# Finding my Paternal Great-Grandfather's Parents: A Case Study for Using Various Resources
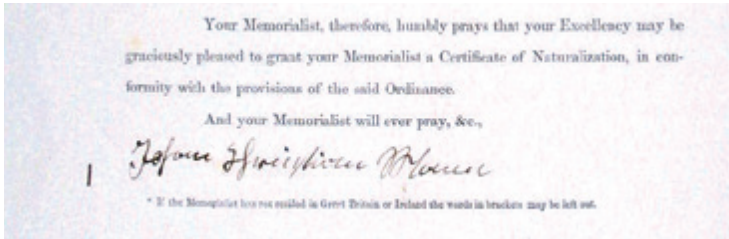
by Philip Mann

Many of us like to tell the stories of our ancestors. Just as important to me and other family historians is how we find the information and the likely traps we might fall into, as well as useful tips which may help us along the way. This article addresses tips and traps and a number of genealogical resources used to determine details of two of my great-great-grandparents, the parents of Johann Christian MANN.

A book published in 2000 by a committee chaired by Lyall KUPKE, *Bradtke Family History*, advised that my paternal great-grandfather Johann Christian MANN was born at Hirschfeldau in Silesia, 11 kilometres north-east of Sagan and 28 kilometres south of Grunberg (now known as Zielona Gora and in Poland). Hirschfeldau is now also in Poland and is called Jelenin. The book also advised that my great-grandfather's parents were unknown. Nor were his parents' names shown on his naturalisation certificate or on his marriage certificate.

Some naturalisation certificates may be found in the National Archives www.naa.gov.au. Initially, searching for 'Christian Mann', I could not find his certificate, so I broadened my search to 'Mann'. I then found that his second name 'Christian' was incorrectly transcribed as 'Christan'. It is always preferable to go to the original rather than a transcription. The application (extracts shown below and on next page) includes a mixture of German and Latin cursive. The 'M' in 'Mann' and the 'S' in 'Silesia' are in Latin cursive. Among other things, the application showed that he could write and sign his own name. Notice it is signed in German cursive; look at the 'st' and 'M'. His date of birth was shown on his headstone at the Immanuel Point Pass Lutheran Cemetery as 2 April 1812. The language used on the headstone is German, which my parents spoke in our home until 1942.
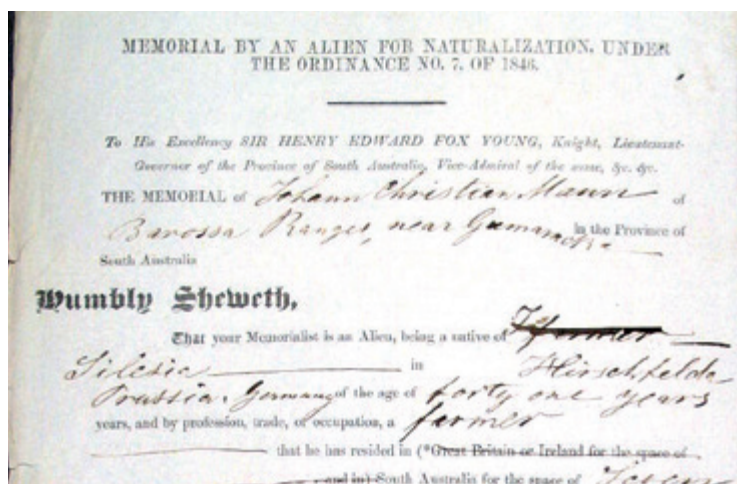
Extract from the 'Memorial and Certificate of Naturalization' for Johann Christian MANN, dated 15 November 1852 (Image courtesy of the author).

MEMORIAL BY AN ALIEN FOR NATURALIZATION. UNDER THE ORDINANCE NO. 7. OF 1846.

To His Excellency SIR HENRY EDWARD FOX YOUNG, Knight, Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of South Australia, Vice-Admiral of the same, &c. &c.

THE MEMORIAL of *Johann Christian Mann* of *Barossa Ranges, near German* in the Province of South Australia

Humbly Sheweth,

That your Memorialist is an Alien, being a native of *Sagan* in *Silesia* *Prussia. Germany* of the age of *forty one years*, years, and by profession, trade, or occupation, a *farmer* that he has resided in (*Great Britain or Ireland for the space of and in) South Australia for the space of *Seven*

Headstone of Johann Christian and Johanne Louise MANN at the Immanuel Point Pass Lutheran Cemetery (Image courtesy of the author).

In my quest for more information about my paternal line, I had my Y-DNA tested by FamilyTreeDNA at the 37-marker level www.familytreedna.com. To date my results are one match at the 37-marker level which records a genetic distance of four steps. The name of the match does not look German or Eastern European and the paternal country of origin is unknown. The match at the 37-marker level is estimated to have lived at 1300 CE (650–1750 CE). Six matches have been recorded as a genetic distance of one at the 25-marker level; they are estimated to have lived at 1750 CE (1450–1900 CE). Paternal countries of origin for these six are shown as Scotland, Wales, unknown, Portugal, Ireland and Cuba. No clear information there, except that the common male descendant is likely to be at least two generations before my great-grandfather. My next step will be to pay for a Y67, Y111 or Big Y from FamilyTreeDNA which will refine my matches to discover who shares a direct paternal line ancestor within a more recent time frame and refine my haplogroup (currently shown as R-M269). There are no guarantees of finding a match. There may be better options.

I heard a presentation on FamilySearch www.familysearch.org and their Research Wiki www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/ given by Ian SIMON to the SAGHS Germanic and Continental Europe Special Interest Group. To use Research Wiki, you need to know whether the persons of interest are Catholic or Protestant and the parish where the

activity would take place. My ancestors are mainly Protestant, and the naturalisation certificate indicates that Johann Christian MANN was born in Hirschfeldau, Silesia. Using Meyers Gazetteer www.meyersgaz.org I determined that the nearest Protestant Church to Hirschfeldau was Hertwigswaldau.

Extract from www.meyersgaz.org (Image courtesy of the author).

The next step was to find the parish records for Hertwigswaldau. FamilySearch has extensive records, but is not easy to navigate. Under 'Search' on the main menu, you will find 'Research Wiki' at the bottom www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Main_Page. After selecting 'Europe' from the next page, where will Hertwigwaldau be found? Jelenin (formerly Hirschfeldau) is in Poland. Hirschfeldau was in Silesia, which, when my great-grandfather was born, was in Prussia, but the Meyers Gazetteer covered the German Empire (1871–1918). So, we look up the 'German Empire', which includes Silesia.

The link 'Silesia' takes you to a page full of information (part of which is shown below). It is worth reading for background information on an area whose boundaries have seen frequent changes over the last three centuries. www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Silesia_(Schlesien),_Prussia,_German_Empire_Genealogy. From here I searched an inventory of all the records available through FamilySearch www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Germany,_Prussia,_Posen,_Catholic_and_Lutheran_Church_Records_-_Inventory. I then searched a long list of localities for Hertwigswaldau, which took me to the listing for the Hertwigswaldau Kirchenbuch for 1806 to 1870 www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/324995.

When I downloaded this Kirchenbuch it contained 42 files, and I had to sort through them all to find the relevant one. Identifying the year was okay, identifying the date was much more difficult. Unfortunately, to access these records now, I would need to make an appointment at a FamilySearch centre, a small number of which are situated in suburban Adelaide www.familysearch.org/centers/locations/. The lesson from this is to save any relevant information you see and record when and where you have seen it.

Germany, Prussia, Posen, Catholic and Lutheran Church Records - Inventory

This article contains an inventory of the microfilm/digital folders found in a FamilySearch Historical Records Collection.
Not all the films listed here may have been included or indexed in this collection.
To learn how to use the collection and to access the records see:
Germany, Prussia, Posen, Catholic and Lutheran Church Records - FamilySearch Historical Records

This table lists all the titles included in this Historical Records publication. The default sort is by **Locality** and **Author** (the organization which created the records). You can change the sort order by clicking on any column heading.

The collection contains records from 1,439 FamilySearch Catalog records covering 2,929 films/folders. The localities listed in the **Locality 1** to **Locality 9** columns are those found in the FamilySearch Catalog record sorted alphabetically.

The link in the **Title** column will open a new window where you can see the FamilySearch catalog record for more information on the records.

Please note that not all records contained in this material may be included in the index available in the Historical Records collection.

Locality	Kreis/District	Organization	Author	Title	Locality 1	Locality 2	Locali

Kirchenbuch, 1806-1870

Authors:	Evangelische Kirche Hertwigswaldau (Kr. Sagan) (Main Author)
Format:	Manuscript/Manuscript on Film
Language:	German
Publication:	Salt Lake City, Utah : Gefilmt durch The Genealogical Society of Utah, 1971
Physical:	auf 2 Mikrofilmrollen ; 35 mm.
References:	(Digital Collection) Germany, Prussia, Posen, Catholic and Lutheran church records = Deutschland, Preußen, Posen, Katholische und Lutherisch Kirchenbücher : COLLECTION RECORD, 1430-1998

Within the Hertwigswaldau Kirchenbuch, 1806–1870 I was able to locate a relevant record dated 3 April 1812. It was written in a mix of old German and Latin script. Thankfully, I studied German and Latin for two years at high school, and I have attended several webinars conducted by Katherine SCHOBER of Germanology Unlocked https://germanologyunlocked.com/deciphering-church-records-baptism/ and a seminar presentation by Janette LANGE, then with the Lutheran Archives, on German cursive. I have several sheets showing the German equivalents of the letters I am used to. I also learnt to write in Latin cursive at primary school. A useful resource (shown right) is the alphabet in a German cursive called 'Kurrent', which is an old form of German-language handwriting based on late medieval cursive writing, also known as Kurrentschrift (cursive script), deutsche Schrift (German script) and German cursive. Over the history of its use into the first part of the 20th century, many individual letters acquired variant forms. German

writers used both cursive styles, Kurrent and Latin cursive, in parallel: location, contents, and context of the text determined which script style to use.

Letters that can be difficult to identify include: 'c' (one peak), 'i' (like the 'c' but with a dot above it), 'n' (2 peaks), 'e' (also 2 peaks but more compact), 'm' (3 peaks), 'h' (loops both top and bottom), 'f' (loop only at the top), 's' (one form of it, no loops). When two or more of these letters are together in a word, it can be very difficult to differentiate them. The second bottom row in the table shows the lower and upper case forms of 'a', 'o' and 'e' with umlauts, which are often converted to

Deutsche Kurrentschrift (Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Deutsche_Kurrentschrift.jpg).
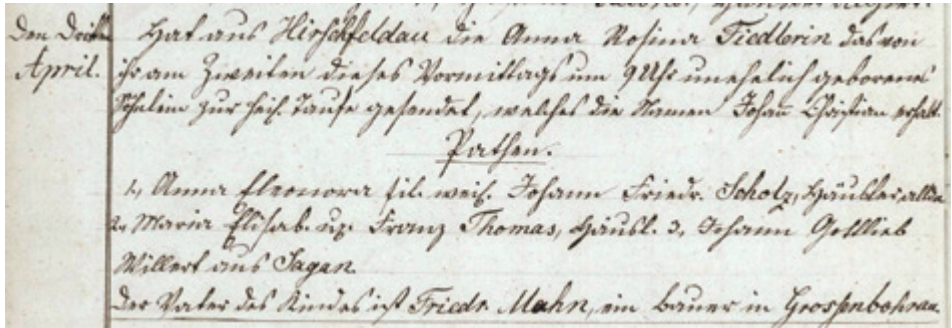
Extract from the Hertwigswaldau Kirchenbuch, 1806–1870 (Image courtesy of the author).

English as 'ae', 'oe' and 'ue'. The bottom row in the table is common pairings of letters: 'ch', 'ck', 'th', 'sch', 'sz', 'st'.

Although I studied German for two years at high school and all my ancestors that I have found to date spoke German, I cannot read German. But I wanted to know what was written on this document (extract shown above). So, using the cursive sheets and Google Translate https://translate.google.com/, I crawled and struggled my way through the record.

The text shows the mother's surname as 'Fiedlerin', but the suffix '-in' in German modifies an actor noun into a specifically feminine form, in this case of the surname FIEDLER https://linguistics.stackexchange.com/questions/14338/feminization-suffix-in-in-german-etymology-and-relatives. Tools such as WordMine www.wordmine.info can be used to determine German words using identified letters at the start, middle or end of words. For example, I identified a word with the first four letters 'uneh'. Entering these letters into

WordMine using 'Words starting with' and 'German', provided the word 'unehelich' which means 'extramarital' or 'out of wedlock'. At that time, the right to marry could be determined by the local nobility or the community council who could decide whether the groom would be able to support a wife.

Once we have transcribed a sentence, how do we translate it? There are a number of tools online that can be used, including Google Translate https://translate.google.com/ and Deepl Translate www.deepl.com/en/translator. I applied the sentence 'Der Vater das Kindas ist Friedr. Mahn, im Bauer in Grossenbohrau' into Google Translate, which provided the translation (shown below), 'The child's father is Friedr. Mahn, the farmer in Grossenbohrau'. Location spelling may not be consistent with other sources; the extract from Meyer's Gazetteer www.meyersgaz.org for the location 'Grossenborau' also provides the spelling as 'Grossenbohrau'.

I now know that on 3 April 1812, the son of Anna Rosina FIEDLER, born in Hirschfeldau
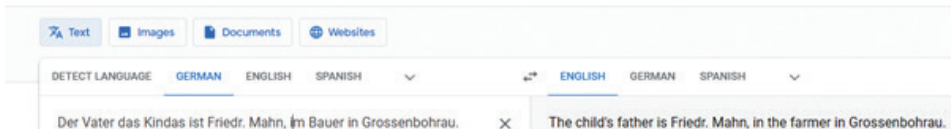
out of wedlock on 2 April 1812, was baptised at 9 o'clock in the morning and was named Johann Christian. Sponsors were Anna Eleonora, daughter of the deceased Johann Friedrich SCHOLZ, cottager, Maria Elisabetha, wife of Franz THOMAS, agricultural worker, and Johann Gottlieb WILLERT of Sagan. The father of the child was Friedrich MAHN, a farmer from Grossenborau.

For a more detailed description of the search described in this article, please contact the author Philip Mann *philip@philipmann.com.au*.

Points to note:

- It is preferable to go to the original document rather than a transcription.
- Save what you find, as well as recording when and where you found it.
- The more you attempt German transcription and translation etc., the easier it gets. There are people willing to assist within the SAGHS Germanic and Continental Europe Special Interest Group, within your DNA matches, and in Facebook Genealogy groups.
- The transcription and the translation do not have to be perfect. The concentration is on names, localities and occupations and there are resources online showing the German and English versions of words commonly used in church records.
- Broaden your knowledge of all things German.
- There are many free or inexpensive online webinars on relevant genealogy interests, including those provided by Legacy Family Tree Webinars https://familytreewebinars.com/

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