



Welcome

Welcome to the second newsletter of The People of the British Isles project. It has been a very busy time since the last newsletter, and it has been taken up by collecting samples and starting to do much more genotyping. We are now up to around 3,000 samples, which is great news and means that we are on target to collect all the samples we need by the end of the project. A big thank you to all who have taken part so far and there are more details and stories about the collections below.

sample collection

The sample collection is progressing well. We have over 3,000 samples and there are a number of regions that have been completed thanks to the hard work of our collaborators. Our most successful regions are shown in the map and the top seven are complete. We will always be happy to collect more samples from volunteers representing these areas but we are not planning any more specific events there. We are still actively collecting from the rest of the UK and the Oxford collection team, organised by Tammy Day, is planning to visit most parts of the country over the next year or so. A number of our collaborators are also still actively seeking volunteers.



- Cumbria (312)
- Yorkshire (271)
- North East (268)
- Oxfordshire (182)
- Lincolnshire (176)
- Orkney (160)
- Norfolk (153)
- North Wales (107)
- Suffolk (104)
- Devon (103)
- Sussex (98)
- Cornwall (84)
- Pembrokeshire (83)
- Northern Ireland (72)
- Forest of Dean (68)
- Northamptonshire (65)
- Leicestershire (55)



Many rainy days in 2007.

The collection of samples has been undertaken in a number of different ways. These include large, specifically organised collection events, the first of which was in Newcastle in December 2005.

There have also been numerous smaller events throughout most parts of the country. Agricultural Shows and History Fairs have played a big part, in particular over the last year. The first big, successful show we attended was the Great Yorkshire Show in 2006, whilst last year saw us at around a dozen shows both large and small. Other samples have also been collected by researchers making home visits and by local GPs, either by direct recruitment or taking blood samples from individuals to whom we sent kits.

We have been learning from each collection event and have been refining our approach as we go along. The first big lesson was in Newcastle. Once the talk was over and we were ready to take the blood samples suddenly there were 80 people queuing up in front of five people taking blood! A numbered ticket system like those at shop counters has been used since and we now often try and book people in at appointed times to make things more convenient. We also learnt very quickly the best ways to recruit volunteers at Agricultural Shows. The biggest hurdle was coping with the extremely wet and windy summer we had. Our thanks to those volunteers who braved the weather and the foot and mouth outbreak.



Great Yorkshire Show 2006.



A windy day in Campbeltown.

Many different organisations have been extremely helpful and have allowed us to join their events or let us collect blood samples after a lecture, or have helped publicise our recruitment. In particular, we have had a lot of help from the Women's Institute, Rotary International, numerous Family History and Genealogical Societies, and the National Farmers Union. On top of that, there are many individuals who have been very helpful, ranging from hard working journalists and editors in the media to show organisers to put upon friends and contacts of researchers involved in the project. We have taken advantage of the kindness and good nature of many people. The TV programme, Face of Britain, was shown on Channel 4 last year and, along with the accompanying book, has also generated a lot of interest.



A sunny day in Uffington.

What we do with the samples

We thought you might like to know what happens to the samples. The collection tubes contain nutrients for the cells they are kept at room temperature to keep the white blood cells alive (these are the ones that fight infections in your body). They are rushed back to the laboratory where about a third of these white blood cells (the lymphocytes) are separated out under sterile conditions, frozen down and stored. At some point in the future these cells can be immortalised (made into cell lines) so that they will provide an unlimited source of DNA for future researchers. In the meantime, the residue remaining after removal of the lymphocytes contains enough DNA for the current study.

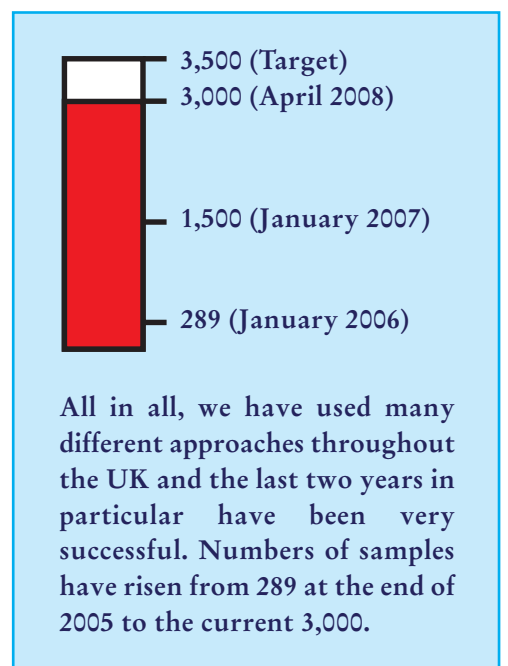
Our genetic analysis involves looking for differences between individuals. Everyone has DNA, the so-called blueprint of life, in their cells. In each cell, the DNA is found in chromosomes and is made up of four different chemicals, the bases, known by the letters G, A, T and C, in a particular order. People have two copies of each of 22 chromosomes as well as the sex defining ones where men have an X and a Y and women have two Xs. One complete set of chromosomes has a total DNA length of about three billion bases. About



99.9% of bases are the same in everyone but every so often there is a position that is different and is known as a Single Nucleotide Polymorphism (SNP). It is these SNPs that we are looking at. Indeed we plan to look at about 3,000 of them for this project.

We are currently in the process of analysing our data from the latest round of genotyping and hope to report the results later on this year. In the mean time, we thought you would like to hear how things are progressing with the project and would like to end this newsletter by saying that we are still looking for volunteers. So, if you know anyone who is interested in the project, and all four of their grandparents were born within 30 miles radius from each other, do get them to contact us.

Thank you once again for your contribution to the People of the British Isles



All in all, we have used many different approaches throughout the UK and the last two years in particular have been very successful. Numbers of samples have risen from 289 at the end of 2005 to the current 3,000.

Please do let us have your comments on, and questions about, this newsletter. You can contact us directly through the main website or by using the details below. Also, please don't forget to tell any friends who have not yet volunteered but fit our criteria of having four grandparents from the same rural area in which they live to get in touch with us either through the website or at:

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