biological when reflecting upon his unusual surname.

On another occasion James told me how he had also volunteered for yDNA and surname analysis with the University of Leicester. The interest of this particular genetic study concerned the identification of Viking descendents in the north of England. James stated that he had no great desire to confirm any personal genetic Viking heritage to his family history, but explained that he was interested in learning how yDNA analysis could add to his current genealogical investigations. James told me that he viewed any available genetic-based genealogical evidence as 'something more to go in the file', but explained that there were, what he considered to be, certain culturally inherited characteristics associated with his surname that had presented more insightful results as part of his family history research. As we sat talking, less than a mile from the North Sea, James recounted his past occupational experiences as both a global seafarer and local river-pilot on the Tyne. 'I was a river-pilot, as was my father and grandfather' James told me, before explaining that it was his belief that one could not be employed as a river-pilot on the Tyne without your father having first held the position. This occupational nepotism had helped James to trace a 'long family line' of river-pilots in his paternal lineage back to 1850. James was also eager to point out that during his time as a river-pilot the majority of his co-workers could also trace occupational links across a number of paternal generations.

For James, a working life on water going back across the generations was more important than any tentative genetic (biological) affiliation to Viking ancestry. Moreover, by identifying the interrelationship between his occupation and his surname James implicated the River Tyne within his genealogical imaginings. In so doing James was explicitly 'rendering connections tangible' (Edwards 2000: 209) between his paternal kin, surname, occupation, place of work, and himself. James's

actual surname has no discernable occupational categorisation, but rather carries its association through its appearance in specific documentary records and the reminiscences and oral accounts of fellow river-pilots (those stories told to him by his father and grandfather). But he told me it also represented something that he was proud to have inherited and passed on. James explained that his son was not a Tyne river-pilot and indicated that the occupational affinities of his surname were ephemeral. In the genealogical imaginings of James and his son, the River Tyne features differently: The former mediating cultural and genetic connections to the Port of Tyne's economic heyday's, with the latter identifying a break in cultural affinity with its recent demise. In short, James's use of his surname in order to thicken genealogical imaginings mitigated both the social and the biological and was framed within idioms of inheritance, transmission, and succession.

Bill and James's cases show surnames being used to reveal connections to specific individuals and geographic locales respectively, which then became implicated within their own genealogical imaginings. Moreover, the genetic associations that were linked to the inheritance of their surnames were seen to play a role in the ways in which they chose to position their genealogical imaginings. One member of the BFHG told me that they were interested in learning more about the genetic story of their surname but that they had been left disappointed when rejected as a potential volunteer for a genetic surname study on account of their residence within what was explained to them as being 'the wrong county for the study'. This rejection was not expanded upon further in the discussion but it did bring to mind a comment made to me by Raymond regarding the use of genetic technologies in order to clarify regional affiliations: 'I'd be interested to know whether the genetics are, you know, North East genetics'. In order to achieve this one would have to identify a surname that can demonstrate its roots in the northeast of England, like Robson:

[T]he Robsons were one of the four great clans or 'graynes' who dominated the North Tyne. The name is still markedly more popular there than anywhere else and in 1881 more than half of all the Robsons were still living in Northumberland and County Durham. Elsewhere, the name was not at all common (Redmonds et al. 2011: 65).

The formulation of a genetic surname study in an attempt to align or separate the Robson's of Northumberland to, or from, the Robson's of County Durham, the Robinson's of Yorkshire, and/or the Robertson's of Scotland, for example, would be one step towards fulfilling Raymond's hope of revealing North East genetics. The possibility of being able to prove or disprove any local origins and/or distinctions between Robson and the other spelling variants of surnames that essentially mean 'Son of Robert' (*ibid.*: 64-65), for example, impacts upon the ways in which family historians like Raymond are able to use surnames as part of their genealogical enquiries. For example, family history groups that are interested in particular historic surnames and their associated founders are able to explore present-day distributions through genetic analysis. In so doing, the identification of contemporary inheritors of a surname can be used to isolate specific genealogical lineages. As a result, family historians are able to evidence and imagine their genealogical connections through surnames with the aid of documentary and genetic records.

The following section concentrates upon an ethnographic account taken from my fieldwork whereby family historians in the USA were attempting to identify surname descendents in the northeast of England in order to genetically thicken certain genealogical imaginings.

## **6.7 Belt Family Case Study**

My knowledge of the 'Belt Family' emerged through contact with Diane, a senior librarian who works at the NTLSC. Early in May 2011 I received an e-mail informing me that the library had 'just received a booklet from the 'Belt Team' asking for people to undergo DNA testing', which would be 'paid for by the family based in the USA'. This was combined with a further request to document their booklet within the relevant 'biography folders' at the NTLSC. Diane explained that the booklet had arrived from Dallas, Texas, and was concerned with locating the descendents of a Sir Robert Belt of York. The arrival of an advertisement from the USA aimed at attracting potential genetic donors via one of my fieldwork sites in Tyne and Wear suggested an important facet of genealogical research. When I went to the NTLSC to find out more about the Belt's I was presented with a ring-bound six-page booklet, and accompanying introductory letter. The introductory letter introduced the Belt

family as a globally networked genealogical ‘team’, whereby the search for information regarding their seventeenth century MRCA (Humphrey Belt, born England, 1615) was the primary research focus.

The front page of the booklet included a mixture of image and text, with a computer-generated graphical representation of Watson and Crick’s (1953) DNA double helix printed vertically along the left-hand margin. The remainder of the page consisted of the following advertisement and accompanying text:

ARE YOU  
A MALE  
DESCENDED  
FROM

SIR ROBERT BELT  
OF YORK

b. 15?? – d. 4 September 1656

If so, then the Belt family which now extends from the United Kingdom to the Netherlands, United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand would like to hear from you to assist with a DNA project to ascertain who is, and not, a descendant. This would involve giving a DNA sample, at no charge to you.

The major intent of the test is to compare it with other Belt family [*sic*] tracing their descent from Humphrey Belt born 1615 who immigrated to Virginia, USA in 1635. This will enable the discovery of the most likely areas in which Humphrey was born and possibly lead to the discovery of his origins.

Should you be a Belt not interested in giving a sample, but in joining the online Belt family details of present members can be found at

[www.humphreybelt.net](http://www.humphreybelt.net)

When delving deeper into the document I learned that it had been formulated and produced by a professional genealogist, who was working *pro bono* as a result of ‘having become an ‘Honorary Belt’’ (Coumbe 2008). The findings of the genealogical research demonstrated that there was ‘irrefutable evidence’ that Humphrey was ‘born in 1615 and immigrated to the new colony Virginia on the ‘America’ in 1635’, and that ‘he was born in England’. It also explained that the Belt team was eager to attain further information about Humphrey, which had led to the commission of a geographic name map. The map showed that it ‘seemed most likely Humphrey’s origins were in the north of England’. Following these declarations the reader is informed that it is unclear how Humphrey came to sail on a vessel ‘from Gravesend . . . to the New World’, and how it was that this voyage was financed by the ships captain William Clarke. Moreover, further questions are posed as to how, upon arrival in Virginia, Captain Clarke ‘was granted on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1636, 450 acres of land in Henrico County, Virginia on the Appomattox River’. In order to address these questions the genealogist mixes fact with supposition. Here, two known seventeenth century knights of York (William and Robert Belt) are implicated in the account due to their ‘enormous influence on business and trade in York and the surrounding area for several decades, including the years Humphrey lived in England’. In addition to this, further information is presented explaining that the knights had ‘huge extended families with members in London’ and that they had been ‘fined for tobacco smuggling’. With this latter observation used to indicate that ‘they were receiving cargoes from the New World’. In this account Captain Clarke is assumed to be one of the knights’ illicit, tobacco smuggling, contacts. We are told, however, that Captain Clarke’s involvement in tobacco smuggling ‘could not be proved and had to be anecdotal’. Furthermore, it is revealed that ‘due to the paucity of facts about Humphrey’s life, almost everything is within this standard of truth’. The documentary-based evidence concerning the establishment of Humphrey’s route into the USA and the subsequent roots of his assumed Belt descendants were only able to take the team so far.

The subsequent Belt request for genetic volunteers thus represents an attempt to supplement the content of their story so far with genetic-based genealogical information to be gathered using contemporary DNA analysis. In accordance with

this request Page 5 of the document presents a '2011 UPDATE' concerning the 'search for Humphrey Belt':

In April 2011 it was established his probable place of birth was Yorkshire and within the areas of influence of Sir Leonard Belt and his two sons Sir Robert and Sir William Belt. Contrary to the beliefs of many, Humphrey Belt was not a legitimate son of either Sir William or Sir Robert Belt. There's no evidence as yet to suggest he was illegitimate, and in any event, his surname in that case would not be Belt.

It has taken nearly a decade to reach this stage and throughout the Belts of York have been on the fringes of previous research. The time has now come to try and expand what is factually known because Humphrey was most likely an impoverished relative who could have been as distant as 3<sup>rd</sup> cousin to the ennobled branch.

Part of this research is also an attempt to establish whether there exists today a direct male descendent from the Belts of Bossal and York. Should one be found and be agreeable to a DNA test this would scientifically prove Humphrey belongs within this family tree. This test would be at no cost to the volunteer.

To the living members of the Belt family, Humphrey is an archetypal figurehead through which they are able to reckon kinship links through a surname that connects New World descendents to those of the Old World. In order to establish an already imagined genealogical connection to the Old World the identification of a genetic descendent of Sir Robert Belt is required to compare yDNA results with those of the known living descendents of Humphrey Belt. In doing so, Humphrey, and more importantly, his contemporary descendents could therefore be situated within, or as the case may prove, outside, of the aristocratic Belt lineage. This practice of self-associating with an aristocratic lineage is reminiscent of Cannell's (2011) observations that many contemporary inhabitants of the New World hold the desire to be able to trace their roots to elite members of the Old World aristocracy. In short, it is the genetic fixing of genealogical imaginings that is key to the Belt Team here,

with facts about biological inheritance viewed as a necessary complement to the cultural work that is concerned with past and present social status.

The contemporary formation of ‘The Belt Team’ also provides a further outlet for exploring relatedness as its members are explicitly affiliated with an ongoing search for communal roots. The search for further living Belt’s to join the team also demonstrates the potential for contemporary lateral growth as part of any genealogical project. Moreover, the reference of the Belt team to ‘our story’ and their request for it to be included within library collections for other researchers to be able to explore suggests an attempt at simultaneously prioritising and expanding their genealogy amongst a myriad of others. This observation demonstrates parallels with the ways in which family historians interact with the wider Y-Clans presented by the Oxford Ancestors genetic ancestry tracing laboratory, albeit with shorter timescales and smaller numbers of affiliates involved. Here, Humphrey’s biography is of significance to the ways in which Belt family members engage socially, and reckon genealogical connectedness with each other. Moreover, it is related to Bill’s combined use of personal reminiscences and idioms of genetic inheritance, in that genealogical imaginings are readily interfaced between that which is culturally significant and that which is genetically significant in order to give them credence. As will become evident across the following chapter, this also occurs in a similar nature amongst Oxford Ancestors Y-Clan product consumers.

## **6.8 Summary and Link**

Using ethnographic description and analysis, this chapter has demonstrated how family historians use reminiscence as a means for genealogical positioning. As part of this imaginative exercise it is also shown that genealogical connections are thickened through the reinvigoration of shared sensory experience. Significant affiliations are also drawn between reminiscing, oral history, and genealogical research. Local folk idioms of inheritance are shown to represent an important facet in the evidencing and imagining of genealogical connections whereby the cultural work of genetics is given permission to ‘wonder’ as part of the flesh and bones of kinship. Surnames have also been presented as a valuable resource for family historians when exploring what is inherited both culturally and genetically. The Belt Family case study presents an

example of global kinship thinking that relies heavily upon the practices of genealogical imagining and genetic evidencing. Throughout this chapter focus has been maintained on the digital and genetic spheres of family history research with their prominence upon contemporary kinship thinking further exemplified.

In the latter stages of this chapter contemporary relatedness emerges as a significant factor when the results of genetic ancestry tracing tests are used in order to answer specific genealogical lines of enquiry. With this method of genealogical exploration seen to manifest into something that impacts directly upon relationships in the present. This phenomenon is explored further in Chapter 7.



## Chapter 7. Interacting With The Evidence

When interviewing Mary she told me about her Polish ancestry and her personal affinity with it: 'I have always been told that I've got more genetic links with my family in Poland than here, so I've always felt that my origins were far away from here'. As part of these feelings of connectedness with her Polish heritage Mary described how she had visited Poland on several occasions and that she had established and maintained contact with some of her Polish relatives:

Last Christmas was the last time I was there [Poland] and I don't know whether you want to hear this, it's just a bit of a story. My dad was captured by the Germans but was liberated by the Americans and was supposed to go and live in America but ended up in England because his brother had T.B. I mean there is a whole story to do with the war and what happened. But he found it easier not to keep in touch with his family because he thought he'd never see them again. So he lost touch with them and he also had a little mini stroke which meant he couldn't write, and he was a very, very proud man and his writing became quite bad but he wouldn't get us to do it. Well we couldn't speak Polish anyway so even the people he did have contact with, he lost touch with completely and he didn't talk about them. I think it was too upsetting for the fact that he could never go back. So I always would ask him about it and he would always change the subject or whatever and I got to a certain age where I wanted to find my family in Poland. It's like family history again except that they're still alive, because I wanted that identity sort of thing again. I had a friend who was working, teaching English as a foreign language in Warsaw in Poland and she asked me to go out there and I thought: right I'm going to take the opportunity of finding my family. But my dad wouldn't give me any information until the day before I went, he gave me one address and we just turned up in a taxi and I found them. And I promised them to take my mam and dad and my brother back the next year and I did. And I'm really, really proud of that, and I mean my dad was 50 odd when I was born and he was one of the younger ones, and two of his brothers and one sister were still alive and within three years of going there they were all dead. It was amazing; I'm getting emotional just thinking about it (Mary).

Here, Mary's affinity with her Polish heritage and her close relationship with her parents converge and she creates connections between herself and her Polish relatives as well as reestablishing relatedness between her father and his siblings.

Significantly, Mary's perception of a strong genetic connection to this Polish genealogical lineage was instrumental in developing these relationships.

## **7.1 Outline**

This chapter is concerned with the ways in which the digital and genetic technologies of genealogical investigation are used in order to make contemporary relationships. In analysis of this point I employ a genetic reading of genealogy and Euro-American kinship terminologies. Taking yDNA and mtDNA as key genealogical markers, phylogenetic trees are presented which show an array of genetic connections that infer kinship possibilities when tracing ancestry along the male and female lineages. Following this, ethnographic analysis demonstrates that family historians implement high levels of selectivity and choice when investigating such kinship possibilities, and particularly, when establishing social interactions with genealogical and nominal relations.

These ethnographic observations emerged when monitoring online interactions between Oxford Ancestors customers and through experiential insight gained when engaging with the Oxford Ancestors genetic database in order to contrast and compare my yDNA results. In addition to this data, ethnographic accounts that detail episodes of social interaction between contemporary kin and the subsequent relationships that have developed as a direct result of active family history research are also presented. Here, the genealogical exploration of MRCA's is shown to intersect with genealogical investigations that are directed towards living relations. In such instances, one is seen to complement the other, whereby, family history research is able to reveal connections to previously unknown living kin, while contemporary social interactions between living kin is also able to aid in the evidencing and imagining of genealogical connections. In the final section of this chapter the succession of genealogical knowledge between family historians and their descendents is explored. This important feature of family history research demonstrates the laying down of genealogical routes by contemporary family

historians in order to instigate relationships with future generations, and thus represents a continuum in the flesh and bones of kinship.

## 7.2 Commercial Connections

Following DNA analysis with Oxford Ancestors, customers receive a code. The code represents membership of the Oxford Ancestors community, and allows access to an online genetic database detailing all of its recorded clients. Using this database it is possible to compare personal yDNA and/or mtDNA haplogroup affiliations, yDNA STR mutation markers, and surnames, with other Oxford Ancestors clientele. This can be done using the following search options: *Y chromosome SIGNATURE SEARCH*; *Y chromosome SURNAME SEARCH*; *MatriLine CLAN SEARCH*; and *MatriLine MUTATIONS SEARCH*. It is not compulsory to supply personal contact information on this database. However, it is possible to do so should customers wish to share their personal genetic markers, and associated clan affiliation, with others on the database. The explicit reasoning offered by Oxford Ancestors for the Y chromosome search options on the database is that they are aimed towards researchers interested in learning more about the geographical distribution of their Y-Clan signature. As knowledge of the distribution of a clan – or haplogroup – enables further analysis regarding the frequency of a Y-chromosome signature together with the location of other men who share it. The possible inclusion of personal contact details as part of this process does suggest that Oxford Ancestors expect that their customers would also want to establish social connections with other interested users who share similar yDNA and mtDNA genetic profiles. Significantly, the sharing of genetic characteristics in the form of specific mtDNA and yDNA markers, and their associated clan affiliations, is suggestive of an effective line of genealogical enquiry in which contemporary kin connections are both newly established and expanded.

As described in chapter 5, part of my own ethnographic enquiry involved registering with Oxford Ancestors and undergoing the induction procedure that all subscribers must complete. I did not, however, talk about what happens when using the online genetic database in order to compare the results of personal yDNA testing. It is to this feature of genetic genealogical investigations to which I now turn. When personally logging in to the Oxford Ancestors database and selecting the *Y chromosome*

*SIGNATURE SEARCH* option I was prompted to conduct an exploration of the database. This entailed using the 15 markers associated with the Y Clan results that I received from the laboratory. When inputting all 15 markers into the database the only match revealed was that of my own personal results. The listing consisted of all 15 markers together with my surname, clan affiliation, country of birth, and country of known paternal ancestry. For those that choose to supply one, a contact email address is also shown on this page. When subsequently entering 13 of my personal 15 markers into the database I discovered one matching result in addition to my own profile. On closer examination the database revealed that 14 of the 15 personal markers of this fellow Oxford Ancestors customer were identical to my own. There was only a single mutational difference existing between the one non-matching marker (11 repeats to 12 on DYS 385a). The country of origin and known paternal ancestry for this member was shown as 'England', and the surname listed was 'Hancock'. This customer had not supplied a contact email address. Through the use of the online database, and in Oxford Ancestors message board parlance, I had found a 'genetic cousin'.

To the uninitiated, observable similarities between Y-chromosome signatures of the kind revealed between Hancock and myself, indicate potential biogenetic connection. For example, it is entirely possible for a single mutational difference across these 15 markers to exist between a fairly recent common paternal ancestor (CPA) and myself (e.g. great grandfather x 5), as a mutation can equally occur, or not occur, at any generational step. Of course, there are greater and lesser probabilities when calculating these possibilities. There is approximately less than a 20% chance of such a mutation occurring in this time. However, the inference is there to be made that at first glance Hancock and I could share the same great grandfather x 5 and thus be fairly closely related. The difference in surname is clearly an anomaly, although such discrepancies can be explained through maternal inheritance of a surname, adoption, and/or cases of non-paternity. In short, such a revelation to a customer searching for genealogical connections on the database can be read and imagined as close and potentially traceable genetic kin.

On closer examination the probability of revealing such genealogical connections through a Y-chromosome signature alone diminishes significantly. For example,

Poisson distribution analysis concerning the genetic markers that are used by Oxford Ancestors in their Y-clan test reveals that the most likely point in time that Hancock and I share a common paternal ancestor is approximately 15 generations (*circa* 1640, with an average generation calculated at 25 years). A time-scale that could be feasibly cross-referenced as part of a more traditional documentary-based genealogical research project. Even at this point, however, the maximum probability remains 37%. This suggests that even at the most likely point in time that the genetic results indicate the sharing of a CPA there still remains a 63% chance that no common ancestor exists within this timeframe. Moreover, this probability decreases the further one traces back. Oxford Ancestors do indicate that ‘although the Poisson distribution is a useful guide to the behaviour of mutations over time, we do not recommend using genetic differences between Y-chromosomes alone to fix the time of a common paternal ancestor’ (Oxford Ancestors 2011b). On account of the difficulty in establishing links to recent CPA’s, customers choose to reckon contemporary affiliations using the Oxford Ancestors genetic clans and archetypes. Consequently, genetic markers associated with yDNA and mtDNA lineages act as a credible ‘substance’ for family historians to fix and forge affiliations to specific archetypal figures as well as their past and contemporary clan members. For example, it is not in any doubt that Hancock and I are associated with the genetic clan, and archetypal clan father, of *Oisin*. This connection is evident through our familiar sharing of specific genetic markers, My own experience of accessing genetic genealogical information via the online database was helpful as it revealed some of the ways that Oxford Ancestors customers begin to use substance-based genetic affiliations as a means towards building imagined kin connections with other customers. In the following section, I initially explore this theme by presenting evidence-based genetics and Euro-American kinship terms together within genealogical diagrams that reveal differing categories of ‘genetic cousins’.

### **7.3 Evidencing Cousins**

When viewed from afar, the practice of genealogical evidencing across documentary and genetics-based sources by family historians seems like Rivers’ pre-functionalist approach. Lineage and descent are documented using genealogical trees, whereby kinship through connection is both assumed and implied. Moreover, in similar

fashion to the Kinship Algebra Expert System (K.A.E.S) (Read and Behrens, 1990; Read, 2006), the identification of perennial kinship terminologies within an extended genealogy also presents kinship as something that is preexisting, recurring, and accessible through documentary and genetics-based evidence. This thesis shows that in the flesh and bones of kinship there is a crossover between expert and lay accounts with family historians opting to turn to processes of layering and weaving in order to add depth to such one-dimensional approaches of genealogical recording. The integration of new kinship terminologies to genetic-based genealogical data is thus representative of the first step in a mode that is directly concerned with the fleshing out of genetic genealogical connections.

As was demonstrated in chapter 5 the commodities of genetic ancestry tracing, through their commercial design, apply Y chromosomal and mitochondrial DNA analysis and interpretation in order to assign relational affiliation to individual ancestors and their kin. Moreover, these genetic connections stretch deep into antiquity. Consequently, genetic-based genealogical evidence can be integrated within traditional family tree diagrams in order to highlight genealogical lineages that are associated with the Y chromosomal clan father *Oisin*, and/or the mitochondrial clan mother *Helena*, for example. Through the use of kinship tables and generational diagrams, yDNA and mtDNA relationships between contemporary living kin and recent ancestry are revealed, whereby specific genealogical lineages can be clearly and easily traced and classified. It has been demonstrated how this is significant when translating information about genetic inheritance to family historians, and particularly when putting into context the deep ancestral genetic affiliations that are offered by Oxford Ancestors.

Interactions observed across the Oxford Ancestors online message board revealed the specific use of the term 'genetic cousin' when referring to fellow clan affiliates. This is significant as we can see that certain contemporary forms of address that are employed within Euro-American nuclear and extended family groupings (Schnieder 1980) harbour the potential for change, and reappraisal, as part of the current genetic age. Particularly, this has the potential to take effect as idioms of genetic inheritance become more greatly embedded within public consciousness across contemporary Euro-American societies (Nelkin and Lindee 1995).

Morgan's descriptive and classificatory system (1870) built in an evolutionary element whereby descriptive kinship was believed to describe a more advanced form of kinship due to its closeness with biological facts. This is important, as through the recurrent use of specific Euro-American kinship terminologies (i.e. maternal uncle, 1st cousin 1x removed, etc.) in genealogy, family historians shift from folk systems to ones that correspond to a scientific classification that is yet more descriptive. For example, recent developments in genetic technologies show that members of a genealogy can also be categorised with regard to certain familiarities and/or non-familiarities relating to the sharing and non-sharing of yDNA and/or mtDNA. Here, traditional Euro-American kin terms such as cousin, aunt, and uncle reveal inherent genetic bifurcations, according to the inheritance or non-inheritance of yDNA and mtDNA:

<b>Genealogical Relationship</b>	<b>Kin Term</b>	<b>yDNA Affiliation</b>
Father	Father	yDNA match
Father's brother	Paternal Uncle	yDNA match
Father's sister	Paternal Aunt	yDNA non-match
Father's brother's son	First Cousin	yDNA match
Father's brother's daughter	First Cousin	yDNA non-match
Father's sister's son	First Cousin	yDNA non-match
Father's sister's daughter	First Cousin	yDNA non-match
Brother	Brother	yDNA match
Mother	Mother	yDNA non-match
Mother's brother	Maternal Uncle	yDNA non-match
Mother's sister	Maternal Aunt	yDNA non-match
Mother's brother's son	First Cousin	yDNA non-match
Mother's brother's daughter	First Cousin	yDNA non-match
Mother's sister's son	First Cousin	yDNA non-match
Mother's sister's daughter	First Cousin	yDNA non-match
Sister	Sister	yDNA non-match

Table 2: Table showing yDNA affiliations across two generations of genealogical kin if ego is male

<b>Genealogical Relationship</b>	<b>Kin Term</b>	<b>mtDNA Affiliation</b>
Mother	Mother	mtDNA match
Mother's sister	Maternal Aunt	mtDNA match
Mother's brother	Maternal Uncle	mtDNA match
Mother's sister's daughter	First Cousin	mtDNA match
Mother's sister's son	First Cousin	mtDNA match
Mother's brother's daughter	First Cousin	mtDNA non-match
Mother's brother's son	First Cousin	mtDNA non-match
Sister	Sister	mtDNA match
Father	Father	mtDNA non-match
Father's sister	Paternal Aunt	mtDNA non-match
Father's brother	Paternal uncle	mtDNA non-match
Father's sister's daughter	First Cousin	mtDNA non-match
Father's sister's son	First Cousin	mtDNA non-match
Father's brother's daughter	First Cousin	mtDNA non-match
Father's brother's son	First Cousin	mtDNA non-match
Brother	Brother	mtDNA match

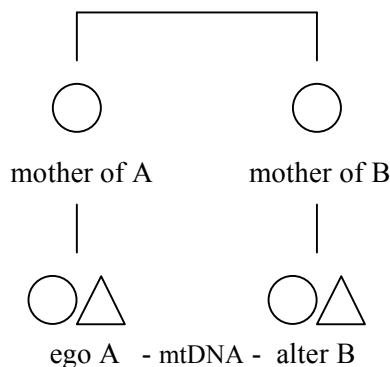
Table 3: Table showing mtDNA affiliations across two generations of genealogical kin if ego is female or male

The integration of genetic genealogical data with kinship terminologies demonstrates that across any two generations, where ego is situated in the younger generation and one individual is represented for each example of possible genealogical kin across the present and previous generations, there are sixteen permutations. Exempting mother and father, any number and variation of brothers, sisters, maternal and paternal aunts, uncles, and 1<sup>st</sup> cousins are possible in any snapshot across two generations, but in this instance only one of each is assumed. Consequently, across two generations, where ego is male and situated within the younger generation, four of the sixteen (25.0%) possible variations of genetic kin would share yDNA with ego and therefore represent yDNA matches. Due to the fact that females do not have a Y chromosome there is no corresponding relative example if ego is female. Furthermore, it is also shown that across two generations, where ego is either female or male and situated within the younger generation, seven of the sixteen (43.75%) possible variations of genetic kin would share mitochondrial DNA with ego and therefore represent mtDNA matches.



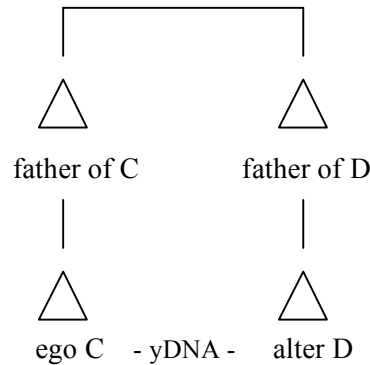
Significantly, these models can also be applied to any ego in any generation of a family genealogy in order to establish yDNA and mtDNA matches and non-matches. Moreover, when tracing yDNA and mtDNA affiliates to ego across past and future generations that reside outside of the initial two generational models, further matches are identifiable by selecting a new ego that represents a mtDNA and/or yDNA match with the initial ego and then following the same links across the corresponding generation. Here, one is able to construct additional mtDNA and yDNA matches and non-matches both linearly and laterally across a genealogy. For example, in order to trace matches linearly back to the third generation a male looking for ancestral yDNA matches could choose his father or father's brother (paternal uncle) as the correct point of departure (see Figs. 14, 15 & 16).

Correspondingly, these permeations can also be aligned using traditional Euro-American kinship terms as part of a genealogy. For instance, if ego A and alter B can trace a genealogically symmetrical link from, and to, each other via the mother's sister's daughter or son then the two – A and B – will share mtDNA and may be classed as mtDNA cousins. Consequently, the mother of ego A represents the mtDNA aunt of alter B and vice versa (the mother of alter B represents the mtDNA aunt of ago A). For example, when A is asked the question how are you genealogically related to B, and the very same question is asked of B regarding A, both answers will be genealogically symmetrical: A is B's mothers sisters child, and B is A's mothers sisters child:

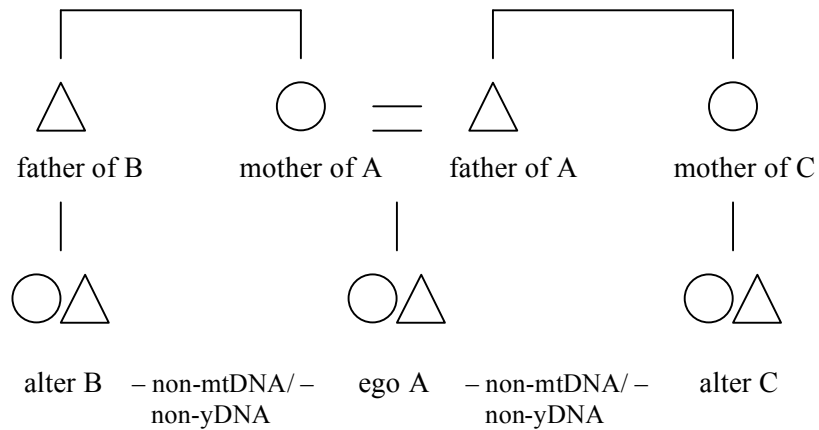


Similarly, if ego C and alter D can trace the same genealogically symmetrical link from, and to, each other via the father's brother's son then the two – C and D – will share yDNA and may be classed as yDNA cousins. Consequently, the father of ego A

represents the yDNA uncle of alter B and vice versa (the father of alter B represents the yDNA uncle of ego A). For example, when C is asked the question how are you genealogically related to D, and the very same question is asked of D regarding C, both answers will be genealogically symmetrical: C is D's fathers brothers son, and D is C's fathers brothers son:



Conversely, if ego A and alter B can trace a genealogically asymmetrical link from, and to, each other via the mother's brother's son or daughter and the father's sister's daughter or son then the two – A and B – will share neither mtDNA nor yDNA and will therefore be non-mtDNA and non-yDNA cousins. Moreover, this asymmetry is extended when taking into account that in such instances the father of alter B represents the mtDNA uncle of ego A, while the mother of ego A represents the non-mtDNA aunt of alter B. A similar representation is true in the case of ego A and alter C who can trace a genealogically asymmetrical link from, and to, each other via the father's sister's daughter or son and the mother's brother's son or daughter, with neither mtDNA nor yDNA being shared between the two – A and C – therefore making them non-mtDNA and non-yDNA cousins. Moreover, the mother of alter C represents a non-mtDNA aunt of ego A, while the father of ego A represents a non-yDNA uncle to alter C (where C is male):



Aunts, uncles, and first cousins have been used in this instance; however, it also stands that wider matching and non-matching yDNA and mtDNA relations can be traced via similar symmetrical and asymmetrical relational lines linearly and laterally across a genealogy. Therefore, if two individuals of the same lateral generation of a genealogy are able to trace a linear symmetrical relationship to each other paternally (regardless of ancestral phylogenetic distance) then they will share yDNA, and if two individuals are able to trace a linear symmetrical relationship to each other maternally (regardless of ancestral phylogenetic distance) then they will share mtDNA. To elaborate further, the relationship to the most recent common ancestor between two male paternal 4<sup>th</sup> cousins is that each is the great-great-great grandson of the same man, while the relationship to the most recent common ancestor between maternal 4<sup>th</sup> cousins of either sex is that each is the great-great-great grandchild of the same woman.

When employing some of the illustrated genealogical examples above it becomes evident that all male parallel cousins of a paternal lineage will always share yDNA. Furthermore, when addressing the yDNA paternal genealogical tree introduced below (Fig. 14) it is deducible that all extended male parallel cousins of the paternal lineage (e.g. 1<sup>st</sup> cousins removed, 2<sup>nd</sup> cousins etc.) will also share yDNA. Consequently, all male parallel cousins of the paternal lineage represent genealogical yDNA cousins. Similarly, by referring to the genealogical analysis above it is also demonstrated that parallel cousins of either sex that are situated within a maternal lineage will always share mtDNA. Moreover, these relationships can be represented across all extended parallel cousins of the maternal lineage (e.g. 1<sup>st</sup> cousins removed, 2<sup>nd</sup> cousins etc.), and thus, all parallel cousins of the maternal lineage represent genealogical mtDNA cousins. It is also deducible from the above analysis and description that cross

cousins, whether male or female, and/or descendents of either maternal or paternal lineages, will never share mtDNA or yDNA, and thus represent genealogical non-mtDNA and non-yDNA cousins where applicable. Such information offers assistance to family historians when evidencing specific genetic lineages across a genealogy and when positioning their ‘genetic cousins’ within a family tree.

Acknowledgement of these models indicates that a first cousin can be genetically termed in one of three or four different ways: yDNA cousin, mtDNA cousin, non-yDNA and/or non-mtDNA cousin. For Oxford Ancestors’ clients, these categorisations are highlighted in their reckonings that one is a cousin on the basis of an affiliation to a particular Y-Clan or Mt-Clan. The point is that the term first cousin, which has traditionally encompassed all lateral genealogical kin that share a common recent ancestor to two linear generations in Euro-American kinship terminology, is subject to more precise genetic distinctions. Specific cousins – across any generation – like the mother’s sister’s son or daughter, can be genetically categorised independently of the father’s sister’s son or daughter, for example, (as ego would share mtDNA with the first and neither mtDNA nor yDNA with the second). In turn, Euro-American kin terms reveal the potential for change, with aunts, uncles and cousins no longer uniformly represented across a genealogy, but rather deconstructed into categories such as mtDNA aunt/uncle/cousin, yDNA uncle/cousin, and non-mtDNA and non-yDNA aunt/uncle/cousin.

The following genealogical charts are presented in order to demonstrate the genetic evidencing of these genealogical connections. By producing these diagrams I am mirroring one of the ways in which family historians in my study area offered methodological assistance to my ethnographic enquiries. At BGRG meetings Bill would regularly present me with various photocopies of charts and diagrams that he considered would be helpful to my personal genealogical investigations and to family history research more generally across the region. This information included perpetual calendars and BMD interpretation help sheets, family relationship pyramids, and generational relationship guides. All of which, Bill told me, had been extremely useful to him in ‘making sense’ of the results of his genealogical research. The family relationship pyramid in particular was of great use to family historians when applying direct kin terms to newly revealed genealogical connections, which

enabled phrases such as ‘they were 2<sup>nd</sup> cousins twice removed’ or ‘she’s my great grandmother times five’ to be used as terms of speech that could also be represented in diagrammatic form.

In the following diagram (Fig. 14) the path of shared yDNA is shown across the male members of 8 successive genealogical generations. Traditional Euro-American kin terminology is used in order to demonstrate the simultaneous transmission of two differing modes of kinship reckoning.

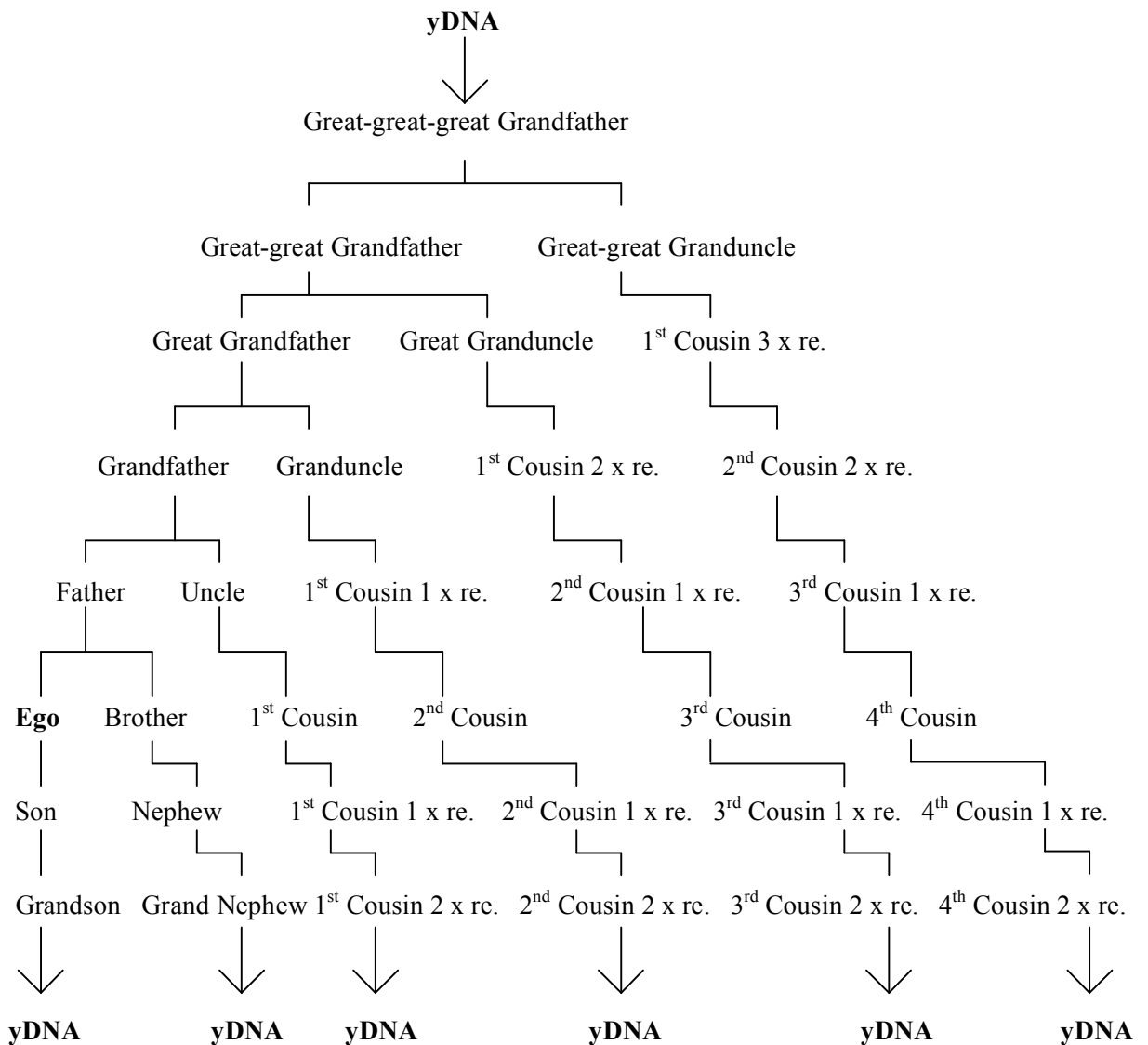


Figure 14: Representation of path of shared yDNA in male relatives across 8 paternal generations where ego and all cousins are male

In the following diagrams (Figs. 15 & 16) the path of shared mtDNA is shown across 4 successive genealogical generations. Due to the fact that shared mtDNA is present in both male and female individuals, but is only transmitted to offspring along the female line, individual diagrams are presented with ego as both female and male respectively.

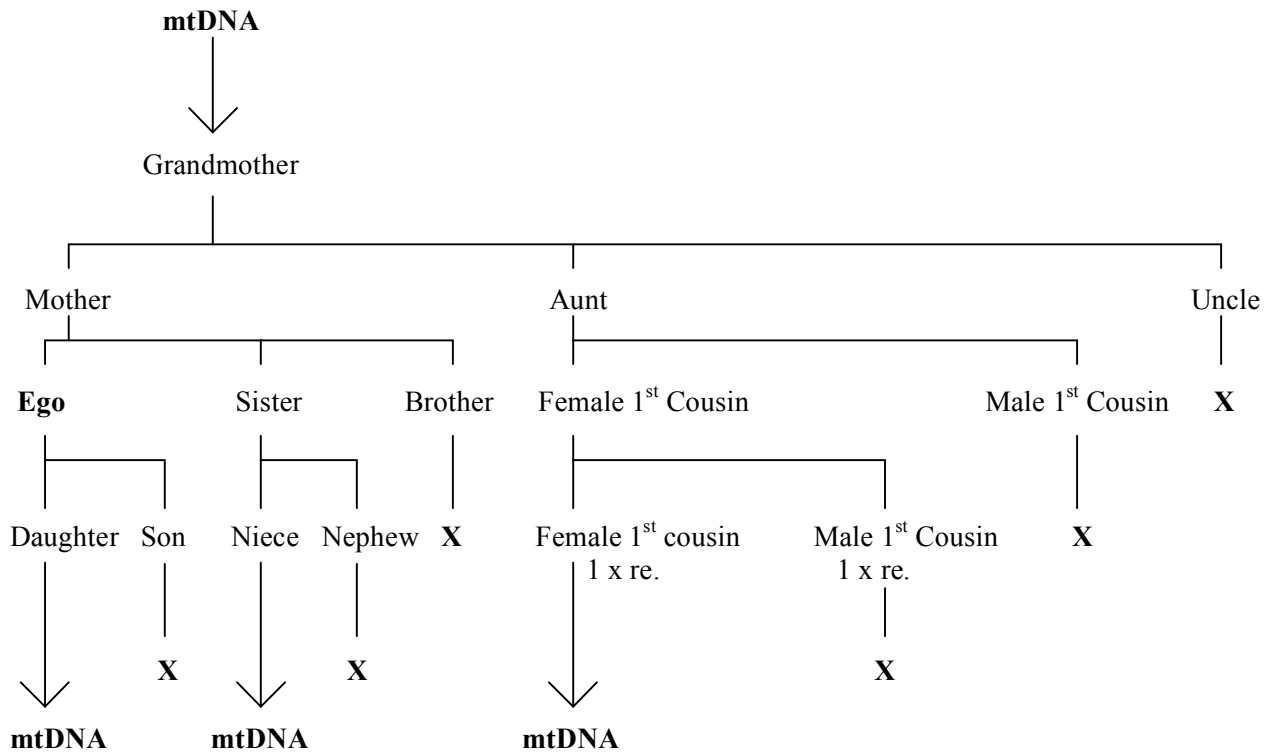


Figure 15: Representation of path of shared mtDNA in relatives across 4 maternal generations where ego is female

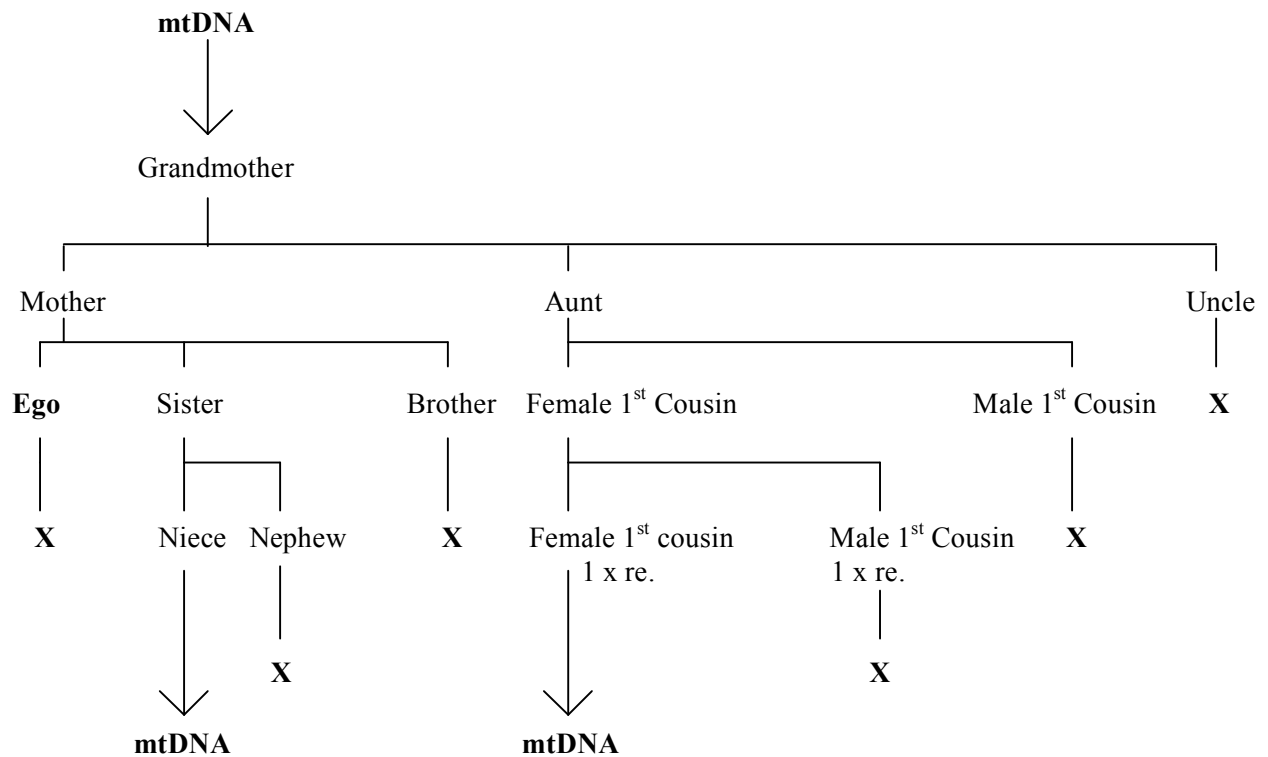


Figure 16: Representation of path of shared mtDNA in relatives across 4 maternal generations where ego is male

These three diagrams present clearly the direct path of yDNA or mtDNA within, and across, any one genealogy. What they fail to represent, however, are some of the idiosyncrasies of genetic inheritance that are presented by Oxford Ancestors, together with those folk idioms of inheritance that have entered into the genealogical imaginings of contemporary family historians. In short, this information is able to classify genetic cousins, on the one hand, but is unable to reveal the role designating aspect of this recurring kin group, on the other. The following section then addresses the second modal step by which family historians flesh out genetic genealogical connections amongst genetic cousins whereby relationships are developed and maintained through affiliations that extend above and beyond the sharing of DNA.

#### 7.4 Imagining Cousins

Schneider and Homans addressed kinship terminologies using the concept that '[e]ach term has two aspects or functions: first an *ordering* or *classifying* aspect and,

second, a *role or relationship*-designating aspect' (1955: 1196, emphasis in original). This observation draws parallels with my ethnography concerning family historians and their use of specific genetic kin terms. For instance, when employing the genetic kin term cousin a specific 'ordering' emerges within what has traditionally represented a 'genealogically distinct' relational category in Euro-American kinship (*ibid.*: 1196; Schneider 1980). Schneider and Homans viewed the "“role-designating” aspect . . . the pattern of behavior or relationship that the term symbolizes' in everyday familial terms and put forward the 'order' of the father with the 'role' of formality and authoritarianism (1955: 1196). What I have observed is that the specific ordering of cousins, through the use of genetic kin terms, also implies particular role designating properties, and that these properties are directly linked to the formation and maintenance of contemporary social interactions. Moreover, as archetypal figureheads the Oxford Ancestors clan mothers and fathers are seen to represent stewardship over these respective role designating and ordering aspects of genealogical connection.

To elaborate, the online message board service offered by Oxford Ancestors represents a virtual place where customers are able to establish social contact with fellow clan affiliates. Not all customers take advantage of this service, but those that do, do so in such a way that leads to the imagining of specific 'role-designating' properties to their newly discovered kin. Here, social interaction is viewed as the fundamental role that is expected within the order of genetic cousins. The following message board post reveals the disappointment that was experienced by an Oxford Ancestors customer when such a role designating aspect was not wholly fulfilled:

#### **Cousins who won't talk**

I am rather disappointed that of the 7 people who share my mDNA code only myself and one other have given their email addresses and are therefore inviting contact. If you don't want to be in touch with people who share your code why be on the database? Why pay Ox.Ancs. [*sic*] for the test in the first place? (Oxford Ancestors Message Board contributor 1).



The topic title of this message board post – ‘Cousins who won’t talk’ – immediately represents both the ordering and role designating aspects of the kin term. Having undergone mtDNA testing with Oxford Ancestors the above customer clearly expected to gain something more, kinship wise, than purely coded genetic evidence regarding a specific haplogroup or clan affiliation with which to document and trace genealogical connections. Here, the cousin to cousin relationship was imagined by this customer as something that could be developed and progressed through direct social interaction. Holmes argues that the colonial making of tribes in Kavirondo (Kenya) was contested by Kager peoples in order to assert ‘alternative and more fluid ways of constructing relatedness’ (2009: 57). In the Oxford Ancestors case it is the divergence of uses that is the bone of contention, with this customer making the assertion that if one does not use the social networking aspect of the Oxford Ancestors product in conjunction with the database’s genetic evidence then kinship and relatedness between clan members – genetic cousins – cannot be fully actualised. Moreover, for this family historian not only is one missing out on possible relationships through a perceived misuse of available resources, but one is also losing out materially in monetary terms. The lure of genetic evidencing, in this instance, is imagined through the prospect of locating and establishing contact with genetic cousins who can then also perform social kin roles, with this latter point emerging as a key motivating factor in this individual’s decision to commission genetic testing with Oxford Ancestors.

The revelation that only two of the seven individuals identified on the database who share the same ‘mDNA code’ have supplied contact information has been shown to be a major disappointment for this customer and is viewed as the explicit rejection of an imagined kin role. For this customer, the undertaking of genetic ancestry tracing in order to find out about one’s mtDNA and/or yDNA affiliation is of little or no use if one is not then going to establish contact with fellow clan affiliates, and thus explore one’s genetic kinship socially. The implication here is that genetic-based genealogical evidence is not solely linked to the exploration of deep ancestry and/or the tracing of essentialised genetic genealogical lineages. Rather, it is treated as a means whereby individuals can openly attempt to extend their own personal kinship networks by creating contemporary social connections in which relationships are both classified in genetics and ordered within culturally reciprocated interactions.

Another Oxford Ancestors customer openly revealed the emotions that were involved when dealing with the social rejection of genetic genealogical connections:

**RE: Cousins who won't talk**

I'm sad too that nobody with my mDNA code has given contact details (Oxford Ancestors Message Board contributor 2).

The sadness experienced by this person is analogous to feelings of non-reciprocation. Here, both message board contributors can be seen to be offering individual genetic data and personal contact information in the form of a 'gift' (Mauss 1954) that is to be obligatorily returned. Any refusal to enter into this system of exchange is thus explicitly interpreted as an act of denying kinship.

The observations outlined here reveal a contemporary folk interpretation of traditional kinship analysis which interweaves the social and the biological; and this is done so in a way that is in keeping with the commercial exploits of Oxford Ancestors and the growing preoccupations of family historians. In light of the new digital and genetic technologies, the crossover between expert and lay classifications of cousins also calls into question past assertions concerning the potential for science to discover new biogenetic relationships that indicate what genealogical kinship is and always was (Schneider 1980). For example, the science of genetics is able to reveal and classify certain genealogical connections; however, family historians show that cultural work, in the form of social interaction, is also required in order for these connections to begin to say something to them about kinship. Furthermore, this unique feature of evidencing and imagining genealogical connections, through the respective classification and role designation of genetic cousins, presents another girder in the family historian's metaphorical bridge of putting flesh onto the bones of kinship.

## 7.5 Social Interaction

In the following section I use ethnographic examples that show how family historians selectively enforce the role designating aspect of social interaction with contemporary kin as part of their genealogical research. In such instances, it is demonstrated that genealogical imaginings figure prominently in the making of relationships.

I conducted formal and informal interviews with family historians who had established contemporary kin connections with previously unknown relatives. For others, contact was established with relatives where communication had been broken since youth. Research participants frequently talked to me about newly established kin connections with relatives outside of Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear, for example, when describing their genealogical connections with New Zealand, Poland, Northern Ireland, Orkney, and the English south coast. In all of these episodes face-to-face meetings had been made, or were planned, with digital technologies and the Internet crucial in facilitating the development of these connections.

Questionnaire analysis of family historians in my study area further demonstrated the importance of making social connections with genealogical kin. 31 out of 35 respondents (88.6%) reported that they had located previously unknown living relatives as part of their genealogical research, and 20 of these 31 researchers (64.5%) also revealed that they had gone on to establish contact with their newly discovered kin. Moreover, 15 out of the 20 (75.0%) researchers that had established contact said that they had also maintained these communications over time. The questionnaire also demonstrated that 19 of the total 35 respondents (54.3%) had directly applied their genealogical research findings in order to establish contact with family members that they did know existed but with whom they had not previously experienced social contact. Finally, 21 of the 35 (60.0%) respondents also indicated that family history research had helped them to reestablish kin connections with living relatives that they had lost contact with since youth.

Expanding and reconnecting social contact with extended family members is therefore a common outcome of family history research. When discussing

contemporary kin connection and the discovery of previously unknown living relatives with family historians one research participant told me: 'I think you're always discovering cousins'. This statement was inclusive of those extended relations that are farther removed in generational terms across a family tree, as well as genetically closer first cousins. It is therefore significant that social connections, and/or reconnections, with kin were welcomed by my research participants regardless of their relational distance. For example, Mary was eager to point out that establishing contact with a 2<sup>nd</sup> cousin 1 x removed (her mother's cousin's grandson) was no more, or less, important to her than those other contacts that she had made with genealogically closer kin: 'No, I don't think the distance in genetic terms would put me off, it's more whether they're an interesting character'. Here, contemporary social relations represented the greatest importance to Mary whether the genealogical link that lay at the foundation of such a relationship was straightforward or fairly convoluted. Similar to the Oxford Ancestors cases discussed above, it is important to recognise that while there must be some form of acknowledged genealogical connection between family historians and contemporary kin the practical effects of familial sociality can be seen to compensate for any extended phylogenetic distance.

The second Belmont Family History Group meeting that I attended began with a review of the minutes of the previous month's meeting together with apologies from those who were absent. Following this, there was a brief financial annual review and reshuffle of positions with a new Chairperson and Secretary for the upcoming year quickly decided upon. There was also a vote concerning whether the group should become affiliated with the NDFHS to which there was a resounding 'yea'. Once the formalities were over, a speaker was introduced who gave a presentation concerning the local history of County Durham stretching back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. There was a military theme to the talk and this sparked a discussion amongst the group members concerning who could, and could not, trace a genealogical connection to the Durham Light Infantry. As part of this discussion another group member (Graham) openly recounted his past experiences of 30 years service with the Territorial Army. Following the talk, the usual informal discussions between group members began and the outgoing Chairman (Edward) – who had not been present at my first visit – engaged me in conversation in order to find out more about 'why exactly' I was there. I explained my interests to Edward, who told me that he had little knowledge or

experience of genetic ancestry tracing as part of his family history research, but that his contemporary kin connections had certainly been expanded as a result of his recent genealogical research.

Edward described how his grandfather had moved from Ireland to Consett, County Durham during the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century in order to gain regular work at a local blast furnace. He explained how census records had shown that, upon settling in the region, his grandfather had married in 1901 and gone on to father ‘no less than 15 children’. Edward also told me how he was a child when his grandfather had died and that he had always been interested in learning more about his Irish roots. It was revealed that Edward’s father had spoken little about these roots, nor had his grandfather, but that other family and friends had jokingly suggested that his grandfather must have died from exhaustion after raising 15 children. Edward described how he had been unperturbed by his father’s silence on the matter and that he chose to begin his genealogical investigations by questioning an aunt in Barnard Castle, County Durham. There he learned that his grandfather was originally from County Tyrone, Northern Ireland. Using this newly found information Edward explained how he had acquired a present-day telephone directory for County Tyrone in order to look up his paternally inherited surname. He told me that there were ‘four matches’, and that he had written a letter addressed to each one of them. All had replied to Edward’s genealogical enquiries, but unfortunately, ‘it turned out that none were related’. Edward then described how he had repeated the process by using differing spelling variants of his surname and had consequently managed to locate a further 17 records in the County Tyrone telephone directory. Following this Edward received a dozen replies, and once more, each response revealed a negative genealogical connection. Edward told me that at this stage he was beginning to lose hope until, ‘as luck would have it’, a few months later he had received an email from one of the 5 households that had thus far failed to reply to his second letter. This email was from Maureen, and informed Edward that her grandfather’s uncle had moved to England in 1899. Edward said that he had immediately felt that the date sounded ‘about right’ and that when Maureen had asked him if his grandfather had moved from Ireland to England with anyone else he had replied ‘yes, with his sister Eliza’ (Edward’s great aunt). Here, Edward explained how Maureen had responded excitingly to this revelation with: ‘Eureka! Welcome to the family you’re our long-

lost relative'. Following this episode Edward told me that he and his wife had since visited Maureen and been introduced to further newly discovered relatives, and that all of them 'live in and around' the family home of Edward's paternal great grandparents.

This example highlights the fact that family historians do not solely limit their research to the tracing of historic genealogical connections, but are also actively exploring and establishing contemporary genealogical connections. And they seek ways of socially actualising the documentary-based and/or genetic-based genealogical evidence that initially constituted the base of their connections. Moreover, these efforts are expanded and elaborated upon through associations with particular people, places, and things. In Edward's case, for example, Maureen's physical association with his great grandparents' house had enabled him to explore his paternal genealogy in greater detail through imaginings that were drawn from staying overnight in the house. Thus giving Edward a tangible connection that was greater than those experienced when using the historic census record alone.

Conversely, at one particular meeting with the BGRG George described how a previously unknown relative living in Orkney had recently contacted him. This individual had located George via the website of the community resource centre where the Blyth group meet and had sent an email stating that she believed she was related to him. Following this contact, George was quickly able to trace their connection on his family tree via her father and told me that they were in fact 'second cousins once removed'. Further correspondence also indicated that this newly discovered relative had old photographs of George and his parents that he had not previously seen. George explained that he and his wife already had a trip to Orkney planned in the summer and had therefore arranged to meet up with this relative when on the island. In this instance, the Orkney relative was able to activate a relationship with George who up until this point had been just a face in an old family photograph. Furthermore, George was able to use this newfound relationship in order to explore just how exactly this relative had copies of photographs of he and his long-deceased parents. Here, the Orkney relative expanded her genealogical imaginings into newfound relatedness, while George used this newfound relatedness in order to expand his genealogical imaginings. In short, the latent dynamism that is inherent in

most forms of genealogical evidencing is often most efficiently released through contemporary social interaction.

The reestablishment of fissured social relations is also often a significant consequence of genealogical research. In an early interview with Raymond I asked him directly whether he had discovered any previously unknown living relatives as part of his family history research. Raymond answered that he had, and that these new connections were ‘more recent’ and ‘more closer to home’. Raymond also revealed that through family history research he had both established and reestablished connections with specific extended family members. As he put it: ‘I’m in touch with my cousin who I haven’t really had much to do with since we were kids, and I’ve just discovered another one who’s a daughter of a cousin, which is a cousin once removed or whatever it is’. Raymond revealed that these two extended family members and he were all ‘working’ on the same genealogical lineages and that they ‘had been able to help each other out on different [family history related] things’. Raymond went on to say that ‘it’s nice to be in e-mail contact’ and revealed to me that ‘one of the things I’ll be doing is probably looking them up more, especially when I go down south’. This incorporation of actively making a ‘point of calling and visiting’ newly discovered and reestablished extended family members was clearly a feature of family history research that Raymond enjoyed and was keen to maintain. For Raymond, the establishment of social connections with contemporary genealogical kin also interrelated with genetic imaginings that were traceable to affiliations that he understood as ‘family traits’:

**Martyn:** So we’ve touched a bit on this already but have you discovered any previously unknown living relatives as a direct result of your Family History research?

**Raymond:** Certainly. The relatives in North Yorkshire, you know, I’m getting on very well with them and we’d like to go and see them again, Or if they’re coming up here we’d be pleased to have them come up and see us as well, so it’s a nice way to do that and it’s more personable, you know, to be able to say ‘well we are related’. It may be very tenuous in some cases.

**Martyn:** But there is a connection there?

**Raymond:** Yeah, yeah, and as I said, when we saw these one's in North Yorkshire there was a definite physical resemblance, you know, because looking at some of the photographs of their relations they looked very much like some of ours with a heavy, sort of, eyebrows and sunken eyes, which is obviously a family trait.

This social, and as Raymond described it, 'personable' nature of establishing relations in order to fix, or re-fix, active kinship connections in this instance shows how genealogical information about the past is able to develop and progress relationships in the present. Moreover, the 'it's more personable ... to be able to say 'well we are related'' phrase further intimates that the social sharing and acknowledgement of certain genetic characteristics (family traits) is as important to Raymond as carrying them in his genes. These family traits are meaningful here as Raymond views the 'heavy eyebrows' and 'sunken eyes' as affinities that not only connect the two sets of ancestors with he and his Yorkshire relatives but which have also contributed towards actualised social relationships with these 'one's in North Yorkshire'. In this 'family trait' there is simultaneously 'mystique' (Nelkin and Lindee 1995) and familiarity for Raymond, whereby, the social relationships that have emerged are able to make sense of, and in a sense fix, both shared and given physical characteristics. The insinuation is that regardless of the lateral genealogical distance, commonly shared genetic and/or cultural markers are sought, recognised, and integrated into the social dialogue that ensues among family historians and their contemporary kin. In short, there continues to be classificatory as well as role designating properties.

When discussing such themes, alongside revelations regarding family history research and lineal genealogical affiliations James, the former Tyne River Pilot, described how cultural family traits had acted as a means for expanding social connections with contemporary kin. In this instance, new kin had been discovered in Orkney, once again, and it was extremely significant to James that these relatives were 'also seafarers'. Here, the sharing of related characteristics not only thickened



genealogical connections over time, but also, significantly encouraged and enabled social communications in the present. In fact, the doorstep appearance of a previously unknown relative from Ottawa, Canada, provided the catalyst for James's current interest in genealogical research. James told me how the social networks that he had established in recent years with newly discovered kin in Canada and the Orkneys had also aided in the formation of a 'broadened view' of his contemporary and historic genealogical connections. Here, genetic evidence that pointed to an affiliation with Central Europe and contemporary interactions with North America had forced James to expand his imagined and actualised contemporary genealogical horizons far beyond the northeast of England.

As part of the ethnographic exchange that opened this chapter, Mary talked to me about her desire to extend social interactions with a newly discovered Polish relative who had displayed similar artistic characteristics to her. For Mary, this particular relative was imagined as the potential genealogical link to an artistic 'trait' that was otherwise missing in her English family and which had caused her some genealogical concern in her younger days:

**Martyn:** Is it the stories that these characters might hold?

**Mary:** The stories and the kind of interesting life they did, or, you know, the things they chose to do, and the kind of, yeah, the stories that go with them.

**Martyn:** And how does that work with what you were saying before about learning about yourself? Or is it more just a kind of vicarious interest in just seeing how someone may have lived their life? Or was it a combination of the two?

**Mary:** I think it's a combination. I mean, yeah, it sounds strange to say it but I thought it was just because I thought they were interesting characters but when you come to think about it you think, well yes, it's something that I would find interesting so it's obviously about me as much as them.

- Martyn:** Learning about your own eccentricities?
- Mary:** Yeah, your own quirks, sort of thing. And I suppose you find you're attracted to people who have some meaning to you in that way. You don't want to be the only one. Because most of my family are very scientific, very black and white, and my degree is in history of art, my subjects at school were art, I'm interested in history, I'm interested in film particularly, and all that sort of thing. And no one else in my family is, absolutely no one, apart from one cousin in Poland, and you think: God, was I adopted?
- Martyn:** Where's the arts link?
- Mary:** But sometimes I felt like I wasn't the same as my other relatives that were near by, sort of thing. And err, so I suppose you're trying to find some kind of reassurance that you've got something in common with someone somewhere in your own family.
- Martyn:** But you do feel that you've found that by doing the family history?
- Mary:** Yeah, yeah, definitely.
- Martyn:** Certain characters have helped give you that kind of understanding?
- Mary:** Yes, they have.

For Mary, the establishment of social interactions with contemporary kin was necessary in order to make sense of her genealogical imaginings. Moreover, her imaginings interweaved certain cultural and genetic affinities, and these were viewed as complementary on the one hand (the two being a product of genealogical transmission), but also distinct, on the other (genealogical proximity is not always akin to cultural proximity). Like Carsten's (2011) observations regarding 'substance

and relationality’, the genealogical evidence that is of such use and importance to contemporary family historians reflects what, as Sahlins would have it, is: ‘Neither a universal nor an essential condition of kinship . . . [rather] a culturally relative hypostasis of common being’ (2011a: 14). And this is a critical feature that is reflected by family historians as part of the process of adding flesh to the bones of their genealogical connections.

In many respects the sections within this chapter aim to advance previous anthropological observations that ‘look at the ways in which genetic knowledge gears itself to different kinds of social experience and vice versa’ (Salazar, 2009: 179). Moreover, this wider thesis follows Salazar by highlighting that ‘the translation of truth knowledge into symbolic knowledge is a complex one’ (*ibid.*: 191). In the final section of this chapter I turn to the practice of ‘passing on’ genealogical knowledge as a process of extending and transmitting relationships with future generations.

## **7.6 The Continuum of Kinship**

In discussions with family historians I often raised the question as to whether there could ever be a ‘natural cutoff point’ to one’s genealogical research. There were varying replies. The consensus seemed to be that as long as one continues to interact with their genealogical evidence then the process is fluid. Concerning the notion of a ‘cutoff point’ Gwen explained quite plainly that she ‘hadn’t found it yet’, while George described how he felt that ‘there was always something more to find’. Sitting in front of a monitor screen that displayed a nineteenth century census return that was littered with transcription errors Raymond also told me:

I don’t think you ever finish on something like this ... I mean the next stage is really going to individual offices and studying records ... and because the family’s spread out a bit I might have to go to two or three different ones so I can combine them into a holiday and spend a few days’. ... [L]ook at the settlements, walk around the villages and things, you know? Walk the footpaths, walk in the ancestors footprints (Raymond).

For Raymond, family history research represents a continuum whereby the geographical and topographical investigation of ancestral ‘footprints’ is a natural next step from his imaginings with the census and his establishment of active kinship networks. This journey was also viewed as part of a process where Raymond’s own ‘footprints’ would also leave markers for future generations to trace, follow, and ‘walk in’ as part of their own genealogical research. When I asked Raymond why this was important I was told:

It’s mainly to pass it on, if Paul and Dominic [his sons], you know, have some interest and if their possible future sons and daughters are interested. It’s just so that if somebody does want to know who people were, and where they came from, there’s a chance. I mean, I would have liked to have known and I think it helps put things in context. You might have more connections than you think. I mean people talk about whether there are ghosts, or spirits, or things around about. I don’t believe necessarily strongly in any of those things, although I’m not ruling them out, but some people feel it’s important that their spiritual home is in a particular place, and you know you hear these stories that there may be somebody still living there locked in a time, locked away in a castle as a ghost, for whatever reason, that is related to you (Raymond).

The ways in which Raymond explains his ideas and experiences of family history research through specific relationships and connections to the past, present, and future highlights the temporal forward momentum that resides within genealogical research. Evidence is laid down and collected by genealogical kin and explored in varying forms through the establishment of tangible connections with people and places and imagined relationships with the spiritual realm. Particularly, the inclusion of Raymond himself, his sons, his potential grandchildren, and hypothetical spirits from the past, as part of this exchange, is indicative of the processual nature of family history research.

Bill repeatedly spoke of the potential future value of his family history research and described to me how it was important to transmit, or in his words, ‘pass on’ genealogical knowledge to younger generations. ‘I’m head of the family now’ Bill told me during one of our many Monday afternoon discussions at the BGRG,

meaning that he was the eldest living member of his extended family group. Moreover, Bill explained that he understood his position as family elder as one which represented a link between those familial generations that had gone before him, those that had followed, and those still to come. When guiding me through his online Ancestry account one day, Bill explained how he had stumbled across a younger extended relation of his who was also investigating the same genealogical lineages as he (it being possible for those users researching the same genealogies to view and connect with each through the website). ‘He’s made some mistakes though and I’m not going to correct them for him’ Bill told me, on account of the fact that he felt that this ‘cousin’ should have first asked for his advice. ‘He knows I’m doing the family research but hasn’t been in touch’, was the situation that had angered Bill somewhat, as he viewed part of his role as the ‘head of the family’ as the key transmitter of genealogical knowledge.

Despite this minor disappointment Bill explained that he was in the process of maintaining the flow of genealogical knowledge within his family:

I’ve got three kids of my own, I’ve got a son and two daughters and I’ve got a file for each of them ... photo’s at the top and then all the details, dates of birth, marriage, death, all that sort of thing, goes underneath. So what I’m doing, I’m doing 3 files and I’m putting a front page like that [shows me a piece of paper with the layout on it] with the photograph’s and all, I’m putting a copy of each census in each one. I’m also typing up what I know of things they’ve done in their lives. I’ll put my own record in too and it would’ve been nice if I’d had my granddad’s record, if he’d have written all his record out. So I’m putting in my school days, my RAF days; what I did, and the rest of my time. I’ve only done it briefly, I’ve typed about 5 or 6 pages and I’ll just slide that in, staple it together. I’m putting in a record from the cemetery, I’ve copied that, cemetery records, I’ll slide that in, I’m putting anything I can think of that’ll help them with research if they want to do it in their time – if they want to continue it on. So anything I can, I’ll just slide in and then I’ve put my great granddad’s, my granddad’s, my dad’s, and mine to start, and then I’m putting my mam’s family next; my granddad and grandma on my mam’s side (Bill).

The inclusion of genealogical evidence in these ‘files’ is presented by Bill in light of its potential usefulness to the future family history research of his offspring. The recording of his own school and RAF days, as well as information concerning his parents, grandparents, and great grandparents, presents itself as a valuable resource for the transmission of genealogical knowledge and as a mode of interacting with succeeding generations. In short, Bill and his compiled portfolios act as valuable mediators, which in turn, aid in the maintenance of genealogical connections.

For Bridget the view was: ‘Oh I think you never finish’, and this, as with a great deal of her genealogical imaginings, was linked to a Norwegian heritage:

I could go back to just say when the Norwegian came into this country and start from there but I started wanting to know what he did when he was over there. Were there other family members I mean. I actually know that he did have brothers going to sea because I was told that they visited Jarrow [Tyne and Wear] at one time but there was a language barrier there (Bridget).

Here, the journeying of Bridget’s Norwegian ancestors, via sea, to Jarrow acts as a metaphor for the flow of genealogical connections within her family history from Norway to the northeast of England, which she then converts into an imagining that is linked to personally receiving these visitors herself:

It would be nice to think that I could [meet up with these visitors], but I don’t know how I would feel really, you know; you haven’t been brought up with them or lived with them through the years. They’re just suddenly, that’s a person that appears on your family tree and you, well I mean, you obviously prove that they belong to you but I don’t know how I’d feel (Bridget).

Just because a genealogical connection can be proven, as she infers, does not mean that she would be able to establish relatedness. Bridget’s efforts at recording her own position within this genealogy therefore suggests a method in which she is able to present a more detailed picture of herself to subsequent family historians in the hope that they might then feel differently about her. The transmission of genealogical knowledge, in Bridget’s case, is an attempt to communicate with future generations

so that they can feel that she represents a name in a family tree and more importantly also someone they can get to know and relate to.

For Elizabeth, there was ‘always another layer to investigate’ and she elaborated on this point by making a particular reference to her granddaughter:

I don't think very much that my granddaughter would be interested [in the family history portfolio], not at the minute, but later on hopefully when she gets a bit older and things as she's interested in people. She must be because they were here at the weekend and they only came for an overnight stay but she still goes through her routine. The things that she did when she was little and lived here. They always have to go down to the beach on the last morning and walk along the beach and then they throw sticks. But it's obviously a home tie, it represents home to her, you know, I mean she wasn't born in Blyth she was born in Worcestershire, her mam lived away by then, but she seems to tie herself into our lifeline somehow or other (Elizabeth).

This ‘other layer waiting somewhere in the wings’, as Elizabeth also put it, was the ways in which her granddaughter could be seen to maintain her genealogical connections with Northumberland through the repetition of particular ‘routines’ when visiting. Moreover, Elizabeth believes that as her granddaughter grows older one further way in which she will be able to ‘tie herself into our lifeline’ will be through family history research and this is where the results of Elizabeth’s current genealogical research will be of use. Here, the collection and transmission of genealogical knowledge across the generations is viewed as a means towards saying something more about kinship. It represents a continuum of both physical and imagined connections, whereby the past, present and future figure simultaneously.

## **7.7 Summary**

This chapter has used ethnographic observation and analysis in order to demonstrate the hybrid nature of the flesh and bones of kinship. In addressing genetic technologies with Euro-American kinship terminologies one of the ways in which family historians incorporate the social and the biological into their evidencing and

imagining of genealogical connections has been explored. The categorisation of genetic cousins and subsequent application of role designating aspects to them, by Oxford Ancestors customers, demonstrates a unique means of extending genetic affinity through direct social interaction. Key to the relationship that exists between family history research and genetic techniques of genealogical investigation is the establishment of social interactions with contemporary kin and this is has been explored in greater depth as a feature of all aspects of genealogical research. By ending with an examination of the transmission of genealogical knowledge from family historians to future generations a continuum of kinship thinking is shown to exist in which the building of relationships with the past, present, and future is key. In short, this chapter has presented another facet of the flesh and bones of kinship thinking, whereby the transmission of genes, kin terms, family traits, and/or genealogical knowledge, is predicated in processes of social interaction for the fixing and forging of lasting meaningful relationships.



## Chapter 8. Conclusion

Returning to the BGRG for one last time, I recall a discussion with George where he was eager to ask me for information on genetic ancestry tracing. George told me that he had recently discovered a distant genealogical connection to a German lineage in the 1700's. The puzzle for George, I learned, concerned whether it would be possible to find evidence of these ancestors in Blyth, and this had caused him to consider the possibility of exploring genetic techniques of genealogical investigation. George had not previously mentioned this lineage and I got the sense that it had been stirred at this meeting by ancestral imaginings that were associated with a distant German heritage. The group as a whole was conducting genealogical research for a project related to the people and families that had worked on and around the Blyth River and its port. This project had already sparked a discussion about how many of the group's members had discovered ancestors who had originally arrived in Blyth via sea. Using Ancestry, the group continued to research and relay facts about historic harbour masters and mariners of the Blyth locale. Meanwhile, George pressed me for more information on the genetic products offered by Oxford Ancestors. 'I'd be willing to pay the costs if they can tell me more about the German link', George explained. I told him that the types of genetic tests that Oxford Ancestors offer would say little about genetic geographic affiliations in the 1700's but could indicate a much deeper ancestral genetic connection to the region surrounding what is now modern day Germany. George then told me that genetic ancestry tracing was something he was likely to go ahead with as part of the next stage of his genealogical research.

During the above exchange the majority of the group was content to envisage ships carrying people to the northeast of England from the British Isles, Scandinavia, and Northern Europe, and to take their genealogical imaginings from there. George, on the other hand, was concerned with thinking about a different heritage and was aiming to turn to genetic technology in order to add credence to his meditations. Both instances display genealogical momentum whereby the awareness of great generational and geographic distance contributes both to the enduring of relationships and to the development of new ones. For most of the group genealogy was found in the shared experience of a long and arduous journey over sea. For George, the interest

was beginning to shift to the transference of genes on arrival, and the locus of their origin.

## **8.1 Thesis Reflection**

For family historians, the genealogical grid is not ‘held as possible hypothesis’ (Schneider 1984: 200). Rather, it represents an explicit framework for a succession of connections that are seen through census records, genes, memories, inheritance surnames, family traits, and social interactions. The ways in which family historians explore such connections is imaginative and enterprising. On the one hand, it involves switching between that which has gone before and that which is still to come and, on the other, focusing upon the essential facets of contemporary living. This thesis set out to address just how the digital and genetic technologies are integrated into the evidencing and imagining of genealogical connections and how this impacts upon kinship thinking. In so doing, it has shown how family historians merge the flesh and bones of genealogical research within a mode that blends social and biological readings of kinship.

Sahlins has reiterated that in kinship ‘[w]hatever is construed genealogically may also be constructed socially’ (2013b: 2). In family history research, the advent of cyberculture in the form of digital and genetic technologies presents an element of choice to the family historian whereby relationships are both ‘construed genealogically’ and ‘constructed socially’. This occurs not in the functionalist fashion of a simple social recognition of biological facts however, but rather as part of a processual exercise that involves the social integration of genealogical facts from dual perspectives. Moreover, as part of this amalgamation of perspectives valuable knowledge about connectedness between people in the present and the past is both generated and revealed.

Pálsson (2009) has argued that, in Iceland, digital genealogies are significant in the development of connections between people and that this impacts upon their understandings of kinship. Moreover, these digital genealogies, Pálsson suggests, are to be viewed as ‘machines’ that are integral to the doing of kinship work (*ibid.*). In

the northwest of England Edwards' (2009b) has observed that family historians often use microfiche and digital databases as mediums that enable them to be able to connect with and reveal ancestors. Significantly, for Edwards' research participants these ancestors were seen to be 'in the machine' (2009b: 11). The online publication of digitised historic census records has presented to family historians the opportunity to explore their genealogical connections through the largest of contemporary machines: the Internet. My ethnography has shown that family historians in Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear are taking advantage of such opportunities by using both paid-for and free-to-view websites in order to look at and download digitised census records. Here, genealogical facts are extracted from the census record and explored within narrative family histories with both modes of analysis essential when reckoning connection.

By integrating with digitised historic census records online family historians demonstrate a genealogical 'imperative to connect' (Green et al 2005). Here, the implementation of particular strategies in order to address gaps in the evidence (potential disconnections) demonstrates the importance of building a genealogical framework upon which their narrative histories can be constructed and explored. However, this does not occur in a typically essentialised manner (Nash 2002) but rather allows for notions of shared and collective experience, association, and community to be invoked in the imagining of genealogical connections. The combination of empirical research and imagination that surrounds the ways in which family historians interact with digitised census data connects 'facets of human being that are often, in analysis, kept apart' (Edwards 2009b: 18). Significantly, this observation is able to contribute to contemporary Euro-American understandings of kinship whereby the genealogical model has been reconsidered (Bamford and Leach 2009b).

Through ethnographic interaction with a contemporary census it has also been demonstrated that what stands as the potential genealogical knowledge of tomorrow is often entwined within the contextual circumstances of its day. Here, it was observed that family historians take heed of this fact, and forge connections with their descendants through the private completion and archiving of contemporary census records. One important aspect of this finding is that such records reside in personal

computer hard drives and amongst genealogical portfolios that are not bound up in strict data protection legislation and/or commercial copyright laws. The private harbouring of census data with the explicit intention of distributing it for the assumed interests of future genealogical kin highlights the secular nature of Euro-American kinship reckoning whereby the tracing of connections through 'ego' is often the imperative. By following such actions, contemporary family historians are in a sense crashing a party to which they may never be invited, through their assumptions that their descendents will look at them with as much interest as they have their own ancestors.

The notion that genealogical knowledge is waiting to be found brings to mind popular media reports in which 'population geneticists are often depicted as uncovering secrets about the past, resolving long-debated questions about origins, or tracing continuity between people living today and their ancestors' (Tutton 2004: 106). By focusing upon Oxford Ancestors, and particularly the commercial genetic ancestry tracing products that they offer, I have explored how the genetic technologies interrelate with the ways in which family historians perceive such previously latent genetic genealogical knowledge. Nash has argued that the 'effects of genetics on genealogy and on the versions of relatedness bound up with ideas of ancestry and origins are ... likely to prove politically and culturally significant ... in complex and contradictory ... ways' (2004: 6) and this is explored within the rubric of 'genetic kinship'. By analysing the differing primary and secondary discourses of genetic genealogy I have shown that the 'cultural work' that Nash speaks of, in the hands of Oxford Ancestors, is actually an effort to contribute specific marketable imaginings to otherwise commercially meaningless data. Moreover, I indicate that the presentation of product results to customers that use clan and archetype affiliations act more as a means of adding a workable narrative to the raw genetic data than of explicitly essentialising connections. Imagined genetic narratives are then shown to be integrated within preexisting family history projects as an additional feature rather than as a limiting one. In Bill's case, for example, the addition of Iberian ancestry to his Sheffield heritage was accepted in similar fashion to Tutton's research participants who, when receiving the results of genetic ancestry tracing tests, 'saw that to be Orcadian could mean to be a composite of many different elements' (2004: 116). This was a quality of genetic make up that Raymond acknowledged in his

reflections about the genetic history of the populace of Britain, despite his reluctance to embark on any genetic testing of his own.

The integration of the new digital and genetic technologies into genealogical research reveals new cultural conditions within which the family historian must work. These conditions have a contributory effect on the ways in which family historians go about their research and on the types of things that their research can reveal. This thesis has shown that as well as making use of the Internet in order to access census records, family historians use the Internet as a virtual place in which to interact and to share digital and genetic genealogical information. Beaulieu talks of the making of ethnographies on the Internet and suggests that '[f]or those studying practices of scientific knowledge production ... data-sharing, the use of mailing lists and webpages or 'open publication' practices have created new sites where science can be studied' (2004: 141). THE NDOML represented one such virtual place where genealogy could be studied in that it provided a vehicle for family historians to embark upon processes of genealogical thickening and positioning.

When investigating Euro-American kinship Edwards looked to 'go beyond ... shared ... substance and affective ties, and to include connection with or without what are conceptualized as blood or genetic links' (2000: 29). I observed that, in their efforts to thicken genealogical connections, family historians often turned to personal reminiscences and folk idioms of inheritance that sometimes did, and sometimes did not, conceptualise connections in genetic genealogical terms. It was also shown that family historians were able to reckon forms of relatedness with people in the past and the present from qualities as diverse as the communal memories of a toffee factory and the reoccurring symptoms of ill health. In some instances, these different types of connections were combined with reminiscences and explored directly using terms of inheritance. Rather than highlighting an inherent need for family historians to fall back on some form of empirical fact, these interplays served to demonstrate the importance of combining evidence and imagining when mapping, forging, and adding depth to genealogical connections. Moreover, they showed that this involved a unique twisting of what can be classed as culturally inherited and what can be classed as genetically inherited.

Taking inherited surnames as ‘unique cultural labels of common ancestry’ (King and Jobling 2009a: 1093) I explored how family historians integrated what they already knew about the origin and meaning of their patronyms with what the genetics could tell them. Haraway has previously stated that ‘[t]ies through blood – including blood recast in the coin of genes and information – have been bloody enough’ (1997: 265), and has called for a reassessment of kinship through attributes of ‘friendship, work, [and] partially shared purposes’ (*ibid.*). I suggest that in following this line of argument an outmoded either/or dichotomisation of kinship and relatedness reckoning is actually being maintained. For example, When James the Tyne River pilot talked about his patronym he did so in terms of inheritance that included the sharing of genes and occupational experiences. Consequently, he demonstrated and maintained a dual-perspective, undichotomised form, of understanding genealogical connections that was familiar to most, if not all, of the family historians with whom I interacted.

Marks (2001) indicated that genetic genealogical knowledge does not always figure in the folk kinship reckonings of specific individuals and groups, and that in some cases it can be confrontational. In essence, what people know about their ancestry and what the genetic technologies are able to tell them do not always marry. However, for some family historians I found that suppositions about a genealogy could be investigated using genetics and that this would lead to new forms of relatedness with people in the past and the present. To clarify, I often found that my research participants felt that they had inherited a cultural story in conjunction with their biological genetics and vice versa. The Belt family study exemplified this point whereby the cultural work of the team was integrated with what they knew about genetic inheritance in order to position their ancestor Humphrey in relation to themselves. Moreover, the team’s acknowledgement of the commissioned genealogist as an ‘honorary Belt’ in this instance, on account of the significant genealogical cultural work that had been performed on their behalf, demonstrates an important and complex aspect of family history research: connections are described and understood in ways that are, and are other than, genealogical.

Carsten tells us:

It is a truism that people are always conscious of connections to other people. It is equally a truism that some of these connections carry particular weight – socially, materially, affectively. And, often but not always, these connections can be described in genealogical terms, but they can also be described in other ways’ (2000b: 1).

When exploring affiliations with people in the past it has been demonstrated that family historians use narrative, reminiscence, supposition, and folk idiom in order to interpret and communicate connections in places where genealogical illustrations do not suffice, or are not needed. My thesis also aims to better understand just how those cultures of relatedness that exist between family historians and their contemporary kin reflect such a phenomenon. As a final research question I therefore asked how significant the evidencing and imagining of genealogical connections is in the formation and maintenance of social kinship networks. Carsten describes how Iñupiat ties ‘are seen as optative rather than given’ (*ibid.*: 2) and in chapter 7 I demonstrated how family historians make a point of choosing how to socially actualise that which is genetically given. Through genetic kin terms and the mapping of inherited genetic markers across genealogies it is shown how ancestors and contemporary relations alike fall into differing genetic genealogical categories. Here, the result is that these genealogical classifications are also seen to have their own role designating aspects. However, it is learnt that not all ‘genetic cousins’ are actually accorded the same relational status, with social interaction shown to be key in the actualisation of genealogical connections. There is then an observable difference between the assimilative and distinctive power (Bourdieu 1990) of genetic cousins with the majority remaining as names within a genealogical chart, which is in stark contrast to the select minority who become friends, holiday companions, and/or regular telephone and email correspondents.

Ingold (2009) has applied the concept of ‘wayfaring’ in an attempt to break free from the rigidities of the genealogical model. By selectively forging relationships with some genetic cousins and not others, family historians show that ‘[t]o know someone or something is to know their story, and to be able to join that story to one’s own’ (*ibid.*: 200). In essence, genetic genealogical connections alone are not sufficient in relatedness reckoning and family historians show that to know someone’s genetics is

not akin to knowing their story. The observation that in some instances perceived inherited ‘family traits’ play an important role in these stories may appear contradictory; however, this feature is viewed as an illustration of the ‘creative improvisation’ (Ingold 2009: 203) that is required to sustain contemporary social relationships. These stories are also viewed as an important communicative and interpretative tool when looking forward and this was particularly evident in Elizabeth’s reflections concerning her granddaughter.

The creation of genealogical portfolios for future generations by family historians encompasses some of what Edwards (2009) observed concerning the anti-genealogical model of skipping a generation. By presenting their contemporary genealogical work in a form where it can be picked up, used, and continued at some point in the future, but not necessarily at every generational step, family historians follow Ingold in the assumption that ‘people grow into knowledge and do not receive it ready-made’ (2009: 211). This is significant, in that family historians can be seen to be acknowledging their own important role in the integration of cultural work and empirical discovery when exploring genealogical connections in the past, present, and future.

This thesis has shown that for family historians the reckoning of kinship and relatedness has no dividing line between the social and the biological, cultural work and genealogical fact. As a result, gaps in genealogical evidence are bridged by supposition and narration; genetic codings are embellished in transcription and translation; reminiscences and folk idioms are used as thickening agents; and social interactions actualise that which is otherwise genealogically latent. Edwards argues that in contemporary northwestern English understandings of kinship: ‘Neither genealogy nor affective ties are pure, fixed or uncontaminated. Nor are they necessarily and always pitched against each other’ (2009: 152). Such understandings are also evident in the northeast of England, and they constitute a foundation for what is viewed as the flesh and bones of kinship.



## 8.2 Flesh and Bones

To return to the central idiom of this thesis for one last time, to the flesh and the bones, it is important to clarify its abiding relevance to kinship studies in anthropology, new and old.

It has been made clear in chapter 2 that a certain perennial dichotomy has permeated the topic of kinship in anthropology for the past 150 years, and that this has been fundamentally concerned with the relationship between the social and the biological – so-called, nature and culture. Chapter 2 shows that when interpreting and elucidating this dichotomy anthropologists have turned to varying modes of description and analysis in order to present what they observe as kinship in the ethnographic record as something that can be stratified, structural, and/or processual. Moreover, as part of the genealogy of kinship thinking in anthropology that has developed across the past three centuries, chapter 2 also illustrates that when viewed free from the shackles of Western ethnocentrism certain pre-perceived boundaries between the social and the biological are becoming increasingly blurred, and that this is occurring within a framework that is less rigid than it is fluid. However, the assumption remains that Euro-American kinship systems remain largely implicated within inflexible biologically orientated perspectives.

The flesh and bones of kinship thinking and practice that I both observed and engaged with amongst family historians in Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear – as well as those of the wider digital sphere – is a contemporary ethnographic representation of relatedness that highlights the interdigitation of genetic and cultural affinity as a malleable and shifting process. My research participants forged connections sometimes through biological affiliation, sometimes through socio-cultural associations, but mostly through some form of combination of the two. Unsurprisingly, I am unable to answer Sahlins' (2013a) recent reciprocal question concerning the actual percentage ratio of biology to culture in kinship reckoning. However, I can concur that the continuous interaction is suggestive of a mode of mutuality in existence between the two. For the family historians described here, there was no flesh without bones, nor bones without flesh.

In the context of Euro-American kinship the flesh and bones idiom presented in this thesis demonstrates one of two possibilities: Firstly, that those fundamental assumptions upon which the premise of so-called Western kinship has been based are in fact flawed. Secondly, that as a result of the contemporary progress and development of certain newly emerging genetic and digital technologies, Euro-American kinship thinking and practice must be viewed in a new light with a reappraisal of its previous assumptions therefore required. I would suggest that the second possibility is more representative of the current state-of-play concerning Euro-American kinship, and that the ethnographic data and analysis presented in this thesis goes some way towards illustrating another valuable instance of the ‘complexity and diversity of kinships that fall under the rubric of the West’ (Edwards, 2013: 290).

### **8.3 Future Implications**

The combined digitisation and geneticisation of Euro-American society is an ongoing process and one that will no doubt continue to impact upon past, present, and future reckonings of kinship and relatedness.

Habermas’ concept of Scientization (1971) is significant concerning the present discussion in that the growing democratisation of digital and genetic technologies amongst family historians in Euro-American society can be seen to represent a process of empowerment regarding how people choose to trace genealogical connections, and in turn, relate to each other. Lee (2001) views this democratisation of genetic knowledge through a political lens:

Democratization is a trope, a rhetorical strategy developed by personal genomics companies to encourage investment and development of genetic technologies and research by organizing consumers desire for access (Lee 2011: 22).

If this is the case it is likely that consumer demand will continue to rise and that the products that genetic ancestry tracing companies are able to offer their customers will undoubtedly become more specific. Raymond may then be closer to finding out about his North East genetic links than he actually thinks, or George closer to the genetic

routes of his eighteenth century German ancestors. The revelation of such specific facts would be sure to impact upon the uptake of genetic testing by family historians, particularly if the tests to be developed were to offer recent ancestral information in conjunction with the deep ancestry data that is currently being presented. Moreover, any potential future testing that was not solely concentrated on yDNA and/or mtDNA markers would certainly be viewed as a further democratising act, in that the gender bias and exclusivity that is leveled at current tests would be partially addressed. It is clear that any future developments in genetic ancestry tracing concerning the levels of genealogical information that it reveals, and wider accessibility, would continue to impact upon how genealogical connections are explored by family historians. However, I would suggest that it is unlikely that such tests would ever represent an overarching genetic essentialisation of family history research due to the great importance that is afforded to the cultural work that goes into the exploration and interpretation of genealogical connections. As such continued integration would be expected.

The 'cyberculture' of Escobar's (1994) day is fast changing with the digital technologies accelerating at a rate that everyday contemporary consumers struggle to keep up with. The growth in social networking and virtual places for social interaction on the Internet is also a far cry from the early chat-rooms of the mid-nineteen nineties. Despite such technological advancement many of the questions Escobar posed are still relevant, however, and not least that 'the study of cyberculture is particularly concerned with the cultural constructions and reconstructions on which the new technologies are based and which they in turn help to shape' (*ibid.* :211). With regard to the social networking potentialities of the present digital age it is only natural that the exploration, formation, and maintenance of genealogical connections will continue to grow using aspects of communication available on websites like Ancestry and via genetic ancestry tracing message boards and regional family history mailing lists. I was particularly struck by a comment that I observed on a popular social networking site where a former school friend of mine announced that 'Ancestry is my new Facebook'. I took this as a loaded statement with the individual in question explicitly intimating that the past and present genealogical connections she was able to explore and actualise via Ancestry were as significant as the daily social interactions that she maintained on Facebook. This is certainly an aspect of

family history research that requires monitoring with regard to how people forge digital connections with their contemporaries and the types of things they feel they can take from such relationships.

To conclude, it is argued that as the digital and genetic technologies develop and progress in the coming decades so too will family history research. What is of paramount importance to the family historian is the exploration of imaginings, putting the flesh on the bones, and I fully expect that they will continue to be comfortable in engaging with the digital and genetic technologies in light of the fact that they represent both a useful source of genealogical evidence and a valuable place in which to interact. Furthermore, this continued advancement will impact further still on the study of kinship in anthropology whereby its status and attention in the discipline will be both progressed and preserved.

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