



REALLY USEFUL Bulletin

No 52

December 2024

FAMILY HISTORY FEDERATION
Supporting the Family History Community for Fifty Years

Season's Greetings to all Bulletin subscribers!

Welcome to the last edition of the *Really Useful Bulletin* for 2024!

Inside find...

Lead article this month—*The Story of Pantomime*

Plus *Christmas 1910-1914—the Fletton Experience* along with news from local FHS
AND Santa's sack of free items for our subscribers!



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Really Useful Bulletin

THE STORY OF PANTOMIME

by Alan Ruston

The pantomime is a unique British activity. The word is often contracted to 'panto' in conversation about a much-loved institution. It has a long tradition of being mounted in most British theatres and many village halls in December each year. Indeed, many theatres rely on it as a money-spinner, for it often shows to packed houses around Christmas. Pantomime has appeared intermittently in countries like Australia, New Zealand and Canada, even in the past the USA, but nowhere can match the British addiction to it over time. The panto is unknown in mainland Europe. It has long been a British institution (there are Scottish and Irish varieties) performed by professional actors as well as by amateurs. Some see it as a unique form of performance art.

Its origins in Italy go back to the fifteenth century, and stretching out across Europe in the sixteenth century, where it was known as *Commedia dell' Arte*. It was a type of travelling street entertainment which used dance, music, tumbling, acrobatics and buffoonery as it went from place to place at fairs and markets. There were troupes, often made up of family members, who had a repertoire of stories, which involved the stock characters Harlequin and his true love Columbine. An overprotective father Pantaloon refuses to allow them to be together, aided in this by Punchinello, later known as the Clown. The characters go through a variety of difficulties and scrapes but all comes out well for everyone in the end, even sometimes for the baddy.

These characters became popular in England around 1660 and started to be used in a variety of performances around the country. Within days of a new production put on in Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre in 1716, a performance of the same name opened just afterwards at the Drury Lane theatre; this is seen as the first tenuous beginnings of the pantomime. The earliest playbill for a pantomime in existence was that put on at Drury Lane late in 1737.

The panto we experience today bears little resemblance to these early days. What constitutes the modern version,

developed in the later nineteenth century, reflects the impact of the music hall, the circus, plus the advent of the Vaudeville format from the USA in the twentieth century. In its heyday in the mid-nineteenth century, the panto story often reflected events of the day and there were serious sections and dark forests through which the main characters had to pass. From about the 1920s, pantomime was constructed with the aim of appealing mainly to children, with asides for adults which the children are not meant to understand.

Structure of the pantomime

The plot of a modern panto is very simple. Although there are variations, it chiefly consists of a girl dressed as a boy, who is the son of a man dressed as a woman, who will win the other girl (dressed as a girl) with the assistance of various characters, some dressed in an animal skin. The message of the panto is always the good triumphing over the bad, however it's presented – the audience cheers the good and the bad are booed. There is plenty of audience participation with shouts at appropriate times of 'Look out he's behind you', 'Oh yes, it is!' and 'Oh no, it's not!', with booing and cheering at appropriate places. Today troops of children are often part of the performance, dancing as elves in the

appropriate scenes. All wear vivid and extravagant dress which is changed with each scene. Critics now say that professional productions are dominated by TV personalities who are easily recognised by the audience.

The male and female characters can be crossed-dressed. The Principal Boy is a woman and in tights. The Dame is a male, often a well-known TV personality in professional productions, usually extravagantly dressed and is a study in female eccentricity. The Principal Girl is a woman who ends up living happily ever after with the Principal Boy. The Ugly Sisters originate in the Cinderella story but are now incorporated in most pantos in one way or another as a 'nasty element', and can be played by men or women, often in extravagant dress. The 'animals' are usually men although they are not seen as they are but as the front and



The Christmas Pantomime, colour lithograph book cover, 1890. Public domain.



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back of a 'skin', usually meant to be a horse. As well as these characters there are groups of dancers and a chorus of varying numbers singing throughout a performance.

This broad description of pantomime will remind many of their visits as children, and also taking their own children or grandchildren to performances, both professional and amateur. I went to my first panto when I was just eight; my parents took me to the Hackney Empire in London, and have never forgotten the experience. In turn my wife and I took our children to those held each year at the Watford Palace Theatre. In their teens they didn't want to go any more, but when they had their own children, they took them, often with us. Now our grandchildren feel it's not for them and so the cycle goes on.

Family history and the pantomime

While my interest in the pantomime is of long duration, it was researching my family history that got me committed to theatre research. I commenced my family researches quite young in my twenties in the 1960s (no computers then). Tracing my mother's line took me into the Lee family of East London. My great-grandfather was Victor Leopold Alexander Lee (1855-1880), an unskilled worker who got a



chest infection and died in the London Hospital. He had married Mary Rogers in 1873, their one child Florence E Lee (born 1876) was my grandmother who died a few months before my birth. Getting Lee's marriage certificate proved the key development – it said his father was Nelson Lee, theatre manager.

Nelson Lee performing in a panto circa 1830s.

I looked in a nineteenth-century directory of theatre people and there he was – Richard Nelson Lee (1806-1872), not just a theatre manager but a leading writer of pantomimes. It all went on from there: Nelson Lee was a significant figure in the London East End theatre, and wrote over 200 pantomimes. Those who would like to know more about my Nelson Lee researches, see *My Ancestor Worked in the Theatre*, Alan Ruston, Society of Genealogists, 2005, p 72-76 (a successor publication is now being developed with Family History Books). A significant figure, Lee had an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. When this massive work was under review in the 1990s, I was able to persuade its editors that I should rewrite his entry; it was published in the even larger *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

(2004) it comprises sixty volumes and can be viewed online which you should be able to do using your UK public library card number to gain entry.

Searching for those pantomime ancestors

Panto ancestors are researched in the same places that the theatre is examined, ranging from the serious theatre putting on Shakespeare, Vaudeville, light comedy and whatever a theatre puts before its audience. The music hall in its early years in the mid-nineteenth century centred on stages annexed to public houses, but as time went on that moved to the theatre. There are no hard and fast rules of who appeared in what, and well-known actors, male and female, have appeared in panto, even in the circus. For example, Sir Henry Irving, the tragedian, started off his career in the 1850s as Scruncher, Captain of the Wolves, in *Little Bo Peep* at the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh. In modern times, Sir Ian McKellen has played the Dame in pantos mounted at the Old Vic Theatre in south London. Not everyone went as far as my ancestor Nelson Lee who in the 1850s was the first to create a pantomime performed on horseback at Astley's Amphitheatre in London.

Where to start researching? Pantos have always been reviewed in local newspapers. Before the First World War, they commenced on Boxing Day (26 December) and could go on into February as part of a wider theatre programme. Local and national newspapers reviewed and often mentioned the names of principal figures appearing in theatres in their area. Only the major theatres today maintain their own repository of records on site. Therefore, it's back to record offices and local studies centres which family historians know so well. Some retain playbills, programmes, etc (performance programmes did not appear before the 1870s) from the past. If they don't hold material on a particular theatre, they can probably tell you who does.

In the period up until mid-1870s the only records that remain are playbills. They were regularly up to three feet long, printed on strips of very thin paper that was pasted onto walls and bill sites, or given away by hand as an advertisement. See the image of the playbill for the performances at the Royal Grecian Saloon of 28 January 1851; it started with an opera, then a farce before the panto. Such shows often commenced around 6pm and went on until late. On other occasions these evenings started with a melodrama, with the panto usually coming last, described in detail. The costs of getting a seat varied, depending on the time entry was sought.

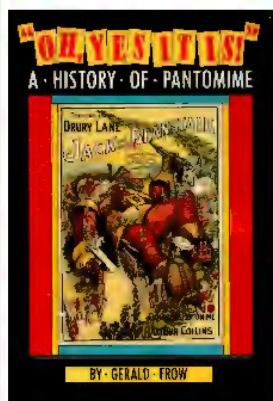
The panto titles, until late in the nineteenth century, had long and convoluted titles to link in with happenings of the day, usually starting with the words, *Harlequin and the...* These bills are kept in repositories in long cardboard boxes



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and are fragile. One of the few libraries with a large collection of playbills stretching beyond the capital, is the Guildhall Library, City of London. Annoyingly, the bills often just give the surname with Mr, Mrs or Miss, so identification of a performer can be an issue for the family historian. The British Library holds summaries of pantomimes that had to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain during the period 1824 to 1968.

There are numerous books written on the history of the theatre in its many manifestations in a variety of sizes and formats. Books describing the story of the pantomime are more limited, both in size and content and often only mention the major authors and actors. The most authoritative modern account I recommend is Gerald Frow's book *"Oh, Yes It Is!" A History of Pantomime* (BBC Publications, 1985). Published autobiographies of major actors are also worth investigating as they may mention in passing an ancestor with whom they had performed.



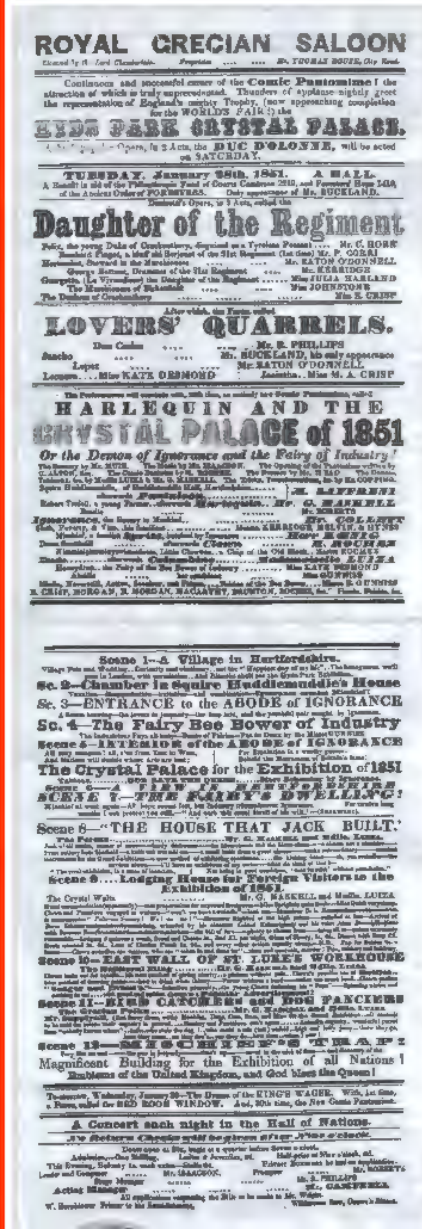
The actors' trade union, Equity, was founded as recently as 1930 and is not geared to researching family history. There are theatrical newspapers, the main historic one being the *ERA*, a weekly, which ran from 30 September 1838 to 21 September 1939. It is perhaps the best source for the family historian to go to in the first instance, as it has been fully digitalised and indexed. In its early years it was mainly a general newspaper with an interest in the theatre, but from about 1850 the theatre was its main focus. In the early days of digitalisation the British Library put fifty British newspapers online in the British Newspaper Archive; fully indexed one of these was the *ERA*, added in 2011.

Not only does the *ERA* give reviews and reports of theatrical activity, but its front page often consisted of private advertisements put in by actors describing what they could do and when they were available to be engaged by theatre management. Numerous ancestors no doubt will be mentioned there; when I put Nelson Lee in the general index the search-tool came up with over 2000 references.

The profession of acting is an uncertain one for the family historian to research. The main figures are covered but not the jobbing actor or performer, who went into the profession but had to leave it again when their services were not required by theatre management. They did something else as a job, but most could not leave its allure alone and entered it again when they could persuade a theatre to take them on. None of this was regularly recorded before the First World War, and a career was generally of an 'on-off' nature. The same goes for the

numerous theatre staff required to build often complex scenery in a panto in particular, who were not recorded by theatre management, ever averse to keeping records.

The attraction of the panto over time mainly rests on our distant memories retained from childhood. The challenge for the family historian is to trace performers, to whom they are related, who transmitted that magic on stage, recorded in the remaining records which are limited and often imprecise. Don't enter on the search expecting too much.



Playbill images of the performance at the Royal Grecian Saloon 28 January 1851. [Ed: Enlarge your view to 200%+ to read the details—and names!] The Royal Grecian Saloon was built in 1841, at the side of the Eagle Tavern in Shoreditch, London. The Eagle was commemorated in the popular rhyme *Pop Goes the Weasel*:
*Up and down the City road,
In and out the Eagle,
That's the way the money goes,
Pop goes the weasel.*

About the author
Alan Ruston has been involved in lecturing, speaking and writing on family history for many years and has written two books in the Society of Genealogists *My Ancestor was ...* series. His specialist areas are the history of

nonconformity, the story of the popular theatre particularly pantomime, ancestry of civil servants, postmen etc. His popular book, *My Ancestor Worked in the Theatre* is being revised. Family History Books looks forward to publishing the new book during 2025.



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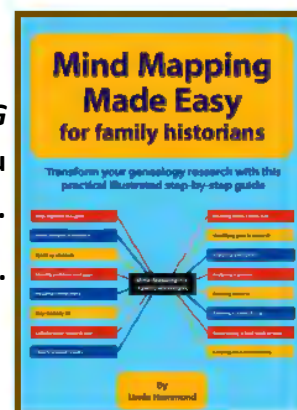
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Christmas 1910-1914—The Fletton Experience

by Dr Sadie McMullon

It's that time of year when advertisements paint a wonderful picture of Christmas Past complete with carol singing, snow and church services. I investigated local newspapers to see how Fletton and local parishes celebrated between 1910 and 1914 as war loomed.

The Christmas build-up wouldn't be complete without bazaars. It was reported in the *Hunts County News* on 8th December 1911, that on Wednesday 6th the London Road Wesleyan Church had held a two-day bazaar to raise funds for the repayment of the building loan. The church presented an 'animated and picturesque scene', the lady stallholders wore Welsh, Scottish and Irish national dress, whilst the young men wore English dress. The total proceeds were £94 7s 2d which was a record.

It was a busy few days as on Thursday 7th December the George Street Baptist Church held its sale of works many of which would make superb Christmas gifts. There was a tempting display of goods on offer including plain and fancy needlework, cakes, sweets, and men's fancy goods. There were also entertainments in the evening. The sale had a four-fold purpose: to raise funds for the chapel extension, the Sunday school fund, the Baptist Missionary Society and the general church fund. £40 was raised.

As now, festive food was always in great demand. On Friday 22nd December, the *Hunts County News* reported that on the previous Sunday the Fletton PSA (Pleasant Sunday Afternoon) group had held its meeting. An appeal was presented to the group from the Peterborough tradesmen. They wanted each individual to contribute a mince pie the following Sunday to be presented to the old people in the workhouse. It was therefore decided that the next Sunday would be 'Mince Pie Sunday'.

Of course, no festive season would be complete without football. It was reported in the *Peterborough Express* on Wednesday 3rd December that neither Fletton United nor the Reserves had a fixture on Saturday. The writer commented that as they weren't doing very well in the Northants League the 'enforced rest may have a good effect on the players'. In the event a match was played in Bedford, but the Fletton team was unable to field a full side and lost 8-1.

A modern-day problem, or so we think, are queues of traffic as people do their Christmas shopping. But the *Hunts County News* on Friday 26th December 1913 reflected on the 'crush of Christmas traffic' at the Fletton railway crossing, which led to a spate of minor accidents. One prominent citizen had 'a bad spill' from his bicycle as the gate shot up as he approached it. The writer commented that the goods trains were getting longer and

of greater frequency resulting in a louder public outcry as queues increasingly developed. As the festive season was upon the town, the bridging committee would not be meeting for some time. But the public were hopeful that improvement was imminent so were waiting 'with good humour and resignation'.

No festive season would be complete without the annual distribution of prizes for success in the preceding year. Less than year away from the Great War, an evening took place at the Coffee Palace and the Commanding Officer was Captain J E Hill. Four members of the Company had gained the Territorial Force Efficiency Award for twelve years' service and being efficient at twelve trainings. He then went on to present in excess of sixty other awards to the men.

On 4th August 1914 Britain declared war on Germany, and despite promises that it would be short-lived, war was ongoing as preparations for Christmas began. The *Hunts County News* of Friday 18th December 1914 encouraged people to celebrate Christmas as they usually would. However, patriotic gifts were encouraged. J W Benson Ltd, of Ludgate Hill, London, introduced several low priced but appropriate items of jewellery. These included an 'active service' watch with luminous dial and hands, brooches which displayed enamelled flags of the allied countries, and the 'perfect safety' wristwatch.

In the same edition it was also reported that the Rector of Fletton, Rev C Dowman had arranged for the Mission Room on Glebe Road to open every evening, except Sundays, so that the billeted soldiers could meet to play games and listen to the entertainment provided.

The children of serving men were not forgotten either in that first Christmas of the war. Mrs Cook, the wife of Major S G Cook of the Hunts Cyclists planned on distributing to all boys under fourteen and girls under sixteen, whose father was on active service, the good things that had been sent by the American Gift Ship. The combined efforts of Mrs Cook and her friends meant that companies from Fletton, Farcet and Yaxley received vests, a pair of warm gloves, socks and scarves, and it was hoped that each man would also receive a Christmas pudding.

Merry Christmas and a Peaceful New Year.

Sadie McMullon is Archive Liaison Officer for the Federation. You can read Sadie's articles about Fletton and its people at www.flettonparish.co.uk/ of interest to all with connections to the area as many names are mentioned, and to anyone seeking ideas for a project about their own local area.



Family History Societies



New Zealand Society of Genealogists Inc.

The New Zealand Society of Genealogists was established in 1967 by a small group of family history enthusiasts. In the decades since, we are firmly established as a national entity enjoying a strong and supportive membership base, with approximately sixty branches and affiliated groups around the country. The organisation is an incorporated society governed by a board of directors.



The society collaborates with many of our national institutions and repositories and has over the years earned a reputation for its commitment to the preservation of historic records and as a representative voice on matters affecting the community of family researchers and historians.

Our mission is to provide educational opportunities and research resources for the development of knowledge, skills and practice in family history and genealogy for members and the wider community.

In our library within our Family History Centre in Auckland we have one of the largest genealogical collections in the southern hemisphere.

Our collections include:

NZSG Certificates

A repository for certificates found to be unrelated to members' research, this collection has over 130,000 certificates which are indexed and freely available to members.

NZSG First Families

Contributed by NZSG members and non-members, these family record sheets cover families that immigrated to New Zealand by 1901.

Pedigrees

Enables contact with others who are researching your family through an indexed collection of pedigree registration forms submitted by members.

Pre-1856 New Zealand Marriages

A database of New Zealand marriages prior to compulsory civil registration in 1856.



Griffis Illegitimacies

A searchable database involving illegitimate births in New Zealand between 1877 and 1950 that were available on public records.

Funeral Service Sheets

An ongoing collection with contributions from members around New Zealand.

New Zealand Cemeteries

Transcriptions for approximately 1,400 cemeteries nationwide made by our members. A significant proportion are from private cemeteries, Māori *Urupa* and remote burial locations.

Obituaries

Contributions from members from sources such as national and regional newspapers, club newsletters and periodicals.

School Records

The only central point for school records in New Zealand. We have accumulated records for almost 2,000 schools nationwide dating from 1858 to present time.

Kiwi Collection

This is the gateway to a vast, meticulously compiled index containing (currently) over fifteen million records (constantly updated and added to) over hundreds of record sets (including many of our collections listed above), some with images, allowing members to locate the records they need and find exactly where and how to access them.

And finally, in New Zealand August is *Family History Month* and we help sponsor family history expos in the main cities of Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

New Zealand Society of Genealogists, P.O. Box 14036, Panmure, Auckland 1741.

Phone (09) 394 9549

Our website is www.genealogy.org.nz



Family History Societies



ORMSKIRK AND DISTRICT FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY

Founded in 1980 and based in Ormskirk, our remit covers the sixteen ancient parishes and townships of south-western Lancashire but our members' interests cover a much wider area. The impact of human migration, particularly since the Industrial Revolution, has resulted in families which once came from west Lancashire being spread around the UK and across the world. Equally, the current population of west Lancashire can trace their roots to many other parts of the UK and the world. About half of our membership lives outside the area of our remit but we all share interests in both family history and the local history of west Lancashire. Further details about the society and how to join can be found on our website <https://www.odfhs.website/index.php/membership>

Meetings are held monthly on the fourth Wednesday of each month (except December) at the Guide HQ, Moorgate, Ormskirk, L39 4RU (opposite Hesfords). Talks start at 7.30p.m. Non-members welcome (£2 admission). Our programme of talks, and other events, can be found on our website, and on Facebook.

Our list of meetings for 2025 is:

22 Jan	The Use of Manuscripts in Mediaeval Lancashire
26 Feb	A Slice of Gingerbread
26 Mar	The Enumerator's Walk, 1911, Long Lane, Aughton
23 Apr	Celebrating VE Day – remembering WWII
28 May	AGM (plus short presentation)
25 Jun	Ormskirk Library – facilities for family/local history research
23 Jul	A Song Seeker Found – inc Emma Vickers
27 Aug	The Lathom Almonry
24 Sep	The Derby Cinema Restoration Project
22 Oct	A Day Out with Mona
26 Nov	Quiz / Social Evening
Dec	No meeting

We hold a monthly **ODFHS Family History Helpdesk** on the first Monday of each month (excluding bank holidays) from 10.30am – 11.30am at Ormskirk Library, Burscough St., Ormskirk, L39 2EN – all welcome.

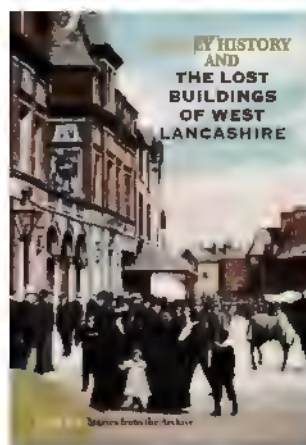
This year ODFHS is also collaborating with the Ormskirk Community Partnership to present a series of **Ormskirk Heritage Talks** at St Anne's Parish Centre, Prescott Rd., Ormskirk, L39 4TG starting at 1.30pm. Forthcoming talks include:

Tuesday 7th January - **History of Ormskirk Inns and Beerhouses**

Tuesday 4th February – **West Lancashire Military Heroes Remembered**

Highlights of the last year include:

- ◇ ODFHS Library Open Day / **Treasures from the Archive** exhibition held in Ormskirk Parish Church on 12th October 2024
- ◇ Completion of in-depth research into fascinating local figures **Cecil Edward MAPLES** and **Arthur William DAVENPORT**
- ◇ Publication of the first of two free booklets jointly



funded by Lancashire County Council and ODFHS crowdfunded donations. This first booklet **Family History and the Lost Buildings of West Lancashire** was featured by Lancashire Archives in their entry in the last LLHF newsletter. So far, well over 1000 free copies have been distributed as printed

copies or downloads from the ODFHS website <https://www.odfhs.website/index.php/downloads>

- ◇ The second booklet **Family History and the Landmarks of West Lancashire** will be published shortly – see our website or Facebook page for further information
- ◇ Supported by Heritage Action Zone funding, ODFHS collaborated with local artists Angie Thompson and Becky Atherton for events at Ormskirk Library and Ormskirk Parish Church. Called **The Memory Collectors**, these art-based activities and heritage displays were designed to spark memories of life in Ormskirk in the distant and not so distant past.
- ◇ Regular attendance at street events, fairs etc.

Website: <https://www.odfhs.website/>

Facebook: www.facebook.com/OrmskirkDistrictFamilyHistorySociety



Family History Societies



Calderdale Family History Society

Workhouse Project

The Calderdale Family History Society undertook a significant project in February 2024 to transcribe records from three workhouses in Calderdale—Todmorden, Halifax-Ovenden, and Halifax-Gibbet Street. This effort, completed by November 2024, aimed to create a standardized online database, despite the varying record-keeping practices of the workhouses. Members of Calderdale FHS can access the database, while the public can view summary index entries via the society's website.

Workhouses and Their Records

Todmorden Workhouse Records from 1880 to 1924 (with gaps) include weekly admissions and discharges on opposing pages, totaling 14,244 entries. The transcription captures all entries, even for habitual residents, resulting in multiple records per individual. Researchers are advised to group and sort entries by surname and date to track movements or locate family members. It is noted that families often had staggered entries and exits.

Halifax-Ovenden Workhouse The earliest and smallest dataset, with 2,424 entries spanning 1756 to 1838, reflects less structured record-keeping. Unique to this workhouse are apprenticeship records for young men, adding a layer of genealogical value. Admissions and discharges often featured *in situ* classifications for existing residents at the time records began. Some records consolidate multiple entries into single entries with date ranges due to the irregular nature of record formats.

Part of page from apprenticeships record book



Section of page from an admission register

Halifax-Gibbet Street Workhouse The largest dataset, with 48,739 entries from 1871 to 1918, posed the greatest transcription challenges due to its size and diversity of record formats. Initially simple, later records captured multiple admissions and discharges on single rows. For long-term residents, transcriptions include the first admission, final discharge, and the date range covered. The final book (1914-1918) added home address information, enhancing the data's usefulness.

Challenges and Access

Standardizing these diverse records required creativity, leading to some unavoidable omissions or summarizations. Researchers are encouraged to consult original records, available through the West Yorkshire Archive Service (WYAS), for comprehensive details. The WYAS document references are included in the database for easy retrieval. Non-local researchers can request document copies for a fee.

Conclusion

This ambitious project highlights the complexities of historical transcription and the value of preserving workhouse records. The Calderdale FHS team's dedication has resulted in a rich genealogical resource, offering insights into individual and family histories within the Calderdale region. Full access to these records is available to society members.

Membership at Calderdale FHS is available from as little as £6 per annum and is available via our website

www.cfhsweb.com

or through Genfair

www.genfair.co.uk



Family History Societies



Cave Family History Society

The [Cave Family History Society \(CFHS\)](#) was formed in 1976, by the late Hugh Cave, who was also one of the founder members of the [Guild Of One-Name Studies](#) (Goons).

We welcome members from all around the world who have an interest in the CAVE or CAVES name, including the distinguished Cave-Browne-Cave line.

Over the nearly fifty years of the CFHS we have built up an extensive series of over **1600 family pedigree** charts which trace the various Cave names along the family lines. Members of the CFHS are given access to the CFHS pedigree charts relevant to their family line.

Not all people who carry the name Cave are genetically related, as DNA research has shown that there are probably eight to ten separate origins of the Cave name. The CFHS supports a DNA Y-chromosome project which investigates the male Y-chromosome in order to match results to the CFHS family pedigree charts.

The CFHS also supports the preservation of CAVE-related historical documents which are held in various record offices around the UK.

If you would like to [join the CFHS](#) please contact us by comment below or send us a [Facebook](#) message, the annual fee is only £10 per year or £12 for members living outside of the UK.

Members receive our informative journal twice a year, and invitations to online meetings.



Bristol and Avon Family History Society

Formed in 1975, the Bristol & Avon Family History Society supports contact between members with regular meetings and a quarterly journal. We assist members with problems encountered during research work. The society promotes and encourages the public study of family history, genealogy and associated interests. Like most other family history societies, BAFHS is run by enthusiastic volunteers.

If you want any more info about the fair or B&AFHS meantime, let me know.

Paul O'Hanlon
fhfair@bafhs.onmicrosoft.com

Website: <https://bafhs.org.uk/>



Sussex Family History Group

Family History for all of Sussex

About Sussex Family History Group

With over 2,500 members worldwide and covering both East and West Sussex, we can rightly claim to be the premier family history society for the county.

Our research room and library, with friendly experienced volunteers to aid you with your research, is at The Keep, Falmer, Brighton. The Keep is the home of East Sussex and Brighton Archives.

New

We have now released "Sussex Discovery", our new online searchable database which is accessed through our website. "Sussex Discovery" already contains over 3.6 million records, including baptisms, marriages, burials, census and monumental inscriptions, etc. and more is being added. "Sussex Discovery" is part of the membership and is available free to all our members.

We have four meeting centres: Brighton & Hove, Worthing, Uckfield and Horsham and frequent web talks.

Where to find out more and to join

Discover what else membership offers, like quarterly magazines and newsletters, members' interests, transcriptions, etc. by exploring our website. Membership is from £15/annum. You can join on our website.

Issued by Roy Winchester publicity@sfhg.uk

Website: www.sfhg.uk

Facebook: facebook.com/groups/sussexfhg

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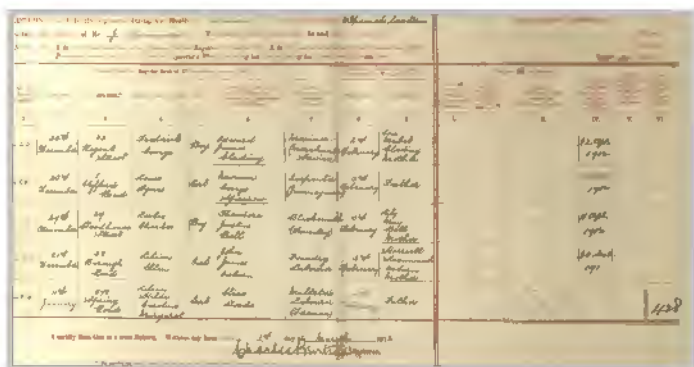
Family History Societies



Suffolk Family History Society

Ipswich Vaccination Returns and Civil Death Registers

Suffolk Family History Society has gained access to valuable genealogical records from Ipswich dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These records include:



Page from Ipswich vaccination births register
(image courtesy of Suffolk Archives)

a) Vaccination Returns: Comprehensive birth registers that document birth details (date, place); child's name and sex; parent information (name, occupation); vaccination details and a column for parental conscientious objection to vaccination.

b) Vaccination Infant Death Registers: As vaccination was supposed to be conducted within the first four months of life, we do not usually see deaths after the age of four months. In Ipswich, however, a copy of the entire death register was made, apparently at the request of the then Medical Officer for Ipswich. Obviously, there are the original death registers which are now held by the General Register Office, from which we can order copies for a fee, but Ipswich's records are freely available. It is believed they are the only ones in existence in England and Wales. They carry the information seen on death certificates, without the informant and the certifying doctor's name (see copy of death register, below). In addition, there is an indication of the date of an inquest, if performed – suggesting that a sudden or unexplained death had occurred.

These archives provide an unprecedented glimpse into local family and social history during this period. There are many causes of death recorded which we would find 'normal' in a historical context: pneumonia, old age, cancer, meningitis. But there are some that cause a second look:

shock to the system caused by injuries accidentally received by a flower stand falling on deceased on 9th September 1895 at the Parish of St Peter, Ipswich



Part page from Ipswich death register
(image courtesy of Suffolk Archives)

diarrhoea, probably accelerated by bad smells caused by defective drainage

natural causes, namely the effects of long dissipation and drunkenness.

Early in the 2000s, a project led by Peter Razzell (then of the Open University) transcribed the contents of the vaccination birth registers and the death registers for Ipswich from 1872-1910. The data were transcribed by a team of volunteers, some of whom were Suffolk FHS members. The project was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. That data is what we now have access to.

As the work of transcription has already been paid for by public funds, we have agreed with Suffolk Archives and the original project team that the information in the Ipswich registers will be freely available to anyone who wants it.

Initially, we will run this as a free look-up service, with requests for surnames. We are developing a free access database for use on our website. Remember that it is 1872-1910 that is currently covered. Please send your requests to me – my email is below. That is not all though.

The registers continue beyond 1910, and we are working with Suffolk Archives, Suffolk University and members of the project team to continue transcribing the registers up to at least 1924 (under the '100-year rule'). Extending the transcription up to 1924 will by itself open up a lot of new information and will cover the period of WWI and the 1921 census.

Furthermore, there are vaccination records for other Suffolk places - Lowestoft, Bungay, Haverhill/Clare, and Colneis (Felixstowe) - which may be of interest for future transcription.

Andy Kerridge, Chair - chair@suffolkfhs.co.uk

Website: <https://www.suffolkfhs.org.uk/>



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