SOME INTERNET RESOURCES FOR MEDIEVAL GENEALOGY



by Chris Phillips [1]

*We aim to provide a regular feature in **Foundations** on "new resources on the internet". In this first article Chris Philips has described some of the major online catalogues and library websites which should help newcomers to the field to get started.*

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Obviously, trying to summarise the contents of the Internet in a few pages of print would be very much like writing a history of the world on the back of an envelope. By way of introduction, a few of the most important general resources for medieval genealogy are listed below, with the emphasis on primary source material relating to England. Of course, in addition to these, there are hundreds of other sites covering other countries or dealing with more specialised topics, as well as a wealth of secondary material. It also goes without saying that because the Internet is a self-regulated medium, information on the web page should be weighed even more carefully than that on the printed page before it is accepted.

The **Public Record Office** is the most important repository for medieval English documents, and it's appropriate that its website, and particularly the online catalogue at **http://catalogue.pro.gov.uk/** is also one of the most important Internet resources for medieval genealogy. The catalogue has been compiled mainly from printed finding aids, and includes abstracts or listings of many medieval records - the level of detail depending on the original paper catalogue - including several of the series of "Ancient Deeds", early chancery and other equity suits, lists of chancery inquisitions post mortem (early 15th-century and later), inquisitions ad quod damnum and many others. All this is searchable, though one potential pitfall should be borne in mind: a range of dates can be specified, and dating by regnal year should be correctly interpreted, but if this option is used, undated documents and those with non-standard dates will be omitted.

For documents in **other repositories** in England, there is the "Access to Archives" project at **http://www.a2a.pro.gov.uk/**, also a compilation in progress from paper catalogues. There is a powerful search facility, which returns a list of document collections containing submitted keywords, and dates, geographical regions and individual repositories can also be specified.

Two other official online indexes are the National Register of Archives, at **http://www.hmc.gov.uk/nra/nra2.htm**, which is a database of collections with brief descriptions only (though with links to more detailed information where available) and the Archives Hub, at **http://www.archiveshub.ac.uk/**, covering archives in UK universities and colleges, including important manuscript repositories such as the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The manuscripts department of the British Library is also in the process of constructing an online catalogue, at **http://molcat.bl.uk/**.

Most major **libraries** allow Internet access to their catalogues - for example, the British Library catalogue is at **http://blpc.bl.uk/**. One library which has gone much further is

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[1] The author's own website, as mentioned in the article, is devoted to medieval English genealogy. As well as providing information in its own right, it includes links to a wealth of web-based resources for medieval genealogy.

Contact details: cgp@medievalgenealogy.org.uk

the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, which has provided an amazing range of published material in its "bibliothèque numérique" at **http://gallica.bnf.fr/**. This includes many volumes of standard reference works published on the Continent, such as *Monumenta Germaniae historica* and *Recueil des historiens des croisades,* and also a surprising number of English works, including the majority of the medieval texts published in the *Rolls Series*. Note that the material is in the form of PDF files containing scanned images of the pages, so that it can be rather slow to download, and most of the texts are not searchable.

There are many other websites providing indexes, extracts or abstracts of specific classes of records, or of records relating to particular families or places. There is also a great deal of background reference material, which can be helpful to those using the records. I have tried to provide links to as much of this as possible on my website at **http://www.medievalgenealogy.org.uk/**. Suggestions of further relevant material are always welcome.