Newspaper Birth, Marriage and Death Notices Transcripts

Some notices in the older newspapers are barely readable with a human eye for a variety of reasons. A comparison of the readable content of the notices against that of the online searchable databases reveals that a significant proportion of them are 'unfindable'. Optical character recognition (OCR) can only go so far. A conservative guess suggests that a quarter of the notices are not represented via keyword search facilities and may be higher depending on the quality of the text on the page.

This work commenced in response to an expectation of finding a Captain John Drake in "The Times" newspaper (London). His wife died 'in The Times', and his children also married and died 'in The Times.' Of Captain John Drake – there is no identifiable trace. He may have been infamous (convicts/slaves)… or possibly incarcerated somewhere (bankruptcy/illness)… or OCR failed to pick up a death notice in any of the searchable 19th century newspapers looked at so far. He was apparently alive in early 1840 when his son Thomas John Drake wrote to him from Port Nicholson, New Zealand. He is not identified as 'late' in 1852 when his daughter Emma married. When and where he died is unknown. It could be, of course, that there wasn't a death notice at all – but how to know that for sure – taking into account apparent family tradition?

So a decision was made to transcribe all the notices as part of a comprehensive search for any information that may provide a 'missed' clue. This is not that much slower than reading the same and "The Times" was chosen – starting with the year 1840. A transcript of all the birth, marriage and death notices has been completed for the years 1840-1841 and entries relating to Australia and New Zealand have been separated out into their own respective documents. Enquiries have been made regarding the legality of publishing a comprehensive transcript of this nature and the result is that doing so would be unwise. Lookups are available.

The Times searchable index vs the transcript

How many of the notices can be found via the searchable index using only the keyword and the 'people' filter?

Canada			**Index** found 5 BDM notices
Feb 08	p7 D	Mitton (Port Sarnia)	No
Feb 14	p7 M	Woolrich-Walker (Quebec)	No
Mar 04	p7 D	Gibson (London District)	Yes
Mar 26	p7 D	Place (Lynwood)	No
Apr 10	p8 D	Cahusac (Montreal)	Yes
Jun 04	p6 D	Huntley (Guelph)	No
Jun 20	p7 B	Maitland (Montreal)	Yes
Aug 18	p7 D	Acland (London Upper Canada)	Yes (and a repeat notice the next day)
Aug 31	p7 D	Warren (Coburn)	No
Oct 26	p7 D	Hall (Cornwall Upper Canada)	No

Drake			**Index** found 4 BDM notices
Feb 08	p7 M	Brockman-Holmes	Yes
Feb 24	p7 D	Cheltenham	Yes
Apr 13	p7 D	Stoke Goldington Bucks	No
Jul 21	p7 B	Pelham-crescent Brompton	Yes
Jul 24	p8 M	Hodges-Drake	Yes
Aug 08	p7 D	Pelham-crescent Brompton	No
Sep 18	p8 D	[James C. Drake]	No
Oct 17	p7 D	Poorrah East Indies	No
Dec 10	p7 D	Maida-hill	No