



Supporting Family Historians since 1974

**FAMILY
HISTORY
Federation**

REALLY USEFUL Bulletin

No 3

Welcome to the current edition of the *Really Useful Bulletin* which provides you with ideas for your Family History



Saturday 14th November 2020

10.00am to 4.00pm (GMT)

**The first speakers have been announced
and there is MUCH more still to come!**

The talks will be available to view for 48 hours after the event as you will definitely not have time to see them all during the Show

We are releasing information regularly so please keep checking the website at

www.fhf-reallyuseful.com for more news

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Really Useful Bulletin

Canal Family Ancestors



The Canal Era

The canal era really began in 1759 when the third Duke of Bridgewater built a short waterway to link his coal mines at Worsley with Manchester, to enable coal to be easily delivered to power the mills and heat the workers' homes.

Over the next fifty years, 2000 miles of canals were constructed. Regions like the Potteries and Black Country developed and became prosperous because of the canal network. Most British canals were completed by 1815. Many canals became profitable whereas others lost money and declined. Some were even abandoned during construction. By the end of the eighteenth century, the canal boom was over, having lost out to the railway network.

Initially canals and railways coexisted, with the railways concentrating on passengers and light goods, and the canals mainly transporting raw materials and bulk goods. By the middle of the nineteenth century the national railways network forced canals into decline that lasted for more than a century. Some canals, however, were taken over and supported by railway companies.

The canals and railways were both nationalised in 1947. In the 1950s there was increased interest in leisure use of canals and the Inland Waterways Association was formed to regenerate the canal system.

There are several waterways museums around the country which contain archive material and illustrate the canal era including The Gloucester Waterways Museum, The National Waterways Museum at Ellesmere Port and the Canal Museum at Stoke Bruerne in Northamptonshire. Each tend to reflect the history of their own particular area or canal system.

Boat people

The boat people lived in closed communities. They were born and lived on the canals, and they normally married within their own community too. Some took jobs on land, especially when the canal trade collapsed. There were many different jobs associated with the canals. The waterways created employment for thousands of people and their occupations included:

- lock/bridge keepers
- toll collectors
- navvies and engineers
- docks and wharves workers
- canal inspectors
- boat men

Thousands of men and women worked on the boats moving around the country. In some areas all-male crews were common and they returned to their families and houses on completing a job. Fly boats were also crewed by men. Whole families also worked on boats. There was only one wage per boat even though all the family was involved. Boaters were paid by the weight of cargo they delivered not by time taken to do so.



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If cargo was unloaded at the destination by the boaters as opposed to the wharfmen, then they were paid more. Some families worked a pair of boats so were able to carry double the amount of cargo. Different boats were often heading for the same destination and if they did not get there first, they had to wait to unload meaning they potentially lost revenue. Loaded boats could not move quickly so the only way to get there first was to work long hours - about 12 to 18hrs per day.

Conditions aboard a narrow boat

Living space was limited on board. Families were often large and overcrowding on boats was a problem. Cabins were only about 6ft wide and 9/10 ft deep

The Canal Act 1877 limited the number of people allowed to live on a boat. This depended on the type of boat and how many cabins it had. Girls above 12 and boys of 14 years old were counted as adults with strict rules where they could sleep. Inspectors ensured the rules were being followed. There were no toilets on the boats and boaters used chamber pots which were emptied into the canal. There was little room in the cabins, so every available space had to be used carefully; there were often hidden cupboards too.

There was no running water on the boats, but water taps or pumps existed along the towpath. Water was stored in ornately decorated cans kept on the roof of the cabin. Water for washing and cleaning was often taken direct from the canal.

Although there was variation in both boats and the canals, lack of space was a common and everything was carefully stashed. At least three quarters of the boat was used for carrying the cargo. The cabins were often highly decorated and very well organised.

The cabin was often painted cream or white with 'combed' paint resembling a woodgrain pattern. Cupboards and drawers were decorated with pictures painted on them. Cabin decor was influenced by the art styles of the time including canal art. Living space, therefore, became a colourful and cosy place.

Women and children

Women on board were mainly responsible for cooking, laundry and cleaning, and mothers cared for their young children. Pregnant women had to work almost up to the birth at which point the boat was moored and the baby was born in the cabin. After only a few days the boat moved on again. Children frequently sat on the cabin roof in fine weather, fastened with a harness to prevent them falling into the water. Older boys helped crew boats or girls helped with the chores. Boat children had little time to play. Children played in the hold when it was empty or on top of cargoes such as coal.

Children were often "lent" to boats that did not have enough crew, although most children lived on their parents' boats. Most were well cared for and worked almost as hard as the adults. They were leading the horse by the time they were 7 years old and working locks by the time they were 12.

Most children had little, if any, education and really were only able to go to school for about three weeks a year, perhaps half a day at a time or occasionally up to a week. In 1920 a law was passed so boat children had to go to school 200 days a year. Some children were taught on land and only saw their families in the holidays. "Schools on boats" also opened in stopping places along the canal.



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Horses or steam

Horses were an essential part of waterway life, often pulling the boats along the canal towpath - hence the name. They were well looked after. If a horse fell ill, then it resulted in loss of income as the boat could not move. Blacksmiths and/or farriers were important to canal life as they were needed to regularly shoe horses. A horse could eat from a nosebag as it walked. Some boaters kept their horse for a lifetime, others regularly traded.

Even after the widespread introduction of steam and motor boats, horse-drawn craft continued to operate and compete with them until the middle of the twentieth century. The canal age gave rise to new and artificial structures including numerous low bridges which were provided with a towing path under for the horses.

Canal people's health and wellbeing

Boaters were wary of both doctors and hospitals. There is a perception that they were healthy because they lived and worked in the open air. A report from the Registrar General, however, showed that the mortality among them was higher than most other social classes. The death rate of boaters between the ages of 25 and 65 was twice as high than among agricultural labourers.

Deaths among the boating community were attributable to:

- Lack of fresh water.
- Lack of sanitary facilities
- Some cargoes were unpleasant and carried disease or attracted rats
- Cabins could become infested
- Disease due to over-crowding
- Little separating the cargo from the cabin
- Risk of accidents and drowning

.The genealogy of canal people

Was your ancestor a canal boatman or maybe a lock keeper, boat builder or canal navvy? Use the information given on birth, marriage or death certificates to work back in time. Boat people were usually meticulous in registering such events, particularly births, but perhaps not where the actual birth took place.

Alternatively, parish registers record baptisms, marriages and burials. Most boat people had their children baptised – the question is where? When researching parish registers for boat families, think of the waterways they travelled along as their home 'parish'. All Saints' Church, Braunston, known as the "boaters cathedral" was a popular venue for boater's weddings from all over the country. Many boaters were also buried there.

Census records provide a fascinating window into boaters' lives. Sometimes canal boats were 'missed' by census officials but often canal families had a house on land, so some family members may have been at home while others were away working the boat.

Until nationalisation, canals were run by private companies who employed boatmen, engineers, clerks, toll clerks, blacksmiths, navvies amongst others. Minute books, wage books, staff ledgers, pension books and rent rolls of a canal company are a valuable resource.





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The National Archives at Kew hold a large collection of canal company records. Use "Discovery" to find canal company records. Some British Waterways Board collections are also held at county record offices.

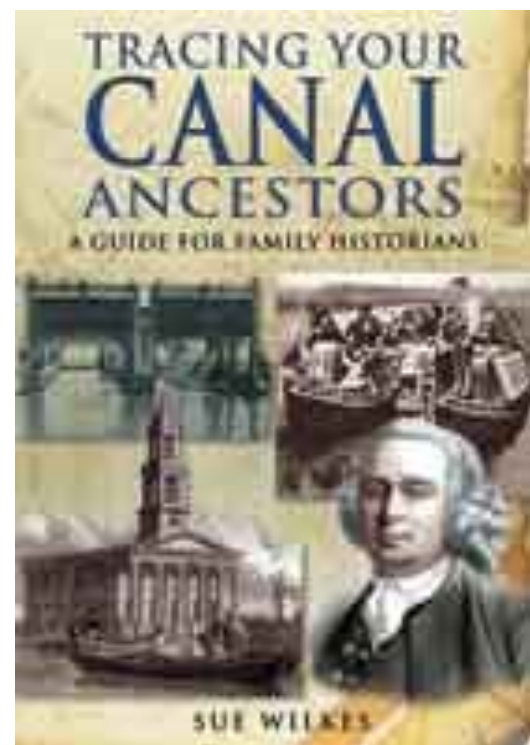
The Waterways Archive at Ellesmere Port holds many hundreds of documents and historic photos of canal boats and workers. The Waterways Archive at Gloucester has records of boat owners and registered boatmen, some toll records allowing you to associate a person with a boat, archives of large carrying companies and gauging tables which were kept by each Navigation Company.

Health registers can also be helpful. After the Canal Boats Act of 1877 and later, all local authorities kept registers of canal boats. Inspectors checked the boats regularly to ensure they were clean and not overcrowded. The registers include owners' addresses and journals recording the number of adults and children on each boat usually with names. These registers are held at county record offices, although the Waterways Archive has a collection. There are also online databases of registers for some regions available via the Waterways Archive website.

.Magazines and journals like *Narrowboat* feature articles and photos of canal carriers and families on the historic working boats. They have also been various articles published on researching canal families. Old newspapers may have family notices, or reports of accidents on the canals.

Once you have worked out the location of your canal ancestors, then online archives should be consulted. You can also see waterways history brought to life at museums or historic sites.

The Railway & Canal Historical Society www.rchs.org.uk was formed in September 1954 and has a useful and very informative website uniquely showing the connection between canals and railways.



Tracing your Canal Ancestors

A very useful resource

Published by Pen & Sword Books

<https://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk>

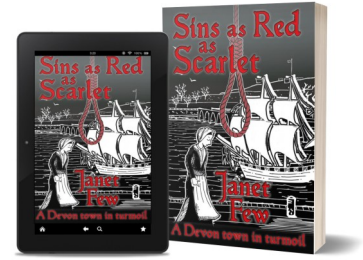


Really Useful Bulletin

**NEW
BOOK!!!**

Sins as Red as Scarlet by Janet Few

**The True Story of a Devon Town
in Turmoil**



**New Novel tells the
True Story of Bideford's Tumultuous Past**

Local author and historian, Janet Few, has just released her second historical novel which is set in Devon. *Sins as Red as Scarlet* is based on actual events that took place between 1640 and 1682; a time when the Age of Reason had begun and scientific thought was ousting superstitious belief. The menacing days of the witch-finder had all but gone. Nevertheless, in Devon's county town, three impoverished women were condemned to death for the crime of witchcraft. They came from Bideford, a prosperous port, with flourishing tobacco warehouses and ships departing for the Newfoundland cod banks or taking pottery across the Atlantic. It was a time of plague, war and religious dissent, all of which fashioned the prejudices and fears of the town's inhabitants.

There is also a modern strand to the book which follows sixteen-year-old Martha, as she researches the seventeenth century history of her home town and comes to realise that human nature does not change; intolerance and peer pressure have always exerted their power. Yet there have been, and still are, those who stand aside from the bigotry and the victimisation. Probing the motivations and beliefs of Bideford's seventeenth-century residents, Martha comes to understand how past events might lead ordinary people to become the victims, the accusers, or the accused. In the process, Martha finds a new resilience, enabling her to rise above those who seek to demean her.

Janet Few, known internationally in the world of genealogy, has meticulously researched the life of each of her characters, using the techniques of the family historian. In this way, she has uncovered some facts that are not widely known about the individuals who feature in her story.

She says...My work as an historical interpreter means that I live in the seventeenth century, in the guise of my alter ego Mistress Agnes. She is a formidable goodwife of a certain age, who leads a somewhat chaotic life during the time of the English Civil War.

Janet goes on to say that...writing this book was a wonderful opportunity to use both my knowledge of the social history of that time and also my genealogical background, as I describe Martha's research. I am fascinated by human behaviour and I was keen to draw parallels between witchcraft accusations and modern-day bullying.

***Sins as Red as Scarlet* can be obtained from:**

- Bideford bookshop, Walter Henry's,
- Blue Poppy Publishing
- and from the author.

The first 500 purchasers who order directly from Janet, will also receive a complimentary copy of her social history of the seventeenth century.

Coffers, Clysters, Comfrey and Coifs.

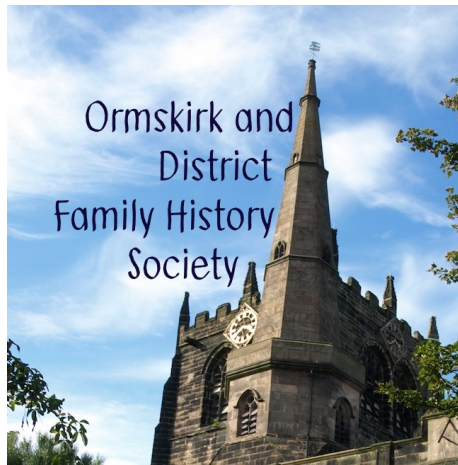
For details of this offer see

thehistoryinterpreter.wordpress.com/historical-novels/sins-as-red-as-scarlet-the-story-of-a-devon-town-in-turmoil/.

Sins as Red as Scarlet is also available on Kindle from www.amazon.co.uk/Sins-Red-Scarlet-Devon-Turmoil-ebook/dp/B08G1HQRS4.



Family History Societies



After the success of their Dig Up Your Roots In West Lancashire event in autumn 2019, Ormskirk and District Family History Society looked forward to a landmark year. They were due to celebrate their 40th anniversary at their February 2020 meeting, with mini case studies presented by five of their members, covering such diverse subjects as WWI soldiers, DNA testing, tips on dating Victorian photographs, and an enigmatic great-uncle. BUT...

A few weeks later, COVID-19 forced them to cancel meetings and their local library helpdesk. So, ODFHS turned creative, keen to do their bit to engage with their membership.

Working safely with St. Cuthbert's Church at Halsall, local committee members have photographed and transcribed burial books from 1950 to 2019 and combined them with other relevant data and published them on CD. As with all their publications, this collection is also available on a USB stick. When circumstances permit, a project to photograph the gravestones and transcribe their inscriptions will form the basis of a new DVD.

Chairman Emeritus, Bill Huyton, has updated the ODFHS sales list to include historical facts, statistics about the number of records and the date-span of each publication to help enquirers understand exactly what they can expect from each CD, DVD or booklet. A simple product list has become a valuable potted history of West Lancashire.

As a substitute for meetings, the Society's YouTube

channel has become a platform for an ongoing series of virtual talks that can be viewed by anyone, anywhere in the world. Featured subjects include births, marriages and deaths in old newspapers, the tenth anniversary of the ODFHS boat families website, illegitimacy, and an exploration of how researchers can use different types of historic resources from a specific town or village - for example charity records, grave owner's books and parish registers in order to build up a better picture of their ancestors' lives.

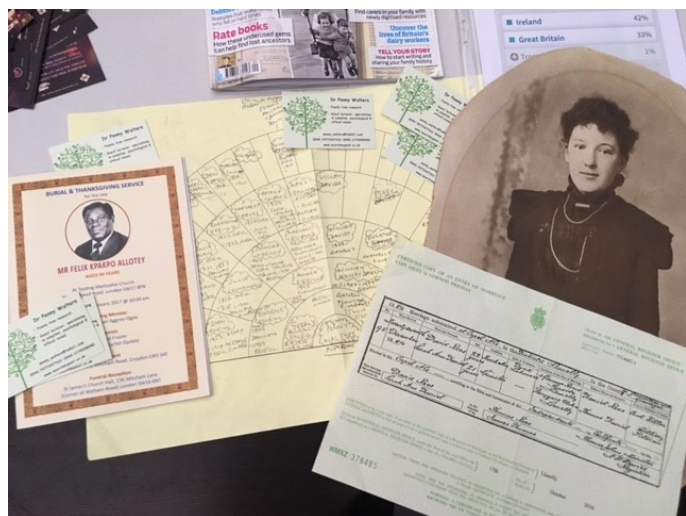
The boat families website was updated for the 118th time on 20 August 2020, creating links to Lathom, Bingley, Skipton, Stourbridge and Worcester. The database now holds 49,924 names. **www.boatfamilies.website**

The ODFHS Facebook page continues to receive a steady stream of comments and enquiries from members and non-members alike, and the Society plans to publish regular virtual YouTube talks until face-to-face meetings can resume.

<http://www.odfhs.website/>



Family History Course



<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/english/study/part-time/short-courses/genealogy-courses/>

Did you know that more than 26 million people had taken an at home DNA test up to the start of 2019? And as many people purchased home DNA tests in 2018 as in all previous years combined!

Have you seen the programmes *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Long Lost Family* on television? With the interest in family history and heritage continuing to grow, why not come along to an evening class and find out more about researching and compiling your family tree.

This 8 week online course will include an introduction to family history and genealogy, and the many resources available. We will find out how to start and fill in a tree, the role of interviewing available family members, what resources the General Record Office has, including birth, marriage and death certificates, and how to read and analyse censuses. We will also look at DNA testing options, with the potential advantages and disadvantages of different companies, and how to upload DNA results to the GED match merging site.

Back to the Roots.

Understanding your history through genealogy research

**Facilitator: Dr Penny Walters,
University of Bristol**

**8 online sessions on Wednesdays,
6-8pm,
14 October - 2 December, 2020**

We will also look at how to mix DNA results with a paper trail. Sessions will also look at those who have been fragmented from biological family through adoption for example, and we will address how to contact biological relatives or compile an ancestral tree. After the half-term break, we will look at ethnicity and identity, heritage, diaspora, homelands, oral histories, including the black British experience.

We will also look at the role of specific religions and countries when compiling a tree. Local, regional and national groups that are available will be given plus information about useful magazines, archives, conferences.

An underlying theme will be that some people may uncover ancestors' secrets and lies, so we will also address ethical dilemmas in genealogy.

This course aims to bring together people who enjoy researching their family history, and hopefully there will be some collaborating with helping others do their family tree.

Course Cost £132.00

The course will be facilitated by Dr Penny Walters, a member of staff at the University of Bristol.

She is also an international genealogy lecturer.



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**This month's Seasonal
Offer from Family
History Books!**

Scary BOGOF - £8.95

BUY

**"Introducing Family History 2nd Edition"
and receive for FREE
"How to Start Your FamilyHistory"**

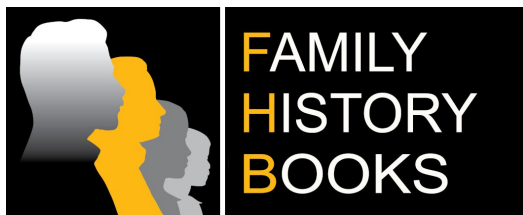
For more details see

[https://www.familyhistorybooksonline.co.uk/
product/scary-bogof/](https://www.familyhistorybooksonline.co.uk/product/scary-bogof/)

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www.familyhistorybooksonline.co.uk



Don't Miss Out!!!

There are more Societies than ever featuring on Parish Chest. The content of Parish Chest already has a good base upon which to increase quantity, quality and type of information on offer and includes some of the following and much more:

- *Parish Registers Transcriptions of births, baptisms, marriages, deaths and much 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*

So head on over to **www.parishchest.com** to see what is new to help you add to your Family Tree.

Ask the Federation

Family History Podcasts

**Now available on the Family History Federation
website.**

**Information about the 1939 Register
(Wartime Domesday).**

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