Really Useful Bulletin

No. 75

November 2026

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Family History Federation

Supporting family historians since 1974

Welcome to your latest edition—inside find...

Lead article is FAMILY AND ESTATE RECORDS

plus news from local FHS and from the Federation



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Really Useful Bulletin

FAMILY AND ESTATE RECORDS

by Angela Malin



Extract of Holdenby estate map. Ref: F272

One of my favourite types of records! Family and estate collections can stretch back over centuries and document the power and property of the landed gentry. They offer a window into the lives of the ordinary people who lived and worked within an estate, be they the tenant farmers, the cottagers or estate staff, and they show how their lives were intertwined with that of the estate owners. Where an estate covered a number of villages, people would certainly have moved within the estate as farms or cottages became vacant or other employment opportunities arose. Conversely, the estate, as the primary owner, could limit the number of people moving into a village as they controlled the housing and to a point, the employment in the parish. This contrasted with an open village which had fragmented landowners and no dominant landlord to dictate terms.

These collections are extremely useful not just to family and local historians but also to those tracing a property within what was (or maybe still is) an estate parish. In terms of cataloguing and searching for documents, most estate records such as rentals are rarely indexed by individual names. You need to think laterally about which type of record may contain details of your ancestor or their property and then investigate further. This article uses examples from collections held by Northamptonshire Archives (we are known as the county of squires and spires) but the type of records will be much the same for other areas.

Finding out who were the local estate owners

Trade directories such as Kelly's usually give a potted history of a parish and list the main landowners. Another source would be a county history or Victoria County History volume as these generally include the descent of a manor; the major landowner in a parish is often the Lord of the Manor. Local history societies or parish councils may also have a potted history of the parish on their website. Bear in mind that landowners may change over time. The stately home or large house associated with the estate will rarely have the same name as the families living there. For example, at Deene in Northamptonshire, it is Brudenell family that has lived there for over 500 years since 1514, and at Althorp, it is the Spencer family.

Where to find the records

Start with the relevant county archives or use *Discovery*, The National Archives' catalogue. If an owner had estates in many counties, then the records may be in a distant archive. Note also that some stately homes such as Castle Ashby, home of the Marquis of Northampton still maintain their own archives.

Starting point

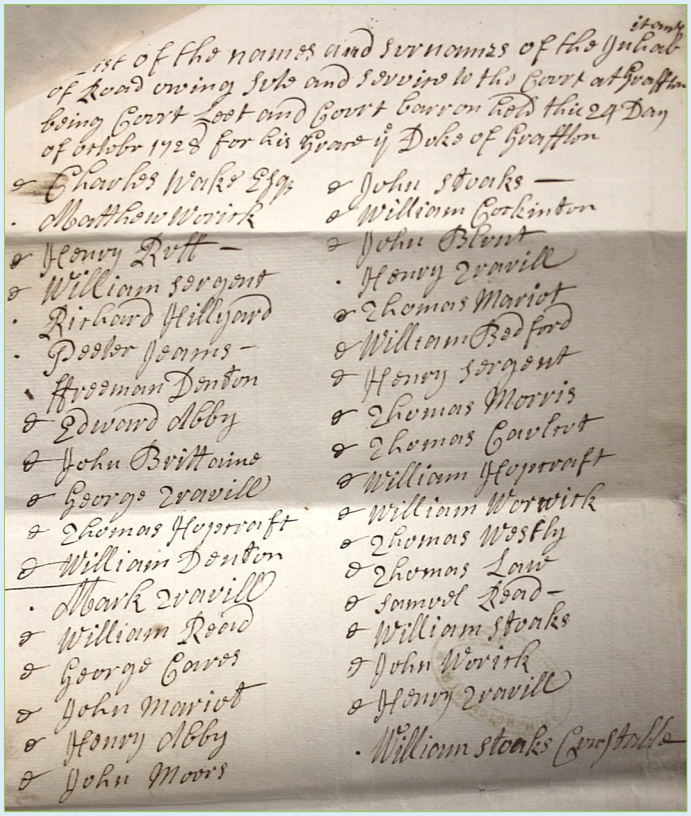
This will depend on your period of research. Some estates may go back to the sixteenth century or even further. Find out how the estate was established. It could be by a gift by a monarch or, as at Boughton House near Kettering, this

was purchased after the Dissolution of the Monasteries and later rebuilt and the estate enlarged. Many others bought up properties after the Civil War when the Crown was desperate for money. If it was originally Crown Lands, then the parliamentary surveys of the late 1640s may prove helpful.

What estate archives can reveal

Some estates contained valuable natural resources like coal and minerals. Local landowners became involved in exploiting these resources and were important players in the Industrial Revolution. Some would have owned urban property meaning their records could document the growth of town buildings and housing. The daily operations of the estate feature in a wide variety of documents including deeds, leases, rentals, terriers, accounts, maps and manor court records. As well as being name rich resources, they are useful for social history and can offer a detailed look at the daily lives of the people who lived and worked on the estates.

Manorial records



Grafton estate suitors roll—Ref. G3286

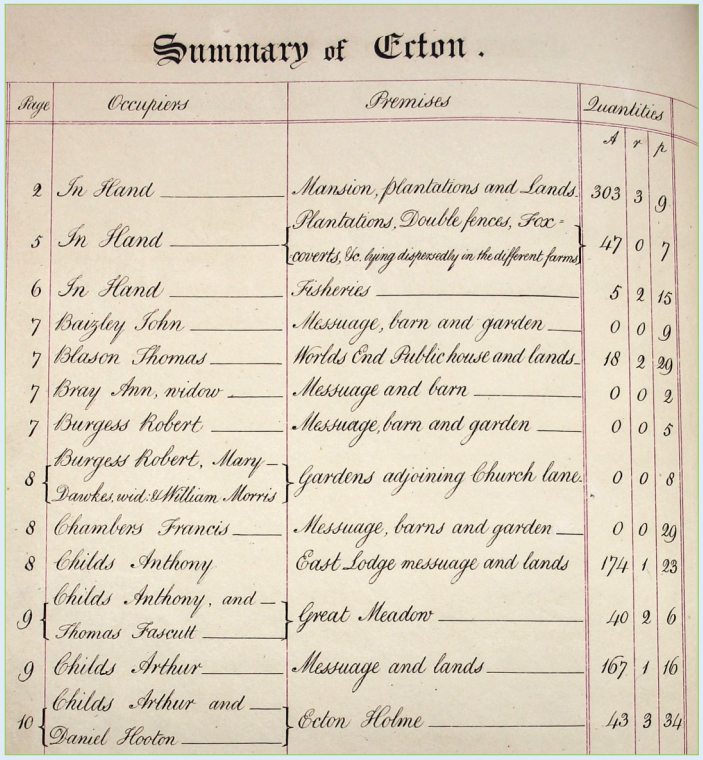
These have already been covered within an earlier Bulletin so are only briefly described here. Records would include manor court books showing the changes in tenancies and of the freeholders within the parish, suitors rolls should list the head of household of each of the tenants and freehold owners as attendance at a manorial court was compulsory. Looked at over a period of time, they can show changes through people moving in or out of the parish. Pre-1733 records are likely to be in Latin but as they use formulaic text, it is still possible to understand them and to extract the relevant information. To find manorial records, search the Manorial Documents Register https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/manor-search

Maps and Surveys

Estate owner would generally commission maps of their estates, often linked to a detailed survey with the properties numbered and the tenants listed. These numbers could be carried forward to a later survey thus enabling you to track the tenants over a longer period.

Where a series of maps and surveys exist, then you can note the changes, see whether a parish has grown or contracted in size. Many estate owners were not adverse to removing the homes of the tenants if they obstructed the view from their house! Some of these maps are superb works of art and highly accurate. For where I live, counting the number of chimneys on a map, albeit fifty years later, and comparing it with the Hearth Tax of 1674, shows an almost exact same number. You could also cross-reference estate maps to enclosure records, tithe maps and later, the Ordnance Survey maps, to give a wider perspective of the parish.

Leases and farm rentals



Summary of Ecton.

Page	Occupiers	Premises	Quantities A	r	p
2	In Hand	Mansion, plantations and Lands	303	3	9
5	In Hand	Plantations, Double fences, Fox-coverts, &c. lying dispersedly in the different farms	47	0	7
6	In Hand	Fisheries	5	2	15
7	Bazley John	Messuage, barn and garden	0	0	9
7	Blason Thomas	Worlds End Public house and lands	18	2	29
7	Bray Ann, widow	Messuage and barn	0	0	2
7	Burgess Robert	Messuage, barn and garden	0	0	5
8	Burgess Robert, Mary Dawkes, wid: & William Morris	Gardens adjoining Church lane	0	0	8
8	Chambers Francis	Messuage, barns and garden	0	0	29
8	Childs Anthony	East Lodge messuage and lands	174	1	23
9	Childs Anthony, and Thomas Fascutt	Great Meadow	40	2	6
9	Childs Arthur	Messuage and lands	167	1	16
10	Childs Arthur and Daniel Hooton	Ecton Holme	43	3	34

Ecton estate, 1809, part of a rental. Ref: E(S)1181

The larger farms within an estate were usually leased for a fixed term, sometimes three or seven years, often twenty-one years or perhaps three lives. Some of these can be very detailed and you may be able to identify the fields (or furlongs within the open fields if pre-enclosure) that formed part of the holding. There could be conditions to be met as in this lease (NRO/G1313 dated 1755)

> *And he will not plow or convert into tillage any meadow*
>
> *and that he will not mow any of the pasture or meadow oftener than once in any one year*
>
> *and that he will spend all the hay and straw arising from the said premises thereon and lay and spread in a husbandry like manner all the compost or dung that shall be made*
>
> *he will yearly plant 6 trees of oak ash or elm and shall have the barn to thrash corn.*

Cottage rent books

These are usually kept separate from the farm rentals. Cottagers would have held their tenancies by copyhold or 'at will', meaning no fixed term or a rolling arrangement. Tenants often moved within the parish to smaller or larger properties as their needs changed. The tenancy could be devised in a will to a widow or descendant.

Estate employment records



Estate map. Ref: 360

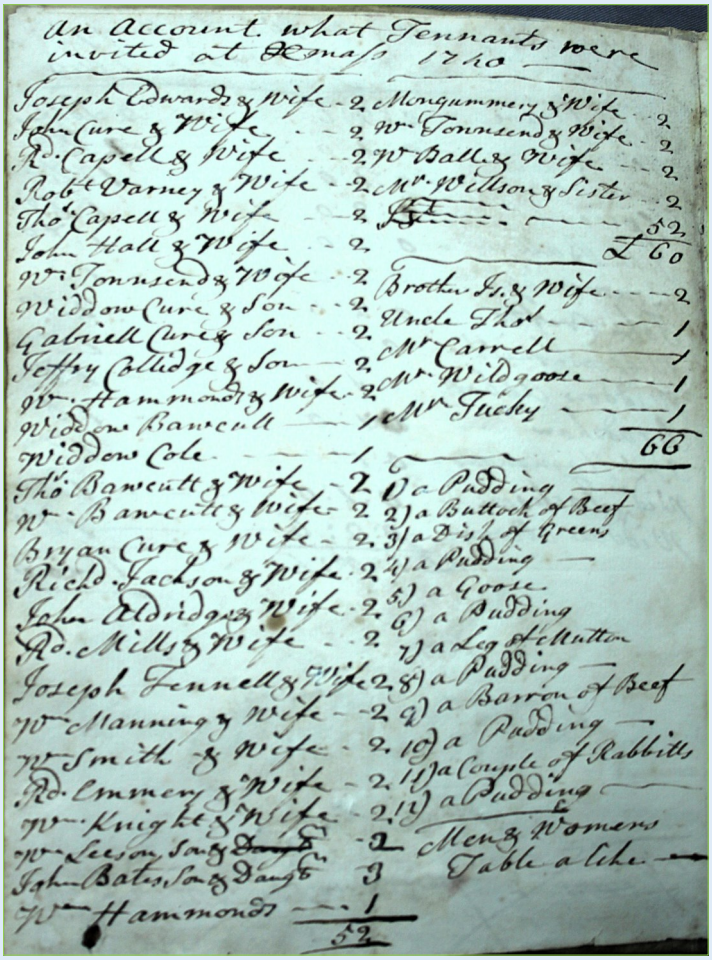
A large house needed a large number of staff, both inside and within the grounds and parkland. Surviving records may name the staff and give details of their work. Some employees may be seasonal showing that extra hands were needed at harvest time.

The estate would also have employed local tradesmen such as carpenters, masons, ironmongers and others to carry out repairs and renewals to estate property. This would have provided a regular source of income for these men. Look for vouchers, household bills and sundry accounts within the records to find out more. If you are researching a house history, then these could also show when a property was extended, a new well dug or an outbuilding converted to a home.

(NRO G2583 Monthly bills of labourers at Wakefield House near Towcester).

> *February 1752. Taking up of mole hills in the paddock, planting a quick set hedge and trees under the pheasantry, chaff cutting, the several women were washing linen, scouring the kitchen furniture and cleaning and airing the rooms in the house and over the stables, the carpenters were employed laying a new floor in the old house, making 6 new ladders for the top of the house and stables, cutting up firewood, making and packing up boxes to go to London, mending windows and casements, doing jobs for the upholsterer and bell hanger, putting up rails in the Great Pond to keep out the deer, mending a step ladder and making a bedstead.*

Charity records



Charity records. Ref: ASL1226

Generally, most estate owners were benevolent to their tenants and employees. During the agricultural slump in the 1830s and 1840s, farm rents were often reduced on the basis that it was better to have the land cultivated at a lower rent than to have it untenanted. If an employee was injured whilst working for the estate, then the landowner might continue to pay his wages. The estate might fund the salary of the schoolmaster or even donate land for a school to be built.

Within the Spencer of Althorp collection are lists of persons over a fifty-year period receiving gifts at Christmas of meat or bread and most estates would give some form of alms at that time. Mr Ashley of Ashby St Ledger even invited his poor tenants to Christmas lunch. In another example, the Duke of Grafton paid for entertainments in all his estate villages on the day Queen Victoria was married.

Printed sources

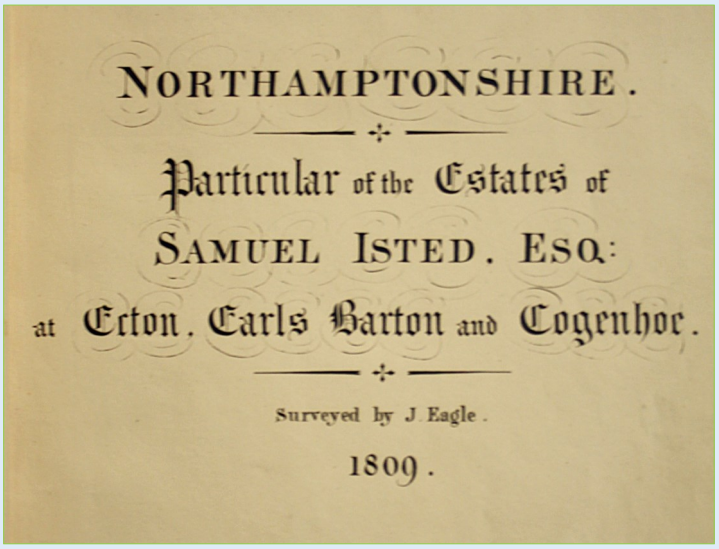
You may find that a county record society has published records relating to the estate you are researching. These can provide additional background information about the community and the times in which they lived. One of the books for Northamptonshire are the Estate Letters from the Steward to Second Duke of Montague which give insights into life at Boughton House as well as dealing with the management of the estate. With the estate owner often in London for the season or on business, the steward would send weekly letters to keep him informed. These can be a gold mine of local information such as deaths, comments about repairs needed, new tenants or other miscellanea. Diaries are another popular topic that often get printed.

December 1718

> *On Tuesday last, during a very violent wind, a fire broke out at an apothecarys in Thrapston, which for a day & a night burnt with such fierceness as consumed 56 houses. The loss is supposed to amount to near £5,000, whereas that of Oundle was but £500. The church is full of poor wretches ready to starve. The neighbouring gentlemen have sent in very large contributions. Some charity from Your Grace in the dismal estate they are in will do them a vast deal of good at this time, & in the urgency of the necessity, the sooner this is done will be the better.*

Sale catalogues

Sadly, after both the First and Second World Wars, many estates became financially unviable and were sold off. This was due to higher income tax, the fact that many heirs had died and the estate suffered repeated death duties.


NORTHAMPTONSHIRE.

Particular of the Estates of

SAMUEL ISTED. ESQ:

at Ecton. Earls Barton and Cogenhoe.

Surveyed by J. Eagle.

1809.

Servants and agricultural workers had been called up and never returned. Sale catalogues will include descriptions of the properties for sale, possibly photographs alongside maps of the holdings. Many tenants were able to buy their farms and homes. The political and economic dominance of the landed gentry diminished and the shift from being a 'managed' village to a more democratic parish began.



Estate map from sale catalogue 1913.
Lots shown in a variety of colours.
Ref: Map05 G3857

Linking estate records to other resources

Estate records, wonderful resources though they are, do not stand alone. Estate owners were usually the winners when a parish was enclosed by being able to consolidate their lands. It is useful to compare estate and enclosure records to document the changes that will have happened at that time. Probate records, depending on the period, may include not just a will but an inventory listing the deceased goods room-by-room so not only can you see the outside of the property from a map, but you can visualise the interior too! Taxation records such as hearth and window taxes could show how many fireplaces and windows there were. Maybe the canal or railway came through the estate – this may have facilitated new wharfs or stations or even provided alternative employment. The local estate owner would have had some influence of the route the lines would take. There are so many different avenues of research to explore within estate records!

I hope this summary of some of the records available within family and estate collections will encourage you to explore these records and to help you build up a bigger picture of your ancestors' lives. If you are unsure what might be available for a place, then contact your local archives or family history society who will be happy to help.

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About the author



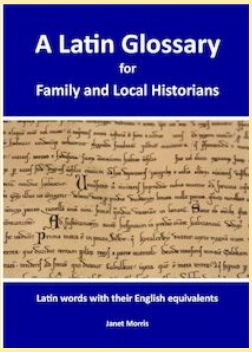
Angela Malin is chair of Northamptonshire Family History Society and a volunteer at Northamptonshire Archives. As an avid local and family historian, Angela lives in a village which was once part of the Duke of Grafton's estate and where her ancestors have resided for over 300 years. Through extensive research of these archives, she is continually fascinated by the stories she discovers and the rich details they reveal about the people who once lived there.

Books to help your estate records research



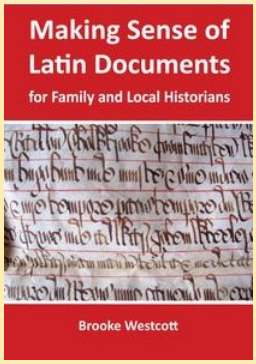
ABC A visual guide to reading secretary hand is a new title and a small book but one that really will enable you to get to grips with the "scrawl"!

Full details for this item are to be found **HERE.**



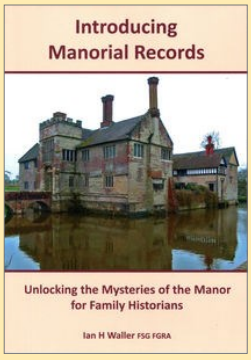
A Latin Glossary for family and local historians is a new version of Janet Morris's classic in a larger print! The glossary is a selection of Latin words from documents with the English.

Full details are **HERE**.



Making Sense of Latin Documents is a super book, recently updated and in larger print. Samples of Latin taken from real documents, with the English equivalent given. A must for all researchers.

Full details are **HERE**.



Introducing Manorial Documents is an excellent introduction to the subject.

Full details are **HERE.**

All books and maps available in the online shop HERE.

FAMILY HISTORY BOOKS & MAPS
www.familyhistorybooksonline.com

Family History Societies

DID YOU KNOW…?

Some short pieces from FHS to tempt you to join their activities!

Liverpool & South West Lancashire Family History Society

Membership of the society includes eleven zoom talks each year. Over the past few years we have had so many enjoyable varied subjects, such as

- ◊ an in-depth look at the FamilySearch website
- ◊ descriptions of newly-released books and the useful ways in which the research of them has helped family history research
- ◊ the Williamson Tunnels - a great mystery as to why such tunnels were dug and for what use
- ◊ a talk by an RAF member about Bravo November, the famous chinook helicopter
- ◊ even special appearances by TV personalities such as Paul McNeil from the DNA programmes.

We have many more lined up and our members really enjoy them, and you can too just by joining our society at very reasonable prices. Please visit: https://www.lswlfhs.org.uk/

Leicestershire and Rutland Family History Society

Did you know that if you join LRFHS now for 2027, you get ALL the 2026 journals in addition, as part of your membership? At eighty pages per each 2026 edition, that's an amazing 320 pages of reading for just £20!

Please visit: https://lrfhs.org.uk/

Email: publicity@lrfhs.org.uk

Northamptonshire Family History Society

Why not join us, we have a lot to offer – you can see the benefits of joining us here https://northants-fhs.org/benefits/

To tempt you, we have a special **Christmas membership offer** – where you get 18 months membership for a discounted price of **£22.50** (normal annual membership is £15) and for overseas members with journal by post, the discounted cost is £33, (normal annual membership is £22).

Visit our website to find out more: https://northants-fhs.org/membership/

Bristol & Avon Family History Society

We currently have two ongoing transcription projects with completed datasets regularly added to our members' area.

- ♦ Eastville Workhouse Registers
- ♦ Ham Green Isolation Hospital Admission Registers

Our website address is: https://bafhs.org.uk

Beresford Family Society

New Beresford Family Society Website

The successful launch of the new society website went ahead in August. We are still populating it with various items such as historic wills, the 1841 census returns etc. and this activity will continue to develop as we upload family trees, pedigrees and lots more Beresford information.

There are also forums on membership, merchandise, the BFS magazine, family history and BFS events.

This is the link to go to the website: https://www.beresfordfamilysociety.com/

Suffolk Family History Society

We already had some members-only indexes on our website—hearth taxes, inquests, Mis, etc but the launch early in 2026 of a new website enabled us to put all the indexes into one search engine (SNAPPI). We have now added fourteen datasets containing well over 100,000 new entries. Nine are for members only with 400 entries for Suffolk witch trials and 250 game-keepers (Game Duty 1796). There are also lists of bailiffs, apprentices and schoolchildren.

There are five indexes open to all – some MIs, burials and then two special data sets:

Deaf Perspectives Part of the project Deaf Perspectives: Past, Present and Future, led by the Offshoot Foundation, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund: c600 entries.

Ipswich Vaccination Birth and Death Registers 1871-1910 All the births (68,000+) AND unusually ALL the deaths (42,000+) - not just those within a year or so of vaccination.

We have another twenty or so nearly ready. SNAPPI can be accessed at https://tinyurl.com/Suffolk-SNAPPI For the member-only indexes, non-members will see only top line data. Access is via membership, only £10 for a year.

The Really Useful Bulletin welcomes contributions from all Federation member organisations.

It is opportunity to promote *your* society to the extensive Bulletin readership.

Family History Societies

Malvern [Worcestershire] Family History Society

Our name makes us sound more local than we are. Yes, we are based around Malvern, but we cover the whole of Worcestershire and have a worldwide membership, who have an interest in family history in the county.

We meet on the fourth Wednesday each month at 7.30pm, except December, for talks and the sharing our knowledge in the Malvern Cube, Albert Road North, Malvern WR14 2YF and via Zoom for the out-of-town members.

Some time ago it was decided that we would transcribe the baptism records for all the parishes of Worcestershire, from 1837 working backwards. This has morphed over time and our progress can be followed on our website https://mfhs.org.uk under the heading of Projects > Parish Record Transcription Status. This is an on-going project and any help would be welcomed. These records are freely available to our members.

There is a quarterly journal, called *Tree Tappers*, with contributions from the members and a monthly newsletter. All for £11 per year, with the subscription year starting in September. Email info@mfhs.org.uk

Lincolnshire Family History Society

Did you know there is a free index on the Lincolnshire Family History Society website, searchable by surname or location? Known as the **Yellow Belly Index**, it allows visitors to preview the exclusive documents and resources available in our members' only area. To unlock these resources, simply join us as a member!

Please visit: www.lincolnshirefhs.org.uk/

Dorset Family History Society

Did you know…

Dorset FHS is having a **Pop-up Family History Research** event in *Gather* at the Dolphin Centre, Poole, BH15 1SZ.

Mark the date—**Friday 29 January 2027**.

New Year New hobby!

See www.dorsetfhs.org.uk/events

Drop in event at Gather – get help with your family history - Dorset Family History Society

London Westminster and Middlesex Family History Society

Where Were They Buried:

Clerkenwell

The latest of our ongoing YouTube series, *Where Were They Buried*, is now available in the members' area of our website. This is one of the questions we are most often asked and, of course, can be very hard to answer. People could be buried anywhere!

In these videos we show where people who died in particular areas are perhaps most likely to have been buried, which local burial grounds were open at which dates, what resources are available for family historians and where these are located. This talk is about where people are likely to have been buried who lived in the ancient parish of Clerkenwell, or its districts of Amwell, Goswell Street and Pentonville with the extra-parochial district of the Charterhouse also being in this area. These are now in the London Borough of Islington.



Members can see this talk, along with others which cover the ancient parishes of Edmonton, Harefield, Hornsey, Islington, Northolt, St James Piccadilly, St Pancras, Stanmore and Willesden. Join us from only £12 for a whole year: https://membermojo.co.uk/lwmfhs

There is a general introduction to the types of records which can be found when looking for burials available for non-members to look at on our YouTube channel here: https://www.youtube.com/@LWMFHS

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Family History Societies

Calderdale Family History Society

Latest additions to our extensive database

For those of you not familiar with Calderdale, we are the 1974 equivalent of Halifax parish in West Yorkshire, give or take a few bits around the edges. Halifax parish is the largest, by area, of any ancient parish in the country. It also covers a number of towns that were in the forefront of the Industrial Revolution, and thus has a rich heritage and is a deep source of genealogical information for many researchers.

Our latest project is the transcription of a number of mill records, mostly wage books, for firms that were vibrant in the textile industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The first tranche of records has been uploaded on to our online database in October 2026 and we plan to add to these over the next few months, as our team work through the records.

The index entries for these are contained in our transcription index, available to everyone on our website www.cfhsweb.com and the detail of each record available to society members on the online database.

The amount of detail is so great that it has not been practicable to transcribe it all, but the major items have been summarised to paint an accurate picture of each individual's career in the mill concerned. The full detail for any entry can be obtained from West Yorkshire Archive Services at Calderdale@wyjs.org.uk There may be a charge for such information.

The type of information that makes these records so fascinating illustrates what working life was like in those days. For instance, there are many examples of employees working for over six years at the same mill without getting a pay rise. A further illustration of this is an element where wage rates in 1920 were reduced by ten per cent due to "cost of living". Even accounting for the value of money at that time, some of the weekly rates were pitiful.

All in all, these records add significantly to information available to genealogists tracing their family history in West Yorkshire.

Membership of the society is available from as little as £8 per annum which gives you access to over 2.5 million individual records for Calderdale residents over the last few centuries.

Please visit out website: https://www.cfhsweb.com/

Cumbria Family History Society

Cumbria FHS has a long tradition of publishing family history transcriptions for the historic counties of Cumberland, Westmorland and the Furness district of Lancashire. Broad subjects covered by these publications have included censuses, parish registers, monumental inscriptions, marriage bond indexes and will indexes.

In 1984 the society began a major, long-term project transcribing and indexing the 1851 census for Cumbria. Work on this project was, however, interrupted for several years due to the society contributing to the national project of transcribing the 1881 census. Once work resumed, our transcriptions of the 1851 census continued to be published into the early 2000s.

The transcription of monumental inscriptions has been a consistent topic over the years, with a steady flow of publications. In the 2010s another significant project was initiated to transcribe the notebooks of a former archivist, Jeremy Godwin, who, around the millenium, had recorded gravestone inscriptions from numerous Cumbrian churches, mainly in the Eden Valley and north-eastern Lake District. This project resulted in over sixty publications.

Parish register transcriptions have also been a regular feature of our output. We are currently running a large project mainly aimed at covering the period 1813-1837, but also with a wider scope depending on the size of the parish concerned, and the interests of the transcriber. A number of transcribers are working on parishes in which they have strong historical family connections, and several have unearthed details of hitherto unknown (to them) family members.

Initially our publications were produced in hard copy, but through time new publications were issued on CD as well. In keeping with the move to a more digital society, all our recent publications, and most of our back catalogue, are now available as downloads.

All Cumbria FHS publications can be purchased through Parish Chest or by following the links from the Shop on the Cumbria FHS website https://www.cumbriafhs.com/shop.

The creation of publications takes a vast amount of time and effort. We would like to thank all our volunteers, both past and present, for their dedication in producing our transcriptions, whether transcribing, checking, typing, editing, information gathering or co-ordinating. Thanks also to those people who, over the years, have generously made their own material available to the society for publication.

Graeme Rogers – Transcription Co-ordinator

Family History Societies



The Parson Woodforde Society

Frolics and Expeditions

When you become a member of the society you can join us on our annual 'frolics', so called because that was the term Parson Woodforde (1740–1803) used to describe his little holidays and excursions. www.parsonwoodforde.org.uk/membership.html



Next year's Frolic will be held in James Woodforde's beloved home county from the afternoon of Monday 27 September to late morning Wednesday 29 September 2027. We shall be based at the Swan Hotel, a fifteenth-century coaching inn facing Wells Cathedral. The twenty-four-year-old Woodforde was ordained priest in September 1764 in the chapel of the Bishop's Palace adjoining the cathedral. Our meetings, dinners and evening talk will be held in the Swan's Ivory Suite. More details and costings will be provided later.
www.parsonwoodforde.org.uk/frolics.html

We would be delighted should you decide to join our society and take part in a frolic or expedition. If so, please contact our chairman, Margaret Bird, email mbirdkingston@hotmail.com Tel. 020 8541 1081

The Cambridge and Ashwell Expedition 2027

Our one-day expedition to Cambridge and Ashwell on Saturday 8 May 2027 will pay homage to Parson Woodforde's first editor, John Beresford. We are visiting places with which he is associated in his weekend retreat at Ashwell, in the north-east corner of Hertfordshire, and at Cambridge University.

The Diamond Anniversary Frolic: Weston Longville 2028

The Parson Woodforde Society will celebrate its sixtieth anniversary with a return to Weston from 18–20 September 2028.



We shall be based at the Wensum Valley Hotel at nearby Taverham, close to the A1067 Norwich–Fakenham road and seven miles from Norwich mainline station. From its terraces we can admire stunning vistas of the rolling hills familiar to the diarist. All the rooms are en-suite; most are on the ground floor.

There is ample free parking at the hotel which is also a golf and country club.

See also article on Explore Your Genealogy HERE.

East Surrey Family History Society

A team at East Surrey FHS has nearly completed an index of the Affidavits of Married Women to the General/ Westminster Lying-In Hospital for the years 1812-1857.

The original records are held at the London Archives, Ref H1/GLI/B11 and about thirty years ago one of our members transcribed the records by hand. Women had to swear as to their place of residence in order to enter the hospital to have their children.

This large dataset has an amazing amount of detail about the mother-to-be and her husband. It gives the woman's maiden and married names, the year and place of the marriage (sometimes abroad) and, in unfortunate circumstances, if she has been deserted or widowed. By looking at her unique reference, it is possible to see a multiple birth.

For the husband, as well as his name and title, there is quite often detail of him serving in the army or navy and/or his occupation. An apprentice will be recorded showing his master's name and likewise a master will detail his apprentice.

We also hold the Single Women's Settlement Examinations for 1815-1858, the Single and Married Women's Affidavits for 1780 -1816 and the Admissions Register 1767- 68. These records, which are now readily searchable for the first time, contain over 34,000 names.

The Westminster Lying-In Hospital was one of the first maternity hospitals, opened in 1767 in Westminster Bridge Road, Lambeth, but by the early 1800s it needed to expand. A new hospital was built in York Road, Lambeth and opened in 1828 and in 1830, by Royal Charter, it was renamed The General Lying-In Hospital. In 1879 a training school for midwives was formed. It closed in 1971.



The data is available on our name index via our research centre in Lingfield.

See our website: www.eastsurreyfhs.org.uk

Email: secretary@eastsyrreyfhs.org.uk

We will again be hosting our:

Fabulous Virtual Family History Fair

Saturday 23 January 2027

10am – 12noon and 2pm – 4pm

On Zoom—free to attend!

Articles from FHF members are welcome. Copy date is 1st of the month of issue.

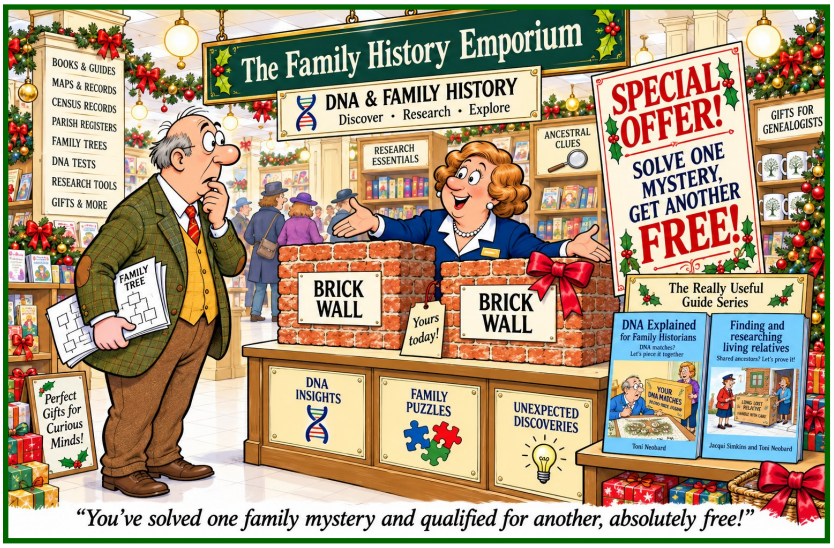
admin@familyhistoryfederation.com

DNA news, views and clues

with Toni Neobard

I've spent much of October putting the finishing touches to my latest book, *DNA Explained for Family Historians*, which will be available in time for Christmas. I'd rather naively imagined that finishing the manuscript meant most of the work was done. Then came the proofs, the corrections and, most challenging of all, compiling the index. I can confidently report that writing about DNA was considerably more enjoyable than indexing it!

My aim was to produce a book that could be read from cover to cover, rather than one that leaves readers struggling through pages of technical terminology. Above all, I wanted to make the subject interesting, accessible and, dare I say it, enjoyable. (*See cartoon*.)



"You've solved one family mystery and qualified for another, absolutely free!"

Of course, while I've been busy writing about DNA, the world of genetic genealogy hasn't stood still.

When two results look different

One development getting people talking is MyHeritage's introduction of Y-DNA haplogroups, in partnership with FamilyTreeDNA. The results are included for MyHeritage Complete and Omni subscribers, and men who have already tested with MyHeritage won't need a new test. But if you uploaded your DNA from another company, you may find your kit isn't eligible.

A Y-DNA haplogroup identifies a branch of the human paternal family tree. Men belonging to the same haplogroup share a common ancestor through their direct paternal lines.

Some people have been puzzled to discover that their new MyHeritage haplogroup differs from the result of a Y-DNA test they previously took with FamilyTreeDNA. But this doesn't necessarily mean either result is wrong.

Often the difference is simply one of detail. It's rather like being told your ancestors came from England, then discovering they came from Essex. Both are correct, but one is more precise. Of course, this is only an analogy: haplogroups trace people, not places.

MyHeritage gives a broad result. FamilyTreeDNA's Big Y test goes much further down the haplogroup tree, to smaller branches known as subclades. But if you took one of FamilyTreeDNA's older, simpler tests, the new MyHeritage result may actually be the more detailed of the two.

Not every difference can be explained this way, but it's worth checking before assuming something has gone wrong. Bear in mind sharing a haplogroup doesn't necessarily mean two men are closely related. Their common paternal ancestor may have lived hundreds or even thousands of years ago.

Two mysteries for the price of one

Meanwhile, our Essex Society for Family History (ESFH) DNA surgeries continue to provide plenty of interesting puzzles. Members submit their DNA questions to a panel of volunteers, of which I'm one, and we share our findings with them and with other members who come along to pick up techniques for their own research. All personal information is anonymised.

I particularly enjoy the way we each approach problems from slightly different directions. However long you've been working with DNA, there's always something new to learn, not least from one another.

One recurring challenge is trying to connect separate groups of DNA matches. You can spend hours building family trees, establishing how people within each group are related, only to discover that the trees stubbornly refuse to join up.

I've been encountering just such a problem recently. The original investigation concerns an unknown parent, and the DNA evidence has begun to suggest a possible answer. So far, so good. Except that one group of matches still doesn't fit the proposed family tree.

It would be tempting to concentrate on the matches supporting the theory and put the others aside. But unexplained matches don't disappear simply because we've found an answer we like.

Looking more closely has raised the possibility of a second unexpected paternity event a generation further back,

DNA continued

where the father named in the records may not have been the biological father. In other words, solving one mystery may depend on solving another that nobody originally set out to investigate.

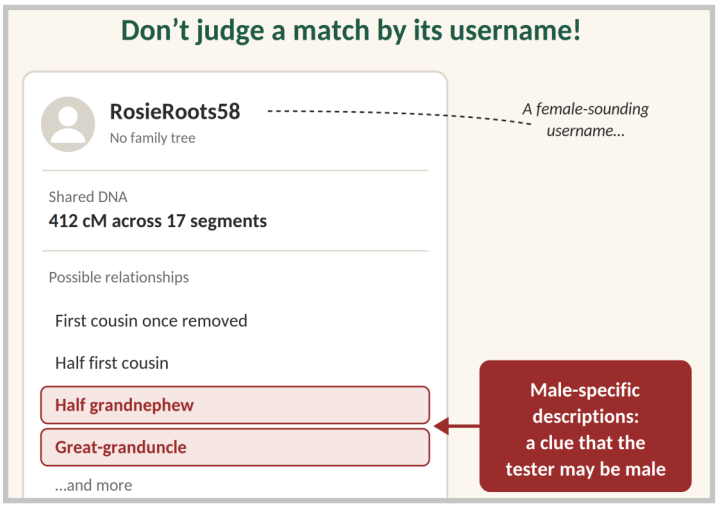
In conventional family history, one brick wall is generally considered quite sufficient. Genetic genealogy, however, occasionally offers a two-for-one deal!

There's still work to do before drawing firm conclusions. But that's part of the fascination. DNA doesn't always provide the answers we expect, and sometimes it raises questions we hadn't even thought to ask.

DNA Tip of the Month: Don't judge a match by its username!

While investigating a recent DNA Surgery case, we'd been trying to identify an Ancestry match with no visible family tree, using a female-sounding username as our starting point. Unfortunately, that may have sent us in the wrong direction!

When I expanded Ancestry's list of possible relationships, I noticed several male-specific descriptions, including 'half grandnephew' and 'great-granduncle'. This suggested that the person tested was male, despite the female-sounding username.



Struggling to identify a match? Check the full list of possible relationships. (Example details are invented)

It's a useful reminder that usernames can be misleading. If you're struggling to identify a DNA match, take a closer look at the full list of possible relationships. You may find a clue that changes the direction of your research.

And perhaps that's what I enjoy most about genetic genealogy. However much we think we know, there's always another assumption to question. The challenge isn't simply to find an answer, but to make sure it's the right one.

Alan Ruston : 1941-2026



The Federation was very sad to learn that Alan Ruston passed away on 11 November.

Alan had been involved in lecturing, speaking and writing on family history for many years and had written two books in the Society of Genealogists *My Ancestor was…* series. His specialist areas were the story of the popular theatre particularly panto, the history of nonconformity, and ancestry of civil servants, postmen, etc. He contributed specialist articles for a number of magazines.

Alan had been chairman of the governing council of Harris Manchester College prior to it becoming part of Oxford University and was a Supernumerary Fellow of the college. He had a lifelong involvement with Unitarianism and had spent many years working on the college archives and a quarter of a century as editor of *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*.

Alan was President of the Hertfordshire Family History Society through to his passing. He is pictured above recording memorial inscriptions with fellow members.

In addition to all the above, Alan had worked for some forty years as a customs and excise officer.

I had the pleasure of working with Alan, forever the perfect gentleman, on the revision and updating of his work which Family History Books published in 2025 as *Ancestors who worked in the theatre*. Well worth reading for its history of the English theatre and popular entertainments. He was generous with articles, too, such as in Bulletin No. 52 and No. 53.



Our heartfelt sympathy goes to his widow, Rosemary, and their family.

Rest in peace, Alan, you will be very much missed.

Ed.

News from the Federation

Mary, Lady Teviot
1933 - 2026

It is with great sadness that we report the sudden passing of Mary on the evening of 20 November. As a Federation life vice president, Mary was involved with many family history activities nationally and locally.

Archives Liaison News

I represent family historians on the User Advisory Group at The National Archives. These are the latest updates.

Service Records TNA reports significant progress to clear the backlog of service record requests. There are only 700-800 now outstanding and these should be substantially reduced by the end of the year.

The transfer of the Army Officers' service records is completed, and requests can be accepted from the New Year. These records can be up to 150 pages.

The transfer of the RAF Officers' service records should be complete by early 2027, and then it will be the turn of the Naval records, which include Wrens.

Volunteer Cataloguing Project Update TNA relies on hard-working volunteers. TNA has 148 onsite volunteers and 200 remote volunteers working on twenty projects. They have produced ten per cent of catalogue amendments. Sixty-four per cent of the volunteers have volunteered for over seven years. Volunteers are often of retirement age, but there are students and younger people benefitting from this unique opportunity. Volunteers gain skills through volunteering, feel valued, and have a purpose.

The Impact of AI TNA is feeling the negative effects of AI. There has been a forty per cent increase in email enquiries which are increasingly complex (sixty-four pages!), with incorrect references, a mismatch of expectations in what TNA can provide, and more requests for paid services. AI can guide people where to search, and people use AI to formulate enquiries. It is also means it is difficult gauge the understanding of the enquirer.

People believe AI not TNA - the copying service is receiving requests for documents that don't exist. Staff have AI fatigue! TNA is looking at technical changes, for example restricting cut and paste into the enquiry section, revising web content, restricting numbers of characters in enquiries, and more support for staff.

However, on a positive note AI is learning!!

Sadie McMullon, ***FHF Archives Liaison***

Secret caches of Irish census material

Claire Bradley is a professional researcher based in Dubin who has a specific interest in Irish research but also in genetic genealogy. Her regular blog has gems for those with Irish ancestors. You should bookmark and visit for news! One of the highlights in October was a new discovery of census material. It may only be for one area, but it could be YOUR area of research.



See https://cbgenealogy.ie/secret-caches-of-census-material/ Her blog has some useful links too.

Musical Connections

THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF MUSICIANS

A new dataset to explore! The Royal Society of Musicians of Great Britain, founded in 1738, is currently transcribing its archive records and building a searchable database of its members and their families.

Volunteers are also creating WikiTree profiles for the musicians, with documents from the society's archive uploaded to them, so that descendants and researchers can discover their ancestors.

If you have a musician in your family tree, we would love to hear from you. Please contact: archivist@rsmgb.org

See: www.wikitree.com/wiki/Category:Royal_Society_of_Musicians

Army Pension Records



For Scotland, we have the release of the **pension appeal forms** for the First World War on ScotlandsPeople, which you can find more about at **www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/news-and-articles/world-war-i-pensions-appeal-records-now-online**.

Findmypast has added a new collection entitled **British Armed Forces First World War Pensions Award Files**, available at **https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/british-armed-forces-first-world-war-pensions-award-files**, although these are partial transcripts from the original PIN 26 series at The National Archives, rather than access to the original records.

With thanks to Chris Paton's blog: **https://scottishgenes.blogspot.com/**

Really Useful Bulletin

News from the Federation

FreeUKGenealogy

FreeUKGenealogy
Human transcription of family history data

You probably use FreeBMD but are you aware of the other projects from FreeUKGenealogy?

In addition to the useful and easily searched indexes to the civil registration of BMD, they have census (FreeCEN) and parish registers (FreeREG). FreeUKGenealogy relies on volunteer transcribers, too! The latest project is FreePRO - *a free database of historical English and Welsh probate records covering from 1854 to 1943.* A quarterly newsletter has been launched, too. You can sign-up here: www.freeukgenealogy.org.uk/about/pages/newsletter-signup

Findmypast—Military Lives

Military Lives is a new way of exploring both military and local history. By combining memorial inscriptions with historical records and newspaper articles, the tool enables researchers to move beyond names and dates to uncover the people, families and communities behind those remembered.

www.findmypast.co.uk/discover/world-war-i/memorials

Find my past

Into the Jaws of Death: Portsmouth's railway past

Dr Mike Esbester

Tuesday 1 December

17.30-19.00



Portsmouth University

Free—in person event—booking required.

Full details and booking available HERE

Picture the age of steam and consider what was life really like for those who kept Britain's railways running. At this live event, Dr Mike Esbester, of **Railway Work, Life & Death** project: www.railwayaccidents.port.ac.uk will reveal the risks they faced, the lives they led and the part they played ishaping Portsmouth.

Interested in railway workers? See Family History Books' *Really Useful* Guide HERE just £8.95 plus p&p.

New records published by Findmypast

Highlighting all FHF record sets published between late October through to late November

Thanks to **Dorset Family History Society** you can now explore additional early census returns specifically for the Lyme Regis and Castleton areas of Dorset from the early nineteenth century in *Dorset Early Census Returns* record set.

Additionally, you can explore a brand new collection of records that uncovers individuals who were charged in 1834 as a result of the *Dorset Swing Riots*. Those who participated were met with mass imprisonments and transportations, so this set is an exciting addition for those with an interest in the social history of Dorset, or indeed, ancestors who were directly affected.

Lastly, we have also published a brand new set of records documenting individuals from Dorset who absconded between 1801 and 1858 (*Dorset Absconders List 1801-1858*). Those documented in this record set may have absconded from the Army or Navy or were convict absconders. Compiled by the society from the newspaper *Hue & Cry*.

Thanks to **Leicestershire & Rutland Family History Society** we have published an additional 30,000+ records to our collection of *Leicestershire Poor Law Records*. These new additions cover poor law cases that were heard in various parishes across Leicestershire. These records can help uncover the type of case your ancestor was involved in, the parish in which the case was dealt with or settled and the parish in which the individual originated from. These new records add to our poor law collection for Leicestershire which also covers removal and settlement order books, bastardy books and the Leicester Union emigrants register.

Northumberland & Durham Family History Society For those with ancestry in the Northumberland or Durham areas, our newly published monumental inscription records may help to add a few new generations to your tree, with records now available from as early as the fifteenth century thanks to new contributions from the society. We have added over 6,000 new records to the *Northumberland & Durham Monumental Inscriptions* collection which covers five distinct churches in the area between 1411-2022.

Kevin Todman

Data Manager – Family History Federation

E: data.manager@familyhistoryfederation.com

If your society has records it would like to place on Findmypast—and earn some money—contact Kevin who will be happy to help you.

FAMILY HISTORY Federation

Find my past

Family history groups are welcome to join the Family History Federation—see www.familyhistoryfederation.com/society-join

Really Useful Back Page

Family History Research Aids from the experts

Parish Chest, a service from the Family History Federation, has over eighty family history societies and associated suppliers at a one-stop online shop, offering a wide range of family history materials in some eighteen categories including:

- *Parish register transcriptions and more from local FHS*
- *Memorial inscriptions information from gravestones across the country, compiled by local FHS*
- *Nonconformists: Baptists, Wesleyans, Independents, Quakers and many more nonconformist lists*
- *Wills and probate indexes of wills and administrations*
- *Folders, printing facilities, giftware*
- *..and more!*

Societies and suppliers regularly add new lines, so visit to see what is there to help you add to your family tree.

www.parishchest.com

Societies and others interested in joining Parish Chest should initially contact:
admin@familyhistoryfederation.com

Explore Your Genealogy

This extensive information website is free to use. It has access to every genealogical topic imaginable, podcasts, resources, societies and much more.
It is provided by the Family History Federation.

FAMILY HISTORY BOOKS & MAPS

www.familyhistorybooksonline.com

Family History Books (FHB) is an online bookshop and publisher; it is owned by the Family History Federation and the aim is to provide a service to the genealogical community. Family History Books Online offers a range of relevant titles relating to family history research, plus a range of specialist maps for historians.

FHB welcomes contact from authors! Works of specific interest to family historians with wider social history topics are of interest. FHB does not publish individual family histories or fiction. If you have a book in the making, then do contact FHB via **admin@familyhistoryfederation.com**. We would love to hear from you about your ideas.

Please visit the online bookshop to see all the recent releases that cover a wide range of topics encountered in family history research. The series of books badged *Really Useful Guides* are just that—full of information in a very readable format. Those dealing with occupations offer in-depth detail on how that occupation impacted on all our forebears—not just those in that occupation!

In addition to its online shop FHB can also be found at major live family history events around the country. Come and visit us and see all the latest titles available. The stall is always very popular!

Happy browsing!

Explore our range of specialist family history books at:

www.familyhistorybooksonline.com

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The Federation policy is to include paid-for commercial advertising providing space allows.
For details of advertising rates, sizes, etc., please email **admin@familyhistoryfederation.com**—
please put "Bulletin Advertising" in the subject line.



The REALLY USEFUL Family History Show

24 April 2027—near Bournemouth—see Dorset FHS

Can FHF members put on a regional show elsewhere? Assistance available.
Contact: chairman@familyhistoryfederation.com

Southern FHF REALLY USEFUL Family History Show

FFHS does not exercise any control over the content of external website links in this Really Useful Bulletin. It is not responsible for the content or quality. Nor does FFHS endorse any companies or products advertised.
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