



# The Website *IS* the One-Name Study

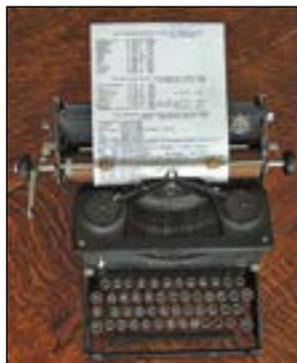
by Mike Spathaky (Member 1785)

When I was 13 years old my grandmother, Annie Cree, showed me her family Bible with the names of five generations of her ancestors written on the fly-sheets. I was fascinated and started my first transcription project, in the process learning to type on Grandpop's typewriter, a new technology for me.

A couple of years later I wandered into my parish church in rural Norfolk and in the vestry I found the chest containing the parish register – the “sure coffer” decreed by Thomas Cromwell in 1538 to be kept in every parish vestry. Records back to the 1500s were written in a neat chancery hand on calf-skin vellum pages. As I read the ancient records of baptisms, marriages, and burials I reflected that there were far more burials recorded here than on the ancient headstones outside the church. Clearly, pen and vellum were a technological advance on carvings in stone.

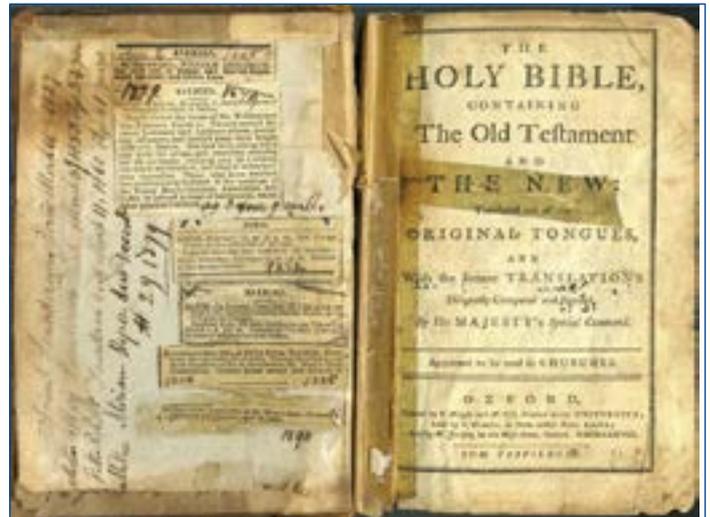
When I took up family history in earnest around 1989, most of my research was done in county records offices, to which parish registers had been transferred. We were still mostly handling original registers. Technology was represented by the microfiche International Genealogy Index (the IGI) produced by the Mormons, which was a very partial index of those registers.

Meanwhile, Trevor Cree spent many hours over many days in St Catherine's House, London, and New Register House, Edinburgh, extracting the Cree entries from the indexes of births, marriages, and deaths, which he published (using spreadsheets) in book form. Coming across a copy of his “Cree – Volume 1” in 1989, I straight away started on family reconstructions, and thus was born the Cree One-Name Study. Trevor and I have collaborated on Cree surname research ever since, though we have not met face to face more than half a dozen times.



A Cree One-Name Society was started, which attained world-wide membership of over 100 during its 10-year life. Conferences were held, newsletters published, and lively correspondence maintained around the world.

We found that others had researched branches of Cree genealogy in England, Scotland, and America long before us, though we did not realise until the 1990s how widely distributed the name was. We found separate lines originating in England, Scotland, and Ireland; and spreading to all parts of the English-speaking world (and occasionally beyond).



The family Bible: A mass of family history on one page.

The Scottish name Cree (with its earlier spelling Crie) has occurrences back to 1459 and is a surname in its own right. Other lines have become Cree as variants of different names, and have themselves spawned variants. From the early 1990s, the research became a true one-name study, incorporating the researches of previous family historians, collecting records on a world-wide basis, and pushing the family reconstructions onwards with the increasing availability of records.

Within a few years I had a four-drawer filing cabinet full of records and several metres of shelf space full of lever-arch files and ring-binders containing the correspondence and records of the one-name study.

Early on I bought a genealogy software package, *The Master Genealogist* (TMG), with which I created and manage a lineage-linked database of details of every individual who can be related to a Cree family line. At first I kept a separate database for each group of Cree lines – the Scottish, Irish, English, and so on. Robert H Cree of Pennsylvania sent GEDCOMs of five Cree lines originating in that state in the 1700s, the result of 50 years' research. He said that the Cree One-Name Study was what he had been looking for to preserve his work as he approached his 90s.

I later combined the separate databases into a single large one. As TMG allocates a unique identifying number to every person, we could now identify each person by this “Cree ID.” (There are 131 people named James Cree with no middle name in the database.)

I have digitised most of the paper records in recent years. Now almost all the material is on the Cree One-Name Study website at [www.cree.name](http://www.cree.name). So, in a sense, it is already “in the

cloud” in that it’s on a reputable hosting company’s web servers. It is also well backed up to on-site and off-site locations.

The website now contains virtually all of the data collected. Much of this is in spreadsheet format, such as birth, marriage, and death indexes, the Scottish Old Parochial Registers Index, ships’ passenger lists, newspaper indexes, and military records indexes around the world. Over 20 such spreadsheets are available for download in the Lists Section of the site.

More text-rich material can be viewed in the Archives Section. This includes transcriptions of medieval documents that throw light on the development of the surname in the period before we have connected genealogies. There are also transcriptions of documents relating to particular Cree individuals whose lives have been researched in detail, such as Irishman John Cree who made his fortune in 18th century Bengal as a free East India merchant; letters written from home to Joe and Martha Cree who migrated to America in 1843 to escape the poverty of north-east Derbyshire; and the expansion of the working-class Cree population in Newark, Nottinghamshire, from a single couple who settled there in 1795.

More extended pieces of work of booklet length are also included in the Archives Section. Many of these were originally print editions in the *Cree Booklets* series, such as the meticulously kept shipboard diary of newly-married Jesse Cree who set sail from Greenock, Scotland, in 1861 with a flock of sheep and sundry other farm animals to join her husband in Oamaru, New Zealand. Biographies and wills also find a place in this section, which is therefore crossing the line between raw data and the analysis of that data.

Binding all this together is the Database Section. A program called *Second Site* converts the genealogy database created by TMG into web pages, including a “Person Details” page for every person in the database (apart from those still alive). Each person is linked to their ancestors and descendants through web links, mini-pedigree charts and full descendancy charts. The web pages are created off-line and uploaded to the website. They are static web pages compiled in HTML and Javascript, so no live on-line database is required. This makes the whole site portable – to DVD for example. A DVD containing the website is submitted to the Guild archives every six months or so.

The Cree ID number allocated by TMG is used to tag the entries in the spreadsheets of the Lists Section. Clearly, many people in the lists will not yet have been identified as members of trees in the Database Section, so their Cree IDs in the spreadsheet remain blank. The ratio of completed to blank Cree IDs gives us a good measure of our progress in reconstructing Cree families, branches, and lines.

Other links between individuals are created throughout the website and I regard this as a major benefit of a web-based study, in that every viewer will use the site in their own personal way by following the links that interest them. Few, if any, will want to read a website of over a thousand pages from beginning to end!

In my view, a one-name study is nothing if the results of its researches are not published to ensure their availability for posterity. The website is, of course, an ideal channel for publication. Central to this is the Family History Section in



Digital: This may yet be the most long-lived medium and can encompass all earlier ones.

which we take each Cree line and branch in turn and summarise its history in a narrative form that brings out the full flavour of the unique story of its people and ancestral lines and gives a new aspect to history, hopefully back to the time when surnames began, history as experienced by people with the surname Cree.

Cree may be an unusual surname in that we have identified five origins that are geographically and linguistically distinct. An Origins Section paints a broad-brush picture across all Cree lines around the world and clarifies their distribution, migrations, and origins.

The News Section gives the latest news of research developments. It also contains copies of all issues of the printed newsletter *Cree News* from the 1990s, and a full sequence of the web-based news bulletins that replaced it.

Communication is more effective if it is a two-way process, so our Contacts Section encourages users of the website to contact us – and even each other through the interactive Cree Family History Network. This is a sister website run by fellow researcher Trevor Cree which provides opportunities to post on forums, create blogs, and exchange messages, photographs, and copies of documents. This has resulted in wider participation in the one-name study and has enabled people to disseminate their family knowledge and research results to the wider Cree Family History Network with an immediacy that was not possible earlier. This data can then be incorporated into the more structured Cree surname website.

Another linked website is that of the Cree YDNA Surname Project, started and maintained by Cree researcher Gary Maher in the USA. DNA testing has confirmed links between several Cree lines and has also led to some intriguing mysteries.

In summary, the website now comprises all aspects of the one-name study, the collection of data, its analysis and synthesis, collaboration between researchers and others interested in the Cree surname, and the publication of results.

So can the filing cabinet really go? Not quite. It will still house the family Bible and my 1955 typescript where I added two more generations down to myself and my cousins. Now there are two more generations: my grandchildren will inherit the Bible and some other memorabilia. I just hope that, after my death, further generations will keep the website alive, accessible to all, not just as a DVD in an archive, because now, for me, the website *is* the one-name study. ■