

# SOME INTERNET RESOURCES FOR MEDIEVAL GENEALOGY

*by Chris Phillips<sup>1</sup>*

In his regular internet update, Chris Phillips presents information on some ambitious plans to place scanned printed materials on the world wide web.

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## Google Print Library Project

In December 2004, Google announced its Library Project, an ambitious programme of book scanning and text conversion, which is to be carried out in collaboration with five major libraries: the University Libraries of Harvard, Stanford, Michigan and Oxford, and the New York Public Library. It is planned to include both books protected by copyright and older works in the public domain. The latter will be made freely available for searching and browsing through Google's website, but for books still in copyright only brief extracts will be provided. Further information can be found at ***print.google.com***.

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<sup>1</sup> *Contact details: cgp@medievalgenealogy.org.uk*

Existing book digitisation programmes, such as Project Gutenberg ([www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)) and the Bibliothèque nationale's Gallica ([gallica.bnf.fr](http://gallica.bnf.fr)), are tiny by comparison with Google's Library Project. The scope of some of the libraries' participation has yet to be decided, but it is planned to scan the full holdings of the University of Michigan - about 7 million books - over a period of six years, and all the 19th-century books held at the Bodleian Library, Oxford - about 1 million volumes. At Oxford, the rate of scanning is expected to be up to 10,000 volumes per week from Autumn 2005.

Given the huge quantity of medieval source material that was published more than a century ago, the ability to search and browse these texts through the Internet is likely to transform completely our ability to trace medieval genealogy.

The Library Project sounds almost too good to be true, and unfortunately it's rather unclear how usable the material will be in practice. The idea is that the full texts of the scanned volumes will be included in Google's main index to the Internet, and that results from books will be displayed along with results from web pages. Considering the elaborate rating system that Google uses to rank its web search results, it's not clear where the results from books will end up in the list, or how easy specific volumes will be to find.

So far, relatively few books are included in the index, and they seem to be mostly modern books submitted by publishers, not volumes scanned in libraries. A few books may be displayed at the head of the results list, if a title or the name of an author is entered as a Google search query - for example, "Charles Dickens" (the full texts of the volumes do not appear to be in the index yet). Unfortunately there is no listing of books included, no way of searching by subject or ISBN number, and even the previously available facility to limit searches to books alone - excluding web pages - has been withdrawn. It is not possible to print or copy the text of the books.

So it remains to be seen whether Google's Library Project will be a godsend for medieval genealogists or a frustrating missed opportunity. Of course, Google will inevitably want to protect its commercial interests, and it seems that some details of the scheme are still uncertain because the "business model" for this enormous project hasn't yet been fully thought out. We can only hope that in the event commercial pressures won't make the new resource too difficult for serious researchers to use.

## Digitisation plans at the Family History Library

While not on anything like the scale intended by Google, digitisation work is also being planned at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. According to a post to the [soc.genealogy.medieval](mailto:soc.genealogy.medieval) newsgroup by Dolly Ziegler in December 2004, quoting a "reliable source", the Library is planning a programme of scanning and text conversion which will include the main published medieval English public records. These will be searchable and freely available. Beyond this, it is hoped to make available scans of original records from microfilm, though this work is at an early stage and will require a great deal of negotiation with copyright holders.

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### EDITORIAL COMMENT

The Foundation for Medieval Genealogy cannot even begin to compete with the above professionally funded resources, however our programme of scanning rare and specialised texts from our library will continue so long as it is not duplicated elsewhere. The texts are available to registered users and members of the FMG on our website, and for those with slow internet connections we can supply materials to order on CD-ROM. We only scan works that are out of copyright.