



Family History Federation's *Archive Liaison Newsletter*

**Welcome to the third edition of the
Archive Liaison's Newsletter.
October 2025**

Over the summer I have had great pleasure in speaking to staff and volunteers from archives and family history societies. These organisations were based not only the length and breath of the United Kingdom, but from all over the world too.

They told me of some of the amazing projects that are happening within the archives and also being tackled by the family history community. The projects are just terrific and it will be my privilege to share these with you over the coming months.

None of these projects would be possible without the hard work and dedication of archivists and volunteers. Thank you to you all!

If you have an event on the horizon, a new dataset which has been published or a project that needs support, then please get in touch.
The Federation is here to help and support you.

In this issue you can find...

...more about Northamptonshire Family History Society and Archive working together

...news from FACHRS

...and an introduction to the North Devon Record Office



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Northamptonshire Family History Society

Northamptonshire Archive Service

Working in partnership



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Northamptonshire Archives Service

Like many societies, Northamptonshire Family History Society has built up an excellent and close working partnership with the local archives, the Northamptonshire Archives Service.

Over the years there have been several changes in how people research their family history; people are using more online resources and have fewer physical visits to the archives.

We work hard to publicise the fact that the archives hold more than just the parish registers. They have fantastic collections that can add much more detail to the stories of our ancestors' lives, and we encourage people to visit.

Through our quarterly journal, we spotlight various collections showing examples of what can be found. Topics highlighted have been family and estate records, apprenticeship and freeman records, marriage licences, nonconformist records, manorial documents such as court books and suitors rolls, taxation records and more. These are all name-rich sources – but rarely indexed by name. In addition to this, Sarah Bridges, Northamptonshire Heritage Services Manager, writes articles for us detailing new collections, updates and work going on behind the scenes. Sarah also gives an annual talk to our Society. The team will also be helping us to celebrate our Golden Anniversary in 2026 (still in the planning stage).

We hold a monthly helpdesk on the first Saturday of every month to help anyone find out more about researching their family, or local history, and how to use the various catalogues and card



Map showing Stemer Hill

indexes to find what they are looking for to further their research.

Other ways in which we support the archives is through donations, sometimes small ones for equipment such as a specialist macro lens for digitising anything small, negatives and slides. By digitising these images, it prevents possible degradation over time and will be preserved. Over the last two years we have also part-funded the cost of employing an archivist to catalogue their vast collection of rate books. Since the change to two unitary authorities in 2021, many additional records were deposited by the previous Borough Councils, and this project enabled the records to be more easily accessible to researchers.

We support them (and they support us) at various outreach events such as Heritage Open Days, fairs



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Using the macro lens

and exhibitions. The archives promote the family history society to visitors face-to-face and also by contacting others by email. We have various downloadable guides on our website which give an overview of records held by the archives such as cemetery records, poor law unions (workhouse) records, maps and hospital records.

Volunteers at the archives have recently completed a long-term project to index all the old Poor Law papers, comprising especially settlement, removal, bastardy and apprenticeship papers in their collections. This index originally focussed on the overseers' records in the parish archives but has extended to include related material in other collections. Now, volunteers from Northants FHS will continue the work on this, to enable the index to go onto FindMyPast and bring in some much-needed royalties.

As many will be aware, current public sector funding is under pressure and spending on archives



Members of the Archives team at the recent Heritage Fair (co-organised by Northants FHS)

and heritage has been reduced substantially over the last ten years, particularly so in Northamptonshire. It was recently announced that the Archives and Heritage Service Manager, along with the Archives In-House Researcher, are being made redundant to save money and will be replaced by an operations manager instead (at a lower cost to the council). The service also faces an income target that is unrealistic (at one-fifth of the salaries budget).

We feel quite strongly that our society has a responsibility to promote the archives to show that the service is needed and that heritage is important to all of us, whether we are family, local, house historians or students. Without them and continued access to their collections, we wouldn't be able to undertake our research into the past.

Together, we can ensure that the history of the county, including the stories of our ancestors, remains accessible and preserved for all.

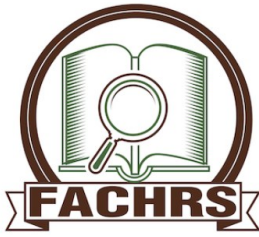
Angela Malin—Chair

www.westnorthants.gov.uk/northamptonshire-archives-service

www.northants-fhs.org



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Family and Community Historical Research Society



The Society (FACHRS) is now in its twenty seventh year, it is comprised of both local and family historians, and continues to offer members a great deal. There is an annual conference, major projects to both follow and be involved with and a wealth of material on the website, as well as regular online and print newsletters. All members are also invited to participate in 'annual projects'. Near the start of the calendar year, everyone is sent the name of someone to research from the 1881 census. The person will have been identified as having a specific occupation (railway engine drivers was the occupation from 2024) and this person will form the root of the research. How the research progresses is very much the prerogative of the researching member.

Members of the society have been exploring the topic of asylums over the last couple of years as part of the last 'major project'. These long-term projects are a key part of the ethos of FACHRS and are always presented at our conference and usually result in a publication outlining the key findings. All members are invited to join in research at the beginning of a new topic and often explore very different pathways in their analysis, although there is always an overarching set of parameters to be followed. Many researchers use family history as the key ingredient for their study. Because members come from a range of locations, it enables the research to be broad and geographically wide-ranging. Examples of past projects have included:

- ◇ Communities of Dissent
- ◇ The British Almshouse
- ◇ The Swing Riots
- ◇ School Logbooks

The publications from these studies are all available on the society's website as well as the many family history events attended by representatives of the society.

Many family historians like to recreate a broad and detailed investigation of the lives of our ancestors and use historical context to 'flesh-out' their findings. Being a member of FACHRS encourages and nurtures the skills that promote this view of the society in which our ancestors lived as well as using these same skills outside of our own family context.



A reminder that the National Records of Scotland hosts public talks on a range of topics.

The recording, of some of these talks, can be found via the NRS Youtube channel [\(1\) Talks - YouTube](#)

Talks are available on a wide range of topics, including:

- ◇ Tracing Scotland's People in Colonial West Indies 1775-1838
- ◇ Counting the People: in search of the 1921 Scottish Census Staff
- ◇ See what it does for the Dimples: Women Workers in Second World War Scotland
- ◇ The Foundation of General Register House in Edinburgh's New Town



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It was appropriate that the Railway Work, Life and Death Project saw the release of another 69,000 records of railway staff in Volunteer's Week, as it is volunteers who have made this project such a success! In his opening address, Dr Mike Esbester paid tribute to the dedication and hard work of all the project volunteers.

In my capacity as Archives Liaison Officer, for the Family History Federation, I attended the launch of this latest record release at The National Archives on 5th June. The total number of records in the project's database is now a staggering 125,000. The project is a joint venture between The National Archives, the University of Portsmouth, Warwick University and the Railway Museum in York.

If you have an ancestor involved in the railways, this database is an invaluable resource. But don't just assume that the accident had to be a death, or a life changing event. Health and Safety on the railways, whilst not perhaps to our standard, was

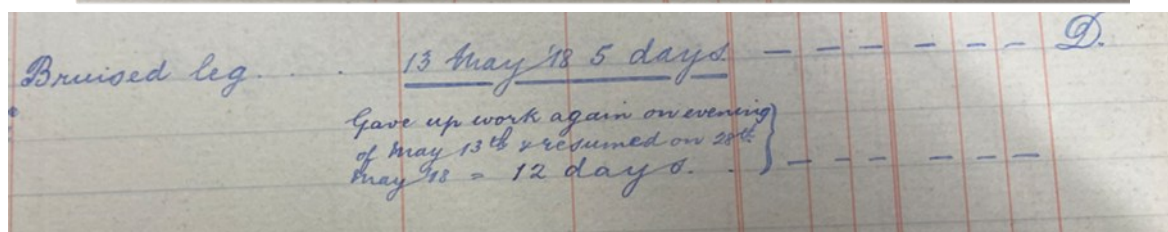
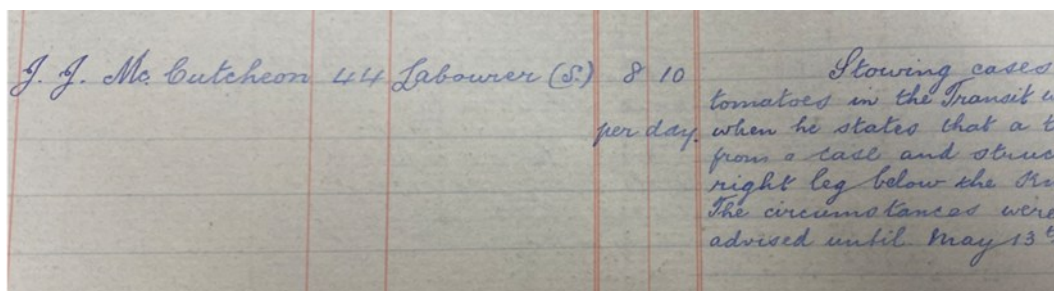
The Railway Work, Life and Death Project



taken very seriously. Nor does your ancestor have to be directly employed by the railways.

For example, where the railways served a port, those workers would also be covered under the auspices of the railways. The same applied to workers in refreshments, and many other subsidiary occupations. Similarly, if your ancestor was a passenger and suffered an accident, they would also be reported.

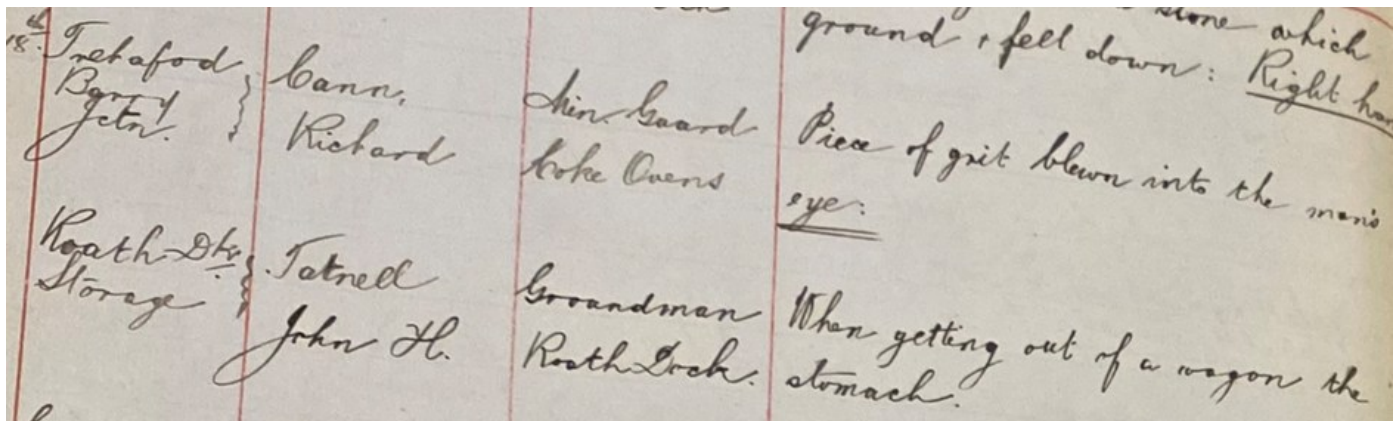
For example, The Barry Railways reported, that Mr J. J. McCutcheon, aged 44, was *stowing cases of tomatoes in the transit warehouse when a tin fell from the case and struck his right leg below the knee*. This was reported on 3th May 1918. It was further recorded that Mr McCutcheon had a *bruised leg, and was absent from work for five days*. In the event he did not return to work until the 28th May.



The National Archives Rail 23/53 Barry Railway: Staff records: Register of accidents to company's servant



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The National Archives Rail 684/117

Taff Valley Railway: Staff records: Register of accidents to company's servant 1910-1914

The Taff Vale Railway recorded a multitude of accidents in their register. The details include the name of the injured party, where and when the injury took place, what happened, the treatment given and the result of the treatment.

On the 15 March Richard Cann, a guard in the coke ovens, had grit blow into his eye. Fortunately, after irrigation, he was able to work on.

This is quite different to John Tatnell, who on the same day strained his stomach getting out of a wagon. John was paid compensation for twenty-four days, a total of £2 5s 0d.

Just exploring these few examples, you can see what an amazing resource the database is. Not only can you research your ancestors, but you can explore topics as diverse as foreign workers, working conditions, trades unions, and social issues.

The project is already working on the next release of an additional 50,000 records. The website is a treasure trove of information.

There are blogs on a range of topics, including: the social aspect of the railways, safe working practices, individual railway workers, and an introduction to various stations, and railway lines.

If you are interested in data, and data analysis, there is a section devoted to the massive quantity of data that the project has generated.

The project relies on the generous time given by volunteers, and they welcome guest writers to contribute articles, or a blog. These may be railway enthusiasts, historians or family historians researching their railway worker ancestors. Guidelines can be found on the website.

What is most exciting is that the database is freely accessible from the project's website, and can be downloaded in its entirety.

Please take a few moments to check out the website, you won't be disappointed.

[Home - Railway Work, Life & Death](#)





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Group of the Year Award! **Community Archive and Heritage** **Group's winner is** **Our Warwickshire**



Our Warwickshire was announced as the Community Archive and Heritage Group's winner of Group of the Year

The Group of the Year award was announced at the Community Archive and Heritage Group (CAHG)'s conference in Huddersfield on 19 June.

About the award

In previous years this award has been chosen by a panel from a range of submissions. This year CAHG did things differently. In order to provide more publicity for more groups across the twelve-month period, they invited groups to self-submit to be 'Group of the Month'. The public was then invited to vote on which of the 'Group of the Month' groups should then be Group of the Year. Over 250 votes were cast and Our Warwickshire was the outstanding winner with fifty-eight per cent of the vote.

Benjamin Earl from Our Warwickshire said:
We are thrilled to have received this award – it is really a testament to all the hard work that has gone into the project from our volunteers and also the support of the wider public in Warwickshire who have submitted images and stories as well as voting for us to win this award.

About Our Warwickshire

The Our Warwickshire Community History website is run by Heritage & Culture Warwickshire, but at arm's length – its focus is community involvement and engagement. The website is both an online archive, hosting a number of images from the County Record Office and museum, along with images submitted by the Warwickshire

Community, but is also an online portal to connect people with similar interests and has worked in the community to improve everyone's digital skills and sense of well-being.

Over the years projects have included working with Orbit, a local social housing provider, to run a series of intergenerational workshops. These saw sixth formers from a local school talk to residents, in retirement housing, about their lives. The sixth formers were fascinated by tales of dancing and courting and how they compared it to their own lives. This improved the residents' sense of well-being and made them realise that their everyday lives were worth recording, and this generated posts for the website. This has also engaged a younger audience in their local heritage and helped them see how it has relevance to them. It also got generations that might otherwise not have spoken to one another connected – they had a whale of a time and just loved the opportunity to share and be mutually inspired, along with getting their egos massaged and their confidence boosted.

Our Warwickshire has also up-skilled volunteers with their #SilverTakeover where the X (formerly twitter) accounts were used by some of their older volunteers to allow them to learn about social media and see the possibilities for their own groups. This helps their own local history groups with digital preservation and publicising what they offer and helps their work as volunteers.

The group has also helped preserve local history and stories that might otherwise be lost. These could be stories that people might not think worth recording.



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The history of place is made by recounting as much as possible; photographs help enormously and by submitting and saving these images, we can prevent losing items that could have easily ended up in a skip. The site has gathered this material, made it accessible to others and this has then inspired people to look through what they have and contribute hitherto unseen views and histories to fill in the gaps. What it shows is that preserving the past ensures it's ever-changing!

In the groups' own words, what makes them special is:

We like the quirky, the unusual; we've got an eye for the eccentric and we're approachable. And because of that we show that history doesn't have to be dull and stuffy. It can be about anybody really, and everybody has something to contribute and something to relate to. We revel in our geekiness but we don't take everything so seriously so it's like you're popping along for a cup of coffee with a friend – we're an online coffee shop without the coffee! What that does is give us incredibly good engagement (we reached 100,000+ page views a month during Covid) and generally praise from our users and participants.

And what we're also good at is shining the light on others, so to say what we do well comes with its own challenges as the whole ethos is about bigging up others so how do we say we're great?

Hopefully this is how.

Find Our Warwickshire online at:
<https://www.ourwarwickshire.org.uk/>

and on social media (X) at:
<https://twitter.com/OurWarwickshire>

Visit the Community Archives and Heritage Group website to find out more about community groups' valuable work.



[Community Archives and Heritage Group | Supporting and promoting community archives in the UK and Ireland](#)



Resources for VJ Day and WWII

To mark the 80th anniversary of Victory Over Japan Day, the *Gazette* has collated their resources from VJ Day and WWII in one place. This includes the dispatches during World War II as submitted by Commanders-in-Chief and published in the *Gazette* from 1941-1951. For example, from the Battle of Okinawa and the Japanese surrender. There is also a range of resources including *The British Army, Burma, and the ragged end of World War II* - the story of Indian soldiers in WWII. Heroines of the war also included, plus details of how to search for your ancestors in their extensive WWII archive.

All can be found at <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/vjday80>



THE
GAZETTE
OFFICIAL PUBLIC RECORD





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North Devon Record Office



One of the many shelves in the NDRO strong room

The North Devon Archives and Local Studies Service was originally established in 1988 alongside the construction of a purpose-built library for the town of Barnstaple. It was proposed that records relating to the north Devon area, which were held by the Devon Record Office at Exeter, would be transferred to this new location to form the collection of a new branch office - the North Devon Record Office. It was also planned that this new office would be merged with both the Local Studies Library provided by Devon County Council, and the North Devon Athenaeum (a free library and archive established in the 19th century) to form an integrated service to be housed in the new library building. This approach of converging and unifying similar organisations was considered novel and unnecessary at the time

but, in more recent times, other institutions across the world have started adopting a similar model – we may even be considered pioneers in this regard! Today, this partnership is overseen by three independent charitable organisations – The South West Heritage Trust, Libraries Unlimited South West, and the Trustees of the North Devon Athenaeum.

Combined, the collections span from the twelfth to the twenty-first century and almost all facets of life in north Devon are featured from the social and personal to the public, economic, and political. Some particular highlights of the collection include evidence that William Shakespeare visited Barnstaple on at least two occasions, an unpublished poem by author and abolitionist Amelia Opie, and a letter from



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renowned architect Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin. Our collections can be explored both in person and online via our catalogues: <https://devon-cat.swheritage.org.uk/> and we are constantly working to improve digital accessibility whether through individual copy requests, embedding digital versions of records into our online catalogues, or social media and other outreach initiatives.

The best way to start your genealogical journey with us is by browsing our online catalogues and the various other research guides available on our website: <http://www.hda10.co.uk/> <http://library-cat.swheritage.org.uk/home> <https://swheritage.org.uk/devon-archives/services/resources/> These should help introduce the types of available resources and point you toward the places they can be found and accessed. Once you have a handle on the material the next step would be arranging a potential visit. Research appointments can be booked via our website: <https://swheritage.org.uk/devon-archives/visit/visiting-barnstaple/> and once you become a registered



member (simply a case of filling in a single form – it's completely free!) you'd have access to all of our onsite resources including the archives, our subscriptions to paid services such as Ancestry, Find My Past, and the British Newspaper Archive as well as our reference collection of books and journals.

There's also plenty of opportunities to get involved in a voluntary capacity to help us continue to care for the records in our custody. This can include assisting with long-term preservation goals through packaging and digitisation, improving accessibility through careful cataloguing and the production of finding aids, or raising awareness through outreach activities both online and in person. If you are interested in helping us out, please consider visiting our volunteering opportunities page for more information: <https://swheritage.org.uk/about-us/volunteering/>

Tyler Pollard
North Devon Heritage Officer
North Devon Record Office



North Devon Athenaeum Collection including original copies of the north Devon journal from 1824





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VOLUNTEERS NEEDED - please!

How YOU could help?

Family historians everywhere need to be kept up to date with recent record releases. In order to accomplish this, I could do with a small team of volunteers to help with this task. ***Can you help?***



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The intention is that these volunteers will make contact with their local archives and repositories on a quarterly basis and gather information about any new record releases, relevant events and projects. Then they would feed this information back to me so that it can be included in the next newsletter.

This role should only take one or two hours a month – and it is also a way of getting to know your local archivists well! It doesn't sound much but it is vital that the Federation can keep family historians as well informed and up to date as possible.

So please consider volunteering to help this new team.

If you need more information, or just want to chat about it first, please get in touch with me.

You can email me at – archives.liaison@familyhistoryfederation.com

What can the Federation do for us?

How archives, repositories, community and heritage groups can help too.

We are trying to join things up and get more information about archives out there amongst our members. If you are an archives or repository, community or heritage group, then the Family History Federation is here to help and support ***you!*** We know you have many name-rich records and we want to help you make your collections accessible to family historians everywhere.

If you would like to help or would like information about your archives or record release included in the next newsletter, then please get in touch.

Please contact me to discuss your needs and to find out more.

archives.liaison@familyhistoryfederation.com