



**FAMILY HISTORY FEDERATION**  
Supporting the Family History Community for Fifty Years

# REALLY USEFUL Bulletin No 53

January 2025

Welcome to the latest edition of the *Really Useful Bulletin*  
*inside find...*

Lead article is *Old Dissent in England up to 1914*  
plus news from local FHS and from the Federation



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Debbie Kennett - Making the most of DNA matches  
Janet Few - The A-Z of family history

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Laurie Page - Reading difficult handwriting/palaeography  
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Family & Community Historical Research Society : Guild of One Name Studies  
Andy Punshon photos and cards : Longley Publications : West Surrey FHS  
Beginners Guide to Writing : Cassini Maps/This Way Books : One Place Studies  
Kinson Historical Society : AGRA (Association of Genealogists and Researchers)  
Martyn Lawrence Antique Postcards : Western Front Association (Wessex branch)  
Hampshire Genealogical Society : Jewish Genealogical Society : Living DNA  
Romany & Traveller FHS : Somerset & Dorset FHS : Stalbridge History Society

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# Really Useful Bulletin

## Old Dissent in England up to 1914

by Alan Ruston

The term 'Old Dissent' is the phrase used to describe those congregations and associations that arose in England from the 1660s onwards, on the return of both the monarchy and the Church of England with its clergy into the historic parish churches. The Commonwealth, led latterly by Oliver Cromwell, had displaced the vicars and rectors from their parishes and introduced new men with a different view of religious belief and practice. In 1662, the former vicars and rectors mainly returned to the parish churches, and those erstwhile ministers were displaced in what is known as the Great Ejection; those ejected often went on to lead clandestine groups gathering in houses and farm buildings throughout England.

These clandestine worship groups could be broken up locally by magistrates, sometimes using the army, and those found there could be fined for not attending worship in the parish church. These gatherings rarely kept records as names recorded in a book would constitute evidence of membership of an illegal organisation.

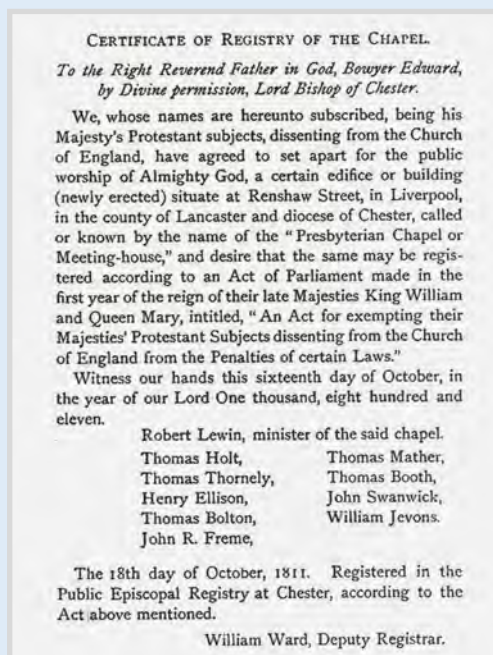
In 1688, following the flight of King James II, King William and Queen Mary from Holland were welcomed to the vacant throne, promising widespread reform. The resulting Act of Settlement of 1689 allowed limited freedom of worship, and it's from this time that dissenting churches arrive on the scene. The collective word dissent means rejecting the worship and practices of the Church of England (C of E). The use of the term *dissent* was mainly displaced in the nineteenth century by the word nonconformity, meaning not conforming to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. Sometimes the appellation of Free Churches is used, but this is perhaps too general and non-specific a term to apply. The earliest registers and records of a dissenting congregation date from the 1690s, but the limited number of these in existence partially reflects a continuing reticence to keep records in case they be used against those mentioned there at some future time.

### Forming the denominations

Old Dissent is not seen as including the Quakers, now the Society of Friends, who rejected those who met in what they termed as 'steeple houses'. In 1690s Old Dissent consisted of three groups of chapels, churches or meeting

houses, known over time as the Three Denominations.

Firstly, the English Presbyterians who were then the largest numerical group. These congregations hoped for a wider freedom by being taken into membership of a broader C of E; this never happened. During the eighteenth century they declined in numbers; congregations did not form a national Presbyterian system as was the case in Scotland. Most of the continuing chapels were influenced by the radical thinking of the time, and some came to doubt the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost; publicly expressing this belief was not legalised until 1813. These congregations, mainly but not wholly, evolved in the early nineteenth century into Unitarian and Free Christian chapels and meeting houses.



Secondly, those who affirmed the primacy of each congregation evolved into what were called Independent churches which mainly held Calvinistic beliefs; they didn't depart in the eighteenth century from mainstream Christian beliefs as many Presbyterians had done, and generally gained in numbers. They affirmed the primacy of the individual congregation as their key doctrine and denied external authority like bishops, so could reach no understanding with the C of E. From the early nineteenth century most of these churches started to be called Congregationalist and they formed the Congregational Union in 1831, a loose association with only the ability to advise and support individual congregations. There was a significant

increase in their number, estimated in 1901 at upwards of 400,000 with over 2,800 ministers, then the largest group amongst the dissenters.

Thirdly, there were the Baptists whose origins in England go back to before 1662, the oldest congregations being formed well before that time. The first recognised Baptist group met in Spitalfields in London in 1612. Their affirmation of believers' baptism meant baptism took place as an adult, not a baby. Adults undergoing baptism declared their faith and then were totally immersed when being baptised, sometimes in rivers and the seas; this took them beyond the practice and beliefs of other dissenters. Baptist groupings then consisted of General Baptists who considered Christ's atonement could extend to all people, while the Particular Baptists believed that it extended only





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to what are termed 'the elect'. The two groupings did not assemble together until 1891. Strict Baptists are different again and continue to maintain a separate organisation. The number of all types of Baptists in 1901 was about 243,000.

The period 1690 to 1710 saw the expansion of dissent into new buildings. Many the oldest encountered today date from this period. The early steps towards creating a denomination, like forming their charity funds, started in this period while at the same time growing numbers of their ministers were leaving and joining the C of E. As the eighteenth century wore on, there was a decline in the number of dissenters but the religious scene was enlivened by the evangelical revival, expressed by the Wesley family and the creation of Methodism in the 1770s. Methodists, of which there were a variety of types, did not in the main consider themselves as dissenters but are now classed as nonconformists.

The numerous churches, chapels, sects, and groups formed mainly in the mid-nineteenth century, like the Moravians (whose history in England is a long one), the Catholic Apostolic Church, the Salvation Army, the Christadelphians, the Christian or Plymouth Brethren, the Churches of Christ, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, the Free Church of England, the Seventh Day Adventists, the Swedenborgians to name but a few, do not come under the category of dissenters. It's a term not in current usage, except in an historic sense. In 1851 it was calculated there were 113 distinct denominations in England and Wales.

## Organisation and records

The separation of dissent into national denominational organisations did not take place until after 1800. Ministers often preached in chapels across Old Dissent but this changed when central organisations were created, reflecting differing views of church order and theology. The Baptist Union was formed in 1813, the British and Foreign

Unitarian Association in 1825, and the Congregational Union in 1831. English Presbyterians did not form into a national organisation, and those holding Unitarian beliefs generally became part of the Unitarian Association. The Presbyterian Church of England, formed in 1836, consisted mainly of congregations of Scottish adherents with different beliefs and structures to the old English Presbyterian chapels.

What records did dissenters keep? The C of E introduced printed books for births etc around 1810, which had to be used by all its churches. Nothing quite like this appeared amongst Old Dissent. Bound books of plain paper, or sometimes partly printed to meet local requirements, were used to record births and deaths and what was entered could vary at the behest of the minister or congregation.

What was recorded varied widely. Nothing like bishops' transcripts in the C of E has ever existed within Dissent or nonconformity. If a register was lost by a congregation before civil registration came in 1837, then no other record of its content remains. These unofficial registers were required after 1837 to be sent to the Registrar General (see The National Archives in the RG 4 series, and in several search engines). The number of registers forwarded was unexpectedly small, despite continuing pressure for such records to be given legal recognition, always previously resisted by Parliament. This rejection led to the establishment of a voluntary system in 1734 for the registration of some births for dissenters at Dr Williams's Library in London; this is now termed the Dissenters' Register held in The National Archives and consists of about 44,000 names.

Dissenting congregations kept other records of likely use to researchers. Nobody was an automatic member of a local congregation as each adult had to apply to become a member and make a financial contribution. There are membership books in most chapels, giving details about

each person, and account books to record a continuing financial commitment. Some records give a greater profile of an individual member than C of E records could ever achieve. These may list all members of a family, with birth dates, and show the date of joining. If they moved away, often the local chapel they had been recommended to join is shown. Some even give the date of death of children of members, which may not be recorded elsewhere.

More rarely, there exists in places what are called 'discipline books.' Members did not always behave as they should and could be censured for aberrant behaviour, the most common being alcohol abuse and financial



Interior of ESSEX STREET Unitarian Chapel (London).

As it appeared at the Centenary Meeting in 1874. This Church was opened in July, 1774, by the Rev. Theophilus Lindsey, who gave up his living of Catterick, in Yorkshire, and came to London to preach his new faith.



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mismanagement. Such a person was visited by the minister and officers of the congregation, and told if they did not mend their ways, they could be suspended from membership and be shunned. Such behaviour was often called 'disorderly walking.' Discipline books in the limited number of places where they were kept and retained can go into great detail about the person or persons involved. Few were maintained after about 1800.

Dissenting church records vary considerably in type, size, coverage and purpose; post-1837 chapels licensed to conduct marriages had of course to keep records as required by law. Other records associated with a dissenting congregation are now chiefly held by county or local record offices. All, for example, kept records of children attending Sunday school; some are very detailed and of significant importance before compulsory state education came in 1870. Not all continuing congregations have lodged their non-statutory records in appropriate record offices; there is no legal requirement that they be placed there. However, county archivists were required from the 1970s onwards to go out to list and describe the records of each congregation not held by them; the record offices are therefore the first port of call for all researchers.

## Expansion

The nineteenth century saw the expansion of nonconformity in both numbers and influence in England and Wales and by 1914 looked significantly different from what it was like in 1800. At that time, parts of dissent were under a cloud in wider society, not being seen as committed supporters of the government or the war against France. In the next twenty years expansion took place, not least in the number of MPs who were its adherents. Dissenters were denied certain rights, for example of being able to hold office as a public servant, which they had long been agitating for. As the denominations were being formed nationally, they sought to directly influence government. By 1830 most civil rights had been granted to them by statute. Civil registration came in 1837, chiefly due to direct pressure by nonconformists. By then they had so many supporters amongst MPs, the government could do no other.

Their changed position is reflected in their numbers. In 1715 there were reckoned to be 1,845 dissenting congregations in England, a slightly lower number in 1773, but in 1851 there were 17, 019 of all categories. In Wales there were less than 200 in 1773 yet 2,459 in 1851. The reason for the accuracy in 1851 is because in the national census that year, questions of religious affiliation were asked for the first and only occasion until 2001. In 1800, about ten per cent of the population in England were connected in some way with religious dissent. In the 1851 census, the percentage of the population attending C of E worship was 19.68% and those attending nonconformist worship was 18.62%. These comparisons continued into

the twentieth century; the total nonconformist membership in 1899 was assessed as 1.91 million and attendance at CofE Easter Communion services was 2.10 million (see M.R.Watts, *The Dissenters*, Oxford, 1995, vol 2.)

By the 1850s many new churches and sects had appeared on the scene. They proved to be a challenge to Old Dissent, though much of the middle class still kept an allegiance to the Three Denominations and to certain varieties of Methodism.

## Denominational history societies and associated colleges

The Three Denominations have long-established history societies, and each has colleges with which they are associated that hold original records. These colleges will often aid the family historian as to where they should go next. In most cases this will be to the local or county record office to see original registers and related records.

The Baptist Historical Society ([baptisthistory.org.uk](http://baptisthistory.org.uk)) provides a history of the Baptist story in this country, plus gives a lead into the Angus Library located in the Regents Park College, Oxford (<https://theangus.rpc.ox.ac.uk/>) which hold a variety of original records.

The Congregational Historical Society ([conghist.org.uk](http://conghist.org.uk)) and the [United Reformed Church History Society](http://www.unitedreformedchurch.org.uk) from 1972 guides the researcher towards local record offices, and to Westminster College Cambridge which can aid the family historian ([www.westminster.cam.ac.uk/library-archives-history](http://www.westminster.cam.ac.uk/library-archives-history)). Being part of the United Reformed Church, the college also holds records associated with the Presbyterian Church of England as distinct from the Presbyterian chapels of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which evolved in the nineteenth century mainly into Unitarian churches and chapels.

The Unitarian Historical Society ([unitarianhistory.org.uk](http://unitarianhistory.org.uk)) provides original indexes and citations relating to Unitarian ministers and congregations. These are direct finding tools, often citing original materials located at Harris Manchester College, Oxford ([www.hmc.ox.ac.uk/special-collections](http://www.hmc.ox.ac.uk/special-collections)) and elsewhere since the eighteenth century. The college in addition hosts the website ([unitarianobituarie.org.uk](http://unitarianobituarie.org.uk)) which is a finding tool giving the reference to the over 30,000 obituaries which have appeared in Unitarian newspapers and journals in the last 230 years.

## Other libraries

John Rylands Research Institute and Library ([library.manchester.ac.uk/rylands](http://library.manchester.ac.uk/rylands)) in Manchester holds perhaps the largest collection of nonconformist material in the UK, covering most denominations. It is particularly strong on Methodist material, and has significant amounts of records of other denominations. Getting into what you want may not be particularly easy but John Rylands has much to aid the researcher into the historic records of the Three Denominations.





# Really Useful Bulletin



John Rylands Library, Manchester  
Image: Shutterstock

In October, the Dr Williams's Library website announced:

*We are truly excited and honoured to announce a new partnership between the Dr Williams's Library, previously based in London and the John Rylands Library at The University of Manchester, one of the acknowledged great libraries of the world. The new partnership will bring together inarguably the two finest collections of nonconformist religious social history in the world and situate them in Manchester, itself a renowned city of dissent and innovation...*

See: <https://dwl.ac.uk/> for further details.

Dr Williams's Library in London is often cited as having the most extensive historic library, dating from its foundation in the 1720s. It is not open at present and only requests to see specific material uniquely held there will be considered. Its website ([dwl.ac.uk](http://dwl.ac.uk)) provides readers with its catalogue and includes a listing of early dissenting ministers (Surman index). It does not hold Methodist material.

## Monthly journals and publications

A key source to learn more about likely forebears during the nineteenth century and after are the obituaries in denominational journals and periodicals. Each denomination had a series of mainly monthly publications, weighty when bound together yearly. Among the main ones are the *Congregational Magazine*, the *Baptist Magazine*, the *Monthly Repository* (Unitarians) but there are many more, some lasting just a few years. They contain notices of the deaths of ministers, leading laymen, and unusually women. The nonconformists were amongst the first in British society to note the lives of women in this way.

The modern newspaper type obituary did not start to appear until the 1850s. Many of those in denominational journals of course are long, and frustratingly not always very specific on facts about the deceased. However, they are unique with information not to be found elsewhere.

As in other areas, these monthlies are not the place to look for obituaries of agricultural labourers and the like. Many journals also include marriage announcements which can be useful. Indexes to some journals exist and the journals themselves can be seen on-line. I've found the digital library - [hathitrust.org](http://hathitrust.org) in the USA has many of these nineteenth century journals available to the researcher.

An example of the riches that can be found I've taken from the *Monthly Repository*, April 1816:

*'Died March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1816, in her 52<sup>nd</sup> year, Ann, wife of Mr Robert Blyth, of Birmingham (to whom she was married April 10, 1783), and daughter of the late Mr George Brittain,*

*merchant, of Sheffield... Her estimable and liberal-minded parents, had educated her to the principles of the Established Church. The events, however of her early life, led her to examine the foundations of Unitarian Dissent... she saw reason to embrace that simple faith in the evidences and obligations of which she assiduously instructed her children; ten out of the eleven, of whom survive to bless her memory....*

Another related source is the denominational year books and similar publications. Examples include the *Congregational Year Book* (1847-1972), the *Baptist Handbook* (1860-1970s), and the *Unitarian Almanac* (1840s-1890) and its successor *Unitarian Year Books*. Besides listing all their chapels with the name of the minister and the chapel contact, they can include obituaries of ministers and leading lay figures, and sometimes of local lay preachers.

## Sources to consult

If guides are required, showing where collections of material are held, there is the *My Ancestor was...* series produced by the Society of Genealogists. Published from about 1990 onwards, they can be a useful introduction to research. Each of the major denominations is covered in a separate booklet giving a short history, plus information on the present location of records. I wrote the one on English Presbyterians/Unitarians. They remain widely available, many in online versions.

There are two books I'd recommend, designed with the family historian in mind, to aid research in this complex area of family research.

The first is *Tracing Your Nonconformist Ancestors, A guide for Family and Local Historians* by Stuart Raymond, Pen and Sword. This authoritative and comprehensive work is based on detailed research amongst the denominations. It lists places to go for anyone researching nonconformity, and in particular those seeking to trace their dissenting ancestors.



# Really Useful Bulletin

It is a weighty volume, but those wanting something put differently should consult the Federation publication, *Introducing Nonconformist Records, Explaining Nonconformist Records for Family Historians*, Ian Waller. It assumes limited knowledge of the subject and tackles the complexities in a different way. It has its strengths: Chapter 14 on the Quakers is among the best brief descriptions of Quakers and their records that I've seen. The book has numerous appendices which, in a few words using bullet points, imparts the information to be found in various places, not only of Old Dissent but also a range of often small denominations.

If you're starting on the task of finding out more about your nonconformist ancestors in England then this is the book for you. However, Stuart Raymond's book expands beyond Ian Waller's work to give guidance and sources on some obscure religious groups. My advice is to buy both books to provide, for example, a more complete account of the different terminology used amongst the historic denominations. I'd see it as £30 well spent that can get the researcher into what is often a mystery area amongst family historians.

## About the author:



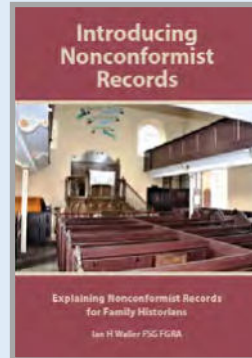
Alan Ruston is president of the Hertfordshire Family History Society, and was for twenty-five years editor of the *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*. He is a vice president of the Hertfordshire Association for Local History and a

former president of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, a national body mentioned in the text. There is also mention in the text of Harris Manchester College, Oxford – of which he is a Supernumerary Fellow.

*Images on pages 2 and 3 provided by the author.*

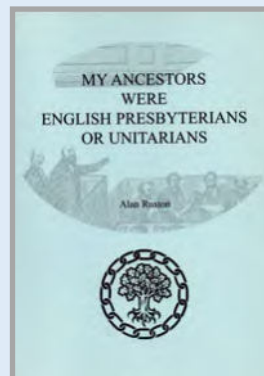
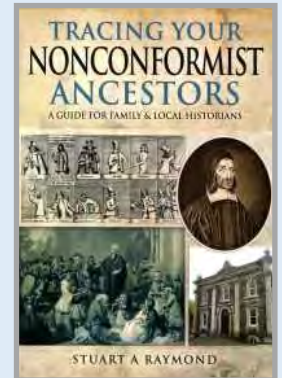
## Alan Ruston's recommendations for further reading

Available from Family History Books are:



*Introducing Nonconformist Records—Explaining Nonconformist Records for Family Historians*. Ian Waller's book, published by Family History Books in 2023 has details of sources in addition to explaining the various nonconformist groups. Available from [FHBO here](#) at £14.95.

*Tracing Your Nonconformist Ancestors* Stuart Raymond's handbook published in 2017 provides an overview of the sources. He identifies the numerous websites, libraries and archives that local and family historians need to consult. Available from [FHBO here](#) at £14.99



*My Ancestors were English Presbyterians or Unitarians* by Alan Ruston. This booklet lists the known records for Presbyterian Chapels in existence before 1850, with details of holdings by record offices and major libraries. Available from [FHBO here](#) at £4.95.

## Family History Books

The publishing arm of the Family History Federation is Family History Books. FHB is operated by volunteers who work with authors to bring their text to fruition either in print or in digital format where appropriate.

Family History Books will consider works from new or established authors. FHB is always happy to discuss possible projects informally with authors. FHB welcomes works detailing the contextual history and information that can be obtained from described sets of records, and explain any peculiarities and challenges that a researcher may encounter when using the various documents for a particular topic.



Family History Books does not accept "family histories" or fictional material for publication. FHB will consider the commercial viability of any work prior to commissioning.





# Really Useful Bulletin

## Plans to Destroy Original Will Documents Scrapped

by Richard Holt

The Ministry of Justice published its response to the consultation 'Storage and retention of original will documents' on 8th January 2025.

Almost 1,600 organisations and individuals responded to the consultation, many of whom described themselves as family historians and genealogists. Based on the analysis of responses and the issues raised, the Government has decided "that it will not pursue any reform that involves the destruction of original will documents." While this is a win for family historians everywhere, the battle is not entirely over. The response mentions a number of topics that the genealogy community should remain watchful of, including future changes to legislation, born-digital wills and changes to fees for digital copies.

One issue the response does not fully clarify is the relationship between the Public Records Act 1958 and the Senior Courts Act 1981. There are access requirements under both Acts and currently a vast amount of the Ministry of Justice's probate archive is not available to order and is indeed exceptionally difficult, if not impossible, to access. Whilst it is reassuring that the Government has listened to respondents' concerns, the response also reflects the legal position in relation to public records that have been selected for permanent preservation and have been transferred to a place of deposit.

Documents released under Freedom of Information show that the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, along with The National Archives, engaged with the Ministry of Justice in relation to their responsibilities under the Public Records Act. While the majority of the disclosed documents were redacted, it seems likely that they outline the legal position and responsibilities of the



*Ministry of Justice Building*

*Image: CC BY-SA 2.*

*Photograph © Andrew Dunn*

Secretary of State and Keeper of Public Records, whose permission is required under law to destroy public records in places of deposit.

Justice Minister Sarah Sackman has stated that the documents "will remain in storage, and – on request – are available for all to access," although in reality, much of the vast archive cannot be accessed. I for one would welcome the ability to access original wills in cases where only office copies are provided. I would also like to see access to other documents submitted during the probate application process, such as oaths, which are now known as 'statements of truth'. As a community, we still need clarification on legislation and access rights and, despite such a positive response, we should not stop seeking these answers.

The full response to the consultation can be found [via this link](#). Alternatively, search for 'Government response to retention of wills'.

### **About the author:**

Richard Holt is a professional genealogist who runs [Holt's Family History Research](#). Prior to becoming a professional researcher, he worked in a number of schools as an early years teacher and senior leader. He has a deep-rooted belief that learning is a lifelong endeavour. Richard also tutors for Pharos Tutors [<https://www.pharostutors.com/>], teaching their Apprenticeship Records and Victorian Crime and Punishment courses. He presents talks to family history societies, including the Society of Genealogists and Legacy Family Tree webinars. Richard is a Member of AGRA (Association of Genealogist and Researchers in Archives) and currently serves on their Council.





# Family History Societies



## Wiltshire Family History Society

### Wiltshire parish register transcriptions

Wiltshire FHS achieved a milestone event in December with the publication of baptisms and burials for Ramsbury parish from 1589 to 1837. This completes the monumental task by volunteers of the transcription and publication of all Wiltshire parishes.

Beginning in 1987 the transcription of the registers was masterminded for much of the thirty-seven years by John Hurley, who sadly died in July, just a few months before the culmination of this project. The final volumes have been dedicated to John in recognition of his role not only in leading this work but also for his major contribution to Wiltshire family history.

The baptisms and burials recorded in all 302 parish registers are now available in print, on CD or pdf download.

Combined with Wiltshire marriages transcribed by Nimrod Research, they can also be purchased on CD or pdf.

See [wiltshirefhs.co.uk/publications/sales](http://wiltshirefhs.co.uk/publications/sales) leaflet for details.

Parishes covered by Wiltshire FHS can be found here:

[www.wiltshirefhs.co.uk/databases/wiltshire-parishes-map](http://www.wiltshirefhs.co.uk/databases/wiltshire-parishes-map)

Email contact is [publications@wiltshirefhs.co.uk](mailto:publications@wiltshirefhs.co.uk), for general enquiries [admin@wiltshirefhs.co.uk](mailto:admin@wiltshirefhs.co.uk) and of course, our website [www.wiltshirefhs.co.uk](http://www.wiltshirefhs.co.uk)



Image from Wiltshire FHS website.

## For informed HELP and ADVICE



## Join your local FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY

Explore Your Genealogy

[www.exploreyourgenealogy.co.uk](http://www.exploreyourgenealogy.co.uk)  
[www.parishchest.com](http://www.parishchest.com)  
[www.familyhistoryfederation.com](http://www.familyhistoryfederation.com)  
[www.fhf-reallyuseful.com](http://www.fhf-reallyuseful.com)  
[www.familyhistorybooksonline.com](http://www.familyhistorybooksonline.com)



## Supporting Member Societies

The Federation makes considerable effort to promote all its member societies whether they are in UK, abroad or specialist ones. This takes place at all manner of live events as well as online and in print.

The above is the advert published in the 2025 *Family Tree* magazine's annual handbook—inside front cover where readers cannot, hopefully, miss seeing it!

Each year the *Really Useful Leaflet* listing all members societies and groups is produced and available free at many events around the country. It can be read online [www.familyhistoryfederation.com/really-useful-leaflet](http://www.familyhistoryfederation.com/really-useful-leaflet)

Societies are encouraged to provide articles up to 500 words for this *Bulletin* to promote themselves and encourage people to join and support their work.

Members are also provided with access to the Federation website where they can add information on upcoming talks and events:

[www.familyhistoryfederation.com/news-and-events](http://www.familyhistoryfederation.com/news-and-events)

Do encourage your local group to get involved—and if not already members do join in!

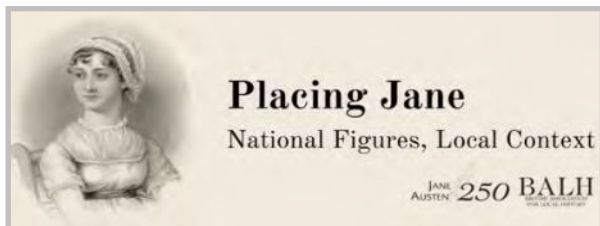




# Family History Societies



**British Association for  
Local History**



The British Association for Local History, a member of the Family History Federation, is delighted to present this conference as part of the **Jane Austen 250** programme and Local and Community History Month.

**Saturday 3rd May 2025 9.45am - 4.45pm**

**MAST Mayflower Studios, Southampton, SO14 7DU**

The programme includes presentations and talks:

### **Literary Landscape**

*Jane Austen and Southampton: inspiration for Northanger Abbey and Sanditon?* by Dr Cheryl Butler

*Locating Pemberley: The Importance of Place in Jane Austen's Fiction* by Dr Gillian Dow

*Muddy Petticoats and Parasols: Uncovering Jane Austen's Experience of Walking* by Nicola Pritchard-Pink

### **Jane Austen Dramatized**

*The Night-time Economy: The French Street Theatre and The Fitzhughs* by Dr Cheryl Butler

*Dramatizing Jane: Sarah Siddons, Austen's Favourite Actress* by Jo Willet

*Jane Austen and Character: An Actor's View* by Angela Barlow

### **Letters, Journals, Household Books and Diaries**

*The MAD letter, the Austen Household Book, and the Royal Engagements Pocket Diary* by Dr Cheryl Butler

*Keeping Ladies' Pocket Diaries in the age of Austen* by Holly Day

*Southampton and the wider world: The travels of William Ridding* by Dr John McAleer

Following the conference there will be an optional private viewing of the 'A Very Respectable Company' exhibition at the SeaCity Museum.

**Full details:** [www.balh.org.uk/event-balh-placing-jane-national-figures-local-context-2025-05-03](http://www.balh.org.uk/event-balh-placing-jane-national-figures-local-context-2025-05-03)

**Booking:** Early Bird Tickets are £25 (this will rise to £28 in early 2025) and includes lunch and refreshments. Tickets can be booked directly with the MAST Theatre box office here: [www.mayflower.org.uk/whats-on/placing-jane-2025/#synopsis](http://www.mayflower.org.uk/whats-on/placing-jane-2025/#synopsis)

Discover more about Local and Community History Month at: [www.history.org.uk/historian/resource/1567/local-and-community-history-month](http://www.history.org.uk/historian/resource/1567/local-and-community-history-month)



**Pharos Teaching and Tutoring Ltd**

Pharos Tutors, an organisation member of the Family History Federation, offers short topic-based online courses on a variety of genealogy-related subjects. Topics range from genealogical sources, like wills and Chancery records, to courses on one-name and one-place studies, Scottish and Irish research, DNA and the popular "Professional Genealogist" course. Our tutors are professional genealogists, archives professionals and subject experts and have often written books on the subjects they teach. We have twenty tutors and over fifty courses, with more courses in development.

Our tutor-led courses are our most popular and usually last between three and six weeks. The format of each is the same. Students are delivered lesson notes at the start of each week. These are in pdf format so that they can be downloaded and kept forever. Each lesson contains activities for students to complete and these are posted in the online course forum area. Students can see each other's work, comment and collaborate where appropriate. Every week the students have the opportunity to attend a weekly online chat session with their tutor and fellow students. This is a great opportunity for students to ask their tutor questions.

We have two certificate programmes in genealogy, which are combinations of tutor-led courses, but with the added benefit of formal assessment. These were developed in partnership with the Society of Genealogists, and our Advanced Certificate is recognised by AGRA (the Association of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives) as a route to professional genealogy.

One of past Intermediate Certificate students said:

*"I have been studying the Intermediate Course for eighteen months. The modules are taught by different tutors, each with expert knowledge in their field. I've found them to be really supportive, always ready to answer questions (no matter how silly!), and encouraging throughout.*

*I was initially anxious about returning to studying after all these years, but I had nothing to worry about.*

*Overall, I've found Pharos to be nurturing and eye-opening – I couldn't believe the extensive collections of records out there that I didn't even know existed!"*

Visit the Pharos website at: [www.pharostutors.com](http://www.pharostutors.com)

**Use code FFHS10, valid until the end of February, for 10% off ALL courses, assessed and non-assessed**

Follow Pharos on X, Facebook, LinkedIn and Threads at @PharosTutors. On Bluesky @pharostutors.bsky.social.



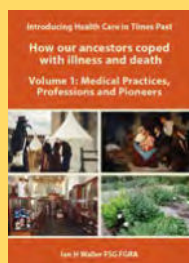
# Really Useful Bulletin

## News from Family History Books

### INTRODUCING HEALTH CARE IN TIMES PAST -

#### *How our ancestors coped with illness and death*

Following the success of the four-book set, and in response to requests, you can now purchase each volume separately. The individual volumes are £12.95 each. The four-book set is £40—a considerable saving.

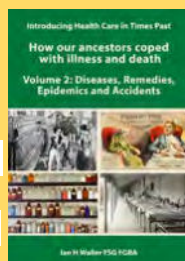


**Vol. 1: Medical Practices, Professions and Pioneers**—describes how medicine evolved through the centuries. It discusses various medicinal practices by *wise women and witches* in medieval times through to *quacks, apothecaries* and then how health care became more prioritised and organised with trained

doctors, nurses and others. There are chapters on different kinds of hospitals from almshouses and poor law infirmaries to the more modern hospitals of today. It also discusses some famous medical pioneers and developments in health care from very basic medical equipment to vaccinations and penicillin.

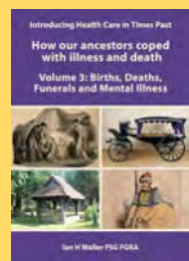
#### **Vol. 2: Diseases, Remedies, Epidemics and Accidents**

—covers diseases through the centuries in some detail ranging from *evil spirits in the head* in medieval times, various epidemics and hereditary diseases to childhood disorders. The section on accidents at work covers agricultural work to the Industrial Revolution and much more. This volume also examines some unusual cures and remedies, especially those in earlier times, and uncovers some myths and folklore too.



#### **Vol. 3: Births, Deaths, Funerals and Mental Illness**

—is all about birth, death and funerals. It covers how our ancestors dealt with childbirth centuries ago from basic care in medieval times to Victorian trends – and includes some odd superstitions about childbirth too. As sure as night follows day, death follows birth and the causes of death are examined in detail in this volume. This volume includes extensive details about funerals and how they have changed over the years. The volume ends by discussing the asylum system and how our ancestors dealt with mental illnesses.



**Vol. 4: Military Medical Care**—covers all aspects of medical care in the military from the Crusades in the twelfth century, the Battle of Agincourt, the Napoleonic and Crimean Wars through to the extensive care dealing with casualties in both world wars. The methods of transporting the wounded in the war zones are examined including the various military and volunteer groups that were involved such as naval nursing, volunteer aid detachments, the British Red Cross and many others. There are also extensive details of medicine, health care and surgery at sea. This volume ends with the transition to the NHS and details about the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine.



The direct link for the four book set is [here](#). The set is £40, a considerable saving on £51.80 if you buy four individual titles.

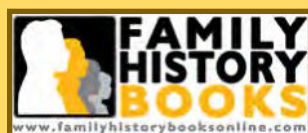
If those don't tempt you to the online bookshop, then how about the books by Colin Chapman? Many will use *Chapman Codes*—the simple designations of counties etc., devised by Colin for use in family history. His books offer great insight and helpful explanations. Titles include:

**[Sin, Sex and Probate—Ecclesiastical Courts, Officials and Records](#)**. This provides an easy-to-understand guide to the operation of the Church and its records that all family historians rely upon.

**[Marriage Laws, Rites, Records and Customs](#)**—Was your ancestor really married? This book will help you understand what was really happening!

**[How Heavy, How Much and How Long? Weights, money and other measures used by our ancestors](#)**. We all struggle with those old terms and this booklet will help resolve your finds!

**[Pre-1841 Censuses and Population Listings in the British Isles](#)** (sixth edition). An early census list could bring down your brick wall! This book lists those known to exist.



The direct link to the online shop for all your family history reading:  
[www.familyhistorybooksonline.com/](http://www.familyhistorybooksonline.com/)





# Really Useful Bulletin

## News from the Federation

### Scottish Family History Month

3 – 26 February



Our friends at *Family Tree* magazine have asked that we pass on information for this year's Scottish Family History Month.

*Family Tree* and *History Scotland* have joined forces to present **Scottish Family History Month 2025**, a series of online talks to explore Scottish ancestry and heritage.

Now in its fourth year, Scottish Family History Month is supported by National Records of Scotland and the University of Strathclyde and will feature some of the best speakers from the world of Scottish family history.

Each talk is £12, but you can buy the full bundle for £40 to £50. The full details are on their website:

[www.family-tree.co.uk/store/genealogy-tools/family-tree-magazine/scottish-family-history-month-2025-bundle](http://www.family-tree.co.uk/store/genealogy-tools/family-tree-magazine/scottish-family-history-month-2025-bundle)

### Be Aware of Scams!

Readers who have done DNA tests with FamilyTree DNA will have recently been warned of a “scam” website purporting to be FTDNA. The suffix was the key to identifying the impostor.

We all hear of scams. We must each be vigilant and always check that an email really does come from who it claims to be from (the style of message is the usual giveaway) and that a website really is the one you need.

If you are asked to reply to any email by providing personal information, don't! Verify the message!

### Seminar

#### YOUR FUTURE, OUR FUTURE:

#### Serving the family history community TOGETHER

Saturday 15 February 2025 10am – 3pm

Wesley's Chapel and Leysian Mission, City Road, London EC1Y 1AU

For full details see *Really Useful Bulletin 51—November*

**Booking essential.** Please email Debbie today:

[admin@familyhistoryfederation.com](mailto:admin@familyhistoryfederation.com)



### Really Useful Show LIVE— South West

Saturday 29 March

10am—4pm

Kinson Community Centre—near Bournemouth

Hosted by Dorset FHS

Free admission, free parking, refreshments to purchase...it just keeps giving. See cover advert, but here are additional details to entice those in striking distance to come along.

The talks are on a first-come first-served basis—book your talk as soon as you arrive. A nominal £2 is charged per talk. The talks take place twice during the day.

The list of exhibitors includes a raft of family history societies, local history groups, specialist organisations and commercial vendors...the list on the website will be updated periodically.

There often is a raffle at local events and this show is no exception. At going to print the super prizes so far are:

- \* UK Pro-subscription to *Find My Past* for a year
- \* Personal premium *The Genealogist* subscription for a year
- \* *Living DNA* test kit
- \* Subscription to *Who Do You Think You Are Magazine* for a year
- \* Mystery goody bag of wonderful things!

*Raffle tickets only available at the show.*

Dorset FHS asks you please note that **Treetops Research Centre will be closed** to visitors on 29 March – everyone will all be at the Really Useful Show!

[www.dorsetfhs.org.uk/events-activities/family-history-day/](http://www.dorsetfhs.org.uk/events-activities/family-history-day/)

### STOP PRESS

#### Honour for Federation's Society Liaison Officer



**Margaret Roberts**, has been awarded **Fellowship of the Royal Historical Society** in recognition of her public engagement with historical communities. On receiving the award, Margaret said '*Being elected as a Fellow is a singular honour and one of which I am very proud...I shall continue to engage with FHF membership in my usual manner.*'

Congratulations Margaret!



# Really Useful Bulletin

## News from the Federation

### Federation Out and About in March



The Federation will be promoting family history and society members at a number of hobby/craft events during the year, and attending various local and regional family history events with the bookstall. Upcoming dates below.

Always stop by the exhibit for a chat with our team of helpful and knowledgeable volunteers.

[Glasgow, SEC: ICHF Creative Crafts](#) 6—8 March

[Malvern, The Family History Show](#) 15 March  
**with bookstall**

[Birmingham, NEC: ICHF Creative Crafts](#) 13—16 March

[Kinson, near Bournemouth](#) 29 March

See front page—**with bookstall**

The bookstall will have many books available including new titles from Family History Books and titles from a range of other publishers. There is often a discount for visitors on the day!



### New Year's Honours

The Federation was delighted to learn of an award that included 'genealogy' in the New Year's Honours! It is not often that genealogy or family history are cited!

Congratulations to Bill Lawson on award of the BEM in recognition of his services to the Isle of Harris.

Bill went to the Hebrides as Project Leader of the Integrated Development Programme, a European-funded programme for the Western Isles. Bill moved to Harris, developed a genealogy research company and collected a vast amount of genealogical information.

Bill's research has been passed to the Northton Heritage Trust which is based at [Hebrides People](#) visitor centre in Northton, Isle of Harris. Bill is a consultant to the trust and continues his interest in family history research. Anyone with Western Isles connections should visit the centre's website and also see the books which Bill has produced.

### Christmas Giveaways

Thank you to all those who "had a go" to win the various giveaways which Family History Books provided for Santa's Sack! Here is a list of those pulled from the hat.

**Introducing Health Care in Times Past (four book set) by Ian Waller**

Jan - Brownhills, West Midlands

**Mind Mapping Made Easy for Family Historians by Linda Hammond**

Stephen - Morpeth, Northumberland

**Dating by Design (two book set) by Stephen Gill**

Gwen - Sheffield, South Yorkshire

Peter - Weston-super-Mare, Somerset

Keith - Bolton, Greater Manchester

Dennis - Dunoon, Argyll & Bute

Terence - Widnes, Cheshire

**Mystery Book Parcels (six books in each parcel)**

Anne - Wakefield, West Yorkshire

Caroline - Llandovery, Carmarthenshire

Jane - Lichfield, Staffordshire

Pauline - Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire

Heather - Victoria, Australia

Michelle - Plymouth, Devon

Teresa - Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire

John - Newent, Gloucestershire

Alan - Norwich, Norfolk

Andy - Belper, Derbyshire



What a geographical area they cover! We do hope parcels have arrived and you all enjoy your reading!

### Societies' Data on Find My Past

Kevin Todman, FHF Data Manager, reports on the datasets added to FMP in 2024 on behalf of member societies which then receive royalties.

2024's new items added range from the usual MIs and register transcriptions through to poll books, settlements, window tax, Quarter Sessions...the range is incredible and there are a number of member societies involved. Thirty-four datasets with 1.5 million pieces of information!

Each time you use material provided to FMP by local societies it provides a small fee for the society, helping them to continue their work.

All FHS that are FHF members can take part. If your society would like to learn more about opportunities through datasets online, please contact Kevin:

[data.manager@familyhistoryfederation.com](mailto:data.manager@familyhistoryfederation.com)





# Really Useful Back Page

## Family History Research Aids from the Experts



Parish Chest, a service from the Family History Federation, has over sixty family history societies and some twenty-plus traders, at a one-stop online shop, offering a wide range of family history materials in some sixteen categories including:

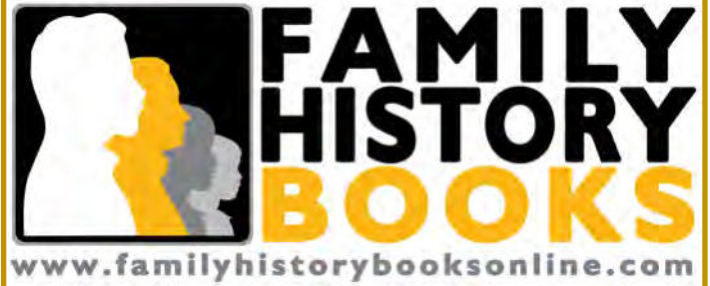
- *Parish register transcriptions and more from local FHS*
- *Memorial inscriptions information from gravestones across the country, compiled by local FHS*
- *Nonconformists: Baptists, Wesleyans, Independents, Quakers and many more nonconformist lists*
- *Wills and Probate Indexes of wills and administrations*
- *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](http://www.parishchest.com)

**Societies and others interested in joining Parish Chest should initially contact:**

[admin@familyhistoryfederation.com](mailto:admin@familyhistoryfederation.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 offers a range of relevant titles relating to family history research.

FHB welcomes contact from authors! Works of general and 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](mailto:admin@familyhistoryfederation.com)

Recent publications have covered a wide range of topics with a good uptake on titles as each is published. The four-volume set *Introducing Health Care in Times Past* are now available as individual volumes as shown in this edition.

In addition to its [online shop](http://www.familyhistorybooksonline.com) 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!

**Please explore the range,  
and place your orders, at**

[www.familyhistorybooksonline.com](http://www.familyhistorybooksonline.com)



## The REALLY USEFUL Family History Show

**Live show 29 March near Bournemouth**

**Online 14 and 15 November 2025**

Please view [www.fhf-reallyuseful.com](http://www.fhf-reallyuseful.com) for full details



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