Ethical Dilemmas in Genealogy
by
Penny Walters

I'm a nice person. *'I'm just compiling our family tree, what possible problems could there be?*

Researching a family tree traditionally involved asking relatives about their lives, drawing a tree and undertaking a paper trail, but it now involves finding new mostly online records and dealing with strangers on the internet. What information should and shouldn't you include on your tree?

Ethical dilemmas came to the forefront since law enforcement utilised information from GEDMatch to apprehend a suspected serial killer, which created a division in the genealogy field about invasion of privacy. Ethical dilemmas unfolding include discovering other people's secrets, lies, enslavement, unexpected ethnicities, indigenous cultures, convict ancestors, criminality, new DNA relatives, and finding that some relatives aren't now related. and considering ethical issues with empathy, sensitivity and diplomacy.

Because such a huge variety of people are now doing family history, and very few of us have had any training in ethics before, we may feel confused as to what to do if a difficult or awkward situation arises. We do much of the searching online now, so there's often nobody to discuss things with, because most hobbyists and many professional genealogists work from home. People can study accredited courses and join professional bodies which have Codes of Ethics and Conduct, responsibilities and accountability.

Attendees will benefit from reflecting on their own ethical dilemmas and considering ethical issues with empathy, sensitivity and diplomacy. *What is the way forward? Are you an ethical genealogist? What ethical dilemmas have you found in your genealogy research?*

Dr. Penny Walters has been a University lecturer for 30 years, teaching Masters' Business studies at British Universities.

Penny's interest in genealogy started after having her first child and then wondering about her biological parents, as she was adopted. Penny has six mixed race children, who have all enjoyed discovering their roots through DNA ethnicity results.

Penny lectures internationally in-person including throughout the UK, Ireland, America, and Australia; writes articles; is sought after for a wide range of webinar topics; and is a regular consultant on a variety of television and radio programmes. Penny has authored the books: *'Ethical Dilemmas in Genealogy'* (2019) and *'The Psychology of Searching'* (2020), available on Amazon in paperback or on kindle
www.searchmypast.co.uk