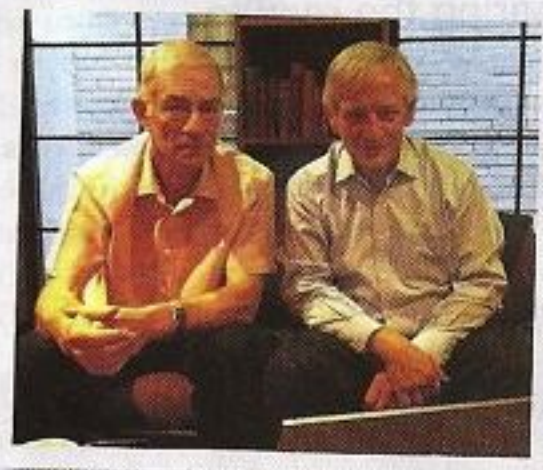


# Howes that?

The Howes, House, Hows and Howse One-Name Study gives immense pleasure to **Paul Howes** and other study volunteers, who together help people with their surname. Peek behind the scenes to see how this impressive labour of love has evolved from its brickwall beginnings less than five years ago.



Top: the Howesfamilies.com website is updated regularly, with data, sources, certificates, gravestones and more and showcases everything that the one-name study has discovered so far.

Above: Paul (on the right) and his cousin, Ian Howes.

It all started with three 'brickwalls' named Howes. My father had two lines of Howes ancestors and my mother, one. Virtually all of my ancestors hail from Norfolk. So, working with my cousin, Ian Howes, we decided to collect all instances of the name Howes in Norfolk, starting first with census information, as it would provide a solid foundation. We then realised that 'collect all instances' really meant 'reconstruct family groups', because there's no point in just amassing data – it's how you turn it into information that matters.

For each person in each census, we typically record five items: name, birth year, birth place, residence and occupation. Starting in 1901, we

worked backward, adding siblings and parents, to make some quite large families, but we soon thought, 'Why do all this ourselves?'! Shortly afterward I announced our intentions in the Norfolk Family History Society magazine, *The Norfolk Journal*. Several society members kindly donated the fruits of their research, giving us a great start. We added census information to those families, and continued our efforts, working backward to 1841.

With rural depopulation, Norfolk families had scattered widely and it made no sense to limit ourselves to that one county. The journal article prompted correspondence with a member of the Guild of One-Name Studies, which led to my joining

them and registering the names Hows and Howse too. Joining the Guild was a breakthrough because it introduced us to a wonderful group of collaborative individuals. Key, too, was learning that we could collect global data at our own speed, we just needed to commit to answer all enquiries.

I had also been talking with the US Howes Family Association



Number of Howes families  
101 - 210  
211 - 420  
421 - 630

from the 1891 England and Wales Census Data

You can see how Howes families moved over time by selecting different Census years.

Census records can tell you little-known facts about your ancestors such as birthplace, occupation and value of personal estate.

[View all Howes census records >](#)



Number of Howes families  
1 - 6  
7 - 10  
11 - 20

from the 1891 England and Wales Census Data

You can see how Howes families moved over time by selecting different Census years.

Census records can tell you little-known facts about your ancestors such as birthplace, occupation and value of personal estate.

[View all Howes census records >](#)



Number of Howes families  
1 - 30  
31 - 120  
121 - 210

from the 1891 England and Wales Census Data

You can see how Howes families moved over time by selecting different Census years.  
Census records can tell you little-known facts about your ancestors such as birthplace, occupation and value of personal estate.  
[View all Howes census records >](#)

(descendants of Thomas Howes and Mary Burr, who emigrated to Massachusetts in 1636), who are on a long-term quest to find their British roots. We joined forces with them to start a DNA project (now with 25 samples, but still no close matches!) and the association has recently become part of our site.

Also, as we moved beyond Norfolk, we noticed a large number of people referred to as both Howse and House. This led to the realisation that House is just another variant and we registered that with the Guild too.

## Sharing the results

From the beginning, we wanted to share as much as possible. More, we recognised that we would make errors and actively wanted others to check our work, and knew we would have a better result if others felt that this is their study as well as ours.

### What our web users think

● 'Thanks for your amazing site. I've learned so much. I'm planning a trip in the summer and will visit the graves and churches using the information you have shared.'

**Vera from Harpenden, Herts**

● 'Thanks to your site I have traced my 7xgt grand-parents and find that I live in the very same village.'

**Bob from Mattishall, Norfolk**

● 'This site has been the most useful one-name site I have ever encountered in my research of the past 20 years! It is the best organised and comprehensive and responsive of any I have used.'

**Cheryl from Utah**

● 'I LOVE YOUR SITE.'

**Gail from New York**

The maps for Howes, Hows, Howse and House, created using Ancestry.co.uk's surname mapping tool, demonstrate that the four names are one and the same and mostly derive from the Anglo-Saxon word for hill or from the name Hugh. Subsidiary clues to this are the numbers of people whose names are spelt using multiple variants along the borders between areas of concentration of different spellings in England.

We looked widely before encountering an American program called TNG (The Next Generation of Genealogy Sitebuilding). It has a very solid database engine and family-oriented display methodology with a completely customisable front-end. It took just a few weeks to set up and we went live with just under 5,000 people listed in September 2008 on our website, [www.howesfamilies.com](http://www.howesfamilies.com).

We display everything, except we show no detail for anyone born within the last 100 years whom we do not know to have died, in recognition of differing privacy standards around the world.

### Impact of the internet

The internet forces many choices, all of which have consequences. For example, because we show everything, search engines regularly trawl through all the links on our site. Consequently, it's difficult to search for a Howes name and not find our site, but we do pay extra costs because of the bandwidth burned by search engines' indexing bots.

We also want to look different every time someone visits so that people return to see what's new. That's tricky when we are small, so we added a feature to bring up a random Howes-

related image every time someone visits the home page. Now, there's a 95 per cent chance that the image will be different from the previous visit.

### What are our aims?

The internet also makes us act more like a business, as we are competing for users' time with other sites, and consequently we had to define our goals, which, after some minor re-jigging, are now:

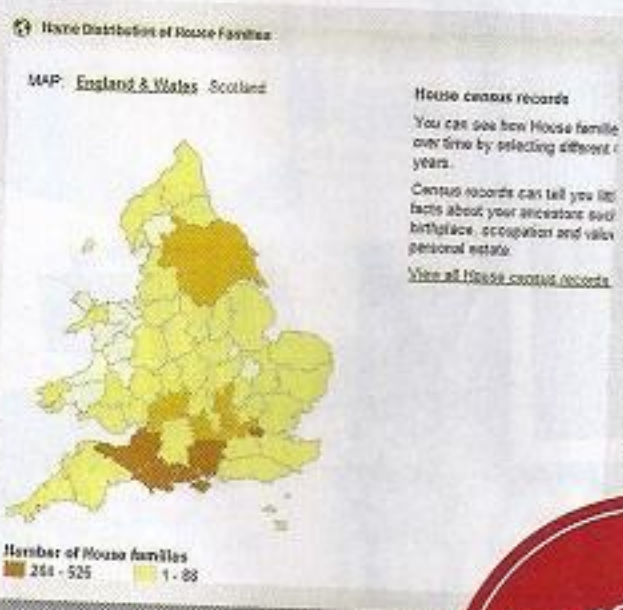
- to be the authority on the Howes/House/Hows/Howse name;
- to help others break through Howes-related brickwalls in their research;
- to examine any common roots with Howe and other similar names.

To be the authority, we need to be a port of call for anyone searching for a Howes in their ancestry. So we go beyond the expectations of the Guild: we try to collect at least two generations down from any woman named Howes. By doing that, web search engines will bring more people to our site, who perhaps hadn't realised yet that they had Howes ancestors.

Our priorities are dictated by these goals. Our initial focus is using census records and life-event registrations from the 19th century to construct a virtually complete database. We will then work backward from there as increasing numbers of parish records appear on the web. Also, we put nothing online unless it refers to an individual as a part of a family. Without context, it's just data. So when we examine a database, we extract what we can and keep a note of what we cannot.

### Howse it going?

Only our 'customers' really know the answer to that (see the panel, left),



## House improvements

Ian and I work to the same data-recording standards and use the same family history software (Family Tree Maker). From the beginning we have recorded our sources, so that others may check our work. For most facts, people can see whether we have used original or secondary sources and whether they are available on the internet.

I maintain the master file.

Ian sends me updates and I share a fresh GED update with him weekly when I replace the website contents. We also receive GED files from correspondents, although sometimes we re-enter the data to ensure our standards are maintained.

Ian is methodical in his approach. He chooses a registration district and lists out all the births, marriages and deaths. He then seeks the people in the census and works forward and backward to build up their families, checking people off the list as he goes.

I work similarly, but my priorities are set more by interactions with correspondents and by the results of 'marriage challenges' run by members of the Guild. Each one provides the opportunity to research yet another family.

Customer service is very important to me: I recognise that how our customers interact with us determines their level of involvement – many correspondents send in additional snippets of data months or years later as they develop their own research, which is exactly what we want.

## Minimalism

We keep very few files beyond what

**One-name talk**  
Paul Howes will be giving at talk at Who Do You Think You Are? Live at 3pm on 25 February.

but just in terms of numbers:

- We now have 53,000 people in reconstructed family groups on our site, about half of whom are named Howes and variants.
- Our file now contains 375,000+ facts and 220,000+ source citations.
- We have 'geo-coded' the most common 5,000 of the 25,000 locations so that most individuals have maps showing where they were born, lived and so on.
- We know the identity of both partners for more than 8,000 marriages of the 23,000 in England/Wales 1837-1950.
- 400+ people from 20 countries have found our site interesting enough that they have registered for monthly reports.
- We have nearly 1,000 certificates (not all English) online and, since a volunteer stepped forward, now display individual or gravestone photographs.
- We have reconnected more than a dozen sets of cousins whose families had drifted apart.
- our GED file now exceeds 1.5 million lines!

## Why the Guild of One-Name Studies?

I wanted to become the expert on the Howes name and contribute something back to the community. What better than joining a group of like-minded people?

- Guild members look up marriage details in a chosen area and other's surnames in their local newspapers and report back with them.
- The Guild maintains an index of names included in probate records.
- The Guild provides archiving services and free study web pages to members.
- The Guild runs fantastic conferences!

See [www.one-name.org](http://www.one-name.org) for further details and to discover how to add your surname to the 8,000 already registered with the Guild.

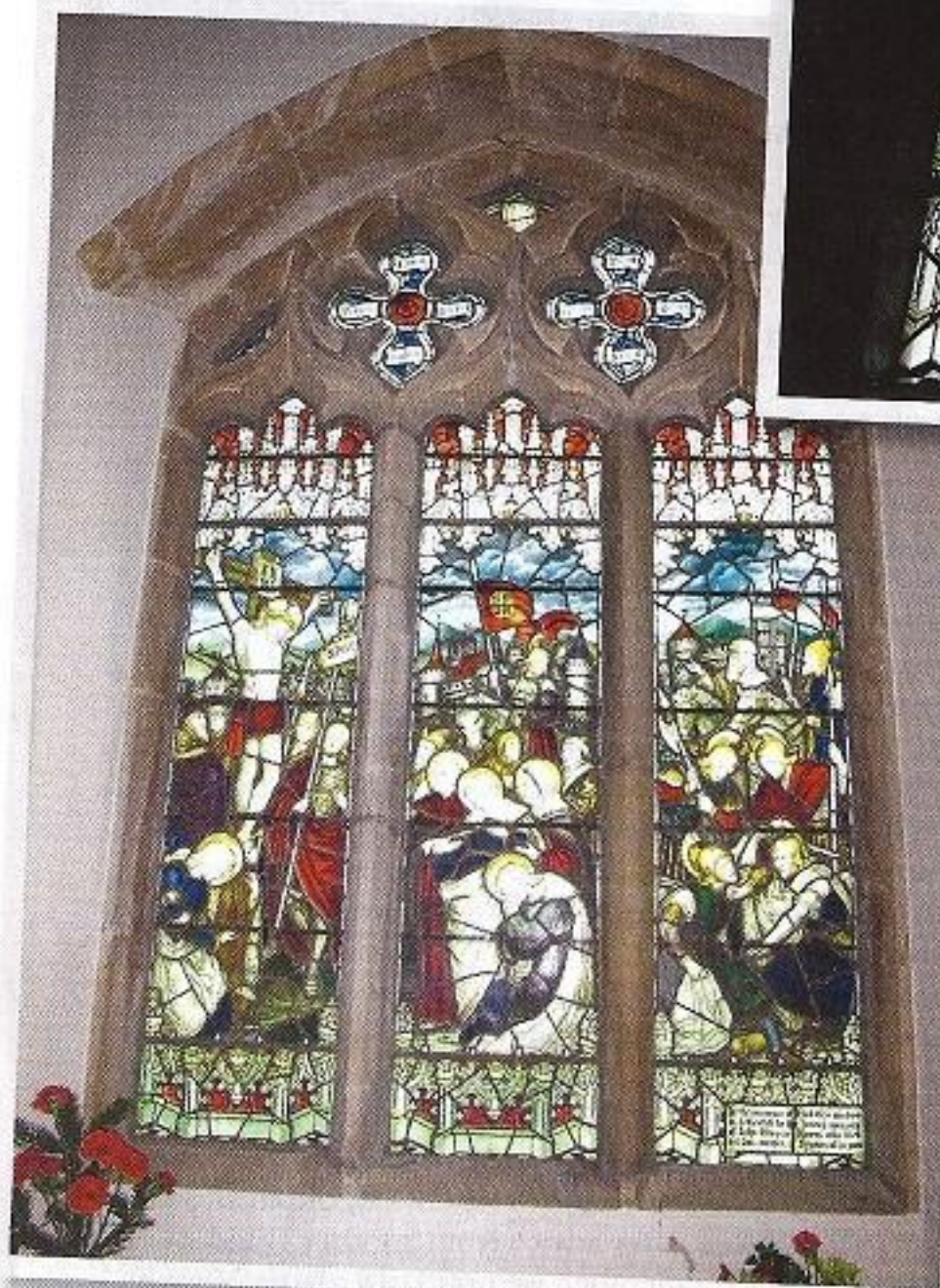
we show online, because the internet now easily allows others to check our work. We keep records of all British births and marriages so we can gauge our progress and avoid duplication. After advice from another Guild member, we now keep a note of each correspondent's location and oldest Howes ancestor, so that we can link relatives. We also track records in some databases that we haven't yet been able to attach to someone in the master file. So, just a hard drive and many backups!

## What have we learned so far?

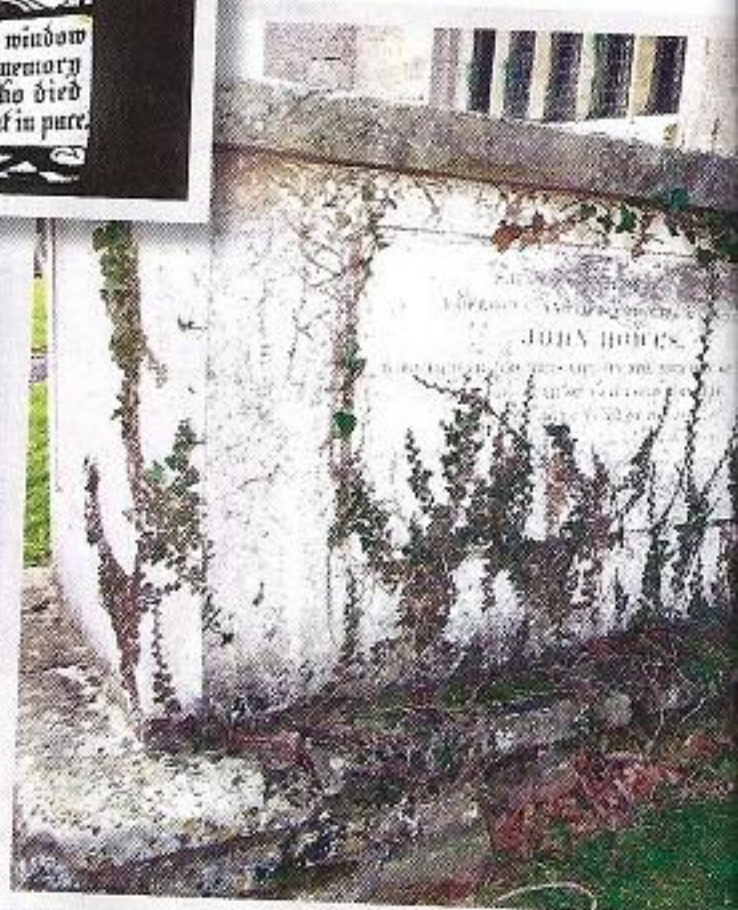
We have learned a lot about our name. The four maps on our website demonstrate that our four names are one and the same and mostly derive either from the Anglo-Saxon word for hill or from the name Hugh. We've learned too that during the 19th



Information for a one-name study is gleaned from all sorts of sources, but Paul insists that the information is constructed into family trees, so that it's not just dry data. Shown here are Trove.nla.gov.au and the British Newspaper Archive.



The stained glass window in the south wall of Kingscliffe parish church, Northamptonshire and, inset, Howes dedication; grave of John Howes, east end Kingscliffe church.



century there was a gradual spelling harmonisation toward Howes, though with the advent of mass literacy, this has now ceased. A few people have changed their name to the singular-sounding Howe but there has been no observed movement the other way.

We've learned some wonderful stories about some fascinating people who share our name, from the two Victoria Cross winners, to a transatlantic circus entrepreneur in the 1850s, to the man who invented the Easy Bake Oven (over 30 million sold!), to an MP and a famous actress, to four generals and several sea captains, and many more extraordinary people who fought and died for their country. We maintain a list of Howes-owned websites to illustrate the diversity in the world today – and it is diverse!

As with other one-name studies we have observed the amazing fecundity of emigrant families! There are now as many HOWESes in the US alone as in England and many more HOUSEs, probably because of the Anglicisation of surnames such as Haus (German)

and Huizen (Dutch).

Apart from learning that my cousin Ian and I got married in the very same register office (!), my own personal learning is that a one-name study can be a means to personal fulfilment through the application of the very same skills that served me well throughout my career.

### What's next?

We need to complete the work on the 19th-century records, thus finishing the secure foundation. We'd very much like to find volunteers to work, firstly, through 19th-century newspapers to give more colour to the cold facts in the database, and secondly, specifically on immigration records to former colonies to make it easier for emigrant families to find their roots.

We'd like some money to do some targeted DNA testing of specific ancestral lines and, finally, we'd like to ensure the continuation of the work we have begun. Our customers know what is important and will no doubt guide us if we are off-track.

### How big is it?

A one-name study's size is typically gauged by multiplying the number of people in the 1881 UK census by seven. Some studies cover a few hundred people.

Ours has a potential population of 75,000, and that's just the UK! Adding in other countries, the potential population reaches more than 200,000. Add in some non-Howes descendants and we're probably looking at half a million people. Only the internet makes such a huge study possible. 🐼

### With thanks...

I'd like to thank Ian in Surrey, Mike in Spain, Pedro in Germany, Judith in Melton Mowbray, recent recruit Sue in Bristol (who herself has no Howes connections!) and others for their work, but mostly all of our contributors for their continued support.

Since the study only began with the advent of the internet, I have never lifted a heavy, dusty volume from a shelf, but I have immense respect for those who did. They paved the way for others to follow.