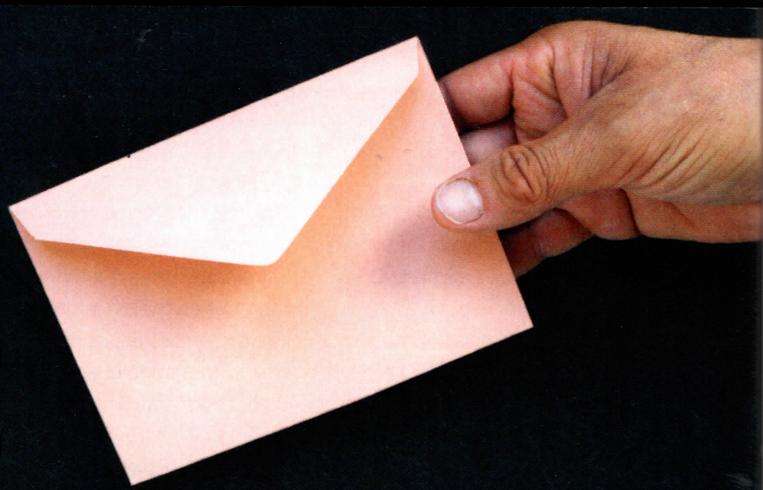


Your LETTERS



Your discoveries, dilemmas and old documents uncovered on the family history learning curve...

An important lesson learned

I thought that perhaps readers in the early stages of research might appreciate this example of the importance of sighting original documents before jumping to conclusions.

In 2012 when I was a member of the South Australian Genealogy & Heraldry Society (SAGHS), I was searching for the marriage certificate of my 2x great-grandmother Sarah Smith (née Hinde) on my father's side.

Sarah had emigrated to South Australia in 1852 aboard the *Medina* from Liverpool as a 19-year-old domestic servant, and married John Henry Smith in St Jude's Church, Brighton, South Australia in 1857. I was sure it would be straightforward.

The SAGHS has an excellent library of resources including the use of microfiche and film readers. Using the facts that I had already established through prior research, and the South Australian Marriages – Index of Registrations 1852-1916, I was at first delighted to find a microfiche image of a marriage certificate.

The dates were correct, the church, the volume and page number – but wait... What was this?

Sarah Hinde's father, whom I had understood to be a butcher, William Hinde, was not mentioned as the bride's father! In his place was one Jesse McInnes.

See my transcript of the index below:

SMITH, John Henry MI (minor) (marital status not recorded) (father James Henry SMITH) married 4 July 1857 HINDE, Sarah (full age) (marital status not recorded) (father Jesse MCINESS) at St Jude Brighton Dist Ade Sym A b30 p69

I followed this puzzle with a look-up in a public library with an Ancestry Library subscription. Its source was the Australia Marriage Index 1788-1950 and – again, everything correct except Sarah's father, once again given as Jesse McInnes. Transcript of index being:

*Name: John Henry Smith
Spouse name: Sarah Hinde
Spouse's father's name: Jesse McInnes
Marriage date: 4 June 1857
Marriage place: Brighton
Reg. Place: Adelaide SA
Page no. 69
Vol no. 30*

What, then, did this do for Sarah's supposed father Jesse McInnes as stated on her marriage certificate to John Smith in 1857 in South Australia? Did her father William Hinde die? Divorce? Go to prison? Did her mother Elizabeth (née Bell) remarry? Did she live in a defacto relationship with Jesse? Would she have been known as 'Betty' on some official documents?

I searched through many Jesse McInnes lines, and many named William Hinde, probate and prison records etc, and really felt I had come up against another brick wall, so decided to let the matter rest.

Six years later one of my first cousins handed me a box of documents from his late mother's effects. One of the prizes within was a folder containing several original certificates – including the marriage certificate of Sarah Hinde to John Henry Smith. It was one of those 'wow' moments for there,

as plain as day, was William Hinde as Sarah's father – and who was Jesse McInnes(s)? He was one of the two

witnesses to the marriage (the other was John's father, James Henry Smith)!

Note: On the incorrect document, although James Henry did appear as

one witness, the other was a totally different person!

It had all proved to be nothing more than some clerk making the mistake of swapping the two names when he was copying the document.

Sadly, all the indexes (and later I found on several public online trees) had blindly accepted Sarah's father being Jesse McInnes.

An important lesson learned. *Never* presume even 'official' documents to be 100 per cent accurate, and *always* take public trees, and indexes, only as a guide until everything can be verified. And never under-estimate the value of cousins' contributions (many thanks to Ian Masters of Victoria, Australia).

Wendy Baker

Editor: Three cheers for cousins and other helpful relations. Well done solving your brick wall, Wendy

The dates were correct, the church, the volume and page number – but wait... What was this?

An original certificate, passed down through the family, solved a brick wall that has stood strong for six years

