A jewel at the end of a cul-de-sac

By Richard D. Rands

It wasn't until after I had lived in England for several years in the late 1970s and had moved back home to the U.S. that I discovered the library in London run by the Society of Genealogists (SoG). I was really disappointed when I finally visited their facility and realized what I had missed all that time.

Hours and hours of research at the Public Records Office, now The National Archives, plus numerous other Public Record offices, churches, cemeteries, repositories, and libraries had yielded lots of information, but when I spent my first day at the SoG library, it was clear that I could have accomplished so much more in one place in a shorter time.

In the ensuing years, my business responsibilities took me back to London several times each year, and I often spent whatever time I could at the library. Even now, more than 30 years later, I plan a day or two at the library whenever we go visit the grandchildren who live in England. For those genealogists who live in England, working at the SoG library is their equivalent to going to the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah—except, of course, it does not have the immense financial backing that the FHL has, and consequently must rely on membership fees and donations.

This article discusses several aspects of the Society of Genealogists: the physical facilities of the library, the features of the society's Website (www.sog.org.uk), and the rationale for those of us who do not live in London to maintain a membership in the society.

The SoG library is located about a

The Society of Genealogists library
in London, England

10-minute walk from the Barbican Tube subway station. When you exit the station, turn to your left and walk about a quarter mile on Goswell Road until you come to a large intersection with traffic lights where Goswell Road and Clerkenwell Road come together. Just before you get to that corner is a Starbucks cafe on the left where you can get last-minute refreshment, or you can leave a nongenealogical companion to enjoy Starbucks' free Internet access while you walk the last several minutes to the library.

Outside and inside

- What's London's best genealogy secret? See above, continued on page 2.

- Got questions? We've got answers, page 4.

- A scanner for the road, page 6.

- Publish Our Work (POW!) workshop, page 6.

- Indexers head toward 1 million names, page 7.

A jewel at the end of a cul-de-sac *(continued)*

(Continued from page 1)

Continue on the same side of the street around to your left. About 100 feet after you have turned the corner and continued onto Clerkenwell Road, a cul-de-sac takes off to the left. The SoG library is on the end of the cul-de-sac, at the left side. The official address is 14 Charterhouse Buildings, Goswell Road, but I find the address quite misleading, because the cul-de-sac leads off of Clerkenwell Road, rather than Goswell Road. Be aware that the building does not look like a library from the front. In fact, it is a surprisingly small building for what you will encounter inside.

Of utmost importance is knowing that the library is closed Monday, Friday, and Sunday. You may need to schedule your travel around those days. The remaining four days—Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday—it is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. except for Thursday, when it is open until 8 p.m. Before making plans to visit the library, check its Website for days when they close for public holidays, and their annual year-end inventory closure.

When you first enter the building, you encounter a small bookstore on the left and a room of computers on the right. The computers are available for researchers to access the Internet and the library catalog. The bookstore should not be overlooked. The Society of Genealogists is one of the top publishers of research books, guides, and historical material of interest to genealogists. In 2009, they were named the Best Genealogy Book Publisher by FamilyTree Magazine. They accept Visa cards.

Directly opposite the entrance beyond the bookstore is a swinging gate that opens when members swipe a membership card. Nonmembers who wish to use the library must stop at the reception desk to the left and purchase a day-pass with the following options:

1 hour	£4	~$6
4 hours	£10	~$9
Full day	£18	~$27

Bring some sort of identification with you, such as your passport or a driver's license. Typical archive library rules dictate what can be brought into the research areas; immediately after you pass through the gate is a locker room where you can leave your "coat, briefcase, backpack, knives, scissors, scalpels, pens, cell phones, pagers, and cigarettes." The staff likes to know and approve of your electronic devices, including laptops, scanners, digital cameras, and flash drives. Also on the ground floor are classrooms, toilets, and a "common" room that contains a couple of snack vending machines.

The remaining three floors are connected by a small elevator and very steep stairs. Downstairs (Lower Library) is where the microfilm and microfiche are kept, along with the respective reading machines. In addition, a number of computers provide access to online resources and the catalog. When you identify a film or fiche you wish to view, you need to fill in a form to present to a clerk, who will quickly retrieve it for you. One problem I discovered is that the lower floor there has no general workspace to spread out your material. The one table there is reserved for the staff to assist with patrons' research questions.

The first floor above the ground floor (Middle Library) features a host of printed and audio material. You will find the typical rows of library bookshelves arranged by geographical locations. You can use computers to search the online catalog or browse the shelves by region. Open shelf browsing is one of the unique features of the

SIDE PLAN OF THE BUILDING

LIFT

Upper Library
Ireland, Armed Forces, Wills, Peerages, Biography, Family histories, Education, Occupations, Overseas, Religions, men's toilets

Middle Library
English counties, Wales & Scotland in book form, Textbooks, women's toilets

Ground Floor
Reception, Common room, Lockers, Lecture room, toilets, Society publications

ENTRANCE

Lower Library
Archives, Family Trees, Maps, Microforms, Computers

The floor plan of the Society of Genealogists

SoG library—many repositories require that you submit a request for a book or document before you see it.

Also, the Middle Library contains local histories, registers, headstone documents, census indexes, directories, poll books, and society publications. At the entrance to the floor is an enquiry desk staffed with willing, helpful librarians and volunteers who will assist with research questions and problems. I have discovered that I need their help with the online catalog because the search terms in England are often not the same ones I would use at home in California. After a futile, exhaustive search for something, I ask for help and find that I should have used a search keyword not in my vocabulary.

I also have discovered that some materials not out on the shelves are being indexed or cataloged, and the librarians can make arrangements for patrons to see them.

The top floor (Upper Library) contains more books and publications that are not specific to a region, plus the Irish collection. Marriage records, wills, directories, one-name studies, apprenticeships, church records, heraldry, family histories, military and occupational records can be found among the shelves on this floor. Most impressive is the collection of military records that supplement the records I've searched at the National Archives. Since the Society of Genealogists is a private organization, it is able to purchase and provide member access to mate-rials that otherwise would not be available to public institutions. In addition, the society has worked hard for nearly 100 years to build a collection of genealogical sources that have been otherwise overlooked. You may encounter a book or docu-

---

Membership costs about $40 per year. Is it worth it?

---

ment that will not be found anywhere else.

The online library catalog (62.32.98.6/S10312UKStaff/OPAC/) is open to members and nonmembers alike. You can perform a simple search by subject, title, author, publisher, or bar code. If you need to be more specific to filter your search, a power search provides more options. The search engine will return a list of all items that begin with your search criteria in the catalog, with the number of hits for your keyword, and will allow you to browse through the list to look for something useful.

If the item is accessible online in the collection, you will be sent to a subscription-based site, such as Origins, Findmypast, or the SoG members' area, to view them. The library index is replete with search subjects, including a lengthy list of surnames, pedigrees, family histories, and birth briefs.

When you discover a source that you would like to research, you can either hop on a flight to Heathrow, or avail yourself of the society's limited search-and-copy service. The society charges a fee of £15 per half-hour for extracting a specific entry, or a search of an index for your ancestor. The Website provides more specifics about the search-and-copy service and lists a telephone number to fax or an e-mail address to use to make arrangements for such a service. They will not accept voice telephone calls for this.

My membership costs about $40 per year Is it worth it? In my case, 14 of my 16 lines five generations back are English. Two nonmember day-passes at the library cost more than the annual subscription fee. Membership provides me with discounts on books purchased online and with a reduced hourly rate for the search-and-copy service, and gives me the ability to view online all of the digitized records in their collections, not to mention free access to the library (after spending time with grandchildren).

And the society's quarterly publication, *Genealogists' Magazine*, is well worth the cost of the subscription. It covers material extending far beyond Britain; in fact, it contained an article about difficulties of the Mormon handcart pioneers—seemingly a long way from typical British research. The Website contains an index of every issue from 1926 through 1996, plus a surname index.

It is well worth the time to go to www.sog.org.uk and look for items you have overlooked or didn't know existed. I regret not being aware of the SoG library when I lived in England, and I still maintain my membership.

Ask the doctor: Channel Islands...ISPs...

Q **I have an ancestor who we believe was born on the Isle of Jersey in the early 19th century. I'm having a difficult time finding records for the Isle of Jersey. Can you give me some suggestions?**

I'm not surprised you're having trouble, because the Isle of Jersey is a great example of a place that usually defies search engines. This place is a wonderful example of how to find material for any place you are researching.

The Isle of Jersey often is categorized as a Channel Island; its official title is the Bailiwick of Jersey. Furthermore, it is a protectorate of the United Kingdom, but is not officially part of the United Kingdom. If you enter *Isle of Jersey* in a Website search engine such as Family-Search or Ancestry, you get zero hits. If you enter *Jersey*, you get hundreds of hits—for the U.S. state of New Jersey.

The British censuses for 1841 through 1901 are online at Ancestry.com, but they are listed in the catalog as Channel Islands Censuses. The Family History Library has quite a few items for the Isle of Jersey, but you need to drill down to them. Do a place search for *Jersey* at the FHL catalog and select the Channel Islands, Jersey location. That will give you about 35 topics to examine. Click on each one and look at each item to see if they are relevant to your search. The Church records reference has two items: LDS membership records and Quaker records. This is curious, because the es-

tablished church on the Isle of Jersey is the Church of England. Where are all the Church of England parish records? Before you leave this screen, be sure to click on the button in the upper right corner: View Related Places This will give you 17 more items that refer to individual parishes; it is essential to examine each of these to see what parish records are available.

Next, do a Web search for Isle of Jersey genealogy. Several helpful links should appear. A link titled Channel Island History and Genealogy will give you access to numerous valuable links. Also, the link to Cyndi's List will give you access to many links for the Channel Islands. Navigate to a site maintained by Alex Glendinning that will give you links to Jersey parish registers and much, much more. Finally, you should spend some time looking at the GENUKI site for Jersey.

This process is a useful pattern for searching for information about a place when your research has dried up

Q **Have you had any experience with Internet service providers? I need broadband for my genealogy work, but I'm confused by all the ads.**

As a matter of fact, we just went through the process of converting our ancient DSL service to cable Internet, and although the final outcome appears to be a significant improvement, the process was a nightmare. I discovered that all the major service providers are marketing their services as a bundle that

includes voice, Internet, and television. In other words, they give you telephone services, a fast Internet connection, and TV, all with one price that may save you money. One way these bundles can save you money is that you are switched to Voice-over-IP (VoIP) for telephone service. The Internet and TV service may or may not be discounted in the bundle.

VoIP telephone service has come a long way in the last dec-

ade, as the Internet has been fine-tuned to optimize voice messages. Essentially, when you talk on a VoIP telephone, the sound of your voice is digitized, compressed, and broken into small packets that are then sent out to the Internet just like everything else that you send over the Internet. Each packet is tagged with the destination and the sequence needed to reassemble the conversation at the other end. Because the Internet is designed to send the packets of information over the most efficient lines at that instance, your conversation may not all arrive at the destination at the same time. The systems are designed to reassemble your conversation so that it is coherent. In most cases, they have to then convert it back to an audio signal and send it to the person you're call-

…tossing old documents…

ing over their local telephone lines. Ten years ago, it didn't work very well. Today, users say it works well. Because the system is digital, providers can add nifty features that could not be done easily in the past. If you have used Skype, you have used VoIP. If you are going to allow your telephone lines to be switched to VoIP, it is absolutely necessary to verify that if you need to dial 911, the service will get you to your local emergency service, and not somewhere half way across the country. Personally, I am not ready for VoIP based on experience I've have with Skype. You get what you pay for.

The various providers operate in different locations. Fiber optic cable is generally fastest for Internet connections.

AT&T is offering a bundle called U-verse that they claim is faster because it uses fiber optic cable, but the end of the fiber optic cable might be a way from your home, and the signal to your home will use the same old copper wire for the last stretch. Another problem you might encounter is that the cable in your home is controlled by your local cable TV franchise. In my area, AT&T has not negotiated a way to get access to that cable, so they wanted to rewire my entire home with their coaxial cable. Not wanting them to drill new holes all over the place and run new cables in from the outside, I decided against U-verse.

After all was said and done, I kept my standard analog telephone lines and added cable Internet to replace the old DSL

line. With the promotions offered by the cable service, I will save money for the six months of the promotion, after which my monthly cost will be the same as it was. However, the DSL download speed was less than 5Mbps (megabits per second). My new cable Internet connection was rated at more than 20Mbps. It certainly shows. Downloading a movie to my wife's iPod used to take at least a couple of hours. Now it takes perhaps 20 minutes. Occasionally when I go to the Internet first thing in the morning, I experience a short delay getting connected. Once it has a connection, it is pleasingly fast.

You can check your own download and upload speeds at www.speakeasy.net/speedtest/ .

One last piece of advice. When I ordered the cable Internet service, I was offered a free "self-install" kit or a technician installation for $25. My 25-year-old home is beginning to show its age. Even though I knew what needed to be done, I opted for the technician to do the installation. It was a good choice, because they have equipment to measure the cable's signal quality. My technician found and replaced two problematic cables in the utility cabinet, which would have seriously degraded the Internet speed. I consider the $25 well spent.

Q **I have recently inherited hundreds of family group sheets from my mother-in-law. Is it necessary to keep the hard copy of these family group sheets once I enter**

them into a database? I know they were submitted to the LDS Church. It seems redundant to have a hard copy in this computer age.

The LDS Church no longer has the physical paper copies of family group sheets submitted through the church's four-generation program. They have microfilms of them, however.

For many families, these documents are valuable because they contain information not available anywhere else. They may include sources and notations. Family history extends far beyond names, dates, and places.

Old-fashioned as it may seem, paper may prove to be more durable than digital information. No one knows how long current digital storage media will last, or what will come next. "Digital death" is a serious concern.

Sheets that were carefully typed by a family member are part of the ancestor's "collection" of papers and materials, which may be precious to descendants.

Evaluate the sheets for information not available otherwise, and for possible value to some in the family. (But then, we save…everything.)

Hocus focus: The new Magic Wand scanner

By Janet Brigham Rands

Some new gadgets generate a lot of buzz in the genealogy community. The $100 VuPoint Solutions Magic Wand handheld, battery-operated scanner is one of these. No sooner was it on the market than people began asking me if I knew anything it.

We are used to scanners attached to computers, which we activate through a program such as Photoshop Elements, which activates a scanner utility. We can preview the scan, see the scan as it happens, and know quickly if the settings are adequate.

Compared to that, using the Magic Wand is like flying an airplane on instruments. A foot long and an inch high, the device runs on two alkaline AA batteries. At first, this might seem like a step back to another century, before most devices came with rechargeable batteries that lasted reasonably long. In this case, however, replaceable batteries make sense, because this device is meant for scanning as many as hundreds of images at a library; packing some extra AA batteries is a small inconvenience for knowing you'll be able to scan everything you want.

Several companies have offered handheld scanners connected to a computer by USB: Pentax, Visioneer, Brother, and Planon.   When you're on the

Publish Our Work

SVCGG co-sponsors all-day workshop September 11

You have worked hard to find your second-great-grandma's maiden name and then traced her family back to the Revolutionary War. Now, what are you going to do with that info?

How are you going to ensure that your granddaughter does not have to do the same detective work all over again? How about adding it to your database and publishing it in a book? Or, maybe putting the info online so that your distant cousin in Ohio can find it and give you that grandmother's exact birth date and where she is buried?

Come to our September 11 workshop, Publish Our Work (POW!), a free, all-day gathering, for the kick in the pants you have been needing to get your story out. The workshop will be 8:15 a.m. to 4 p.m., at the LDS meetinghouse where SVCGG meets, 875 Quince Ave., Santa Clara, California.

The event is co-sponsored with the Santa Clara County Historical & Genealogical Society. Between the two organizations we have myriad talents and energy to motivate and help you preserve your family history, with the stories that get passed down through the generations.

Early registration is encouraged so that we can ensure the facilities are as comfortable as possible. You can register online (www.svcgg.org) or download the registration form for mailing. Same-day registration will begin at 7:30 a.m. on September 11.

POW! will give you lots of ideas on how to share and preserve your family's history or your dad's World War II story. We will have five tracks of speakers covering everything from Shutterfly photo books to Lulu hardbound books. Topics will include these:

- Big Books—Self publishing and more traditional methods, from your own genealogy program's database to selecting a cover.

- Small Books—Specialized books for your grandchildren and the how to of writing a short story about an ancestor.

- Publishing Online—Uploading a tree to Ancestry.com or publishing your own website.

- Potpourri—Displaying memorabilia, compiling a family recipe book, or making a scrapbook.

- General—Digital photography, preparing your photos for publication.

In addition to the sessions and workshops, we will have a Member Showcase. You are invited to show your own talent in how you have shared a piece of you family's history. Members are welcome to bring a calendar, quilt, wall hanging, anything that they have done to share their ancestors' stories.

See www.PublishOurWork.com for details on how to participate. There will be a prize for the best-in-show. Books will have a class of their own.

road, these scanners are powered by a laptop or netbook. This could become problematic in libraries, homes, or other facilities that have no available outlets.
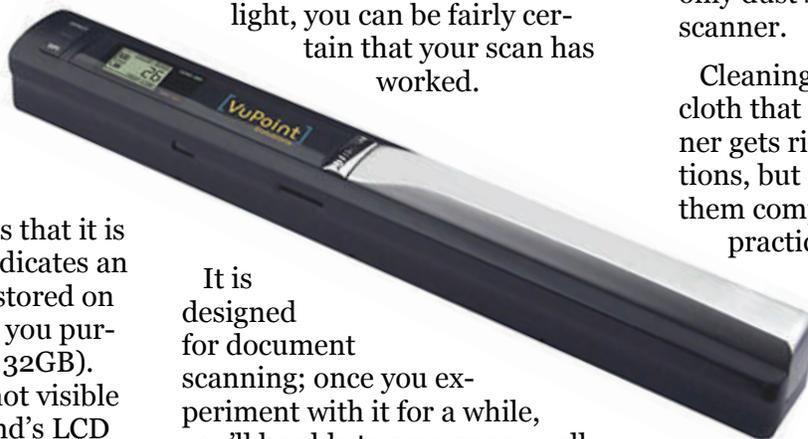
The Magic Wand works like a digital camera without a display. You scan the image by moving the scanner down the original, using marks on the scanner to keep the scanner aligned.

A green light indicates that it is scanning; a red light indicates an error. The images are stored on a microSD card (which you purchase separately, up to 32GB). The scanned image is not visible through the Magic Wand's LCD status screen. To see the scan, you need to plug a mini-USB cable into the Magic Wand to connect to a USB port on your computer (Mac OS 10.r or later; PC XP, Vista, or 7). You can navigate to the device through your computer file management system. Clicking on the image file opens your scan for viewing.

You can't scan while the Magic Wand is plugged into the USB connection, so you'll need to unplug it to continue scanning. Once you begin to trust your scanner and your technique, you won't need to check every image. A good practice, however, is to check all of the images from a source before you reshelve or return it, just to be sure. This means you'll want to take a laptop or netbook with you. Because the microSD card functions like a removable drive, you can copy the image files to a

computer drive, or an external drive connected to a computer, and delete them from the card.

The Magic Wand offers some important advantages: Its compact, it's portable, the batteries are easily replaced (no waiting for recharging), and when you get a green light with no red light, you can be fairly certain that your scan has worked.

It is designed for document scanning; once you experiment with it for a while, you'll be able to scan pages well enough for most research purposes. Saving on photocopy costs at libraries could pay for the Magic Wand within several hundred scans.

The scanner has lower- and higher-resolution settings (300 dpi and 600 dpi). It scans color or monotone. While it does an adequate job of scanning photos, the surface texture of some photos can be difficult to move the scanner across.

Two disadvantages of the Magic Wand are linked: The

scans tend to have minor vertical striations, which don't affect the readability of scanned documents but do diminish the quality of scanned photographs. Because you are moving the scanner down an image, any small specks on the lens turn into streaks, whereas they would be only dust specks on a flatbed scanner.

Cleaning the lens with the soft cloth that comes with the scanner gets rid of the larger striations, but might not eliminate them completely. You'll want to practice scanning .
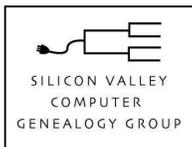
The Magic Wand comes with passable OCR software that can help you transfer scanned text into text you can paste into a word processing document.

If you need to scan important original documents and pictures, you'll be better off with a portable flatbed (not sheet-fed) scanner. The reality is, however, that once you start carting the little Magic Wand around, it may be the only scanner you happen to have handy when you encounter that once-in-a-lifetime family Bible or photo. If that happens, you'll be glad you practiced.

SVCGG indexing approaches 1M names

A dedicated crew of more than 100 indexers has indexed more than 831,000 names through the SVCGG indexing project, including more than 91,000 so far in 2010. The project is affiliated

with FamilySearch Indexing, which involves indexing millions records so that the searchable indexed information can be available free through the site FamilySearch.org.

SILICON VALLEY
COMPUTER
GENEALOGY GROUP

Officers and Staff

Richard Rands	President
	rrands@earthlink.net
	650-969-6567
Janet Brigham Rands	Vice-president, webmaster
Wanda Levy	Secretary
Carleen Foster	Treasurer
Lesly Klippel	Membership director
	leslyk@comcast.net
Brian Smith	Program chair
	bsmith4gen@yahoo.com
Allin Kingsbury	Newsletter editor
	a.kingsbury@sbcglobal.net
Pat Burrow	Board member at-large
Howard Bennion	Macintosh consultant
Leland Osburn	Education administrator
Pamela Erickson	
Betsy Shafer	Assistant editors
Carleen Foster	Newsletter mailing
Website	www.svcgg.org

Upcoming SVCGG meetings, events

The group meets monthly except December, on the second Saturday of the month from 9 to 11 a.m. at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 875 Quince Ave., Santa Clara, California (see map at right). These are the August classes:
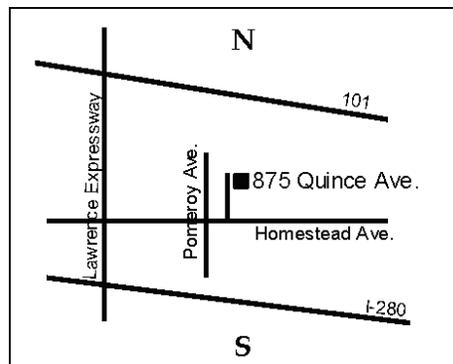
August 14 meeting

- Internet research
- Backup schemes—save your fanny (and your data)
- Reunion for the Mac
- Getting started with Reunion
- Beginning genealogy Q & A

September 11 workshop Publish Our Work

Our September 11 meeting will be a day-long workshop entirely about genealogy publishing (see p. 6). The workshop will have multiple tracks with more than 25 sessions on publishing methods, plus a show-and-tell exhibit area. publishourwork.com.

See www.svcgg.org/directions.html

About the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group

SVCGG is the former Silicon Valley PAF Users Group, a nonprofit group of some 600 genealogy enthusiasts. The group is based in Silicon Valley in the Bay Area of northern California, but members live all over the world.

PastFinder is the official publication of the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group. Published monthly except December, *PastFinder* is distributed at meetings to members in attendance and mailed to others after the meetings. Members can receive the newsletter by e-mail containing a download link.

SVCGG offers research tools and materials through its website, www.svcgg.org.

Membership dues are US$15 per household per year, US$20 for Canada, and US$25 for other international locations.