



Genealogy of the family Helon.

**YOUR STORY**

# Family History: digging your own grave!

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Captivated and spurred on by the advent and promulgation of documentary reality television programs such as 'Who Do You Think You Are' and 'Finding Your Roots' some people have become obsessed with the science of genealogy – the study of families and the tracing of one's lineage and history – in the hope that they might descend from some royal or noble personage, or be related to some famous mega star or historical character of notoriety.

Similarly, viewers have been enthralled with television shows like Downton Abby where they have been mesmerized and drawn into a world that depicts a family's endeavors to retain their genteel lifestyle and social standing against the back drop of a fast changing world.

Makes some really ponder the conundrum "where am I from?" To seek answers to the many questions that have plagued them all of their lives. Then "lo and behold!" there appears an advertisement on the television, or in a magazine offering free access to "millions of online records" – and what's more, a FREE TRIAL!

Now is the time you are pinching yourself ... wow! Free! Ooo!

But sadly, nothing is ever free. The old adage that "if it sounds too good to be true, it usually is" really comes into its own in this instance.

What these family history services providers actually offer during these "free trial" campaigns is just access to snippets of indexed documents. Yes, there are "millions of online records" but when you go to actually try and view them you are prompted to create an account with them.

But to create an account with them you have to provide these service providers with your credit card details, then accept a plethora of terms and conditions.

Now in your excitement you couldn't be bothered to read all of the 'small print' – big mistake!

If you are lucky enough to have predominately Australian, English, or American ancestors then you might find your pot of gold, but for those of us with ancestors from the European continent it becomes a sad and vain exercise met with disappointment!

After a few days of sitting up all hours of the night downloading this and that with pleasant surprises, or experiencing that melancholy resulting from futile searching and crashed high hopes, you decide that your

honeymoon with family history is over.

And like any divorce, this is where things get really messy.

The “free trial” period that you entered into might not yet have expired, so you go to your service provider’s account dashboard and select the cancel option and assume that is the end of the matter; but not quite, as you will unfortunately find out later when your bank account has been raided and you are out-of-pocket.

After recovering from the shock of being robbed by your ancestors, you decide to try and find out “how come?” It is only then – much to your dismay and horror – that you discover that according to your acceptance of the service provider’s terms and conditions (remember the fine print that you couldn’t be bothered to read ..... yawn) you have inadvertently authorised an ongoing subscription which you have committed to and are contractually obligated to pay for.

Quite simply, it is not sufficient to just click cancel from your account dashboard to divest yourself from your contractual obligations - you actually have to submit a written or recorded request directly to the service provider to cancel not only your subscription, but any further debits to your nominated bank account; this condition is often buried somewhere deep in their T&Cs.;

As these family history service providers are generally overseas based they only have token administrative representation locally, so trying to contact them through official channels is often a frustrating and fruitless task.

Often sending a private message, or open comment to the service provider via Facebook or Twitter will solicit a quicker and more positive response as you are airing dirty linen publicly and these organisations jealously value their online reputation and presence.

Remember too that what information and documents which you provide, or upload to these service providers becomes their property, and come the day you are no longer subscribed to their services, you will have to pay a fee to get access to that which you so willingly provided them.

Caveat emptor – buyer beware!  
#Helon