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REALLY USEFUL Bulletin

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Welcome to the latest edition of the *Really Useful Bulletin*

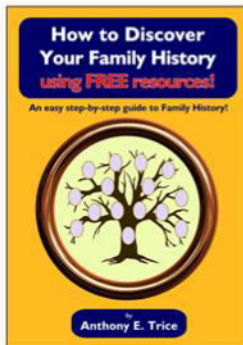
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plus news from local FHS and from the Federation

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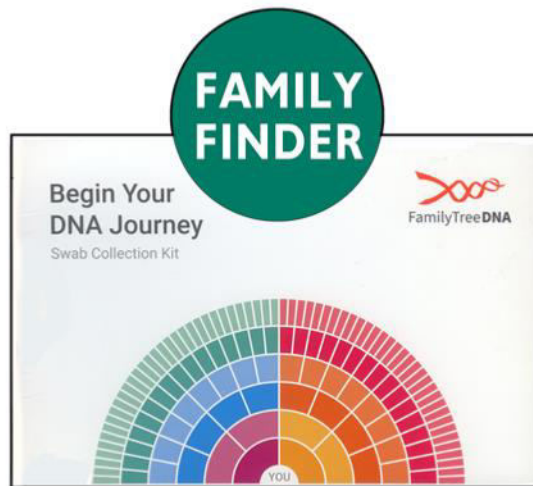


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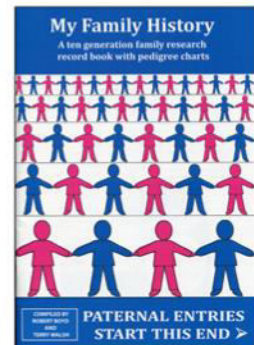


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Really Useful Bulletin

Statute and Hiring Fairs

by Jacqui Simkins

“The Fair without the window was now raging thick and loud. It was the chief hiring fair of the year and differed quite from the market of a few days earlier. In substance it was a whitey-brown crowd flecked with white - this being the body of labourers waiting for places. The long bonnets of the women, like waggon-tilts, their cotton gowns and checked shawls mixed with the carters’ smock frocks; for they, too, entered into the hiring.” [The Mayor of Casterbridge, Thomas Hardy.]

The Mayor of Casterbridge was first serialised in 1886. Thomas Hardy was born in Dorset and lived there for much of his life. He drew on his experiences in the county for his novels so it is not surprising that the description of the *Casterbridge hiring fair* observed from a window is similar to the scenes observed in our illustrations from central and northern England. *Casterbridge* is based on the town of Dorchester.



Hiring fair in Warwickshire from *London Illustrated News* No.1730, November 1872

Rural life

Life in the countryside was nothing like it is today. The agricultural depressions, particularly post-Napoleonic wars and again in the last decades of the nineteenth century, saw farms without tenant farmers. Rural living was hard - very hard for the average agricultural worker in times past. There is a great deal written about the Speenhamland System (1795), Swing Riots (1830s), Tolpuddle Martyrs (1834) and much, much more. The Enclosures of the 1830s and earlier were *fatal to three classes, the small farmer, the cottager and the squatter*, according to *The Village Labourer*. After Enclosure, the ordinary cottage-dwellers lost the right to glean the open fields after harvest was completed, although some landowners still allowed access

to the enclosed land. Then there was a series of poor harvests including that of 1816, *a year without a summer* following the eruption of Mt Tambora which produced severe famine throughout Britain and Europe with associated high prices for food. The potato blight of the 1840s decimated potato crops throughout Britain and devastated Ireland where the poor had come to rely almost entirely on the humble spud for sustenance. Occurrence of the potato “rotting disease” in 1845 in Melbourne, Derbyshire is recorded in John Joseph Briggs’ diary; he also comments on the freezing over of the great river Trent. All these factors enable you to visualise the hard times in the nineteenth century, let alone earlier periods. With an expanded and increased understanding of rural life, and especially the lives of the hard-working agricultural community who were driven by weather conditions, then you can start putting your forebears well and truly into their place and time.

In *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England*, Ann Kussmaul estimated that some sixty per cent of those aged 16-24 were farm servants in the period 1600-1800. Many a poor family would have been relieved that older children were hired, housed, fed and watered by farming employers in much the same way as were apprentices in more urban areas. In her research, she also reckoned that over half of agricultural labourers were live-in farm servants. In the *Handbook of Farm Labour*, published 1868, there are some useful statistics on numbers employed in various agricultural sectors and regions.



Hiring and statute fair, north of England from *London Illustrated News* No.2217, November 1881

It therefore follows that most family historians will find agricultural workers amongst their ancestors. Many of these were regularly moving from area to area, but rarely



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travelling any great distance – if they could change parish, county and diocese in a short move, they did. They are the true “border hoppers” who tax the research ingenuity of many a family historian.

Family researchers frequently comment *oh, they were just ag labs* not realising there was a considerable hierarchy in the agricultural workforce which is detrimentally masked by the nineteenth-century census interpretation of all as merely an “ag lab”. You are fortunate if you find your ancestor listed in the census as teamster or shepherd, for example. Matters are not improved by some incumbents who wrote “labourer” for anyone who earned their crust by their hands, ignoring their parishioners’ skills and ability to run their own businesses – people whom today we might refer to as self-employed or artisans. Richard Jeffries’ *Hodge and His Masters* is worth reading – there was a degree of rose-tinted spectacles involved for his audience of the time as the book, published in 1880, was a collection of essays Jeffries had written for the *Standard*. William Cobbett’s *Rural Rides* should be read too; Cobbett did not mince his copious words in describing conditions in the rural areas visited on his journeys in the 1820s. Cobbett was a radical social reformer who was extremely observant of the rural communities he visited.

When we look at the census entries throughout the nineteenth century, it is obvious that some agricultural labouring families moved regularly between employers – the varying birthplaces of children is a key indicator. Do we accept the moves as simply being “for work”? But even so, how did they know there was work to be had in another place? As a child, I remember an elderly relative telling stories of hiring fairs (and other local activities - not all legal!) and now wish I had been old enough to understand and therefore ask questions!



Photograph by Sir Benjamin Stone of two rural workers c1900 at Bidford Mop (public domain mark). Does the bowler hat denote a horseman or carter?

Hiring fairs

A hiring fair was where those who needed to find work could find those wishing to employ workers and likewise, employers could find employees. Although much is written about hiring fairs for single men (often referred to as farm servants who lived-in with their employer) and women, families were also involved and are included in some research articles. Farmers may take on a man and his family as the wife could provide help in the farmhouse or dairy, and children could do seasonal work such as stone-picking or bird-scaring. A cottage might be provided, although many were described as being no more than hovels. Some farmers and larger estates did provide cottages of reasonable standard often with a garden or allotment for vegetable growing. If the employer and employee found all things to their liking, the annual contract could be renewed between them.

The hiring fair was not just about those seeking employment on farms. As the illustration from Warwickshire shows, women and girls seeking employment as domestic servants were also at the fair. This was commented on by Thomas Hardy in the opening quotation about the hiring fair in *Casterbridge*.

The hiring fair was a key part of life for the rural community; it was not just an opportunity to find work but a time for getting together, meeting friends or family, making connections, exchanging news and more. Such fairs or gatherings were not peculiar to Britain – there are articles and illustrations of those in other European countries which show similar situations. Do you ever wonder how your agricultural worker or servant forebears met? Ann Kussmaul in *A General View of the Rural Economy of England* uses marriage records from many parishes and makes some interesting analyses for those who want to take their research further. She makes a wonderful comment on marriages: *Not all were prudent, though; pre-marital conceptions in the spring, followed by the prudent earning of harvest wages, helped create a pent-up demand for post-harvest weddings* which can clarify a surge in the number of marriages in autumn and may well explain some “short” pregnancies! Her research adds to the understanding of how seasonality varied across the country, and between areas with different types of agriculture and other trades, too. Check the date of your forebear’s marriage – was it around the time of the local hiring fair? Did the two parties come from places in opposite directions from the region’s hiring fair? Use your imagination to work out what may have been feasible!

The origin of hiring fairs

It was in 1351 that the Statute of Labourers was introduced by Edward III. Following the Black Death, there was a chronic shortage of labour and not just in agriculture. High payments for labour were being demanded and the statute



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was designed to fix rates for many artisans to encourage workers to stay in their own area. The Institute of Historical Research's online gazetteer shows some 2,400 fairs in existence by 1516. Further legislation followed including that which required constables to publicly proclaim the rates of pay and conditions of employment. These events developed into a more general hiring fair. In the *Oxford Companion to Local and Family History*, David Hey noted that it was an Act of Parliament of 1677 which endorsed the yearly bonds made at the fairs. Some hiring fairs, probably those dated back to the Statute, were known as Statute Fairs – the *statty*. Statute fairs were generally held on a specified date, as were many hiring fairs, but if any fell on a Sunday, notices were often posted announcing a change, as in the 1861 Cardigan poster.

Hiring fairs frequently took place in autumn when harvesting was over. Scottish and north of England hiring (or feeing) fairs similarly occurred in autumn but there were a number held in springtime as suited the regional farming calendar. Some areas held both spring and autumn hiring fairs, especially where six-monthly hiring for seasonal work was dominant. Where agricultural employment was seasonal, a family had to earn enough to carry them through the winter or they could fall on the poor law. In the *Oxford Companion to Local and Family History* Hey advises that annual contracts *expired on Old Martinmas Day (23 November)*. Fairs continued until the Edwardian period, though very few continued as hiring fairs beyond WWI.

The day at a hiring fair

At the Fair, Hey advises that *the farmers and servants of a district came together to negotiate new contracts. Farm servants liked to move to a new place every year.* This would be the scenario for those farm servants hired for a year, particularly those who lived-in and wished to further their experience; these would generally be single men and women. *They spoke freely amongst themselves about their experiences and warned others about poor employers who offered inadequate food and harsh treatment; they were not afraid to refuse offers and were in a position to choose.* It must surely follow that employers, or their agents, similarly discussed the employability of those offering themselves for hire! *Bargains were clinched with a fastening penny which was worth much more than the term implies; in the late nineteenth century, for instance, a head-waggoner was usually given five shillings, a seconder half-a-crown, and lads a shilling.* Also called fastening money. It is reputed that much fastening money was then spent at the fair. *The associated funfairs were greatly enjoyed by young people, at what was often a dreary time of year; most had a reputation for rowdiness.*

In *Labouring Life in the Victorian Countryside* the "rowdiness" would appear confirmed as the

superintendent of police at King's Heath is recorded as saying in 1860 that *Statute Fairs were one of the greatest evils in existence. I have seen married and single conducting themselves with the greatest impropriety...* The book goes on to note that his colleague at Worcester agreed "*Mops are calculated to bring trouble and misery, without producing the least benefit to society.*"

Those offering themselves for hire at the fair displayed their trade or speciality. To show their trade, a series of indicators was developed – the shepherd carried his crook or had sheep's wool pinned on his smock (a cotton or linen overgarment) or coat while a housemaid may have carried a mop or worn a white apron and a dairymaid carried her pail, while a piece of whipcord, tucked into a hat or pinned on a smock or coat, could indicate a carter. In some areas, the style of the smock being worn could indicate the specific skill of the wearer. Employers could then approach those offering appropriate skills.



Poster for Cardigan Hiring Fair 1861, National Library of Wales (public domain mark)

Calendar of fairs

Pat Loveridge's *A Calendar of Fairs and Markets held in the Nineteenth Century* lists hundreds of fairs and markets around the country. In her introduction she notes that, in order to keep the numbers manageable, the regular weekly markets were not included. The book lists fairs by calendar day, by specified days (such as Easter) and it has indexes for place, county and type of fair – very useful for both the family and local historian. Not all fairs had their purpose specified, but one of the earliest hiring fairs listed was in March at Bromyard suggesting an area of seasonal hiring. Where identifiable, statute fairs are shown of which the author notes *Statute – fairs held in accordance with the law for hiring, etc., held at specific times.* The book is well worth acquiring to understand the pattern of markets and fairs in the various areas (see end). It will explain the rhythm of rural life and could explain why your forebears moved area.

The decline of hiring fairs

The hiring or statute fairs declined as the agricultural workforce decreased. In the 1850s it is reckoned that some twenty per cent of the working population was employed in agriculture – it had been higher in earlier times. The financial ups and downs of farming also affected the number of workers that individual farmers could afford to employ. Don't forget that many farmers



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were not landowners but were tenants subject to annual rental agreements renewable at Michaelmas. The arrival of better literacy and newspapers also provided an alternative means of finding workers through advertisements.

There was opposition to hiring fairs from various quarters including the Agricultural Workers' Union (formed 1872) led by Joseph Arch which, among other things, campaigned for better pay and conditions for agricultural workers. Early mechanisation led to a reduction in the number of farm workers needed. The number employed in agriculture steadily decreased to a suggested six per cent by time of WWI which itself further reduced the workforce.

All these factors added to the decline of hiring fairs.

Mop fairs today

Today a number of "mop" fairs still take place - the fun-filled few days when the fair comes to town; this is a reminder of what were once the statute or hiring fairs. *Wikipedia* lists English towns that held a hiring or statute fair and which still hold an annual 'mop' funfair – Chapman county codes have been added:

- Alcester, WAR
- Banbury, OXF
- Burton-upon-Trent (Statutes Fair), STS
- Chipping Norton, OXF
- Chipping Sodbury, GLS
- Cirencester, GLS
- Daventry, NTH
- Evesham, WOR
- King's Norton, WOR
- Ledbury, HEF
- Marlborough, WIL
- Moreton-in-Marsh, GLS
- Sherborne (Pack Monday Fair), DOR
- Southam, WAR
- Stratford-upon-Avon, WAR
- Tewkesbury, GLS
- Warwick, WAR



Thomas Pitkin of Swanbourne (1826-1910), an agricultural worker c.1894 in his smock (public domain; Wikimedia Commons)

Conclusion

Our rural forebears can lead us on a merry dance around all manner of records as we seek snippets of their lives. However, do not write off your nineteenth-century census-identified 'ag lab' as a straw-chewing yokel who regularly moved for any job he could find! On the contrary, he may have been a highly skilled specialist, sought after by employers, who moved periodically to better himself and his family. He may well have found those work opportunities at the local hiring and statute fairs.

Sources/further reading:

- Arch, Joseph, *Joseph Arch: The Story of His Life: Told by Himself* (various editions, first published 1898)
- Ashby, M.K., *Joseph Ashby of Tysoe 1859-1919* (Merlin Press 1990)

Ayers, Jack (Ed.), *Paupers and Pig Killers: the diary of William Holland, a Somerset Parson 1799-1818* (Sutton Publishing, 1993)

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Hammond, J.L. and Barbara, *The Village Labourer 1760-1832* (Longman, 1912; online www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/69002)

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Heath, Philip (Ed.), *Melbourne 1820-1875 – A diary by John Joseph Briggs* (Melbourne Historical Research Group/Derbyshire County Council, 2005)

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Kussmaul, Ann, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 1981)

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Morton, John Chalmers, *Handbook of Farm Labour* (Cassell, Petter and Galpin, 1868; <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/mb>)

Plomer, William (Ed.), *Kilvert's Diary 1870-1879 - selections from the diary of the Rev. Francis Kilvert* (Macmillan, 1947) (E-version: <https://heritagehunter.co.uk/product/kilverts-diary/>)

Preston, Jeanne (Ed.), *The Diary of a Farmer's Wife 1796-1797 [Monmouthshire]* (first serialised in *Farmers' Weekly* 1937).

Note: There may be published local diaries worth seeking out for the area where your ancestors lived.

Websites

Gazetteer of Markets and Fairs to 1516 - Institute of Historical Research: <https://archives.history.ac.uk/gazetteer/intro.html>

Text of *Statute of Labourers 1351*: <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/medieval/statlab.asp>

TNA Research Guide: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/markets-fairs/>

Article on Scottish hiring or feeing fairs: *Transactions of the East Lothian Antiquarian and Field Naturalists' Society*, Vol XXV, 2002 : <https://eastlothianantiquarians.org.uk/files/2018/02/2002-ELAFN-Soc-Transactions-Vol-XXV.pdf>

Sherborne Pack Monday Fair: <http://packmonday.com/event-history/>

Eruption of Mt Tambora: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1815_eruption_of_Mount_Tambora

Sole ONS – article includes ballad singing at fairs: <https://sole.org.uk/the-saywells-singing-farming-poaching/>

About the author:

A very nose-y family historian for some four decades, Jacqui comes from a long line of tenant millers and farmers along with others who earned their living in the countryside. She is editor of the *Really Useful Bulletin* and is one of the small team of volunteers operating Family History Books.





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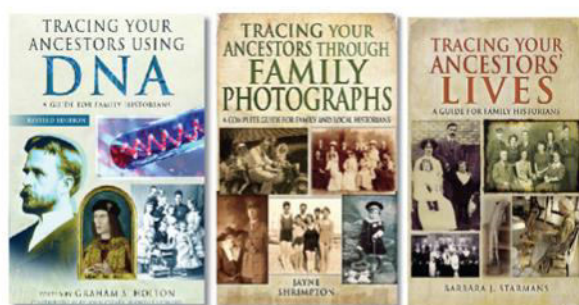
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Family History Societies



Wiltshire Family History Society

FAMILY HISTORY DAY

Michael Herbert Hall
South Street, Wilton, SP2 0JS

Saturday 21 June 2025

10am—3pm

Free Entry and Advice

Wiltshire Family History Society

Together with

Berkshire, Bristol & Avon, Dorset, Gloucestershire,
Oxfordshire, and Somerset & Dorset

Family History Societies

Additional tables include:

The Rifles (Berkshire & Wiltshire) Museum, South Wiltshire
Industrial Archaeology Society, Wiltshire & Swindon History
Centre, Getting Started, and This Way Books

Refreshments: hot and cold drinks are available on site



There are many facilities within easy walking distance in the town centre. The Guild (was Wilton Shopping Village) is also nearby.

Parking: As a first choice, please use Wilton Park & Ride – bus services every fifteen minutes to Wilton market square. There is signed, but limited, off-street parking in Wilton. Parking at the Michael Herbert Hall will be limited to stall holders but there is a public free car park on the south side of the hall. Be prepared for these being full and consider the other parking options.

Walking: 300 metres level walk from Wilton town centre – along South Street, Wilton.

Visit website: www.wiltshirefhs.co.uk/



York Family History Society

Celebrating Fifty Years with Golden Anniversary Fair!

Join York Family History Society as we celebrate a remarkable fifty years of helping people connect with their ancestors! To mark this golden anniversary, we're hosting a special fair filled with resources, expert advice, and fascinating insights into the past.

On **Saturday June 28th**, 10am to 3pm, at **Acomb Church Hall** 18A Front Street, Acomb, York YO24 3BZ, you'll have the opportunity to:

- ◆ discover invaluable genealogical resources and tools
- ◆ seek guidance from experienced researchers
- ◆ connect with fellow enthusiasts and share your stories
- ◆ potentially find that long lost branch of your family
- ◆ tour the local churchyard with an expert guide.

Whether you're a seasoned genealogist or just beginning your family history journey, this fair offers something for everyone. Learn how to trace your lineage, uncover hidden family secrets, and bring your ancestors' stories to life.

The York Family History Society has been a cornerstone of the local community for half a century, helping countless individuals piece together their personal histories. This fair is a celebration of that legacy and an invitation to everyone to discover the rich tapestry of their own family's past.

Don't miss this unique opportunity to delve into the fascinating world of genealogy and celebrate 50 years of York family history

Exhibitors include:

- ◆ York Family History Society
- ◆ Borthwick Institute
- ◆ Holgate Windmill Preservation Society
- ◆ Acomb Local History Group
- ◆ Clements Hall Local History Group
- ◆ York Men's Shed (crafts)
- ◆ Family History Federation
- ◆ York Oral History Society
- ◆ Yorkshire Architectural and York Archaeological Society
- ◆ Royal Naval Association
- ◆ Acomb Community Forum

Refreshments will be available. There is a public car park, with no time restriction, adjacent to Morrison's supermarket in Front Street (YO24 3BZ).

For more information, please visit
www.facebook.com/YorkFHS or
www.yorkfamilyhistory.org.uk/

**Come and celebrate fifty years of discovery with
York Family History Society!**



Family History Societies



Northamptonshire Family History Society

Northamptonshire Heritage Fair



Two members of Northants FHS committee, Angela and Janet, organised the Heritage Fair held at Chester House Estate.

What a great day it was! The sun was shining and over forty-seven exhibitors had stalls to showcase and promote the rich variety of heritage in the county. These included various archaeological societies, museums, historic homes, Northants Archives, lacemakers, spinners and weavers, many local history societies, narrow boat restoration groups, historic churches groups, wildlife societies, Northants FHS (of course!) and the Romany and Traveller FHS and more! Alongside this were tours of the Archaeological Resource Centre where all county finds are now held, landscape tours of the site which covers 10,000 years of history, boat rides from the River Nene, re-enactments groups and archive film shows. Something for everyone no matter what age you were!

Feedback from the event included: 'Fantastic event – so many talented and knowledgeable people' 'Amazing stalls, so good to see such dedication to Northamptonshire's historic importance' 'Please do this again!'.

It is often said that you can't do family history without local history and vice versa so this was a great opportunity to learn more about the county's history and heritage and how to find out more about both!

Northamptonshire FHS website: www.northants-fhs.org/
Angela Malin & Janet Lawrence

Image – team photo of all the exhibitors © Chester House – permission to re-use



Suffolk Family History Society

Suffolk Family History Society has recently released via Findmypast a large batch of transcriptions of Anglican marriages and baptisms covering 1754-1812. These supplement the later Suffolk indexes which are already on FMP. The transcriptions are available via our online shop (<https://tinyurl.com/SFKShop>) or use the QR code below.

The indexes are arranged by deanery (a deanery is a collection of fifteen to seventy-five parishes – we normally combine the smaller deaneries to give similar numbers of parishes per index).

We are ploughing through the earlier registers, and there are indexes already available for quite a few deaneries for 1538-1649, and 1650-1753, as well as an index of nonconformist and workhouse baptisms 1650-1964. Our burials index (only £15) covers the whole of Suffolk 1538-1900 and is a more recent edition than on FMP as that was from the National Burial Index. There is more data per entry than the NBI required.

Most of the indexes are £10 or £15, although some of the composite indexes are £25. The indexes are available as a CD or a download. If you are a member, you can have a 20% discount (excluding postage of course) which can soon cover the cost of membership (from only £10 p.a.)



You can join Suffolk FHS via our website <https://suffolkfhs.co.uk> (or QR code below) and the Membership tab has all the information you need, or you can join via Parish Chest .



Suffolk FHS online shop



Suffolk FHS website



Family History Societies



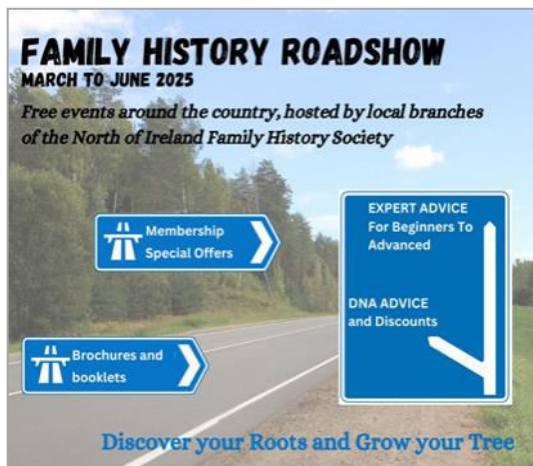
North of Ireland Family History Society

A summer of activity!

We are all very busy in the North of Ireland Family History Society at the moment!

Over the last few years we have realised that there are lots of people in the nine counties of Ulster who have never heard of NIFHS (genealogists included!) and we have made it one of our key priorities this year to get our name out there and to increase awareness of what we do.

This led us to the idea of holding a series of events across Northern Ireland, organised by many of our local branches, which we are calling our Family History Roadshow.



We have been holding events at local fairs and events and also appearing at local libraries, popping up all over the province to get people involved with

family history where possible. It's been great being out and about meeting locals in different places and recruiting new members who are interested in what we do.

We are ending our roadshow with a special day in **Ulster University** (York Street, Belfast) where we'll be holding an 'Ask The Experts' Day on **Saturday 14 June**. We are inviting the general public to engage with us in the centre of Belfast to find out how we can help them with their family history brick walls. We'll have experts there answering questions on land records, census records, DNA and much more and we'll also be trying to sign up new members and sell our various booklets in our shop.

We are hoping that this event and others in our roadshow will inspire people to start looking into their own roots and get involved.

Not wanting to rest on our laurels over the summer we have another big event planned for **Saturday 23 August** when we'll be holding a live **Really Useful Family History Show** in the **Public Records Office** (PRONI) in Belfast. We hope to replicate the very successful event we held last August when we had a packed venue almost all day long.

This year there will be exhibitors from across Ireland in attendance and we hope that our friends at the Family History Federation will also be coming over and joining in the fun!



There will also be talks

throughout the day, including the latest in our series of celebrity reveals that we call 'We Know Who You Are!' – this is where we investigate a local celebrity's family history and DNA and then present our findings to them for the first time in front of a large audience. It's a way to have some fun with family history in an entertaining yet informative way. We are keeping the identity of our latest celebrity under wraps until nearer the time but our previous one, with TV comedian Tim McGarry, was recorded and can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7Vz2yaFaFE>

We had about 200 people in the audience who all knew Tim from a local sitcom, a comedy panel show and a radio and TV series called *The Long and the Short of It*. Tim had no idea what we were going to tell him and was rather surprised when we revealed he was distantly related to his co-host! [Picture above]

Our summer plans draw to a close with our sixth annual **DNA Summer School** which is being held on zoom from **Monday 1 to Friday 5 September**. Over this week we'll be holding ten live talks (with Q&A afterwards) and each attendee will be able to watch recordings of the talks for twenty-eight days afterwards. As usual we will cover all types of DNA and give you practical advice to increase your skills and knowledge. The summer school is suitable for beginners and also those who have been using DNA for a while – we promise to open your eyes to new methodologies and new exciting ideas! We have some excellent guest speakers lined up and will be revealing our full programme for booking on our new website very soon.

We usually have a large number of attendees from around the world and we hope this year will be no different. So even if you don't have any ancestors from Ireland the DNA Summer School is still the place to hone your skills and get immersed in all things DNA!

Ed: NIFHS is launching a new website in early June when all above events will be detailed. <https://www.nifhs.org/>



Family History Books

Share your knowledge!

The best family history research guides are those written by family historians who have battled to find their own way to and through specific records! We know many family historians become expert in some quite niche topics – *is that you?*

Family History Books – the publishing arm of the Federation – is looking for people who are willing to share their knowledge and try their hand at writing. We are not looking for huge “tomes”, but useful short guides.

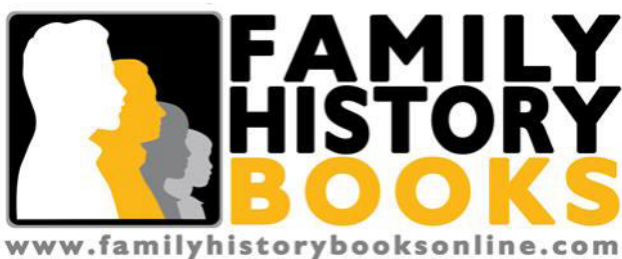
Researchers often ask at the book stall...*do you have anything about...* and then mention a topic. It can be an occupation or period of time, or series of events and so forth. Today people are frequently reluctant to part with appreciable amounts of money for large books when they first encounter a topic. However, people do like something to which they can refer, especially when doing their research, and this is where smaller books – booklets – come to the fore. The existing range of booklets, especially the *Gibson Guides*, remain very popular for their factual help, lists of what is where and for attractive prices. New topics are needed!



The aim is to provide help for others investigating a topic by providing a little background history, what an occupation or topic was about, along with plenty of resources, further reading, what is where, specialist holdings, museums to visit and so forth. Topics which are particularly “niche” can be produced as digital downloads avoiding costly printing of large quantities. Each format provides royalties for the author - you!

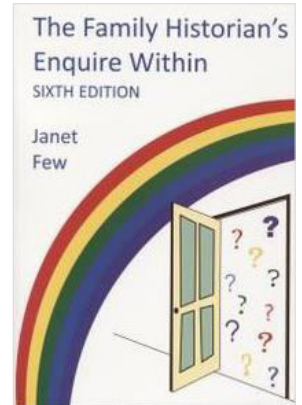
If you do have an inkling you could provide the ‘meat’ for a booklet but feel you are not a writer, then help is at hand! Family History Books has a friendly, small team with access to copy editors and proofreaders who all want to make your knowledge into a best seller for you!

Interested? Please make initial contact with Debbie admin@familyhistoryfederation.com - and we will be delighted to discuss your ideas.



Enquire within...

Having wasted time Googling and getting nowhere, I turned to my copy of *The Family Historian's Enquire Within*. My Googled keywords failed because none appeared in the title of the Act I was trying to find! The book gave me the year of the Act and then it was relatively easy to locate it.



These days we Google and then sort through the results. Having *The Family Historian's Enquire Within* on the desk, I picked it up to check another item...so much quicker than searching online! It will now remain beside the computer and not on the shelves!

Presented in alphabetical dictionary format, this really is the speedy way to resolve genealogical queries.

Over 290 pages in “pinched quarto” (a tad smaller than A4) and 23mm thick, it is packed full with family history information.

It is currently on a promotion offer from Family History Books at just £5 plus p&p. A bargain—and a time-saver!!

Full details here: [Family Historian's Enquire Within](#).

A Good Day Out!

The Family History Books' stall at The Family History Show at Aintree Racecourse on 3 May this year was very popular with punters. So busy in fact that we forgot to take any pictures—so here is one from an earlier show!

We had enquiries for a wide range of subjects and could provide a relevant title for many—but not all (see left). The online shop and bookstall carry titles from a



number of publishers in addition to those by Family History Books in order for researchers to have opportunity to see and compare what is on the market.

There was considerable uptake of the latest [Really Useful Leaflet](#) listing all member groups of the Federation (click the link for a digital copy). It is surprising how many event visitors do not know local family history societies exist! The RUL, as it is commonly known, means visitors have details not only of societies close to their home, but also those for the places where their forebears originated.



Really Useful Bulletin

News from the Federation

Over half a million new Suffolk parish records launched on Findmypast

In conjunction with the Federation, Suffolk FHS has made available over a half a million new parish records for publication with Findmypast. This bumper set of new records is exclusive to Findmypast and offers users a fresh opportunity to uncover their East Anglian ancestors.

The new collections include:

Suffolk baptisms – 364,307 records from 504 parishes covering the period 1722-1855

Suffolk marriages – 190,030 records from 501 parishes covering the period 1753-1816

New datasets continue to be submitted from the various family history societies so watch out for upcoming releases of more new records on Findmypast.

If your society has transcriptions that may be suitable for publication with FindMyPast then please get in contact with the Federation's data manager at

data.manager@familyhistoryfederation.com

Is your name in the Federation's surname interests database?

Did you know that the Federation holds a database of surname interests submitted by members of the family history societies? The link is

www.familyhistoryfederation.com/surname-interests

This database currently holds over 75,000 names, submitted from over twenty societies. Each name 'result' provides a link back to the submitting society. This not only enables the researcher to be put in contact with the person who submitted the surname interest but also promotes the family history society as a potential source for further information relating to the name search.

If you are a society that holds a members' surname interest list and would like to get your names added to the Federation's surname interest database then please contact the Federation's data manager at

data.manager@familyhistoryfederation.com



In addition to the above, FMP advises...

Suffolk [Graves and Memorial Inscriptions](#) –

20,837 records This new collection includes over 20,000 new records relating to burials in the county, searchable by name, birth date, death date, location and cemetery.

New Suffolk newspaper pages

With a special Suffolk focus, Findmypast has published one brand new title from the county and updated several of our existing Suffolk titles. The [East Suffolk Gazette](#) has been published online for the first time, with an initial run of 1,256 pages covering the years 1870, 1896 and 1897.

The *East Suffolk Gazette* was established in the Suffolk market town of Beccles, in the east of the county, as its name belies. The paper was launched in 1857, and it was owned by William Clowes and Sons Ltd.

Updates include over 4,000 brand new pages from the late 1800s added to the *Suffolk Mercury* and additional years added to the *East Anglian Daily Times*, *Haverhill Echo*, and the *Newmarket Journal*.



Railway Work, Life and Death Project

You can read details about the project at

www.railwayaccidents.port.ac.uk/ In June the next 55,000 or so railway staff accidents 1855-1929 are being added to the database with a launch at The National Archives.

On going to press, you can download the database at www.railwayaccidents.port.ac.uk/the-accidents/ The database is available free of charge for personal use. If you had anyone involved on the railways, then you could find them mentioned in the database!

Peak District—Family History Conference

6 September 2025

The Palace Hotel, Buxton SK17 6AG

Organised by U3A Peak District Family History Network in partnership with the Family History Federation. We warmly welcome members of family history societies who wish join the conference. Presentations will include:

Suffragettes and Suffragists

Unlocking the secrets of DNA Testing

Researching a War Memorial

Photographic Restoration and Conservation

Tickets £30 include a light lunch and all presentations.

Full details and booking information, please visit:

<https://peakdistrictnetwork.wixsite.com/familyhistory/about-5>



Really Useful Bulletin

News from the Federation



The Best Days of your Life?

The next Guild of One-Name Studies seminar looks at education

Saturday 14 June

**Bearley Village Hall, Snitterfield Road, Bearley,
near Stratford upon Avon CV37 0SR**

9.30 am - 5 pm.

Easy access, parking on site, railway station nearby.

The best days of your life? Who went to school, what did they learn and who taught them? What can we learn from school registers? How can we find out about ancestors who went into teaching?

There are so many 'name rich' records, make the best use of them to enrich your family history. Come along to explore how your ancestors were educated and what the records can tell us.

We have four sessions from knowledgeable speakers for this seminar.

The seminar cost, including refreshments and buffet lunch, is £25.00 (including VAT), advance bookings only.

Full details of the seminar programme, including online booking which is open to all comers, go to

<https://one-name.org/seminar-events/>

SECRETS & LIES

**A Thought-Provoking
Genealogy Experience**



Discover Hidden Voices at the Halsted Trust's International Family History Conference

The Halsted Trust invites all family history enthusiasts to an unforgettable weekend of discovery, discussion, and camaraderie at the fourth International Family History Conference, *Secrets & Lies: More Hidden Voices of Our Ancestors*.

19 –21 September

Holiday Inn, Peterborough West,

This immersive residential event promises a fascinating exploration of the untold stories that shaped our past.

Secure Your Place NOW! Tickets are selling fast, and the **early bird offer expires on May 31st**. For the full programme, speaker line-up, accommodation details, and ticket bookings, visit: <https://secretsandlies.org.uk/>

Join us for an inspiring journey into the past!

For details of the Halsted Trust see:
www.halsted.org.uk/

ScotlandsPlaces website closing

The ScotlandsPlaces website www.scotlandsplaces.gov.uk is to be ended on June 24th. The following message is on the website:

Scotlands Places will switched off on 24th June 2025, however users will be able to access the materials directly from each of the contributing bodies

HES material can be found on trove.scot

NLS material can be found at nls.uk and maps.nls.uk

NRS records will be at scotlandspeople.gov.uk

Further information about the closure can be found on www.historicenvironment.scot/about-us/news/retiral-of-hes-web-services/.

ScotlandsPlaces, launched in October 2009, has provided a variety of resources free of charge for genealogists and historians with Scottish interests. However, the priorities of the founding institutions have changed massively since then.

See [//scottishgenes.blogspot.com](http://scottishgenes.blogspot.com) for further details.

With thanks to Chris Paton

The Gazette launches new WWII commemorative edition

The Gazette, the UK's official public record, launches a brand-new personalised commemorative edition, to commemorate VE Day 80 and VJ Day 80.

Military awards and promotions during WWII have all been dutifully recorded in *The Gazette*, and so you may trace a relative who was gazetted for their contribution.

A commemorative edition makes a perfect gift or keepsake to remember them by. It combines a personalised certificate of record complete with special WWII emblem, and a replica



copy of *The Gazette* issue or supplement featuring the achievement. Presented in a linen-textured folder ideal to store additional papers or memorabilia. Examples of the awards you may wish to commemorate are the Victoria Cross, Military Cross, Mentioned in Despatches or citation for a gallantry award.

The Gazette has created a [VE Day 80 hub](http://www.thegazette.co.uk/veday80), which features lots of free resources and tips on how to search for your relative who served during the war.

Visit www.thegazette.co.uk/veday80



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

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

admin@familyhistoryfederation.com



FAMILY HISTORY BOOKS

www.familyhistorybooksonline.com

Family History Books (FHB) is an online bookshop and publisher; it is owned by the Family History Federation and the aim is to provide a service to the genealogical community. Family History Books 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—especially a shorter one on a easily defined topic such as an occupation—in the making, then do contact FHB via admin@familyhistoryfederation.com

Authors are working on several publications which will be out within the next six or so months! *Bulletin* readers will be first to have the full details—and offers!

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

Happy browsing!

Please explore the range, and place your orders, at

www.familyhistorybooksonline.com

The *REALLY USEFUL Bulletin* is published monthly and circulated free of charge. Members of the Family History Federation are encouraged to provide information about their projects and activities for inclusion. The Federation policy is to not include paid-for commercial advertising. However, when space allows, the editorial team is happy to include mentions of activities relevant to readers which are offered by other organisations—plus any special offers, too.



The REALLY USEFUL Family History Show *LIVE*

North of Ireland FHS at PRONI, Titanic Quarter, Belfast

Saturday 23 August 2025—see www.nifhs.org/

There will be no online REALLY USEFUL Family History show in 2025



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