

Into the Unknown

I received an invitation to join a group on Facebook called Lincolnshire GEDMatch. I had no idea what GEDMatch was, so I decided to investigate. Little did I know where it would lead me.

GEDMatch is an organisation to provide comparisons of DNA reports. As I have had very little success in tracing Lincolnshire ancestry I decided to join. On Facebook is the opportunity to ask people if they have ancestors with the names and locations you are researching. My search is around my maternal grandmother, Margaret Smith, born in Whaplode Drove.

The next thing was to submit my DNA report to the GedMatch web site. I didn't even realise that I could get my DNA report from Ancestry. I managed to download the report after following instructions from GedMatch. It was in spreadsheet format and is massive. Anyway, the download to my computer and the subsequent upload to GEDMatch were both successful.

The next thing was to run the utilities against my report. It is possible to run a "One on Many" report which compares every DNA report in the database against my own and reports on matches. The number of matches is quite amazing. The vast majority of them are only distant matches which are really only to do with geography rather than recognisable ancestors. Many were showing that their DNA tests were not from Ancestry but from other companies like "23andMe" who also check health issues, for a fee.

The next step is to find matches which are closest and run them against a "One on One" comparison which tells you which DNA units match and their level of significance. It also gives an estimate of the distance of relationship. Many are 4.5+ which means that they are likely to be greater than 4 times removed. That is, that the common link is further than 4 generations away. I have to admit to running these utilities with little understanding of what some of the numbers mean. Maybe I need to look back at the Family Tree magazine. There are also tutorials on YouTube describing what they are and their meanings.

So what have I found so far? The nearest link is 4.4 with someone who is in New Zealand. The only way I know that they are there is because their email ends ".NZ". There are many more links to look at.

The next step was to upload my family tree. It has to be exported from Family Tree Maker in GEDCOM format. When I ran the export utility, it failed with unexplained errors. So I ran the error reporting in FTM, to find that there were a number of logical errors, most of which were duplicate "Residences" from Census Records, and some with multiple birth dates which I had caused by linking to other trees on Ancestry. On investigating the errors, I also discovered some anomalies which were worth looking into.

I found 2 William Bourn's, born 2 years apart with the same parents. I thought that I had created 2 people instead of showing an alternative birth date, so I went to merge them. Fortunately, as I was checking the data, I found that one had died at less than a year old and the other was born after the death so had been given the same name as the child who had been lost.

Then, the surviving William Bourn appeared to have a wife with alternative names, Esther or Mary Hogg. In fact they were sisters and William married Esther the year after Mary died.

Looking at these records I found that a number of that generation had new document matches such as against parish records which had appeared since I created their record on Ancestry. So I pursued them, ignoring many from other trees.

When I was satisfied that I had done enough, I tried again to export to a GEDCOM file, and this time it worked. My next step was to upload the file to GEDMatch and see what appeared. Having uploaded the file I allowed some time for the file to be established, then I was able to run a comparison against other trees. As many of them, again were not on Ancestry I was hoping for a match or matches. A very large number of matches came up, and I have not yet trawled through them all. However, the ones I have checked are not matches at all. It appears that the comparison software had simply matched a name the same or similar, and with a birth date within about 10 years of the person in my tree. Also, the majority appear to be in the USA. Consequently, I have not yet found a match anywhere.

There is an option to run a comparison with tree and DNA. Unfortunately there is a fee of \$10 (yes, dollars) per month to subscribe to the Level 1 membership. So far I have not paid anything so it needs serious consideration.

I have now also registered my DNA file in GEDMatch with the Lincolnshire group, which is where I started. Watch this space.