

Berkshire Family Historian

the quarterly journal of the Berkshire Family History Society

September 2015

vol 39

Contents

Family names

appearing in this issue

excluding living people, authors of sources, royalty, corporate names, glancing reference to famous people and members' interests

Barlow 18
Blackwell 14
Blagrove 27
Bowyer 32
Brown 28
Butt 19
Cootes 24
Crozier 24
Desormeaux 15
Doggett 14
Elliott 19
Flower 22
Forge 31
de Freville 31
Heath 18
Homewood/Holmwood 27
Hull 17
Jones 32
Lee 26
Liddiard 25
McCullan 24
McLaren 14
McMullen 24
Monsarrat 27
Mountjoy 24
Ridge/Rudge 20+
Riley 18 +
Rolfe 28
Sansom 32
Scadden 28
Shorney 27
Slade 24
Stokes 15
Strong 28
Szabo 32
Thurlow 23
Wake 32
Wyatt 18+

	AGM report	2
Your Executive Committee for 2015 to 2016		6
	Cause for celebration	8
	Projects and publications update	9
	Events	11
	Around the branches	12
	Anniversary talks programme	16
	The view from next door	17
	by Ivone Turnbull	
	New publications	17
	"Disgraceful conduct of husband"	18
	by Harry and Connie Dixon	
The water gypsy: how a fishergirl married a viscount		20
by Julie Ann Godson		
	Robust entertainment	23
	Liddiard gathering 13 and 14 August 2016	25
	by Karen Rogers	
	Readers write	26
	Bookends	29
	Berkshire FHS Research Centre	34
	Members' surname interests	36
	Dates for your diary	36

AGM report



The fortieth annual general meeting of the society was hosted by the Computer Branch at the Oakwood Centre, Woodley, on Wednesday 17 June 2015. 53 members attended.

All those officers, vice-presidents and trustees shown on the agenda were voted in, and the resolutions regarding the appointment of a society president and of an independent examiner were endorsed by the meeting.

Two trustees, Tony Wright and Vanessa Chappell, stood down and one new trustee, Colin Jones, was elected, replacing Vanessa as the Vale Branch representative on the Executive Committee.

After the formal business of the meeting members were entertained and informed by Ian Waller on the subject of *Wicked Wikis*. A summary of this talk can be seen on www.berksfhs.org.uk.

Secretary's report

and acknowledgments to those who have given so much to the society

CONFERENCE

The conference held on 18 October 2014 at Theale Green School was a resounding success, stemming from many months of meticulous planning by Catherine Sampson and her team. Feedback from many of the 120 delegates attending indicated that it was the best that they had ever attended. More than 60 people were engaged in preparing and running the event, which has raised the society's profile in family history circles. Interest and practical support from Berkshire Record Office and Findmypast is gratefully acknowledged.

The programme of nine visits associated with the conference provided some 600 hours of educational experience.

THE RESEARCH CENTRE

With a new team managing the centre, work has gone into refurbishment, but there is still more to be done. A deep clean of the carpeting, redecoration of the ground floor, and replacement of chairs in the computer suite have been carried out.

A laptop has replaced one of the desk PCs as a trial facility, proving popular so far. Some monitors have been replaced. *The Genealogist* has been added to the suite of family history programs available. Charges have been abolished.

Uncertainty continues over our future at Yeomanry House. For two years now there has been no indication of Reading Borough Council's intentions. Nonetheless the centre continues to attract visitors; nowhere else in Berkshire offers comparable resources.

The centre opened as part of Heritage Open Days in September, and we look forward to welcoming even more visitors for the 2015 weekend.

Thanks go to Richard Ashberry, Linda Ricketts, Pam Scoble, Joan Vinall, the IT team and all research assistants and other volunteers for their dedicated and continuing support to the centre.

MEMBERSHIP

Welcome to the many new members who have joined (or in some cases re-joined) the society during the past year.

This last year has seen a larger decline in numbers (9 per cent) than we have seen for many years, although this is no more than many other societies have experienced. However this challenge is not an irreversible trend, and we plan for change to offer both existing and future researchers appropriate services. Berkshire Family History Society seeks to deliver a quality experience to all family historians, wherever their interests may lie, whatever the extent of their research experience, and whether or not they

are society members.

Gift Aid is of great value to the society, at no cost to members. Thanks go to Richard Ashberry, Bob Plumridge and Mike Booth, who maintain its administration.

BRANCH MEETINGS AND OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Some 1,600 people came to 69 branch meetings in the year. The challenge facing every branch is to engage with more local members, and to bring meetings to the attention of the wider community, not once, but regularly.

All branches arranged visits as precursors to the conference, as mentioned above.

“Natter” evenings have been introduced at the Research Centre, where informal discussion on a particular research topic have proved immensely popular, and we thank Gillian Stevens and Chad Hanna for arranging them.

The society heavily subsidises its branches, covering most of the costs of speakers, hall hire, equipment and hidden items, like insurance.

Thanks go to all the volunteers whose efforts have supported a county-wide outreach programme during the year.

BERKSHIRE FAMILY HISTORIAN

Penny Stokes has once again given us four top-class magazines in 2014-15 but, after 10 years as editor, she will be stepping down in early 2016. The search for a new editor is underway, but to date no-one from the membership has come forward. We owe a considerable debt of thanks to Penny for making our magazine a class leader, time and time again.

SOCIETY 40TH ANNIVERSARY

Later this year the society reaches its fortieth birthday, still strong and healthy, and full of vigour after so many years, thanks to the support of all its membership, and its active volunteers.

PROJECTS AND PUBLICATIONS

Catherine Sampson leads an enthusiastic team in the key tasks of compiling and publishing records of pre-1974 Berkshire. The team works hard to ensure outputs are of a high quality.

This last year has seen steady and continuous work on edition 12 of *Berkshire burials* and edition 2 of *Berkshire baptisms*. Also in preparation are CDs of several parish registers, and of monumental inscriptions from other parishes. There is a long lead

time in producing CDs, and speed of publication depends partly on the volunteers available. Catherine would love to hear from more members who can give regular help with transcribing, checking and, above all, data assembly and web building.

This year's new CDs are: *Berkshire marriages* edition 3; *Berkshire war memorials* edition 1; *Wokingham Without St Sebastian monumental inscriptions*; *Sulhamstead and Ufton Nervet monumental inscriptions*; and *Berkshire and the war* 2nd edition (the first edition was by another publisher 90 years ago).

Particular thanks go to Catherine, Tony Wright (society data manager), Jocie McBride (publications manager), David Wright and Brian Wilcock, who lead the burials and MIs teams respectively, and to the many project volunteers and transcribers in this country and abroad.

ONLINE PUBLICATION OF THE SOCIETY'S TRANSCRIPTIONS

Our parish register transcriptions continue to be published on Findmypast, generating useful and increasing royalty income. For data protection reasons, cut-off dates and permission constraints mean that online data will NEVER be as complete as that in society publications, or in datasets at the Research Centre.

Thanks go to Berkshire Record Office for its continuing help with permissions for online publication of parish records. This year Dr Peter Durrant retired after 26 years as county archivist. He is a vice-president of the society, and we wish him a long and happy retirement. We have already worked closely with his successor, Mark Stevens, and look forward to our continued close relationship.

PUBLICITY AND PROMOTION

The conference publicity was clearly successful, as demonstrated by the numbers attending. The four-page A5 leaflets, with key society details, branch programmes and Research Centre information, continue to be used.

The society supported the open days of the Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and West Surrey societies, achieving variable commercial returns in the face of declining attendance which, at Bracknell Family History Fair was again disappointing although, according to the organiser, numbers were slightly up on 2014.

Who Do You Think You Are? Live was held for the first time at the NEC in Birmingham. Neither this

nor the Bracknell event realised high sales of our products, but they did enable active promotion of the society.

Ongoing interest from BBC Radio Berkshire continued to give the society some live programme opportunities to reach a county-wide audience.

Led by Catherine Sampson, the society is giving experienced and practical support to the *King & Country* project (Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead's WWI remembrance project), providing excellent publicity for the society.

The society took part in the MERL summer fair, as well as giving talks and being represented at other events.

I would like to thank Margaret Crook and Gillian Stevens for leading our events team. More volunteers are always needed to assist in maintaining a high public profile for the society.

SHOP, WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Online shopping is the norm for many people, and the society must offer a simple, straightforward online retail experience. Besides some 430 subscriptions, around eight worldwide orders are packed and sent out every week. We thank Ivan Dickason, Geraldine Marsden, and Tony Roberts for their sterling efforts in handling these, and Pauline Cannon for keeping the financial records.

New regulations regarding distance selling came into force this year and the shop terms and conditions have been amended accordingly. We wait to see how the proposed EU VAT regulations will affect us. These were aimed at large corporations, but they could severely impact small and medium-sized concerns.

The IT development team constantly looks at further refinements of the website www.berksfhs.org.uk to enhance visitors' experiences. Much data has been added to the Members' Area, with more to follow. Many of our members are now registered to access the Members' Area of the site. If you are not one of them, do register and take a look. We owe many thanks to Chad Hanna and other members of the team.

The society has also made useful progress in using social media. Our followers on Twitter have grown to 426, and some branches have set up Facebook pages. We would like to see more members engaging with online social networks.

BERKSHIRE PAGES OF GENUKI

Robert Monk has done a thorough job in building up the Berkshire pages, which are now essentially

complete. We give thanks for his excellent effort. If there is further information that you can contribute, please let him know.

DISCUSSION LIST

Those who have joined this key resource know what a lively and valuable forum it can be, addressing almost any genealogical topic under the sun. If you have not signed up, you are missing out on a major benefit of membership. Thanks are due to Joan Vinall, who looks after the list on a day-to-day basis.

SERVICES FOR MEMBERS AND THE PUBLIC

Surnames from the Berkshire marriages, burials and the probate index CDs are online in the Members' Area. Berkshire Name Search trawls a master index of society databases, and work is afoot on an improved version. Thanks go to Shirley Manson, Alan Brooker, Bob Plumridge, Chad Hanna and Tony Wright for this work.

DELIVERING PUBLIC BENEFIT

Under the Charities Act of 2011 all registered charities have a duty to report their main activities and achievements in relation to the objects of the charity. For Berkshire Family History Society, its charitable purposes include:

- to advance education of the public in research into family history and genealogy, primarily but not exclusively within the boundaries of the pre-1974 Royal County of Berkshire;
- to work to promote the preservation, transcription, indexing and ready public accessibility of related records and information.

Benefits are:

- readily available and accessible to members and the public, whether in Berkshire or beyond;
- free of charge at the point of delivery, in most cases.

The society is actively involved in local communities in a wide range of regular meetings, outreach events, and other activities.

We also responded to the government (Office of National Statistics) consultation on the proposed form of the 2021 census, voicing our concerns on behalf of future genealogists.

With regard to the preservation of records, we will be lodging some of our own archives with the Berkshire Record Office soon.

SOCIETY GOVERNANCE

The society is a registered charity, managed by an Executive Committee (the trustees), elected annually by members. The committee met seven times in the year, for six bi-monthly management meetings and once to receive and approve financial statements for presentation to this AGM. More specific activities are managed by sub-committees, and local branches by their own committees.

Within the next two years many current trustees will reach the end of their permitted tenure. To allow the society to continue to offer its current range of activities new trustees need to come forward very soon. It is not necessary to wait for the next AGM to do this. Those willing to be trustees may make themselves known to the society at any time.

SOCIETY FINANCES

Income has reduced this year, but much of this is accounted for by a dip in the number of new products published by the society, and the coming year should see a considerable upswing in this part of the society's income. Member donations held steady. Once again, royalties, principally from Findmypast, have continued to provide a steady and rising level of income, supporting subscription and Gift Aid income.

WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

As reported at previous AGMs, the choice can be summarised thus: societies can adapt and evolve, or they can wither and die. There is no safe middle way, nor are there any easy fixes to be had. The future of the society is not solely in the hands of the Executive Committee; it is in the hands of the membership and with the members' willingness to come forward, for only with willing volunteers can the society continue to thrive.

THANK YOU, TO EVERY VOLUNTEER

I would like to thank the many members who regularly and generously give their time and expertise to the benefit of others, especially Tony Wright and Vanessa Chappell, who stand down as trustees after this meeting, for their dedicated work in managing the many facets of society activity. I thank too the Computer Branch committee and members for welcoming us here, at Woodley's Oakwood Centre, and hosting our society's fortieth Annual General Meeting. We look forward to seeing you all again at the next AGM, which will be on Wednesday 8 June 2016, when Newbury Branch will be our hosts.

*Tony Roberts
Secretary*

Accounts

Publication of the society's accounts for 2014 to 2015 has been delayed pending further information from Berkshire Family History Enterprises Ltd. When this has been received, the accounts will be published on www.berksfhs.org.uk.

Have you renewed your membership?

If you have, thank you. Your new membership card should be attached to the front of this magazine.

If you haven't, please act now.

The membership year ended on 30 June, and this issue of the magazine has been sent to you as a courtesy, assuming that mere oversight has delayed renewal of your subscription.

If, however, your subscription is not received by the end of the month your name will be taken off the list and you will no longer have access to the society's member benefits.

www.berksfhs.org.uk/renew

Do it now, please.

Your Executive Committee for 2015 to 2016

RICHARD ASHBERRY (5694)

Richard joined the Exec as treasurer in 2012, and has been re-elected to that office for 2015-16. A society member since 2004-05, he is on the projects committee and the Windsor Branch committee, and is a Research Centre assistant. He also burns the society CDs and prepares them for sale.



SANDRA BARKWITH (3550)

Sandra has been a society member since 1998, joining the Exec in 2012 as the representative of Bracknell and Wokingham Branch. Prior to this she was minutes secretary to the Exec for several years. In April she took over as chair of the branch, having served as secretary and programme secretary on the branch committee. She is also a member of the Research Centre committee and a Research Centre assistant.



VICKI CHESTERMAN (4870)

Vicki joined in 2002, joining the Reading Branch committee in 2004, and has been programme secretary for the branch since 2005, except for a year's compulsory absence from the committee. She served on the 2014 conference committee, is a Research Centre assistant and is currently involved photographing Berkshire's war memorials for the next edition of that CD.

KEN HOUGHTON (6213)

Ken joined the society in 2006 and was elected in 2008 to the Windsor Branch committee, which he chairs, and to the Executive Committee in 2013. He looks after the branch publicity, and offers family history advice once a month at Slough Library.



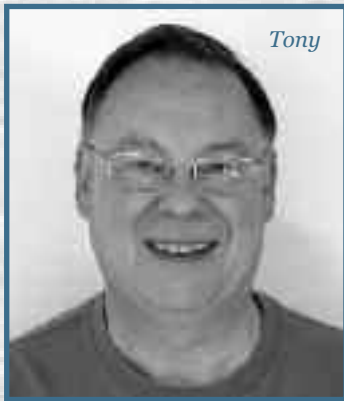
COLIN JONES (7691)

Colin Jones joins the Exec this year as the new representative of Vale Branch.



JUDITH MITCHELL (2031)

Judith became a committee member of Windsor Branch in 2011, having previously been involved in a couple of projects. A society member since 1989, she is on the Research Centre committee, and manages the Strays Index.



TONY ROBERTS (7118)

Tony joined the Exec for the first time in 2012, having been a Research Centre assistant. He has been a member since 2010, and has been the society's secretary since 2013. He is also on the board of Berkshire Family History Enterprises Ltd as company secretary.

CATHERINE SAMPSON (6979)

Catherine joined the society in 2009-10, and was initially involved in writing parish histories for CDs. She has been projects co-ordinator and an Executive trustee since October 2011, and she chairs the projects and publications committee. She also chaired the 2014 *Conflict and Change* conference committee.

EILEEN SCHOFIELD (7477)

Eileen joined the Newbury Branch in 2012, and has represented the branch on the Exec since 2014. This year she has taken on the chair of Newbury Branch.



GILLIAN STEVENS (3959)

Gillian returned to the Exec in 2013. She works as events co-ordinator with Margaret Crook, and continues to be closely involved with the Computer Branch and the website.

Vice-presidents



DR PETER DURRANT MBE (9005)

Peter recently retired after 36 years as Berkshire's county archivist, and he is an honorary member of the society. He has been re-elected as a society vice-president, and he will continue to provide his advice to the Executive Committee on an informal basis.

CHAD HANNA (382)

Chad has been re-elected as a vice-president of the society. In this capacity, as well as those of IT manager and webmaster, he attends most Exec meetings. Chad is also chairman of Berkshire Family History Enterprises Ltd, and leads the team working to develop and maintain the society website.

DEREK TRINDER (4369)

Derek has been re-elected a vice-president of the society, having served as the society's chairman from 2009 until 2013. In June 2014 he stood down from the Exec, having completed a second five-year term, but he continues to represent the society in local media and FH-related organisations. Derek is also a director of Berkshire Family History Enterprises Ltd, and a member of the IT team.

Cause for celebration



As you will know from the front cover, Berkshire Family History Society celebrates its fortieth anniversary this autumn.

From a small group of enthusiasts in Reading it has grown into a vigorous organisation which researches, educates, publishes and campaigns on behalf of family historians in Berkshire and far beyond. Roughly half the membership lives outside Berkshire. Some members have no Berkshire ancestry, but nonetheless find society membership a valuable aid in pursuing their research.



Commemoration of the anniversary is taking several forms. With this issue of the magazine you'll find an **anniversary booklet** chronicling the society's past, present and future. Some of the pictures and reminiscences may strike a nostalgic chord with more senior members. (The society still has many from the earliest years, loyalty being a noteworthy characteristic of our membership.) You will also find **a society gift pencil** because, digitisation notwithstanding, a family historian cannot have too many of these.

And there is to be **a party** later in the year, to which all the society's volunteers will be invited as a thank-you for their dedicated hard work.

Last but not least, **a series of talks** is being arranged in conjunction with the anniversary, the first of which will be on 9 November at the Berkshire Record Office. Information about the first talk and ticket application can be seen on page 16, and later talks will be detailed on the website:

www.berksfhs.org.uk

UPDATE

Projects and publications

I'm delighted to confirm that we have now completed transcribing and checking all of the parish registers for All Saints, Binfield, that have been deposited at the Berkshire Record Office and, as I write this update in early July, John Pearce is doing an excellent job of compiling the CD for publication. The final CD should be available for purchase around the time this *Historian* is published or shortly afterwards.

For a good few years now this has been an ongoing project which has been interrupted a few times whilst we pushed to get another edition of *Berkshire baptisms* or *marriages* ready for publication, and we're all delighted that it is now complete. Binfield's earliest register was particularly challenging due to its poor condition, and this comprehensive transcript will ease the job of those who struggle to read the fished copy.

Excellent progress is also being made with the combined parish CD for Purley, Sulham and Tidmarsh, which should be completed shortly, thanks to Colin Liebenrood. *Berkshire baptisms* edition 2 is also being prepared for publication: more on that soon. We are also reasonably progressed with transcribing and checking the registers for Peasemore, so hopefully this will be a good year for bringing more parish records into a readily accessible format.

The warmer climes of spring and summer give us more opportunity to record monumental inscriptions, and Brian Wilcock and his team of volunteers are working over a number of sites to record and photograph monuments. We do need more volunteers though, please. You'll find details of their latest volume of *Monumental Inscriptions* in the publications list.

I was reminded unexpectedly of the importance of this work when visiting Hatford St George Church (pictured below) with my niece last month. Photographs of the church taken in the early 1900s show this tiny medieval church surrounded by its well established and crowded burial ground, resplendent with a large collection of older tombstones. More recent photographs show



the gravestones largely removed and stacked around the edge of the church building so that they could still be read, but leaving an empty burial ground, easily mown but devoid of its previous markers. Last month I found that a further radical development had occurred. A neat border with shingle surrounded the church, with

A sorry sight at Hatford St George

light markings on the walls of the church being the only evidence of the gravestones which had previously leant against them. And round the back of the church there were three or four large piles of tombstones, with – sadly – those at the bottom broken under the weight of those on top. The fate of the surviving stones is unclear from Hatford’s parish website, but the removal of headstones for health, safety and other reasons is widespread, so recording inscriptions and photographing our county’s monuments is as important now as it’s ever been.

Please do get involved, and volunteer to record your local church: we need as many people who care and want to do something about it to get involved as possible. Brian or I can be contacted at projects@berksfhs.org.uk.

Catherine Sampson
Projects co-ordinator

The Research Centre committee would like to thank Marjory French and Sheila Smith for their many years of service to visitors as Research Centre assistants, since the period at Prospect School, in fact. Both are taking well-earned retirement, but Marjory will continue with her work transcribing documents.

Calling good photographers

The society is seeking scenic Berkshire photos for inclusion in a Berkshire FHS calendar for sale to members and at fairs

Quality: good quality (around 3,500 x 2,500 pixels) is needed for print, and landscape format (ie, wider than higher).

Area: pre-1974 Berkshire, so the Downs, the Vale, Wallingford and Abingdon are all possible subject locations.

Subject: old buildings such as churches, town halls, bridges, old houses – anything which presents an appealing Berkshire scene.

Origin: the photograph must be your own, as we do not want any issues with copyright. Your name will be listed if your photograph is included.

We cannot promise to use all the photographs submitted, because we need to ensure even geographical coverage.

Email them as jpegs to
Judith Mitchell
strays@berksfhs.org.uk.

WANTED



The search continues for a member or friend with editorial or journalistic experience to help edit and produce the *Berkshire Family Historian* from 2016, when the current editor retires. If this interests you and you enjoy networking and language, please contact the editor, or the secretary of the Berkshire Family History Society, for more information (contact details on the inside front cover of the magazine).

co-ordinated by Margaret Crook and Gillian Stevens

LIBERTEAS

On Sunday 14 July the society took part in the national LiberTeas event. The organisers, the UK Parliament, asked everybody to celebrate the 800 years of the Magna Carta by holding a tea party at 3pm. The society hosted its tea party with refreshments and home-made cake at the Research Centre. Unfortunately we did not host the Queen or David Cameron, whom I saw at the main Magna Carta celebration at Runnymede on the following Monday, but we did have more than a dozen visitors who enjoyed the refreshments, joined in a lively discussion about the Magna Carta and the last 800 years, helped by a quiz provided by the UK Parliament. It was something different, enjoyed by all. As it was a day that the centre is normally open, it was also an opportunity for visitors to come early to use the resources in the centre prior to the afternoon event.

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

The Research Centre will be taking part in HOD on the Thursday, Saturday and Sunday of the HOD weekend 10-13 September. Two of these days, Thursday and Sunday, are normal open days for the RC, but the Saturday will be extra. In addition Chad and Gillian are giving a talk on the Saturday at the BRO. Offers to help will be welcome.

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? LIVE

WDYTYA?Live at the NEC, 16-18 April, was a success. With no new updates of the main publications we did not sell as many CDs this year as we did at Olympia, although the *Berkshire and the war* CD sold quite well, and we sold more books. We took five new memberships, and had to reprint the membership form, so hopefully more people will fill them in at home and join.



We've learnt several things concerning the organisation, which should improve our overall efficiency for future events. We plan to book again next year, at the NEC, 7-9 April 2016.

BRACKNELL FAMILY HISTORY FAIR

It appears that there will be no Bracknell Fair in 2016.

FHS SOCIETIES' OPEN DAYS THIS AUTUMN

The Buckinghamshire FHS Open Day in Aylesbury on 25 July will be well behind us by the time this magazine comes out, but we have a busy October ahead:

Saturday 3rd is the Oxfordshire FHS fair in Woodstock, at which our stand will be manned by Newbury and Vale branches; Sunday 11th is Hampshire GS' Open Day in Basingstoke, which falls to the Reading and Computer branches; and on 31st the West Surrey FHS Open Day in Woking will be handled by Bracknell and Windsor branches.

Could you help at one of our events, even if just for an hour or two, on the society's stand? Drop a line to Margaret or Gillian on events@berksfhs.org.uk if you think you could.

Bracknell and Wokingham Branch **bracknell@berksfhs.org.uk**

Our branch AGM in April was followed by a talk entitled *Birth and baptism in the 1800s* given by Tom Doig, a Cambridge social historian. He told us that women were kept out of sight for four weeks before the birth, which is why you never see pregnant women in old pictures. When the baby was due it was traditional to hang a sheet from the window or at night light a bonfire (although this was also the signal for the expected French invasion) to summon the midwife, and it wasn't unusual for her to come straight from laying out a corpse, without washing her hands. Women would be looked after by a monthly nurse, paid for by the village. Leeches were used to prevent deep-vein thrombosis arising from prolonged bedrest. In England they closed all the windows, but in Scotland all the windows were opened, so few babies survived the winter months. After birth the baby was passed to two ladies who were "spiritually right" as it was considered a religious and spiritual event. Called "god-sibs", leading to the term "gossips", they made sure that everything was correctly done.

Heather Sheeley talked to us on *Diseases of town and country* at our May meeting, describing such sources as bills of mortality and plague orders, health board records, official notifications under the Public Health

Act after 1875, diaries, newspapers and county records. Edwin Chadwick, Charles Booth and John Snow made landmark reforms which improved public health. The Public Health Act 1875, city renovations, vaccination, antibiotics, diet and changes to working conditions have all helped to counter infectious diseases such as cholera, smallpox, tuberculosis and polio.

At our June meeting Beverley Walker talked about heir-hunting, finding the beneficiaries of unclaimed estates. Descendants or siblings are sought using electoral registers, telephone directories, trade directories and neighbours. Whilst undertaking their research the hunters are not able to tell beneficiaries who their clients were.

Beverley gave us examples of some of the interesting cases she had been involved with, and concluded by giving the audience some very helpful tips when making and updating their own wills.

We continue to hold our drop-in sessions at Bracknell and Wokingham once a month. On 28 May the branch was invited to have a stand at the Wokingham Town Hall Open Day, and in the afternoon a talk entitled *Where do I come from?* was given by members of the branch.

Since September 2014 we have held 10 Natter Evenings at the Research Centre on the first Tuesday evening of the month. These have proved extremely popular with a total attendance for the 10 months of 201 people, averaging 20 per session. There have been no hall fees, no speaker costs and the cost of refreshments has resulted in a small profit, which is donated via the RC, so it attracts an extra amount as Gift Aid.

In addition the evenings have encouraged to the RC some visitors who may not have previously been to the centre, plus others who are not regular visitors, including one member who was visiting the area from Wales. As well as covering a number of family history topics it has been an opportunity to showcase the resources available, both upstairs and downstairs, in the centre. We are having a break for July and August and intend to resume in September.

Natter Evenings

Windsor, Slough and Maidenhead Branch **windsor@berksfhs.org.uk**

Our May meeting saw the election of our chairman and committee, with no changes from the previous year. The official duties done, we welcomed Tony Hadland with his talk on the bicycle in wartime: *Raleigh-ing to the cause*.

The bicycle first saw military service in 1817, when a Badenian Army messenger powered it by sitting astride and pushing himself along.

By 1875 the Italians used cycle messengers, soon followed by other countries. New designs prompted new thoughts on military use, including by the cavalry. Bicycles were used in the Boer War from 1899 to 1902, mainly by despatch riders. Folding bikes were another consideration and two BSA models were approved by the British War Office during WWI.

Tony then gave a more detailed history of the Raleigh company. Established in 1885 in Nottingham, by 1913 it was producing 60,000 bikes per year. During WWI and later in WWII the company was involved with munitions manufacturing, and this proved very profitable.

The bicycle was never really used as a war machine, although there was an instance of a Lewis gun being mounted on it, and guns were carried strapped to the frame. Its main use was by scouts and despatch riders.

Getting the best from Findmypast, with Peter Christian, was the subject for our June meeting. He began by outlining the website's

history. The company behind Findmypast, DC Thomson, collects data from a variety of sources, including The National Archives, the British Library and partnerships with other companies and family history societies such as our own. FMP employs its own transcribers.

How to find our way around Findmypast? There is a beginner's way and an expert's way. The starting point was to click on *Search* and then the *A-Z of Record Sets* and look for the category you are interested in. The advantages and pitfalls were described, with Peter using his own ancestry as an example. The range of records is considerable, from military to apprenticeships and trades to passenger lists and British newspapers.

Comments were made that the search on Findmypast for British newspapers was not as detailed as found on the British Newspaper Archive website and, with the release of records every Friday, could the pressure of this timescale lead to hurriedly produced data? In all a favourable verdict was given to the website, though with the usual scepticism needed when researching family history.

Windsor Branch is currently supporting the *For King and country* project at Maidenhead, Eton Wick, Cookham, Dedworth and Sunningdale. We have a brief break before resuming at Windsor in September. See www.rbwm.gov.uk/web/fkac.htm

Computer Branch **computerbranch@berksfhs.org.uk**

Following a short branch AGM David Osmond, Tony Wright and Gillian Stevens gave a presentation to 24 members on planning your visit to the National Archives: how to get there, what's there, homework beforehand and wifi facilities, in preparation for a visit to TNA planned on 9 July 2015. The talk was structured to be useful to anyone visiting TNA on any day.

At the society's AGM in June official business was followed by *Wicked wikis*, a talk by Ian Waller. A résumé will appear in the Members' Area of the website shortly.

Vale of the White Horse Branch
vale@berksfhs.org.uk

At the April annual meeting of the branch the committee was re-elected, with the exception of Margaret McAlpin, who stood down as treasurer having served in the position for a number of years. Brenda Parsons has taken on this role, and Colin Jones was elected as branch representative on the Executive Committee. This was followed by a question-and-answer session.

In May we had a talk by Liz Woolley on *Leisure and entertainment in Victorian and Edwardian Oxford*. Liz is well known in the Oxford area, and her talks and guided walks are informative and well delivered. This was no exception. She described the rise of “rational recreation”, meaning the use of spare time to improve oneself. Amongst many things, we learned of the Oxford Gymnasium set up by Archibald McLaren, and of the library set up in the old town hall by B H Blackwell, father of the founder of the well-known bookshop.

In June there was no meeting as such; instead a walk was arranged in Oxford, led by Alastair Lack, with the theme of *Oxford in the Civil War*. Fortunately it was a dry and warm evening as Alastair took us on an enlightening tour from St John’s College through Broad Street to Oriel Square. We learned of the colleges’ differing and somewhat guarded support for the Royalist cause: they hid much of their valuable silver plate when Charles attempted to take it for his depleted coffers. Even so, All Souls College donated over 250lb of plate to the Royalist cause which, along with the plate from the other colleges, was turned into coins by the Mint at New Inn Hall. Gunpowder was made at Osney, and munitions stored in New College cloisters. Charles and his court lived in Christ Church, while his wife, Henrietta Maria, lived in nearby Merton College. This arrangement is still remembered today, with the two colleges alternating in hosting a dinner for the other.

The library session in Wantage was poorly attended, despite being very heavily advertised. We have had no response from Faringdon Library with regard to holding more library surgeries there.

We have been confirmed to attend the Clubs and Societies Day in Didcot on 13 September in the Civic Hall.

Reading Branch
reading@berksfhs.org.uk

In May Pat Hilbert came to tell us about her personal and family interest in Thames watermen and royal watermen. She began by explaining the term Doggetts Coat and Badge, which evolved from Thomas Doggett, an actor manager who founded a race on the Thames in 1715. Doggetts was founded as a school for watermen in 1684. It closed in 1911, but still continues as a charity.

The length covered by watermen runs from the Thames estuary up to Windsor, 215 miles and (now) 109 bridges. In the eighteenth century just one stone bridge, built in 1176, spanned the river, so watermen were the main means of crossing, as “taxi-drivers” taking between two and eight passengers in boats called wherries. Lightermen are the “lorry drivers”, transporting goods in vessels powered by men, horses, sail or steam. Bargemen operate on canals.

In 1555 an Act of Parliament made it law that watermen must serve an apprenticeship, and records of the indentures survive from 1688.

There are only 25 royal watermen at any one time, and they take part in ceremonial events. They have served 10 monarchs over more than 300 years.

Other bridges were built from 1729, thus decreasing the workload for watermen.

In June Berkshire county archivist Mark Stevens gave us an insight into Victorian innovation in the treatment of mental health, régimes changing from an absence of activity or employment to a more wholesome form of treatment in which mental and physical activity were encouraged. He detailed the history of the building of Broadmoor, and the process of transferring patients into the new hospital for the criminally insane from other institutions across southern England. The highlight was the potted biographies of various members of staff and inmates.

Reading Branch will be holding monthly family history help sessions at the Whitley Museum at the South Reading Community Centre.

Newbury Branch
newbury@berksfhs.org.uk

At the branch AGM in May Eileen Schofield was elected as the new chair of Newbury Branch, and Judith Thomas joined the committee. Nick Prince, who has chaired the branch for five years, has stood down, but will continue to help when work permits.

After the AGM Debbie Kennett spoke on the three tests for genealogical DNA – Y-DNA, mitochondrial and autosomal – telling us what we could hope to learn from them and, equally importantly, what we could not. It was a fascinating talk, but not one that is easy to précis, so Debbie has posted her presentation on Dropbox at <http://tinyurl.com/DNAnewbury2015>.

Kathy Chater's presentation in June centred upon the Huguenots, the French Protestants who arrived here as religious refugees in two waves, 1562 to 1598 and 1680 to 1720. Some came directly from France to settle in England, others via other European countries, especially the Netherlands. There is evidence today of their way of life in London, where some old buildings in Spitalfields still have the high windows to let in light for the weavers, and the Dutch Church still has regular services in Dutch. The churches were the centre of Huguenot communities, and they established high quality schools, hospitals and charities. Detailed records were kept, many of which are still available in the Huguenot Society's library at TNA.

Brian Snook's weekly outreach sessions in Thatcham continue (he recruited a new society member recently) but the session at Newbury Library in July had only two enquirers, despite publicity. Renewed efforts will be made in the autumn.



Christ Church, Spitalfields
photo by David Iliff. Licence CC-BY-SA 3.0

**What branch meetings can do
for your research**

Kathy Chater's recent talk at Newbury on Huguenot ancestry prompted me to return to a sideline problem in my family history researches.

As far as I know, I have no Huguenot ancestry, but my great-great-great-grandfather, Peter Stokes, was a silk dyer in Spitalfields in the declining years of the Huguenot silk industry. His will of 1813 carried a posthumous affidavit to the effect that a French-surnamed Louisa and her father, James Lewis ditto, had been present when it was written, though they failed to sign it at the time. (Sounds a bit fishy, but the will simply left all to the widow.)

My palaeographic skills are weak, and I had long given up trying to decipher this name, which appeared to begin with Dese and to end with eaux. Quite what happened in the middle eluded me.

Kathy Chater's talk inspired me to return to the struggle. Deserineaux was my best guess; I put this into Google, which promptly queried: did I mean Desormeaux? That turned out to be a racehorse. Despereaux, then? I felt a bit despereaux, but could find no plausible p in the original script.

*Then I remembered that asterisks could be used for more than one missing letter, and I went to Findmypast with Des*eaux. Eureka: a dozen or more Desormeaux spilled into my lap, including several in east London. (I should have persevered beyond Google's racehorse results.)*

I then found substantial details about Louisa and her prosperous silk-merchant father who, I strongly suspect, was Peter Stokes' employer.

None of it advances my family tree one jot, but I have the satisfaction of having learnt something about the environment in which my ancestor was employed.

The moral of this tale is: don't underestimate the power of a good branch meeting speaker to nudge your research in an interesting direction (and don't forget the power of the asterisk).

Penny Stokes

1975 - 2015



Anniversary talks programme

As part of the society's 40th anniversary celebrations four talks will take place from November 2015 to September 2016.

They will cover a range of social and family history topics, in venues across Berkshire.

Some of these venues will give attendees the opportunity to explore the premises and their grounds, and to exchange ideas and tips with other family historians over refreshments (included within the price each time).

2-4.30pm, Monday 9 November

**at the Berkshire Record Office
9 Coley Ave, Reading RG1 6AF**

How to preserve heirloom textiles, documents and photos, and what to do if they become damaged

*A practical workshop run by Linda Connell
(director, National Needlework Archive) and
Sue Hourigan (senior conservator, BRO).
Each attendee may bring one item on which
they would like to receive advice.*

*Places limited: first come, first served. Tickets £10.00 by post from
Richard Ashberry
Treasurer Berkshire FHS
22 Burroway Road, Langley, Slough, Berks SL3 8EN*

*Please include your name, address, email and telephone number
together with a cheque payable to Berkshire Family History Society*

The view from next door

Ivone Turnbull

senior archivist at the BRO



2015 marks the fortieth anniversary of the Berkshire FHS, which has no doubt seen many changes over the years. In any organisation there will always be new faces to contend with, new budgets and new demands. People move on or pass on, and in a volunteer organisation which is reliant on people giving up their time freely to help others, such things can greatly affect how they function. Adaptability is the key to longevity. Clearly 40 years prove how the Berkshire FHS can accommodate change and carry on.

Set up in 1948, the BRO has also been through many changes in its history, and has already had its fortieth birthday. The first archivist, Felix Hull, dealt with only a handful of visitors in the basement of the old Shire Hall in the Forbury, Reading. After moving to the old Assize Courts, the BRO then moved to Shire Hall at Shinfield Park in 1981. There it remained for 20 years, until it came to

Coley Avenue, our present home. Through that time there have been a number of county archivists and a complete change of the governing authority. The abolition of Berkshire County Council in 1998 resulted in the BRO providing a joint service to the six districts of Berkshire.

Change can be difficult to deal with; indeed, the BRO has recently had to go through a management restructure after the retirement of its longest-standing county archivist, Dr Peter Durrant, in 2014. So much knowledge retired with him – oh, how we would give anything for a download of his brain!

Over the years research methods have changed, fewer visitors now come through the door, most likely because of the amount of information readily available on the internet. However, we have seen an increase in the number of more complex enquiries. Staff have to adapt to changes in staffing knowledge, and demand. We can look back over the past and reflect on how things were different long ago, but it is important to learn from the past and adapt for the future.

The BRO is very appreciative of the hundreds of hours that the Berkshire FHS volunteers have dedicated to transcribing parish registers and other projects. Long may it continue. So thank you and happy birthday, Berkshire FHS, from all at the BRO.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

NEW PUBLICATIONS

BINFIELD ALL SAINTS PARISH CD

Baptisms 1551 - 1979
Banns 1754 - 1984
Marriages 1551 - 2009
Burials 1551 - 1957

Fully indexed, and includes a comprehensive parish history with reference to other useful sources for family historians. This parish is not included in *Familysearch*.

Shop £8.00, UK £9.73, airmail £12.48

COMING SOON

BERKSHIRE MONUMENTAL INSCRIPTIONS COLLECTION VOL 2

MIIs from 10 locations, most not previously published, several of which are from churches which are no longer open, ranging from the the municipal cemetery at Caversham (Hemdean Road) with approximately 1,700 index entries, to Beech Hill Baptist Church with 60 index entries, in total of over 3,100. Largely text-based, but where we have been able to update the material, many if not all the monuments have included photographs, eg, photos of all monuments (dating back to 1754) at Newbury United Reformed Church, which is under threat of demolition.



NEW PUBLICATIONS

NEW PUBLICATIONS

“Disgraceful conduct of husband”

*Harry and Connie Dixon
find another skeleton
in the family cupboard*

In my article about Henry Wyatt in the June *Historian* I mentioned that Connie’s maternal grandmother, Hilda Emily Wyatt, liked to talk about our Wyatt ancestors, although she never mentioned anything of her father, Francis Frederick Henry Wyatt, other than that he had died. In researching the Wyatt family we came across a skeleton relating to the marriage of Hilda’s parents, Francis Wyatt and Emily Grace Jane Riley.

Connie’s great-grandmother, Emily Grace Jane Riley, was born 28 October 1853 to Charles Riley and Mary née Heath. The birth certificate places the birth in Denford, Kintbury. We assume this to be Denford Lodge, as her father’s occupation on the certificate was shown as gardener. Charles Riley went on to become master gardener at Hamstead Lodge (1861 census) and then head gardener (1871 census). In *Craven Country* it is mentioned that the “park and gardens became renowned for their beauty” whilst Louisa, Lady Craven, was in occupation, up until 1860. Charles died in 1871.

We know little of Emily’s early life other than from the census records, which show her living with her parents in 1871 and employed as a music governess, so it would appear that she was well educated. In 1869, aged 16, she published a book of poetry at her own expense. We think that she had inherited her father’s love of nature, for the book contains 18 poems describing the delights of the countryside in a charming, naïve manner.

In 1871 she married Francis Frederick Henry Wyatt, eldest son of Henry Wyatt and Joanne Barlow, at St John the Evangelist in Newbury. In 1861 Francis was living in Chieveley with his grandmother, Mary Barlow, and in 1871 with his parents and other members of the family in Thatcham.

At the time of the marriage Francis was a railway clerk. By 1874 the couple were living in Acton, Middlesex, where they had several changes of address. Their first child, Henry Job, was born in 1875. More followed: Ada Mary in 1876 (who died the following year);

Horace Francis in 1878; and Hilda Emily (Connie’s grandmother) in 1882.

However in 1885 Emily petitioned for divorce. The application filed on 17 October cited adultery by Francis, together with cruelty towards Emily. Under the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act 1857 a husband could divorce his wife on the simple grounds of her adultery (considered to threaten the husband’s ability to pass his property to male heirs), but a wife had to prove adultery aggravated by desertion (for two years) or by cruelty or rape. It was possible to apply for a less costly judicial separation, but without right of remarriage for either party. For Emily to take the step of petitioning for divorce with the financial costs and the possible stigma involved was a very bold step.

The petition outlined in some detail the reasons, and several syndicated newspaper reports gave details of the court hearing, the general headline being *Disgraceful conduct of husband*.

Francis did not appear at the hearing. It was cited in the petition that he had at least two adulterous relationships. His conduct was described as “exceedingly bad”. He had struck Emily, banged her head against the wall, poured tea over her, threatened on more than one occasion to cut her throat with a razor, torn her clothes and pawned several of her things, including her wedding ring.

He drank heavily and would absent himself from home for weeks at a time without making any provision for her or their children. One time an aunt had given Emily £100, and he took all but £5 to spend on himself. Witnesses who lived in the same house as the Wyatts stated that they had returned to the house at Christmas 1881 to find Emily left alone with her children. She was exhausted and in an advanced state of pregnancy.

In November 1882 Francis deserted Emily. A few days after he left, brokers’ men arrived with unpaid bills, and stripped the house of every article of furniture. Her 10-month-old baby (Connie’s grandmother) was lifted out of

her cot and put on the floor, and the cot was carried off. Emily did not start the proceedings until she discovered that Francis had been living with another woman in Kentish Town. Mr Justice Butt remarked that "This is an exceptionally bad case even in this court." A *decree nisi* was granted with costs.

We do not know how Emily survived financially from 1882 until the divorce proceedings, as she was shown on the submission to be still living in Acton. There is mention in the newspaper reports of her giving music lessons, and we assume that it was by this she obtained some income. In 1891 she was living with her mother together with Henry Job and Hilda Emily at The Laurels in Wash Common, Newbury. In 1901 she was still living with her mother at The Laurels. Emily died in 1901 aged 48.

Francis had moved in 1882 to Kentish Town to live with a woman calling herself Mary Helena Wyatt. She had been born Mary Helena Elliot in Cory, Fermanagh, but appeared on the



Emily Grace Jane in what looks like funeral attire, perhaps for the death of her baby Ada Mary in 1877, as she is wearing her wedding ring

Emily's father, Charles Riley



1881 census as Mary H Wyatt, a visitor at a different address in Kentish Town. At the time of the 1891 census they were shown as having three children, Philip born 1883, (another) Horace born 1885, and Amelia born 1891, and living at the Flower Mews Boarding House, where Francis was the deputy manager. He was involved as a witness in a case of theft at the Old Bailey in 1889. In the 1901 census they were living in Finchley with the children including another son, Francis, born 1895. They married in 1907, and the same year they emigrated with their children to Canada. Francis died in Toronto, aged 76.

We know nothing of Francis' exploits in Canada, nor of his children. Francis and Emily's three surviving children all married and had families. Henry Job died in 1952, aged 77, Horace in 1951, aged 73, and Hilda Emily (the baby in the cot) in 1965, aged 83.

We are grateful for the help of Steve Fisher in researching the information about the divorce.

The water gypsy how a fishergirl married a viscount

Julie Ann Godson
has woven an
intriguing tale
of rags to riches
from family history
sources

At dusk on a snowy evening in 1766 a carriage arrived in the village of Shellingford, near Faringdon, in what was then north Berkshire. Lights burning in the windows of the old manor house must have been a welcome sight for the travellers, for this was to be their new home. Earlier that day they had been married in the little country church in Northmoor, just across the county border. The groom was Lord Ashbrook; his bride was Betty Ridge, daughter of a humble fisherman.

August 1737 John, the son of Thomas Rudge and Elizabeth his wife, about 2 years old.

A hastily-sketched family chart clarified that Thomas and Elizabeth already shared the same surname before they married, suggesting that they may already have been related. The age of their son John suggested that they married around 1734/5. However, there was still no clue to where they had come from. Finding a register entry for their marriage was key, as it would reveal the home parish of both parties.



The old manor-house, of Shellingford, which Lysons in Magna Britannia (1813) described as "an ancient stone building called, it does not appear for what reason, Shellingford Castle."

I have to admit that, when I first heard this story, I was a little sceptical. It seems like a fairytale. How would such a couple even meet? Betty's parents Thomas and Elizabeth Ridge were particularly difficult to track down. They were incomers into the village of Northmoor, and the first time they appeared anywhere in the parish records was in this somewhat mind-blowing entry:

Baptised August 7th 1737 Thomas Rudge [sic], a man about 25 years of age, the son of Thomas Rudge and Elizabeth his wife. Also baptised ye 7th of August 1737 Elizabeth Rudge, about 23 years of age, the daughter of John Rudge and Katherine his wife, and now wife of Thomas Rudge. Also baptised ye 7th of

There was nothing for it but to blitz the records of all the surrounding parishes, working outwards until I came to the right place. At last the marriage register for the little church of St Lawrence in Besselsleigh, on the Berkshire side of the river, revealed that, on 25 July 1734: *Thomas Ridge and Elizabeth Ridge, both of ye parish of Buckland, were married.* Why travel all the way from Buckland, a journey of some 10 miles, to marry in the obscure little hamlet of Besselsleigh?

Well, something dodgy was going on at Besselsleigh. A comparison of the register at Besselsleigh with those of Northmoor and Buckland reveals that in the 1720s, in Thomas and Elizabeth's much larger home-village of



Shellingford, mapped in the first OS six-inch series in the late nineteenth century.

Taken from Berkshire Maps CD, which is available from Berkshire FHS Bookshop.

Thomas had every reason to expect the freedom of the city to pass from his grandfather Thomas Ridge de Buckland, via his own father Thomas, to him.

But something went wrong. In 1717 “John Ridge, second son of Thomas Ridge [de Buckland], fisherman” was accepted as a freeman. For reasons we can only guess at, young Thomas’s father was passed over. Did he go off the rails in some way? Whatever the reason, the freedom went to

Thomas’s uncle John, and our Thomas would have grown up knowing that he would forever play second-fiddle in the family business to a younger cousin.

Elizabeth’s parents would have been hoping for a good match for her, as the daughter and sister of a freeman of the City of Oxford. They cannot have been pleased at the prospect of her marrying her own cousin Thomas, a man destined to spend his life labouring to catch fish while her brother swanned about at swanky guild dinners in Oxford.

In 1741 a fishery at Northmoor known as Noah’s Ark was let by Magdalen College, Oxford, to a family of fishermen. Off I went to Magdalen, purely on a hunch, which proved correct: Thomas Ridge’s signature was on the lease. Noah’s Ark was a substantial property, comprising five islands with multiple fishweirs, plus a long section of the river bank for siting eel traps. With their future thus assured, Thomas and Elizabeth set about producing their family of two boys and three girls. But Thomas Ridge was still a man with a plan. After all, even after he acquired his lease, he remained just a fisherman.

Local government at village level was based on the parish, and so members of the vestry, the equivalent of today’s parish council, had to be members of the Church of England. Now we see the reason for Thomas’ belated baptism as an adult after he arrived in Northmoor, the Ridges having never shown much interest in

Buckland there were 21 marriages; in their future parish of Northmoor, a village closer in size to Besselsleigh, there were 10. But in Besselsleigh, during the same period, the number of marriages was 154. These cannot all have been locals. The astonishing number of marriages involving outsiders suggests that the church of St Lawrence was a venue for clandestine or secret unions. Betty Ridge’s parents were runaways. Why?

Quarter Sessions records in the Oxfordshire History Centre revealed that the Ridges of Buckland were fishermen. So Betty Ridge’s family was part of a particularly interesting community. The river Thames at this time was like a linear village, stretching the full length of the navigation, pretty well from Lechlade to London. It swarmed with working people: fishermen, bargemen, boatmen, millers and osier-workers. Their facility on the water made them unusually mobile, and they were regarded as water gypsies by their land-based neighbours.

So this was the background of the groom Thomas Ridge. Thanks to the legal cases, his family relationships were now falling into place. His own father Thomas and his bride’s father, John, were the sons of one Thomas Ridge de Buckland, and grandfather Thomas was no ordinary labouring man, for in 1674 he became a freeman of the City of Oxford. This was a valuable privilege, because only freemen could trade within the city. The freedom would then pass to a son, usually the eldest. So our

the church back in Buckland. Thomas wanted to get on in life, so he did what he had to do.

Sure enough, in the year of our heroine Betty's birth, 1745, Thomas Ridge appeared in the vestry minutes as parish constable. But this job wasn't his ultimate aim. Thomas's plan was to gain the necessary vestry support to make himself into the sort of independent businessman he would have been had he gained the freedom of the city through his father in the normal way. In 1755 he got his reward. In the magistrates' official register for the hundred of Chadlington in 1755 Thomas Ridge was granted his victualler's licence. Henceforth he could dispense ale to the passing river trade, the notoriously hard-drinking toughies involved in the carrying trade.

And there were other users of the river too. High-born gentlemen from the university would have been a familiar sight on their days out. So when Thomas' pretty daughter Betty found herself serving one particular young aristocrat in the summer of 1763, she was probably unfazed by the experience. He was 18-year-old William Flower, second Viscount Ashbrook, third Baron Castle Durrow in the county of Kilkenny, on a jaunt upriver from his college of Christ Church.

William Flower was a lonely young man. Orphaned by the age of 15, he did have two sisters, but the appeal of the rumbustious family home on Noah's Ark becomes clear when the alternative was to spend his college vacations amidst his mourning womenfolk. The Anglo-Irish viscount fell madly in love with a fisherman's daughter.

So this was how, on a freezing evening in the early spring of 1766, Betty Ridge was embarking on a new life in the alien world of the aristocracy.

From these beginnings I went on to trace the career of Betty Ridge as a viscountess, and my book *The water gypsy: how a Thames fishergirl married a viscount* documents the previously untold story of her struggle as a young widow to protect her children's interests in the hostile climate of eighteenth-century

Ireland. It was a project which culminated in the most glittering marriage in the entire history of the Ashbrook family, when Betty's grand-daughter became Duchess of Marlborough and chatelaine of Blenheim Palace. But uncovering her family background was the key to the whole story, and it was this that gave me the most satisfaction.



Elizabeth Ridge

The Water Gypsy: how a Thames fishergirl became a viscountess

by Julie Ann Godson

(ISBN 9781784075545)

£10.99 from FeedARead.com, Amazon, and in bookshops.

Branch secretaries can contact the author to arrange an illustrated talk and book-signing via her website at www.julieanngodson.com.

Robust entertainment

CRICKET EXTRAORDINARY.

A NOVEL MATCH OF CRICKET will be played on THURLOW'S GROUND, CAVERSHAM ROAD, READING, on THURSDAY, July 3, 1845, between Eleven Gentlemen having each only ONE ARM, and eleven other Gentlemen having each only ONE LEG. Two Gentlemen are appointed as Umpires, one of whom has no Arms and the other has no legs. A Referee is also appointed who has neither Legs nor Arms.

Wickets to be pitched at Ten o'Clock.

Should the weather prove fine a very large attendance is expected, and arrangements have been made to preserve order by stationing Police in various parts of the ground.

N.B.—Carriages will be admitted.

from the Reading Mercury, above, 28 June 1845,
below, 5 July 1845

EXTRAORDINARY CRICKET MATCH.—The match between the one-armed and one-legged players announced by Mr. Thurlow to take place on his cricket ground, came off on Thursday last. An unusual degree of interest had been excited by the great novelty attached to a game of cricket in which so many "veteran" players were to be engaged, and the attendance on the ground, of spectators from far and near, greatly exceeded any previous occasion, all of whom appeared with countenances smiling in anticipation of "lots of fun." The parties who were thus to be the source of gratification to so many, and who were expected to bring with them

"Sport, that wrinkled care derides,
And Laughter, holding both his sides!"

formed in procession at the "city" end of the town, on the morning of the eventful day, and, attended by a band, (the veterans themselves carrying banners) marched direct to the "battle-field," where hostilities were speedily commenced in right good earnest. To describe the scene which ensued would hardly be possible; suffice it to say, that the most grave and solemn persons present could not contain their risibility, and very hearty peals of laughter rapidly succeeded each other throughout the day. The game was very strenuously contested, and the following was the score of runs made:—

One-legged players, 1st innings, 25 ... 2nd, 46—total 71
One-armed ditto 50 ... 2nd, 60—total 110

Those minus one arm thus being the "conquering heroes" by a majority of 39.—Mr. Thurlow provided a handsome dinner for them, at his own expense, and procured the attendance of many of the above men from several places at a distance from this town, at no little cost to himself.

Mass entertainment in the nineteenth century often smacked of the freak show, distasteful to modern sensibilities. Any idea that this cricket match might have been a precursor of sporting opportunity for disabled people is belied by the hilarity with which the players' efforts were greeted. The match was seen as slapstick comedy as much as sport.

(These cuttings were spotted and sent in by Heather Evans.)

However, "pedestrian" and other athletic feats by the able-bodied of both sexes were also enormously popular, drawing big crowds, and apparently generating a livelihood of sorts for the performers. See more newspaper reports overleaf.

Windsor and Eton Express

4 August 1827

An extraordinary feat of pedestrianism has been performed in Eton this week, by the celebrated McMullen. He undertook to walk 102 miles, in twenty-four successive hours; and commenced his arduous task on Thursday evening, at half-past seven, in the Brocas meadow. The first twenty miles he walked in four hours, and continued during the night at nearly the same rate, having a few intervals of rest. He rather flagged in his pace during the latter part of his performance, which he finished within three quarters of an hour of the time, without much apparent fatigue. He was pretty liberally rewarded for his exertions, by contribution from casual visitors to the sport.

24 November 1827

A woman of the name McMullen, mother of the celebrated pedestrian of that name, on Monday last undertook to walk 15 miles in three hours, starting from Windsor Bridge, half a mile out and back through Eton. The woman, though upwards of 60 years old, performed her task with amazing alacrity, having a quarter of an hour to spare, and was handsomely rewarded by the inhabitants of the town. The same person lately displayed her pedestrian powers at Aylesbury.

3 November 1827

McCullan's [sic] mother, an old woman of 66, exhibited her pedestrian abilities on Wednesday, by walking twenty miles in four successive hours. She also performed the task she had assigned herself, and without appearing to be greatly fatigued.

8 February 1840

On Tuesday, Slade, the pedestrian, undertook to perform his match of 10 miles in 61 minutes, in the Long Walk, Windsor. It had previously been determined that the match should come off in the Slough road, but the dreadful state of the weather induced all parties to consent to its taking place in the more protected spot to which we have alluded. He started with every prospect of winning, and although the rain was pouring down the whole time, it was believed, until his last run "home," that he would accomplish his task. He, however, lost by about 3 or 4 minutes.

11 January 1840

MATCH AGAINST TIME.- On Monday, a match against time came off on the Bath Road, in which Mountjoy, the pedestrian, undertook a somewhat novel task:-He had first to walk 12 miles and a half in two hours, which part of his undertaking was lost by 52 seconds. The ground selected was from the Red Lion, Slough, to the Dolphin Inn. He then commenced

picking up 100 eggs a yard apart, and fifty nuts also at a yard distance each, making a distance of nearly 13 miles, and accomplished his task half a minute within the given time.

2 April 1842

Cootes, the pedestrian, yesterday performed some astonishing feats in jumping over hurdles, picking up stones, &c., on the Bath road, near the Dolphin, at Slough.

9 April 1842

Cootes the Pedestrian: This individual again exhibited his wonderful powers at Spital, on Wednesday last. The most extraordinary part of his doings on this day was his backward walk of half a mile, and his leaping over 50 hurdles 10 yards apart. Cootes will again go through his manly exercises, and exhibit even more extraordinary feats than he has yet done in this part of the country, on Thursday next, in the grounds of the Queen's Arms, in the New Road.

Salisbury & Winchester Journal

3 November 1817

Esther Crozier, the Female Pedestrian - Thursday morning, at seven o'clock, this Amazon commenced performing her arduous task of walking 1000 miles in 20 successive days, at the Washway, Brixton, near the two-mile stone on the Croydon road, going three quarters of a mile out and in.

These extracts were taken from Richard Heaton's newspaper collection on <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/>

Liddiard gathering 13 and 14 August 2016

Karen Rogers (née Liddiard)



Jonathan Liddiard, born 1752 Ramsbury, son of Jonathan Liddiard, born 1721 Aldbourne

When I started researching my maiden name of Liddiard over 20 years ago it soon became evident that a large proportion of the people of that name came from Wiltshire, Berkshire and surrounds. Using the 1881 census we estimate between 12,000 and 14,000 people have ever held the surname, and I can trace 95 per cent of the trees back to that area.

My research turned into a one-name study over 15 years ago, now registered with the Guild of One-Name Studies. Further research revealed that many the families which moved to Berkshire can find their ancestors either in Aldbourne, Ramsbury or Ogbourne St Andrew and Rockley areas.

After numerous trips to Wiltshire from Australia to research the surname in 2013, I suggested to the Aldbourne Heritage Centre that we hold a Liddiard (and all variant spellings) reunion in Aldbourne in 2016. The idea generated great enthusiasm. Word has travelled, and we have Liddiards coming from Australia, Scotland and of course from all over the UK.

On Saturday 13 August 2016 there will be numerous activities throughout the day, including displays of family trees, photographs and the Liddiard one-name study data, which holds details of over 8,000 individuals and transcriptions of over 900 UK (post-September 1837), US and Australian marriages. The Alan Liddiard Forge will be open for people to visit, as will the Aldbourne Heritage Centre. There will be some talks on the Liddiard family and their history throughout the day. The Berkshire Family History Society and the Guild of One-Name Studies have confirmed they will have stands in Aldbourne on that day.

On Sunday the 14th I am organising a coach to take us to other Liddiard places of interest, such as Ogbourne St Andrew, Ramsbury, Hungerford and Newbury.

If you have any connection to Liddiards of any spelling, we would love you to come along and celebrate our family. To register your interest or for any enquiry please contact Karen Rogers (née Liddiard) at liddiard@one-name.org or by mail to 33 Peat Place, Lower Portland, NSW 2756 Australia.



Standing: Oliver Liddiard 1840 - 1917. Seated, two brothers: left, Joseph Liddiard 1814-93; right, William Liddiard, father of Oliver, 1810-70. Picture must have been taken 1869-70, when Oliver returned from Australia

Readers write

*your pictures,
your stories,
your queries*

Send them in to editor@berksfhs.org.uk



Roger Phipp has sent in some photos which may trigger memories of old Reading



A works outing for Roger's great-uncle, George Lee, to Southsea in 1947. How smart they are, in their jackets and ties, but no women accompanied them, or at least not for this photo. They seem not to be expecting very good weather. The coach company appears to be Butlers. Does anybody remember the pub? (Perhaps it was in Southsea.)



The next year, 1948, they went to Brighton, and this time a few women came too. Six of the men have left off their ties. Smith's was the coach company this time.



The workplace is identified here as the corporation's electricity department, where George Lee was known to have worked. This party seem much more relaxed in their (mostly) open-necked shirts, although there are more hats than in the (presumably) earlier pictures. George Lee is in the middle of the second row, cigarette in his mouth. The man on his right is recognisable in all three photos.

Pauline Weeds seeks help with the Blagrave Family

I am researching the life of one Edward Homewood/Holmwood (1631-85), who married Thamar Blagrave on 22 January 1662/63 at St Laurence, Reading. After her death in 1677 he married (or cohabited with) her sister, Eleanor Blagrave. Thamar and Eleanor were daughters of Walter and Frances Blagrave, who were baptised at Wandsworth in the 1630s, as were another daughter, Ann, and a son, Walter. Walter (snr) and his brother Edward were employed in the royal household, as was their father, Edward Blagrave. Walter (snr) died on 21 March 1661/62, at which time he was described as a husbandman and gent of Tylehurst, Berkshire. His widow, Frances, died on 18 February 1674/75, and was then of St Laurence, Reading.

When Edward Holmwood made his will in 1681, he willed that *my wife doe bring up and keepe Elizabeth Blagrave the daughter of my brother Anthony Blagrave untill she atteines to the age of one and twenty yeares or shall be married*. He left Elizabeth £20 and the lease of a farm at Mapledurham in Oxfordshire after the death of himself and his wife, these bequests depending on her not becoming a Roman Catholic.

I am aware that the Blagraves were a significant family in Berkshire, but I have been unable to find where this branch joins the family tree. Can anyone tell me where they fit in, please?

I should also like to find out more about Anthony and his daughter, Elizabeth. My theory is that although I have not found his baptism, Anthony must have been a brother of Thamar and Eleanor, and that he died and left the guardianship of Elizabeth to Edward Holmwood. Elizabeth could not have been born earlier than 1660, but I have not been able to find any baptism for an Elizabeth, daughter of Anthony Blagrave, between 1660 and 1681, nor the death of an Anthony Blagrave during that period.

Any help with the above would be most appreciated.

Mrs Weeds can be contacted at 37 Holcombe Road, Rochester, Kent ME1 2HU or on pweeds@gmail.com

Daphne Spurling reflects upon some name confusions

Everyone has had problems with names due to mistranscriptions, faulty memories or what-have-you.

1. My father drew up a family tree that included Belle, the wife of his uncle. Recently a distant cousin pointed out that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission gave her name as Pauline, and Pauline is what appears in the BMD index. Perhaps Belle was a nickname or, in the years since his uncle died in WWI, had my father forgotten her real name?
2. I had difficulty in finding my grandfather in the GRO index, and in the end ordered the birth certificate with the right surname, date and place. The certificate revealed that he had been registered as Claude, but a marginal note said that this was later changed to Neville, the name by which I knew him.
3. A few years ago we went to the cremation of my aunt by marriage. We confirmed that the other group waiting were relatives of Aunt Gladys Shorney, and then I introduced myself as the niece of her late husband, Vernon. "But her husband was George Shorney," they protested. After comparing several other cross-references we established that indeed we were talking about the same man. Why had she called him George to her family, when all my family called him Vernon? Didn't he like any of the three baptismal names – William Arthur Vernon – that he had been given?
4. The last example has nothing to do with family history. When living in the States our son Martin had a phone call one holiday from a fellow university student asking if he could come to stay. Martin told us his name was John Monsarrat. But on leaving, this friend signed our visitors' book with a completely different name. Martin then showed us the Monsarrat name in the programme of the play they had both been in. We never did find out the reason for the discrepancy.

Deirdre Martin describes the short-lived WWI marriage of a Berkshire son

I have a story of a young man born in Berkshire who emigrated to Australia, joined the Australian Pioneers at the outbreak of war in 1914, found himself in Wiltshire during training, where he met and married my grandmother, and subsequently died on active service in France.

Richard James Rolfe was born in West Shefford on 14 November 1888 to Edwin Rolfe (1851 - 1941) and Mary Ann Brown (1852 - 1926). In the 1891 census he was living at Newbury Road, West Shefford, with his parents, Edwin, an ag lab, and Mary Ann, a laundress, and his brothers Charles, Edwin, Tom and Jack, and sisters Lizzie, Rose and Isabella.

In the 1901 census he was still living in West Shefford with his parents and sisters, Isabella and Polly Selina.

On 2 October 1908 Richard was a passenger on the ship *Ophir* bound for Brisbane, Australia, along with Charles Rolfe and Mary V Rolfe.

I don't know where in Australia Richard was living, but he enlisted with the 4th Pioneers Australian Infantry on 2 October 1916 at Charters Towers, Winton, Queensland.

Information on Mapping Our Anzacs (<http://www.wagga.nsw.gov.au>) has the following description of him:

occupation: car mechanic, car driver; 5ft 3½ ins tall, chest 35ins, eyes brown, complexion dark, with dark brown hair; religion: Methodist.

On 24 March 1917 the 4th Pioneers were in Fovant, Wiltshire, training prior to being posted to France. During his time in Fovant Richard met Florence Mabel Scadden, who was living with her parents in Swallowcliffe, not far from Fovant.

Richard was posted to France on 5 November 1917, but was back in Wiltshire on leave on 24 November. He married Florence on 1 December 1917, and left again for France on 5 December.

In April 1918 Florence gave birth to their daughter, also named Florence, whom Richard never met, as he was killed in action on 20 September 1918.

Florence found happiness again: in 1923 she married Albert Strong. They were my grandparents, and they had two daughters, one being my mother.



Bookends

Reviews by Grace Gillions, Judith Mitchell, Lin Ricketts and Tony Roberts

Prices quoted are for:

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My ancestors were Londoners

6th ed, Cliff Webb (Society of Genealogists, 2010) A5 perfect bound, 108pp
Shop £8.99, UK £10.16, airmail £14.04

For many centuries London has been the largest and most populous city in the British Isles, and for the last two the London region has been home to around a sixth of the entire population of England and Wales. Its sheer size and administrative complexity makes it a daunting area in which to conduct genealogical research. In this book Cliff Webb aims to provide the London ancestral researcher with a guide to the resources available and some of the genealogical quirks of records pertaining to the metropolis.

The book is structured to give each type of record its own chapter. Most of these records are familiar to family historians, and their interpretation is quite straightforward to anyone moderately experienced in their use. Some records are harder to use than might be expected in locations outside London, while others are the opposite. For example, the boundaries of administrative parishes and districts in London can often be difficult to identify at any particular period, while apprentice and occupational records are plentiful (with nearly 100 guilds and most professions centred in London).

Although the records discussed cover the whole Greater London area, there are differences within it, and particularly in those associated with the City of London (and within the old Roman walls) where commercial activity predominates. For example, the

volume of parish records in the Square Mile has shrunk considerably over time, as commerce took over former residential areas and the city's workers moved away to the suburbs.

Where this book is particularly helpful is in its appendices. The first of these lists repositories of London records. The second appendix provides a tabulated list of some 190 parishes in London, identifying for each the county, hundred, registration district, Metropolitan and London boroughs and probate district in which it fell, and which family history society covers that parish. A third appendix lists over 200 suburban and smaller district names, indicating to which parish or larger area each belonged. A further two appendices provide addresses of pertinent family history societies and of online resources for London and Middlesex censuses.

The author has been deeply involved in London, Middlesex and Surrey family history for many years, and has contributed many databases and research aids relating to London at the Society of Genealogists. His experience shows through in this book, although some readers may dislike all the footnotes being gathered together at the end of the main text rather than being scattered throughout it, and not adjacent to the footnote subject. The reader will also note that a few website references have changed since the book was written. But these are small quibbles, and there is no doubt that this book represents a valuable and very readable guide to anyone researching London ancestors.

Tony Roberts

My ancestor was Scottish

Alan Stewart (Society of Genealogists, 2012)

A5 perfect bound, 124pp

Shop £8.99, UK £9.72, airmail £12.47

This volume in the popular *My Ancestor* series is written by a widely published freelance family history author who has considerable Scottish and Irish ancestry himself (he also wrote the companion volume, *My ancestors were Irish*) and has much experience of research into this ancestral heritage.

While the basic records available are broadly similar to those used in English and Wales, there are quite a number of differences in the content and forms of records. This is hardly surprising, as Scotland's civil, legal and ecclesiastical governance were well established before the 1707 Acts of Union.

The author looks first at civil registration and census records. These are relatively modern, and should be the same either side of the border, but they are not: the Scottish civil registration records give more information than their English and Welsh counterparts. The author has tabulated the differences in the birth, marriage and death registrations between the countries (and between different periods in Scotland), and these give the researcher a very quick overview of what information to expect from the documents. It is worth noting that civil registration in Scotland only commenced in 1855. There are fewer variations in the census questions between the two nations, and the author again provides a table showing questions asked and the differences. He also notes that the 1931 census for Scotland is intact.

Valuation rolls, hearth and poll taxes, other tax and militia lists are also not markedly different from their southern counterparts. So far so good, and all is readily understandable to those unfamiliar with using the Scottish records. But then we get to the old parish registers, the other parish registers, and the wills and inventories chapters of the book.

This is where things are often different from what is usually found in England and Wales, as the ecclesiastical and legal framework in Scotland is quite different. The Church of Scotland is Presbyterian (and has been mainly so since 1560), so there are no bishop's transcripts records. With Roman Catholic, Scottish Episcopalians and the nonconformist churches, it seems that parish registers are quite scattered, and finding individual ancestors is consequentially more difficult. The author gives some data that suggests the number of Church of Scotland recorded baptisms in the year preceding civil registration was only half the number of registered births the following year.

Wills and inventories are always a useful source of ancestral information. The author explains the very different terminology and processes used in Scotland. These explanations are given clearly and they are demonstrated through a detailed example of a real document. There is also a short chapter later on that looks at the related topic of Services of Heir.

There is a chapter on Scottish clans and families, and within the text of other chapters there are articles on Scottish names and naming conventions, and on county and parish boundary changes. There also chapters on Scottish maps and newspapers.

Throughout the book the author points out to the reader the principal sites where Scottish records are to be found, and gives appropriate website addresses in the text. The book is thoroughly recommended to those looking at, or already engaged in, research of their Scottish ancestry.

Tony Roberts

Emmbrook, yet even more unfinished history

P R Shilham (Emmbrook Residents Association, 2015) A5 booklet, 70pp
Shop £4.00, UK £5.17, airmail £9.10

This is the fourth in a series of booklets planned to cover the history of Emmbrook, and is written by local historian and resident Peter Shilham. The series is not in any chronological order, but looks at different aspects of this village on the western edge of Wokingham, and considers the history of its buildings and inhabitants.

This volume concentrates on fewer topics than presented in the earlier works, and a shade more than half of the total body of text is devoted to only one, the de Freville case, but more of this later.

The booklet opens with a short history of Emmbrook School (opened in 1965), which mentions many members of staff and school supporters and also highlights the long and unhappy saga of problems with the building and its infrastructure. Some pupils are mentioned in the text, including the four who won the BBC Radio 4 Top of the Form trophy in 1983. This chapter is then rounded off with some comments on an earlier village primary school.

The second chapter of the book has a history of the Emmbrook Sports Club, from its foundation c1940 through to 1968. Here there is a wealth of names of local residents for the family historian to explore. As the club still exists, perhaps there will be more to come in a later volume.

There follow two further short chapters, on Toutley Camp and on George Forge (killed in action 1916). The George Forge chapter is almost wholly from a recently found piece from 2 September 1916 edition of the *Reading Mercury*. As well as remembrances of Sgt Forge from his contemporaries, it contains a vivid and graphic account by Forge himself of the fierce fighting that he and his battalion took part in a few days before his death.

The second half of the booklet is taken up entirely with the de Freville case. It is an unhappy story of marital and family discord, maintenance claims, false imprisonment and detention in a lunatic asylum. It is a gripping tale, but the link with Emmbrook is slight (Mrs de Freville's parents lived there) as most of the action takes place in Stroud, courts in Stroud, Wokingham and London, Gloucestershire County Mental Asylum. It also touches on the Houses of Parliament, Paris and Detroit.

There are some 330 names in the booklet's index. Despite there being a number of non-Emmbrook residents contained in the listing, there are still a great many there of interest to the family historian.

Tony Roberts

My ancestor was a woman at war

Emma Jolly (Society of Genealogists, 2013)
paperback, 15 x 11cm, 311pp including indexes and appendices
Shop £9.99, UK £12.00, airmail £20.74

It is difficult to spend much time on family history without coming across an invaluable series called *My ancestor*. From gentlemen to gypsies, lawyers to labourers, all manner of occupations and lifestyles have been exhaustively uncovered by expert genealogists; while we are commemorating many wartime anniversaries, one title with particular resonance is *My ancestor was a woman at war*, which looks at the many roles women have played in times of conflict.

Not just recent conflicts, either. Predictably there is no shortage of material from the two world wars, with first-hand accounts from women who lived and worked through them; what the reader might not expect are the chapters devoted to Victorian war work and even earlier possibilities. Do you suspect that your ancestor was a fourteenth-century camp follower, doing her husband's laundry or

tending him when he staggered back wounded from the battlefield? Could she have joined a female army during the English Civil War? Might she have witnessed the Battle of Waterloo or nursed in the Crimea? If records exist, then Emma Jolly will point you to them.

Volumes in this series are subtitled *A guide to sources* and as such a large chunk of *Woman at war* is taken up by lists. Each chapter ends with details of where relevant information can be found, and the final 130 pages consist of notes, appendices, bibliographies, records and indexes. But if this makes the book sound like a dry catalogue, one has only to turn to chapters like *Women munitions workers of the First World War*, or *Spies and intelligence work*, to find plenty of colour and human interest.

Fans of the BBC radio series *Home front* will know that many women were taken on to work in munitions factories during the First World War, but may not be aware of the numbers who died in accidents or were poisoned by the chemicals they worked with every day. Renowned female spies like Violette Szabo and Odette Sansom have been immortalised on film and will be familiar to many readers, while few people will have heard of Nancy Wake, a Resistance fighter who was awarded the George Medal after killing an enemy sentry with her bare hands. Individual stories like these are threaded through the chapters, bringing the archives to life.

When we think of women at war, we may picture Wrens in uniform, ATS girls or the labourers of the Land Army; but females in factories were doing war work too, as were nurses and tram conductresses, Girl Guides and typists. Some women were separated from their families, in constant danger, and performing acts of great heroism; countless others fulfilled their duties in less glamorous and equally vital roles. Somewhere in this book there will be a story you recognise, with the help you need to flesh it out.

Grace Gillions

The family bible: a priceless heirloom

Rena King (The Family History Partnership, 2014) A5 perfect bound, 87pp
Shop £6.50, UK £7.67, airmail £11.55

To the family historian a family bible, containing details of names, dates of birth, marriages and deaths, together with examples of ancestors' handwriting, is a real treasure.

Rena King's book not only endorses this sentiment but she is aware that many bibles were lost or accidentally destroyed, particularly when there was no known relation to inherit them. In an attempt to stop the loss of the information the author has collected hundreds of bibles and reproduced many of the inscriptions they contained in her new delightful book. Some snippets are of short verses and poems. A longer poem written by Mary Ann Bowyer (1818-86) called *My mother's bible*, gives a personal insight into the importance of the bible to Mary and the role it played in her family life. Other snippets include information on enlistments, length of service, apprenticeships and emigration, providing the family historian with ideas on how to make the information written in their own bible even more valuable to future generations.

Other chapters include the history of bibles, listing the different versions and the inventive ways in which they were distributed to the population. Bibles were not free, and the heartfelt story of Mary Jones tells of the incredible effort she made to become a bible owner. Some were luckier than Mary Jones, and received a bible on their birthday or on the occasion of their marriage. Bibles were also a popular prize for Sunday Schools and schools.

The author has thoughtfully provided a separate list of the surnames and places mentioned in her book, which may lead some readers to finding long-lost information about their ancestors.

Lin Ricketts

Fair Mile Hospital: a Victorian asylum

Ian Wheeler (The History Press, 2105)

Shop £14.99, UK £18.79, airmail £23.89

I was not expecting this book to be an interesting read, but I was mistaken. It is a well written and very comprehensive history of the Moulsoford Asylum, as it was called from 1870 to 1897, later renamed Berkshire Mental Hospital from 1915 to 1948, and finally Fair Mile Hospital from 1948 to 2010. Ian Wheeler, although a long-term resident of Cholsey village, was not employed at the hospital; he has had a very varied career in banking and business, but he has carefully researched the the hospital history, and the book has many well captioned photographs.

Asylums and mental hospitals have not had a good reputation. The imposing buildings set in remote areas have often been perceived as dumping places for individuals who had a variety of mental problems. Cures are not often mentioned, but they did in fact happen. The dedication of staff dealing with difficult people with patience and kindness seems to have been forgotten.

The location of the asylum followed the usual pattern. The countryside and rural work were hoped to provide peace, adequate food and fresh air for distressed people living in poverty. When the asylum opened it was only for poor people; well-off folk went to private establishments.

The remote location meant that the asylum had to have its own facilities, such as a gas works to provide lighting and later electricity generators. Water was drawn from a borehole on the premises. Two stokers were needed for the boilers, which unfortunately were unable to keep up with demand for hot water. Many items were produced within the grounds, such as fruit and vegetables, and milk from the dairy herd kept at the asylum's farm. Patients were encouraged to help in many areas of the asylum's work. It was considered part of their treatment: occupational therapy came later. Many entertainments and opportunities for playing sports were provided.

Due to the closure of patients' records Mr Wheeler has not been able to find out much about the treatments practised in the hospital. Most of the information is gained from the Committee of Visitors' records and the recollections of former staff. Medical superintendents deplored the practice of referring certain categories of patients to the hospital when they would be better cared for elsewhere. As knowledge grew it was realised that the hospital was not the best place for people with learning difficulties or those suffering from senile dementia. Before the discovery of reliable sedatives patients occasionally became violent, but use of restraints had to be carefully recorded. Staff regulations of 1904 reminded attendants and nurses that *all the patients must be treated with the greatest consideration, sympathy and forbearance by those who are placed in charge of them*. Some patients inevitably arrived with physical illnesses of various kinds, and isolation wards were required; some patients and staff died in an epidemic of typhoid.

The hospital continued to look after the sick through both world wars, but suffered from overcrowding due to the arrival of patients from other hospitals which had been requisitioned. Other problems were retaining staff and obtaining supplies.

Between the wars and afterwards many attempts were made to modernise facilities. A nurses' home (previously staff had had spartan bedrooms off the wards) and formal training were introduced. However, the development of new drugs enabled patients to be treated in the community, and the number of patients declined, until in 2002 there were only 200 in-patients (compared with 779 in 1923). The patients were transferred to Prospect Park Hospital, and Fair Mile was sold off. The main Victorian building became apartments, the newer buildings were demolished and houses built in their place.

The history of hospital treatment of the mentally ill has been a neglected subject which this book makes a good attempt to remedy.

Judith Mitchell

Berkshire FHS Research Centre

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Society volunteers will explain anything you need to know about the centre's resources, but you do your own research at the centre. You can print pages or photocopy them for a nominal additional charge.

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Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays: 10.00 to 16.00

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2nd Sunday each month: 11.00 to 16.00 (excluding bank holiday weekends)

Can't get to the Research Centre?

The society offers a postal/online search service of Berkshire names, based on:

Berkshire censuses and indexes for 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881

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Berkshire marriages

Berkshire baptisms

Berkshire miscellaneous index

Berkshire probate

Berkshire strays index.

All you need is a surname (or a number of surnames) to access information, the extent of which will vary with the individual database. Your search of the master index will show you the total of entries of that surname in each individual database. You can then request the full details available.

You can ask for a search either online or by post. The charges are:

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National burial index 3rd ed

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Library

The library contains 4,500 items, about 20 per cent of which are Berkshire-related; the rest cover UK, Irish and international material.

The library catalogue can be searched at the centre and online at

www.berksfhs.org.uk/librarycatalogue.

CDs of Berkshire data including MIs, overseers' papers, militia lists, trade directories

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You can also apply by post. Postal search charges are the same as those for online searches excluding the 50p transaction fee. For a postal search you must enclose an A4 self-addressed envelope (large) with stamps to cover return postal costs. An alternative is to supply an email address so that results can be sent to you by email. If you don't have an email address please supply a UK phone number. Please send your request for a postal search to **Berkshire Name Search** at the address top left.

Members' surname interests

directory maintained by Bob Plumridge

memsec@berksfhs.org.uk

Members submitting this quarter:

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7779 LIDDIARD Shrivenham BRK All

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Dates for your diary			Berkshire FHS will be taking part in all these events
10 - 13 Sept	Heritage Open Days	Berkshire FHS RC	www.berksfhs.org.uk
10 - 4pm Sat 3 Oct	Oxfordshire FHS Family History Fair	Marlborough School, Woodstock OX20 1LP	www.ofhs.org.uk/fair.html
10 - 4pm Sun 11 Oct	Hampshire Genealogical Society Open Day	Everest Academy, Basingstoke, RG24 9FP	www.hgs-familyhistory.com/hampshire-family-history-open-day-2015
10 - 4.30pm Sat 31 Oct	West Surrey FHS Open Day	Woking Leisure Centre, GU22 9BA	http://wsfhs.co.uk/pages/open-day.php
2pm Mon 9 Nov	Berks FHS 40th anniv event: workshop on heirloom conservation	Berkshire Record Office, 9 Coley Ave, Reading RG1 6AF	see page 16 www.berksfhs.org.uk

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