

My Elusive Ancestor: James TAGG

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The research outline of the LDS Church states that “*effective researchers first find background information. Then they survey ... sources*” (*Ancestral Trails: The Complete Guide for British Genealogy and Family History*, Mark D Herber, 2001, p2). This was to prove an essential strategy to discover the short life of James TAGG who lived in the very overcrowded and notorious Dickensian London (*Ragged London in 1861*, Holingshead, J).

My first introduction to James was on the 1866 marriage certificate of his son, William:

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF MARRIAGE						given at the General Register Office		
Registration District: Bethnal Green								
1866 Marriage solemnized at The Church in the Parish of St James the Great in the County of Middlesex								
No.	When married	Name and Surname	Age	Condition	Work or profession	Residence at time of marriage	Father's name and surname	Work or profession of father
261	May 7	William TAGG Sarah Ann FISHER	full full	Bachelor Spinster	Labourer	Bethnal Green Bethnal Green	James TAGG John FISHER	Deceased Cork cutter ¹

Following the basic family history method of moving between marriages and births, the next research step was to find William's birth. This would include William's mother who was, of course, James' wife. A combination of sources, as suggested by Herber (2000, p170) was used: parish registers with civil registration and census collections.

Parish registers are listed at the Hugh Wallis website². Searches included many variations such TAG, LAGG, SAGG, FAGG and the older family names TEAGUE and TAGUE: James did not appear.

These searches were repeated using the LDS *FamilySearch* database³ choosing the advanced search option which allowed inclusion of the known father-son relationship of James and William. The results listed 3 possible Williams in England with the father named James at *Ancestry.com* (2006). None in London, Middlesex which would match our area. No possibilities could be dismissed, as many people moved to London in search of work.

Civil registration records for England are available, but incomplete⁴. Civil registration began in 1837; when our William married in 1866 he was at least 21 years old, giving a birth date before 1845. The usual search did

¹ From Australia, the English Birth and Marriage Certificates can be purchased from transcription agents such as Joy Murrin Family History Services www.joymurrin.com.au or Genfindit www.genfindit.com – these agents require a folio and volume reference number to place the order. They will look up the reference for a fee, or you may look this up yourself using the index to records (often called St Catherine's Index) available at larger libraries and many family history centres or online at FreeBMD www.freebmd.co.uk which is incomplete. Entries are currently being transcribed online. Extra care must be taken if the online index is used. The Public Record Office (PRO) www.pro.gov.uk will charge for a search of its records, whether or not it is successful. Certificates generally take about six weeks for delivery.

² Hugh Wallis <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~hughwallis/> designed his online list of parish churches and their records to provide a faster (fewer keystrokes) way to search the largest genealogical collection, that of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). Hugh explains the batch system and how he used this structure to set out parish registers to better suit the user; it allows different searches. Further information is available at the Main page (click on the red link at top of opening page) at the site. It is noteworthy that the site also includes an index to second names. Names which are often the mother's maiden name. Four TAGG entries were returned, none relevant to my research.

³ The LDS *FamilySearch* database includes the International Genealogical Index (IGI); Ancestral Files and 1881 English census. It contains many unverified submissions from members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and many family researchers from around the world and is simply the largest source of family history information. All information must be verified from films of original sources which can be ordered from Family History Centres for a nominal fee. A basic search includes entry boxes to first name; last name; event from drop down menu; year; a year range selection; country. An advanced search option includes the additional boxes for father and mother details. Results list provides individual information. Clicking on a particular individual's result will provide details.

⁴ FreeBMD www.freebmd.org, although incomplete, is so popular it cannot cope with the number of people who want to use it. The progress of this huge transcription task is shown with separate graphs for the progress of births, marriages and deaths. Searching at off peak times can be time saving. The database will search for a surname without a given name,

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not find a suitable entry: GRO Birth certificate 1844 and 1845. Unlike the LDS *FamilySearch* database, the *FreeBMD* database will carry out a search for a surname or given name alone. Using this technique, the results listed additional entries, where both the given and surname could not be deciphered. One of these was an entry for Stepney in 1844 – very possibly our William. The original record (available as an online scan) can be viewed at the site. A result without the volume and folio number – unobtainable. An estimate of William's birth was made using the information we had:

1. William was of full age, or over 21 in 1866
2. Grooms were usually at least the same age or a little older than their brides. William's bride, Sarah Ann (her birth had been relatively easy to find) was born on 5 September 1844
3. Therefore, the best estimate was between 1843 and 1845.

The LDS *FamilySearch* database only includes the 1881 English census while the UK census collection at www.ancestry.com and www.ancestry.co.uk now includes the 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881 and 1891 censuses for Middlesex. When these searches were originally carried out, the 1841 and 1851 censuses were not online; this is what happened without them.

With a birth estimate of 1843, William should appear as a teenager living with his parents in the 1861 census. In this online database, with just a few keystrokes, the entire 1861 census was searched for a particular individual: William TAGG born around 1844. Fifteen entries were listed, but just one for Stepney, about 1845:

William TAGG	abt 1845	Stepney Middlesex	Son	St George in the East Middlesex
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Clicking on this individual entry, the Head of this family was listed as William, not James. No entry had a son William with a father James.

At this stage, I was pursuing every possible resource: Genealogy.com is an internet message board with pages devoted to particular surnames, in this instance, TAGG. Here I found a message from someone researching a William TAGG, the same line. Living in England was a second cousin once removed (which means we have grandparents in common). Sadly he was having similar difficulties to me, but together we would be combining the original Middlesex resources in London with online offerings and the resources of the LDS system at my local Family History Centre where I worked as a volunteer.

At this point I tried another strategy: elimination of the absolutely impossible, so that what remains (no matter how improbable) had to be it. My very understanding cousin checked the census records in London. In the 1851 census, this sequence of children – William, Thomas and Edwin/Ellen had a father named James:

1851 Census		1 Little Fendall Street, Bermondsey			
James TAGG	Head	37	General Dealer	Middlesex	Stepney
Harriot	Wife	34		Do	Do
Elizabeth A	Dau	11		Do	Do
Harriot	Dau	9		Do	Do
William	Son	7		Do	Do
Thomas	Son	5		Do	Do
Ellen	Dau	3		Do	Do
Edwin	Son	1		Do	Do

which can show concealed entries listing all individuals in one area. Widening the search by omitting a given name or including all counties can require time-consuming checking of individuals. For our purposes, a search for a TAGG surname alone revealed indecipherable areas in the Stepney area. Knowing this limited our search efforts. Searching for a given name without a surname was useful for our family as TAGG is uncommon and usually the source of entry problems. A feature of this database is the inclusion of the original scans which can be viewed at the site. These may include details which will allow you to eliminate/include certain individuals, e.g. William.

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1861 Census		29 Hungerford Street, St George			
William TAGG	Head	32 Mar	Ship Smith	Middlesex	Stepney
Harriet	Wife	40 Mar	Ironer	Do	Do
William	Son	16		Do	Do
Thomas	Son	14		Do	Do
Edwin	Son	12		Do	Do
Ellen	Dau	11		Do	Do
Sarah	Dau	10 ⁵		Do	Do

Searches for a William born about 1829 have not been successful. Unfortunately, these are the only three census collections in which James appears as he had died by 1866.

As these census entries contain conflicting information, a process of corroboration as advised by Herber (2000, p170) filtered the results. This may be seen as another circular searching pattern within the also circular birth/marriage sequence.

To determine if this was, in fact, the same family with the Head of the family in the 1851 and 1861 censuses, the birth/christening or marriage records of the children have been searched. Not all references have been found, and certificates are still to arrive from England, but those already found have a father named James:

Registers of Spitalfields Christ Church James TAGG born 1837

Registers of Saint Dunstan, Stepney Elizabeth Ann TAGG born 1840

Registers of Saint Peters, Stepney Harriet TAGG born 1843 (LDS FamilySearch, 2006)

GRO Dec Qtr 1858 Marriage Elizabeth JAGG (FreeBMD, 2006)

For James, his birth date is estimated at around 1815, an average of the dates from the 1841 and 1851 censuses. The date given in the 1861 census of about 1829 has been discarded as it contradicts other sources and remains uncorroborated. Two entries have been identified as possible birth dates for our James:

James TAGG christened 1 August 1813 at Christ Church Spitalfields, father is William and mother is Maria (LDS database)

James TAGG christened 27 June 1813 in the adjoining parish of St Botolph Bishopgate, father is William and mother is Elizabeth. Living at 20 Wilson Street. William's occupation is Paper hanger. (LDS film of parish records St Botolph Bishopgate)

The common naming practice of giving a first born daughter the name of the wife's mother can be a useful tool. As the name Maria is uncommon and has not been found in our family, the St Botolph entry would seem more likely. Unfortunately, Harriet's parents are also William and Elizabeth, confusing this naming pattern. For this elusive ancestor, two possible descendency charts have been constructed. Maria has not appeared as yet.

Occupations can often be a useful indicator to determine fathers of the same name. In this case James, my ancestor, was deceased and his occupation not recorded.

Another researcher named Vivian WILSON has submitted her family tree to Ancestry.com where the Christ Church Spitalfields christening entry is included for James. Emails to the address given by Vivienne rebound, so she cannot be contacted to learn her reasons for choosing the Spitalfields birth entry.

The marriage of James and Harriet was found in Pallot's Index (Ancestry.com):

TAGG Jas. = Harriet Elizth WARD T x 'Ch Spitalfields 1835

⁵ Sarah's age is given as 16 in Ancestry.co.uk's transcription, but a check of the original scanned document available at the same site showed that a flourish had been misread. The age of 10 was indeed correct (although Sarah's birth entry has not been found). Sarah's place within the rank of ages followed an eleven year old and Sarah does not appear in the 1851 census.

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This 1835 marriage date has proved to be a useful guide to corroborate James' estimated birth date. If James was about 21 at marriage, his birth date would be about 1814 – approximately the same estimate from census records, making the 1813 births more likely to be correct.

A search of the LDS *FamilySearch* databases online for individuals named James TAGG born between 1811 and 1829 produced a list of 16. Only two had a father named William: the two known 1813 entries.

The marriage of another James TAGG occurred in 1840 when he married Mary Ann FISHER (GRO marriage certificate). This James and both the 1813 entries have the father named William. Unfortunately, certificates only name the father and not the mother! The children of James and Mary Ann who married in 1840 may still have the answer.

An advanced search of the LDS *FamilySearch* databases for a Maria TAGG, daughter of James and Mary Ann, within the maximum 20 year range after the 1840 marriage did not find a possible result. A repeat search at *FreeBMD* for Maria found an 1851 entry in the District of Bethnal Green. If this entry proves to be the daughter of James and Mary, it may be possible to conclude that the other James with a mother named Elizabeth married the remaining Harriet! The certificate will have to be ordered from England to confirm this strategy.

More records have been ordered to corroborate information: the ten parish churches of 1844 Stepney. Probate records⁶ including wills “*are particularly important because they were prepared with the intention of acknowledging or confirming relationships*” (Herber, 2000, p209). Establishing the relationships is a crucial next step at this stage.

No matter how elusive, the judicious use of research skills in combination are increasingly powerful and available to help us discover the past and ourselves.

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⁶ The LDS *Research Outline for England* (p59) sets out the three steps to find probate records:

- a. Determine when the will might have been proved
- b. Determine the court or courts that had jurisdiction
- c. Search the indexes and records of the court or courts.

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