

## Ever-increasing circles

Hi John,

Just to let you know, I'm well on the way to becoming a fully-fledged genealogist. I'm delving into our family tree, and all because of my grandson, Tom. A teacher gave his class a project on identity. Of course, at first it sounded really dry and boring to him. As far as he could see, he was born here and has never moved, so all he managed to come up with was the classic primary school stuff: Leicester is the county town of Leicestershire in the East Midlands, and so on. But he is a bright boy and he saw that this hardly makes for riveting reading. So, knowing that I've always been interested in history, he asked me. I pointed out that, although I live in Leicester now, I was born in Southampton. I also reminded him that his mum comes from Portsmouth, and that his other grandfather hails from Ayrshire. So Tom's not even totally English, much less a pure Midlander! This got me thinking, so I started trawling the internet and soon unearthed some fascinating facts.

Apparently, one of my grandfathers is a direct descendant of a soldier who settled near Bruges after the Napoleonic Wars and married a Belgian. By some weird coincidence, one side of my mother's family were Belgian lace makers who came over to England in the 16th century. Were my mum and dad destined to get together because of their genes?

I've also found out that the Scottish side of the family has some Spanish blood, via Ireland, where sailors had fetched up after the 1588 Armada. It also emerged that our Portsmouth connections go right back in Hampshire history to the arrival of William the Conqueror. I haven't yet established whether the family were Saxons or Normans. They may have been both.

Until I embarked on this, I didn't realise the extent of our family links with other countries. And it's certainly opened young Tom's eyes. He's now realised that he is English, from the British Isles, but that he also has roots in Belgium, France, Spain and what is now part of Germany.

But, as I said to him, the wonder of identity is that it's not just about the past or ancient history. Identity is also about today (and even tomorrow). His sister's been teaching English in Prague for two years now and she's going out with a Czech, while his elder brother has been living just outside Porto for over five years and is showing no signs of moving. So if they settle where they are and have children, Tom will have Portuguese and Czech relatives as well!