

Genealogy apps for Android phones & tablets

Introduction

Many of us use a genealogy program to record the details of our research and also to guide us where to add more details. But that is at home and when we go to a library or record office I always need details of what I already know about that part of the tree on paper, as I can never remember it all. I can also find that there is something I didn't take with me and think how useful it would be to have all the info on my PC with me.

Many people do now have an electronic device that could help them with that as many now carry a smart phone round with them. I only have the need for a simple phone as I rarely use it, but I have now bought a tablet computer so that I can sit with it in my hand and read my email via wi-fi or browse the web. So that could be used for the job.

So I've been looking for software to do that. The first dependency is the software running on the phone/tablet, and that depends on who made it. Apple have their own system, but the majority of other suppliers run the Android operating system, and that is what my tablet runs.

As I didn't want a full genealogy program to compete with the one I already run on my PC, I only need to look for a gedcom viewer, as all useful genealogy programs can export their data in a gedcom file. I don't want the ability to update it on my tablet as it is much easier using the keyboard on the PC, and far faster to use a piece of paper to write down what I discover in the library. The majority of the ones I found provide the means to view your existing data, but not to modify it and then have to transfer it back to the PC.

Android apps

So a search for this found http://www.androidzoom.com/android_applications/gedcom and it was then a case of comparing what was available. One criteria being that the data is all held on the device without the need for any phone or wi-fi signal to use it.

The first thing to notice is that there are free ones, always attractive, and ones that have a small cost. So for the purposes of evaluation I've just looked at the ones that are free. Many do seem to have a free version with some restrictions, and more features in the one you pay for. One of the limitations in some free ones is the amount of people it can handle. The gedcom file I've used for testing has around 500 people in it and quite a range of data, but no pictures.

Once I started the comparison I found that there is very little documentation or instructions on how to use the apps, and in how to give it the gedcom file. In most I found that when the app was installed, it created its own folder on the tablet and if the gedcom file e.g. phil.ged was placed in there it used it. The other main criteria was the amount of detail in the data they extracted from the gedcom file, and the ease of finding individuals. This comparison was done in early 2013. Features in the apps may change over time, and they may work better with your data rather than mine.

Family Bee (Free trial) - this found my gedcom file but failed to load anything from it. So I crossed it off the list.

FamilyGTG (Free) - seemed to just show relationships and no details at all not even birth/marriage dates. So that was rejected.

The Family Tree of Family - couldn't find a way to get it to successfully read my gedcom file, but it does seem to have the ability to enter information (all the rest just display existing data). Again I rejected it.

GedTreeFree - showed a chart with some people on it, but with no way to see the rest. A tap on a name showed a little more detail, birth and death date. Again I rejected it.

EzGED Viewer - this looked much better as it shows individuals, families and descendency trees. It shows the full details for an individual from the gedcom file. I did want some more options on the descendency tree as it gives you a list of people, but that could do with some dates as I want to know which is which of the five Richard Hightons in the selection menu.

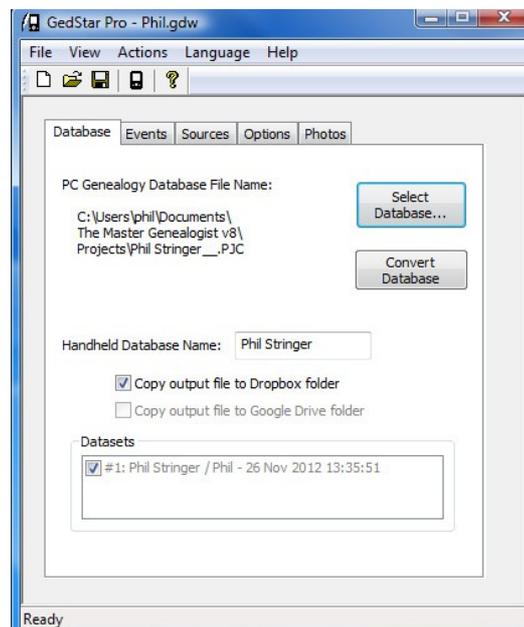
GedStar Pro Genealogy viewer - This uses a slightly different approach. It has a completely free app with support for thousands of people and lost of detail, but reads gedstar format files rather than gedcom. You need to purchase a Windows program to convert from gedcom or if you have The Master Genealogist, or Legacy Family Tree it can read their databases directly. My gedcom file was not in the right character set, ANSEL, but as I run TMG I got it to read that database directly. It did even though it is an ancient version of TMG (windows95!). The Windows program is free for the first 30 days so that is good for trying it out.

This looks far superior to any of the others, especially on a tablet. I didn't realise I had associated photographs of key individuals in my database as it shows these by default in the person view. It has all the details, and list sources. The thing I really liked was its ability to show you places on a map. Navigation is good as it shows descendency and ancestry trees on the right of the screen. This is the one I chose and I bought the license for the conversion program.

For a simpler yet still reasonably powerful view EzGED Viewer would be my second choice.

Gedstar Pro

I've now been using GedStar Pro for few months now, and it does appear to be very well engineered, not just within the app but also the environment to easily transfer the data from my PC when I make the changes there. A number of the others assume you are already an expert in copying the data across and putting it where the app can find it. I just start GedStar on my PC which remembers where the database is. I click the convert button and it creates a gedstar file and uploads it into my dropbox account in 'the cloud'. Then on the tablet I start the dropbox app and click the file which transfers it across and starts the gedstar app. If I'm not transferring data I just start the gedstar app to have all the information in front of me. You get all the information you have recorded for a person, the family group(s) to which they belong and ancestry & descendant trees with pictures if you have recorded them. You can also include pictures of places, documents etc. Then for all the places it can show them on online maps but for it to get it right it is best if you have recorded the lat/lon for all the places.



Windows program to create gedstar file

When you start the Gedstar app on your phone or tablet, you will see the details of the first person in your tree, and subsequently it will remember the last person you were looking at. Here as an example is my grandfather.

The screenshot shows a mobile application interface for a person's profile. At the top, there are navigation icons for 'PEOPLE', 'FAVORITES', and 'LISTS'. The profile is for Joseph Cross, born 25 Oct 1888 in Lytham, Lancs, and died 12 Apr 1954 at 3 Church Rd, Lytham, Lancs. Below the profile information, there are two tabs: 'Parents' and 'Siblings'. The main content is a list of events, each with a date and description:

Name-Var	Joseph Cross
Name-Nick	Joe Cross
Birth	1888; Lytham, Lancs
Residence	Woodville Cottage, Swainson St, Lytham, Lancs
Christning	1888 (0); The sponsors were Thomas and Mary Ann Cross.
Census	1901 (12); 3 Church Rd, Lytham, Lancs
Marriage	1913 (24); John Hodskinson
Residence	1913 (24); 3 Church Rd, Lytham, Lancs
Residence	1921 (~33); 3 Church Rd, Lytham, Lancs
Marriage	1921 (32); Hilda Clark
Son-Bio	1921 (33); Peter Cross
Residence	Bunker St, Freckleton, Lancs
Dau-Bio	1924 (35); Peggy Cross
Residence	1925 (~37); 133 Preston Rd, Lytham, Lancs
Dau-Bio	1925 (36); Cicely Cross
Son-Bio	1927 (38); Michael Cross
Residence	23 Church Road, Lytham, Lancs
Occupation	master florist This is the description on official documents and he did work in the shop where his
Residence	29 Church Road, Lytham, Lancs
Residence	3 Church Rd, Lytham, Lancs
Death	1954 (65); 3 Church Rd, Lytham, Lancs
Causedeath	1954 (65); Cause: 1(a) Coronary Thrombosis (b) Arterio-Sclerosis
Burial	1954 (65); Saltcotes Cemetery, Saltcotes Road, Lytham, Lancs
Obituary	MR. JOSEPH CROSS - We regret to report the death on Monday, of Mr. Joseph Cross, member of...

At the bottom of the screen, there are navigation icons for back, home, and search, along with a status bar showing the time 15:49 and battery level.

At the top left of the screen are icons which enable you to switch between details of the individual, the family, and ancestral or descendant trees.

The app knows the size of the screen you have and the orientation. So if it is a tablet rather than a phone, when you move it into a landscape orientation, it automatically shows an ancestor tree on the right.

Cross
Joseph
M
Birth 25 Oct 1888
Lytham, Lancs
Death 12 Apr 1954
3 Church Rd, Lytham, Lancs
ID: 6
Tags: 24
Parents Siblings

Name-Var Joseph Cross
Name-Nick Joe Cross
Birth 1888; Lytham, Lancs
Residence Woodville Cottage, Swainson St, Lytham, Lancs
Christning 1888 (0); The sponsors were Thomas and Mary Ann Cross.
Census 1901 (12); 3 Church Rd, Lytham, Lancs
Marriage 1913 (24); John Hodkinson
Residence 1913 (24); 3 Church Rd, Lytham, Lancs
Residence 1921 (~33); 3 Church Rd, Lytham, Lancs
Marriage 1921 (32); Hilda Clark
Son-Bio 1921 (33); Peter Cross
Residence Bunker St, Freckleton, Lancs

Family Tree:
Peter Cross (1809 - ? ID: 269)
James Cross (1848 - 1897 ID: 25)
Margaret Ramsbottom (1809 - ? ID: 270)
Joseph Cross (1888 - 1954 ID: 6)
Richard Haighton (1818 - 1889 ID: 212)
Ellen Haighton (1846 - 1912 ID: 26)
Martha Park (1812 - 1873 ID: 213)

When you click on one of the details in the the list, such as the christening above, you then get shown more information.

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Joseph
M
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Census 1901 (12); 3 Church Rd, Lytham, Lancs
Marriage 1913 (24); John Hodkinson
Residence 1913 (24); 3 Church Rd, Lytham, Lancs
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Marriage 1921 (32); Hilda Clark
Son-Bio 1921 (33); Peter Cross
Residence Bunker St, Freckleton, Lancs

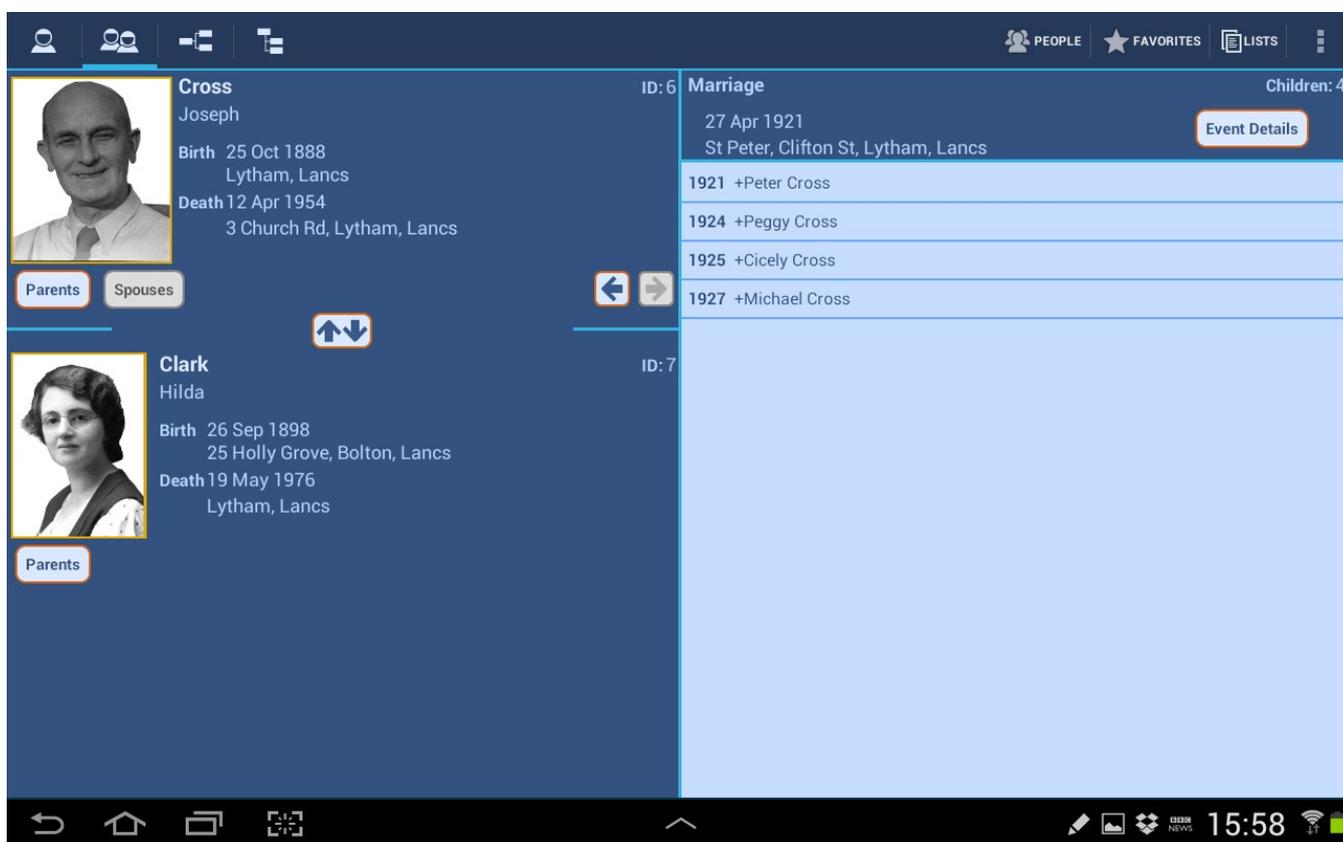
Christning Details
P1: Cross, Joseph [6]
P2:
4 Nov 1888
St Peter, Clifton St, Lytham, Lancs
53.73714N, 2.95934W
Tap to view on map
Role: Principal
Source

The sponsors were Thomas and Mary Ann Cross.

Now you can see where it happened, and I've included a picture, and exact location in my Master Genealogist database. So if you then click on the location you are given the option to see this on a map or in Google Earth which of course has the Streetview option. If you haven't recorded a lat/lon it makes a reasonable guess as to where it is, but it isn't easy based on just a comma separated list of names. So I've gone through the exercise of working out the lat/lon for all my places and in the process finding they weren't always quite where I'd thought they were. I even enhanced the Genuki gazetteer to make it easy to find the lat/lon.

If you click the picture it shows a bigger version, and if you click the source button it shows the citation and source details you have recorded in your database. If you have recorded an image of your source, these will be shown in a similar way to the picture above. All images though have been reduced in size when they are copied over from Windows to limit the file size, and because you have a smaller screen. But the resolution of documents, such as census images, isn't large enough to be able to read the detail.

This is the family screen and you can click on the people in here to move to them. You can also do the same by clicking on people in the ancestor or descendant trees.



The descendant tree format is as follows, but in this example I used Joe's father to give some detail. Joe though is below the bottom of the screen. The blank boxes show that I haven't found the names of their wives yet, so I'll have to use lancashirebmd and find that information.



PEOPLE

FAVORITES

LISTS



James Cross
1848 - 1897 ID: 25



Ellen Haighton
1846 - 1912 ID: 26

Peter Cross
1872 - 1878 ID: 27

Richard James Cross
1874 - 1938 ID: 28

Hubert Cross
1876 - 1877 ID: 29

Margaret Mary Cross
1878 - 1947 ID: 30

Martha Mary Cross
1880 - 1955 ID: 31

Peter Cross
1882 - 1956 ID: 32

[Redacted]

Adeline Cross
? - 1999 ID: 102

Marjorie Cross
ID: 103

Terence Cross
ID: 104

Ellen Frances Mary Cross
1884 - 1952 ID: 33

John Hodskinson
1883 - ? ID: 160

Joseph Gildea
ID: 161

Herbert Cross
1886 - ? ID: 34

[Redacted]

Herbert Cross
ID: 112

William Cross
ID: 113

[Redacted]

The next stage in my family tree will be adding in pictures of all the people, places they lived and churches as that makes the information much easier for other folk to relate to. And this app on a tablet is a very simple way to encourage your relatives to show an interest! When I update my TMG database with new information I just create a new version of the gedstar file and transfer it to the tablet where gedstar uses the new information.

To help further confuse those of you without an android device, as well as being able to install apps (programs), there can also be widgets. These are rather like an icon driven by a program and this just sit on the desktop. I've got one showing the date & time, and another the events for the next few days in my calendar. GedStar Pro also has a widget available which tells you who was born, married or died today in your database. So there is frequently a snippet of information pulled from your database every day.

So if you have an android phone or tablet why not give one of these a try as it cost nothing to try, and you may be surprised by what is available.

Phil Stringer

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