

Vol. 25, Issue 4, October–December 2024

British Connections

*Official Publication of the International Society for British Genealogy
and Family History*



Locations of Interest in British Genealogy



VIRTUAL
*Spring
Institute*



**MARCH 24, 2025
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-ONLINE-**

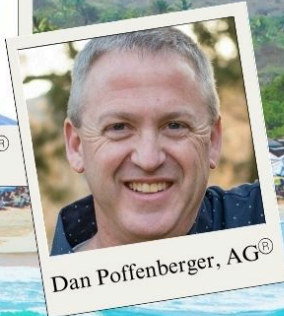
Caribbean Research



for your *British Ancestors*



Todd Knowles, AG®



Dan Poffenberger, AG®

Join us on Zoom for a genealogical journey through the Caribbean Islands! Our expert guides, *Dan Poffenberger, AG®*, and *Todd Knowles, AG®*, will describe the “five W’s” of Caribbean research. You’ve got questions? They’ve got answers. Register at <https://isbgfh.com/si>

TODD’S PROGRAMS

Jamaican Research

Jamaica, an island nation located in the Caribbean Sea, is known for its rich culture, history, and natural beauty. Join us in learning about its culture, geography, history, politics, government, and religion, and discover how to conduct genealogical research here.

West Indies Research Case Studies

Case studies are used to investigate a particular topic or problem and gather data that can contribute to theory-building and understanding. Commonly used in research, this technique will allow us to explore real-life contexts, providing understanding of situations, illustrating genealogical problem solving, and offering solutions to research dilemmas.

DAN’S PROGRAMS

The British West Indies: History and Immigration

History and immigration are deeply interconnected, as patterns of migration have significantly influenced the development of societies, economies, and cultures throughout the world. The movement of people has shaped the history of nations, and this class will introduce you to the British role in the Caribbean countries and British Overseas Territories.

A Brief Overview of British West Indies Research: Records of the former British Colonies and Records at The National Archives

A country’s national archives establishment serves as a custodian of the nation’s history, identity, and rules of governance. It preserves a country’s most important historical, legal, and cultural records, and is a vital resource for research. Come along and island-hop with me as we discover where to look for documents.



Locations of Interest in British Genealogy

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British Connections (ISSN 0736-8054) is published four times a year in March, June, September, and December. Deadlines for submissions are: Feb. 12, May 12, Aug. 12, and Nov. 12.

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Submissions may be sent electronically to: editor@isbgfh.com, or by mail to:

ISBGFH

1312 17th Street, #1751
Denver, CO 80202

We welcome unsolicited contributions. If an item is to be used, notice will be provided within one month of receipt. Unaccepted manuscripts will be returned.

Membership options, which include a digital subscription to *British Connections*:

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President's Message



Craig L. Foster, AG®

Years ago, I had the dubious honor of being on a ferry filled with Liverpoolians bound for Douglas, Isle of Man. They were going to cheer on a Liverpool football club's game with the Isle of Man Football League's team. On the positive side, not all of the lads were drunk. On the negative side, those who were not drunk appeared to be well on their way to being so. It was, needless to say, a memorable introduction to a fun week on the Isle of Man.

Okay, to be brutally honest, it was that Manx visit and then a visit to Malta years later that reinforced for me the fact that small islands and I were not made for each other. I learned that Douglas, the capital city of the Isle of Man, with its picturesque promenade filled with shops and restaurants, is a favorite tourist destination of the English. Other favorite vacation sites for British people are the Lake District, the Cotswolds, London, Edinburgh, the Peak District, Brighton,

Cornwall, the Isle of Wight, and York. I can certainly understand the above-named places being favorite vacation sites—especially the ones that are more inland. Several of these places have made my landlubbing heart happy on visits for both tourism and genealogical research.

Candidly, genealogical research always makes my heart happy. This issue will offer some interesting stories and research tips about various places in the United Kingdom. I'm sure those who have been able to visit Great Britain and Ireland have fond memories of places and people, beautiful sights and incredible research experiences. There are plenty of such places on the island of Great Britain and the positive thing for people like me is that both Great Britain and Ireland are large enough that there are plenty of places to visit for both pleasure and research. Besides, I'm sure most readers don't have my weird aversion to small

islands, so those who have Manx ancestry, you definitely want to include a visit to the Isle of Man if you're able.

Whether or not you will shortly be visiting the British Isles, a definite must for learning about Irish, English, and Scottish research, is the Winter Webinars. The webinars are presently happening and are a great way to learn. Gillian Hunt and Fintan Mullan have presented about Irish research and their presentations can still be viewed by members [here](#). Among the upcoming speakers are some well-known and

respected genealogists like Paul Milner, Jen Baldwin, Chris Paton, and Fiona Fitzsimmons.

Please take advantage of this incredible offering by going to our website and registering for the [Winter Webinars](#).

Craig





From the Editor's Desk

That was Then, and Fare Thee Well, Maureen



Rochester Street, September 2007, Betty Longbottom, CC-BY-SA 2.0, Wikimedia. This is a few blocks down from the old E&M Menders location, but the streets and buildings look much the same.

A few years back, I started researching my husband Phil's family in Bradford, Yorkshire. Unsurprisingly, I found that a large number of his ancestors had worked in the textile mills, but as I dug deeper, I realized that these people had lived remarkable lives. Bradford mill work was a kind of hell: workers (including children, who were beaten if they slowed or stopped working) were required to work long hours; a family's life was completely tied to the mill. And even as the once-powerful mills began to close in the mid-twentieth century, and Bradford—"Wool City"—set its sights on new horizons, my mother-in-law Maureen continued to work in textiles well into the 1970s as a "burler and mender" (<https://www.sunnybankmills.co.uk/our-story/blog/menders/>). Her last textile job was at E&M Menders on the corner of Lapage and Rochester Streets, above the Co-op. Phil remembers waiting for her there after school. Wagons and lorries packed with large bolts of fabric would park in the back, and a special lift transported the textiles to the first floor. (Americans would call it the second floor.)

Edith Maureen Roberts (née Hallsworth) worked as a burler and mender for many years. After the business closed, she became a "home help" for elderly neighbors. I knew her as a lovely woman who was always smiling, active, and curious, and I couldn't have asked for a gentler, kinder mother-in-law. This month, Phil traveled to the UK to attend her memorial service. Our love knows no bounds, Maureen. You will never be just a name on a family tree.

Sandra

That's a Wrap!

Megan Heyl, M.Ed., Education Director

“That’s a Wrap” is an idiom that means the filming of a movie or television show (or one of its scenes) is finished. We can go home now. On October 18, 2024, at about 4 p.m., our president, Craig Foster, and I walked out of the business office at the Plaza Hotel with papers in our hands, and I turned to him and said, in a slightly tired voice, “That’s a Wrap!”

ISBGFH members who attended the British Institute (either in person or via recording access), should know that our 2024 event is now completed, and it’s time to take a brief rest. Why rest? Keep reading!

When an organization puts on an event, whether it is in person or virtual, so much goes on behind the scenes! We hope our attendees don’t have to do anything more than show up, attend the events, and receive a schedule that works around various people, places and things. We want to leave smiles on faces and give people memories to hold onto.



Jen Baldwin, Everyday England class



Everyday England class

As the old saying from the *Wizard of Oz* goes, “Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain!” Dorothy and her friends discover that the “Wizard” is actually a man hiding behind a curtain, making the lights, cameras, and action all come together—and that is what we strive to do.

It takes a full year to put together the British Institute. We need to contract with our speakers a full year (or more) in advance; reserve the hosting hotel (including a block of rooms for the hotel and guests, plus the classrooms for our courses and meetings); plan catering at the events that require food service; purchase any items needed for classrooms; set up evening events (including contracting with guest speakers and securing the rooms at the library and setup/tear down); advertise not only on our website and to our membership, but to hundreds of outlets including genealogical and historical societies, universities and colleges, other providers of genealogical education events, social media sources (Facebook, Instagram,



From left to right: Annette Burke Lyttle (instructor), Glenn York, Steven Asay, and Steven W. Morrison (instructor) in the Quakers class.

Twitter, etc.); request donations for the door prizes; design and print our welcome booklets, trifold brochures, and fliers; support our speakers with anything they need as they prepare institute-quality syllabus materials, and record their programs (we need to make their jobs as easy as possible)—just to name a few items that the aforementioned “Wizard” is working on.

But I couldn’t do this without support and help from many of our board members, friends, and family that inevitably jump right in and offer to lend a hand when they see and sense that there are times the “Wizard” is pushing and pulling each and every lever at once, and forgetting that I only have two hands! And for some silly reason I’m dealing with only 24 hours in a day.

This year’s BI 2024 had its share of glitches—items for which you need to make some on-the-spot decisions to keep the institute running smoothly. Two of these glitches dealt with illness: one of our board members who was to join us and assist us in setting up rooms and technology couldn’t travel because he caught Covid the day before flying to SLC, and one of our instructors came down with a horrible case of the flu on Tuesday evening; fortunately, we were able to pivot her course to Zoom for

Wednesday through Friday. Thanks to her teaching partner and the cooperation of the students, the course ended up being a success!

If you have never been to the British Institute and would like to take a course from world-renowned instructors, enjoy private consultations with them, spend your afternoons at the world-famous FamilySearch Library, attend evening presentations, collaborate with friends and other genealogists, and put a huge checkmark in the box of a week well spent doing what we all enjoy, mark your calendar now for BI 2025. The kick-off Meet-and-Greet is scheduled for October 5, 2025, with courses running October 6–10. Watch the website for more information, with registration opening on 1 April 2025, and that’s not a joke!

In the meantime, video recordings of BI 2024 are still available on our website through the end of the year. We have a link to the videos right on our home page. Videos can only be accessed through December 31, 2024, so now is the time to purchase. Every course comes with a book-length syllabus.

I mentioned earlier about taking a bit of a rest, because two weeks after we returned home from



Helen Smith, Australian Research Instructor, and Megan Heyl, Education Director.



Sylvia Tracy Doolos, Membership Director, and Frank Southcott, both past presidents.

Salt Lake City, our Winter Webinar Series started on November 2! It will run on the first and third Saturdays for five months. And our Spring Institute is scheduled for March 24—it is a day-long VIRTUAL event titled, “Caribbean Research for your British Ancestors!” Travel with our tour guides, Todd Knowles and Dan Poffenberger, as they reveal resources and reasons for your British Ancestors to have ties to this part of the world. Registration opens on November 30.

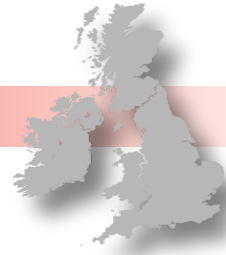
Don't worry about that “Wizard” behind the curtain. Without fail, each and every one of our events is entertaining as well as instructional!

See you soon!

Megan Heyl
Education Director, ISBGFH



Students Dan Poffenberger and Raymond Naisbitt had to stay after class!



Grave Secrets: Welsh Ancestors' Stories Revealed



Llangelynin, by Mike Dodman, CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/5149314>.

Scores of Wales's ancient parish churches lie in secluded valleys or on windy hilltops and coasts, frequented more today by ravens, gulls, and swallows that shelter or nest under their eaves than pilgrims and the faithful. For centuries, these places of worship served as backdrops to our ancestors' lives, playing host to their christenings, marriages, and funerals, shaping our families' stories.

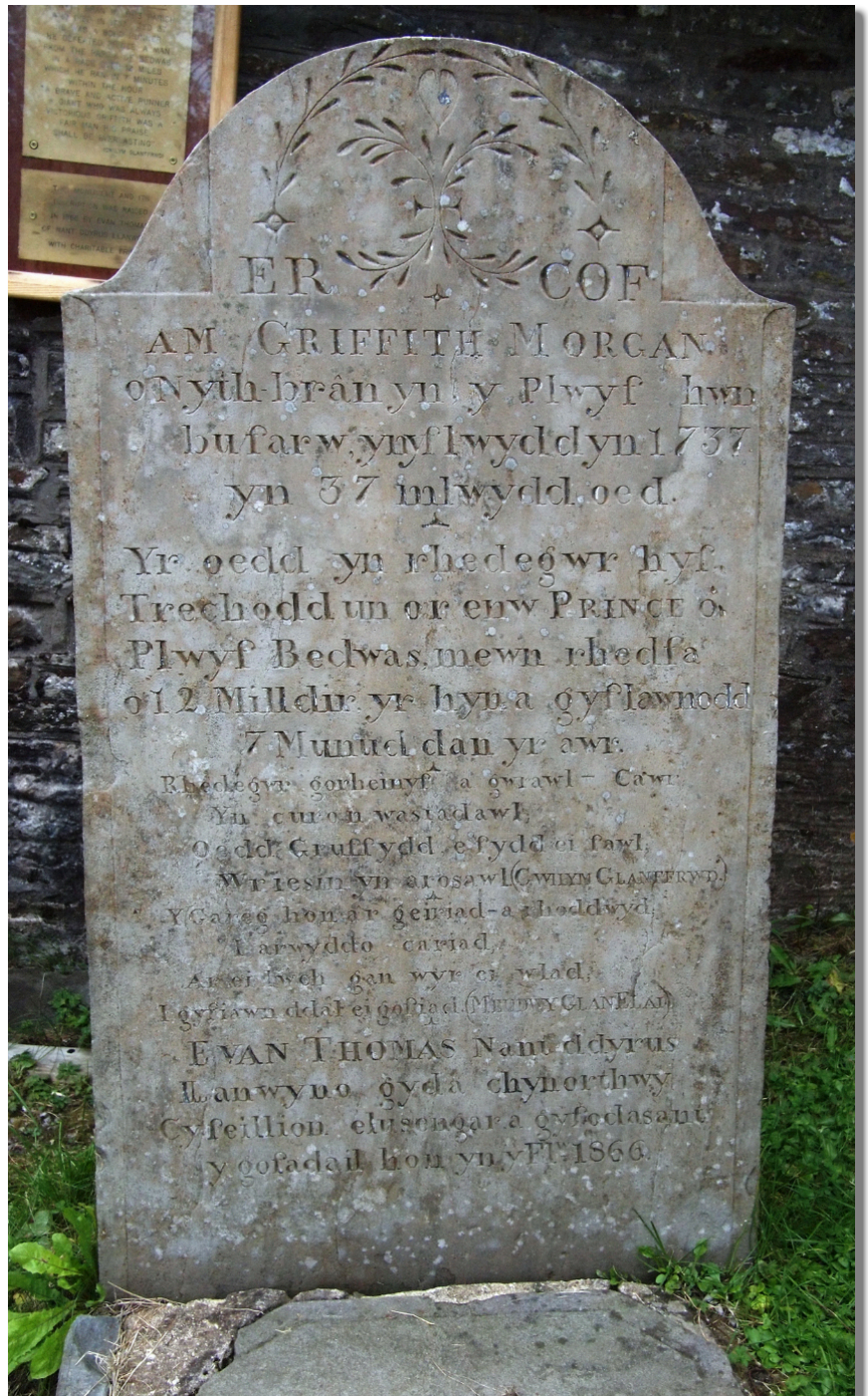
Many of those churches are today closed to worship; some are cared for by charities or by volunteers who maintain the buildings and tend the cemeteries, while other churchyards, reclaimed by nature, are fast disappearing under brambles, briars and thorns. To reach those places and to find your ancestors' final resting places, you often need to go off the beaten track or tread lonely country lanes, but once you reach your destination, there you

may find secrets and stories that are etched into the stones.

Many of the headstones that greet you (the majority in many places) will be written in Welsh, and so in addition to having to decipher weathered lettering, you will also need to translate the inscriptions. Most include common phrases such as “Er Cof Am” (In Memory Of) and record relationships such as “priod” (spouse of), “gwraig” (wife of), “gwr” (husband of), and so can be easily deciphered with the help of a handy glossary, such as FamilySearch’s online list: [www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Wales Gravestones](http://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Wales_Gravestones).

Another feature of Welsh gravestones are the poetic inscriptions that underscore an individual or family’s memorial. Biblical verses are of course commonplace on headstones across the UK, but in Wales you will also come across poetic lines, often an *englyn*, a uniquely Welsh form of poetry. Those stanzas have sometimes been taken from well-known works, while others were especially written to commemorate the deceased by a family member or friend. The bardic tradition in Wales is an ancient one that stretches back deep into the mists of time, way before the medieval period. The poetic craft and its strict metre rules were passed down from generation to generation, and it was certainly not a pastime reserved for the elite, as it firmly lay at the heart of Welsh cultural life, and people from all walks of life practised the art.

Welsh gravestones therefore may not only reveal our ancestors’ dates of death, but they can also reveal some of their stories and sometimes hint at their achievements in life. One such grave is that of a young man named Griffith Morgan, whose athletic prowess made him both a local



The grave of Guto Nyth Brân (1700-1737) in St. Gwynno’s churchyard (Llanwonno parish), Glamorganshire. Verbcatcher, CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

celebrity in his time and elevated him to a national hero as news of his incredible feats spread across the land. Better known as Guto Nyth Brân (Guto is a shortened version of “Griffith,” and Nyth Brân was the name of his family farm, which translates in English as “Crow’s Nest”), Griffith was born in 1700 in the hamlet of Llwyncelyn, located in the Rhondda



Llanengan churchyard, Caernarvonshire, the final resting place of John Evans, Alan Fryer, CC-BY SA 2.0, <https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/519194>.

Valley, Glamorganshire, in south Wales. His speed as a runner had become the talk of the valley after he was spotted running after and catching a hare, one of Wales's swiftest animals. He could also, apparently, run the seven miles to the town of Pontypridd before his mother's kettle had boiled! He regularly competed in races, beating every challenger. His last race took place in 1737 when he went head-to-head against a rival. The prize money was an astounding 1,000 guineas, and the race was run between Newport and Bedwas, a distance of around 12 miles. Guto was once again the victor, sprinting to the finish line, it is said, in 53 minutes. But the celebrations quickly ended in tragedy, for according to reports, he collapsed and died after Sian, his sweetheart, gave him a congratulatory slap on the back.

Guto was buried in the parish church of Llanwonno on the hill that separates the Rhondda and Cynon valleys. Above the original simple slab that commemorates him is a more recent headstone that was erected in 1866, around 130 years after his death. It records Guto's final fatal race and two *englynion* especially composed in his honour, one of which, written by the famous Welsh poet Ceiriog, gives us further glimpses of his life and interests:

Carodd eiriau cerddorol—carai feirdd

Carai fyw'n naturiol.

Carai gerdd yn angerddol

Dyma'i lwch a dim lol

[He loved musical words—he loved bards

He loved living naturally.
He loved music passionately,
Here's his dust and no nonsense.]

In many of the churchyards that neighbour Llanwonno there are inscriptions that remind us of Wales's industrial past and of the inherent dangers that came when working in the local coalmines. But you will also find elegies to some of the South Wales Coalfield's tragic accidents many miles from where the miners met their end. Travel around 150 miles north from Llanwonno and you will find a reference to one of the country's largest mining disasters that took place in the Albion Colliery in Cilfynydd near Pontypridd, Glamorganshire, on 23 June 1894, when firedamp exploded in one of the levels. Almost 290 men and boys were killed, many of them having only recently moved to the area from elsewhere in the country or from England. One of those miners was John Evans, who was 25 years old and married with one child. He was buried many miles from Cilfynydd, back near to his mother's house, in Llanengan churchyard, Caernarvonshire, where the *englyn* composed especially to commemorate him states:

O'r pwll glo'n deffro gan dân—bro ddu bell

I bridd Bwlch Llanengan

Fe'i dygwyd; gyrrwyd y gân

Yn elorgerdd alargan

[From the coal pit that awoke with fire—a far black
land

To the soil of Bwlch Llanengan

He was taken; the song

Became a lament]

Clear away more of the brambles, and you may well come across poems that raise some intriguing questions about individuals and their lives and deaths, inspiring further research. The inscription on the grave of Thomas Rees of Carnabwth farm near Mynachlogddu,

Pembrokeshire, is one such case. He died in 1876 and was buried in the village's Baptist Chapel cemetery. The poem inscribed on his headstone wavers between the philosophical and the matter-of-fact, perhaps hinting at Thomas's own character:

Ni does neb ond Duw yn gwybod

Beth a ddigwydd mewn diwrnod

Wrth gyrchu bresych at fy nghinio

Daeth angau i fy ngardd i'm taro.

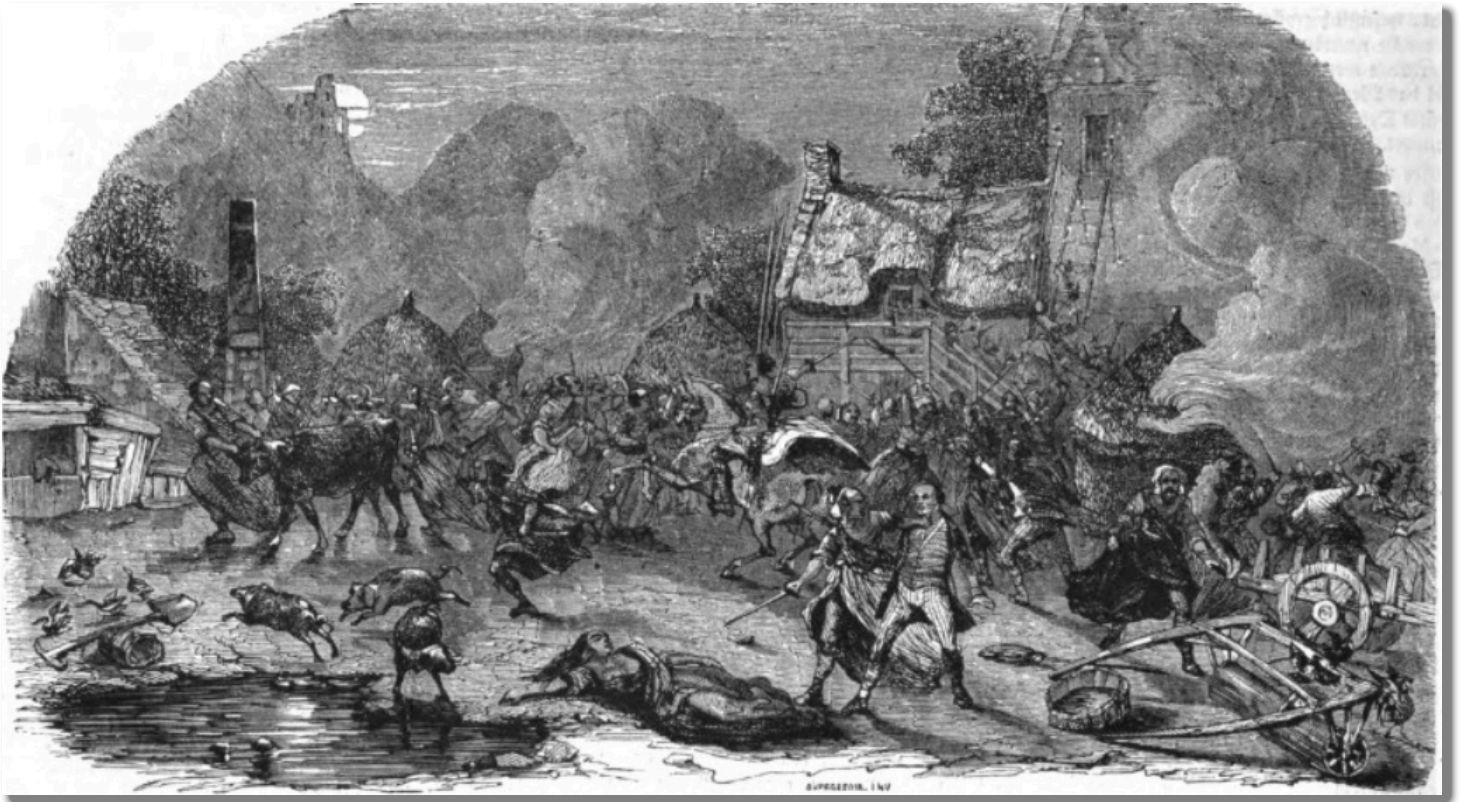
[Only God knows

What fate awaits us on any day.

As I fetched cabbage for my dinner

Death visited my garden and struck me down]

Thomas had a notable history and was far more well known for the events he was involved with as a younger man than he was for his gardening skills. Born in around 1804, local lore states that he was one of the leaders of the Rebecca Riots, disturbances that rocked rural Wales during the 1830s and 1840s. Those riots were a manifestation of the anger of the population that were facing what they perceived to be various injustices. For several decades, landowners had been enclosing common land, making it increasingly difficult for ordinary families to become tenant farmers and to farm their own smallholdings. Salt was rubbed into the wounds when the authorities started to impose ever-increasing financial demands on the populace, including the imposition of tolls to travel along the roads. Events reached a head in 1839, and men from south-west Wales soon started to gather together to plan their protest. Their aim was to target and to destroy tollgates throughout the region, and they did so by hiding their identities and dressing up as women. It is said that Thomas (or Twm Carnabwth as everyone knew him) was the first leader of "Rebecca's Daughters"—the moniker given to the band of activist farmers who have since become celebrated characters in Welsh history.



The Rebecca Riots made headlines in newspapers across the world, including in the German newspaper, *Illustrierte Zeitung*, 25 November 1843. By Unknown author - *Illustrirte Zeitung*, Nr. 22 vom 25. November 1843, J. J. Weber, Leipzig 1843. ÖNB-ANNO, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=94561043>.

Despite the destruction the rioters caused over several years throughout south-west Wales, Twm and most of his fellow rebels were never caught or charged. His involvement in the riots in fact appears to have been a cause of local pride, for his obituary, published in *Seren Cymru*, the respectable newspaper of the Welsh Baptists, only days after his death, was very open with regards to the association. It praised his kindness as well as the strength that he was endowed with for it was key in helping to tear down “the numerous and unjust tollgates that had been erected across Wales during that time.”

Welsh graves therefore often reveal more than just names, places and dates of death. There is a way of browsing them by not having to fight through the brambles and briars, for many of the memorial inscriptions (MIs) have been transcribed by local family history societies, and their collections of MIs are available for purchase

from their websites. You can find links to the individual societies here: <http://www.fhswales.org.uk/member-societies/>.

Another band of volunteers has also been surveying churchyards in recent years, but with the specific aim of gathering together examples of *englynion* and other verses. They publish the results of their endeavours on a dedicated Facebook page called “Englyn Bedd” (“bedd” means “grave”), which showcases the collection. Welsh is the main medium of communication for the group, but many of the entries involve photos of gravestones, and include an exceptionally useful “Files” section where you can view and download transcriptions of graves from across Wales—from Llanystumdwy in the north-west to Llangynwyd in the south. The main focus of the collection is the poetry, and so not all graves in a given churchyard appear on their lists, but the transcriptions that are there also include the

names and details of the deceased. Volunteers regularly add new transcriptions and upload files to their Facebook page that you can access via this link: <https://www.facebook.com/share/g/oKjwjZEPod4Mm6V/>.

This collection also includes Welsh inscriptions from outside Wales, including from some North American cemeteries. When taken hand-in-hand with the traditional MIs published by local family history societies, this source is therefore a useful bonus, especially as it can be consulted online from wherever you are in the world.

It is often the case that the poetic lines on Welsh gravestones are overlooked. But those elegies are both historical and cultural artefacts that can also hint at or reveal aspects of an individual, a family, or a community's history, and so they are always worth consideration, as would be a journey to a coastal or hillside churchyard to discover what stories your ancestors' final resting place could reveal.

Eilir Ann Daniels has been studying family history for well over 30 years and, as the founder of the research service Your Welsh Ancestors, has been working as a professional researcher since 2009.

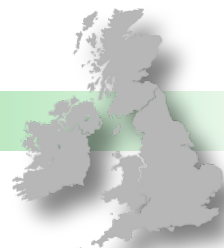


Eilir is a Full Member of AGRA (the Association of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives), and is a Pharos Tutors instructor, teaching "Researching Your Welsh Ancestors and Tracing Living Relatives" courses. She provides research services for private clients and solicitors and carries out research for the BBC's Who Do You Think You Are? and for programs on S4C (the national Welsh language TV channel) and BBC Radio Cymru.

She is a native Welsh speaker, and her academic background, which includes a degree focused on the development of Welsh and UK society after the Industrial Revolution, provides the basis for her genealogical work today.

Tracing *Irish* ancestors

Chris Paton



The last Magdalene Laundry to close in Ireland, in 1996, was that run on Sean McDermott Street by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, author's photo.

Ireland's Magdalene Laundries

One of the greatest controversies in modern Ireland remains the legacy of the institutions known as the Magdalene laundries or asylums. Described by Taoiseach Enda O' Kenny in 2013 as "the nation's shame," the institutions provided a system of institutionalised control for what Ireland referred to as "fallen women," dating back to the eighteenth century. The initial definition of a "fallen woman" was a person who was engaged in prostitution, but the term was expanded across time to embrace unmarried mothers, the daughters of unmarried mothers (many of them of school age), sexual abuse and rape victims, girls deemed to be flirtatious, as well as women committing minor crimes or suffering from mental health issues. Within the

walls of such institutions, they were incarcerated as "penitent females."

The first Irish-based institutions were established by the Protestant-based Church of Ireland, with the opening of the Dublin Magdalene Asylum in 1765 on Gleeson Street, followed by similar institutions in Cork and Belfast. Whilst the Presbyterian church also ran similar institutions, it was after Catholic Emancipation in 1829 that the creation of such bodies expanded considerably, but this time under the control of the Catholic Church. Following the mid-nineteenth century Great Famine, the majority of the laundries were run by four orders: the Sisters of Mercy, the Sisters of Charity, the Sisters of



The site on Sean McDermott Street opened in 1887 and catered for 80 people, author's photo.

Our Lady of Charity of Refuge, and the Good Shepherd Sisters. The movement gained the favour of the Irish Parliamentary Party, which successfully campaigned from 1895 at the House of Commons in London for their laundries to be exempted from legislative controls.

Following the creation of the Free State in 1922, complaints against the harshness of the Magdalene system were ignored, with very few inspections taking place within the laundries, permitting the exploitation of the women within them to continue. Many women were released from service after a period of such “penance,” but others remained trapped within them their entire lives. The women were often treated

harshly in such institutions, being beaten and referred to by numbers, or simply as “child,” rather than the use of their names. Some women escaped, only to be returned by local police officers, whilst those who were officially released received no financial support upon re-entering society.

An article in the *Freeman's Journal* from Wednesday, 18 July 1900, in which the authorities of the Magdalene Asylum at Galway made a public appeal for funds to alleviate a debt of £3,000 incurred by the construction of a new laundry, described the institution's work as follows, from its own perspective:

There is no charity that appeals to the heart more strongly than to rescue the poor fallen woman. No other work will bring a greater blessing. To lift up the sinner from misery and shame—nameless degradation—is charity in the most touching and sublime form, and is particularly dear to the Saviour, Who made it His own special mission “to seek and save that which was lost.”

...

Without a home of this kind very little hope can be entertained for the reformation of this class. Cast off by parents, disowned by friends, branded as outcasts by the world, and maddened with the thought of what they were and what they might have been, they go on reckless and despairing from depths to deeper depths of sin, their lives a very foretaste of the hell to come.

The Magdalene Asylum is then their only refuge and the only house that will receive them. Whenever God's grace speaks to their hearts its doors are always open to welcome them, and there they will be treated as though they had never fallen, and nothing left undone to



A board beside the front door details the Irish Government's plans to turn the former premises into a National Centre for Research and Remembrance.

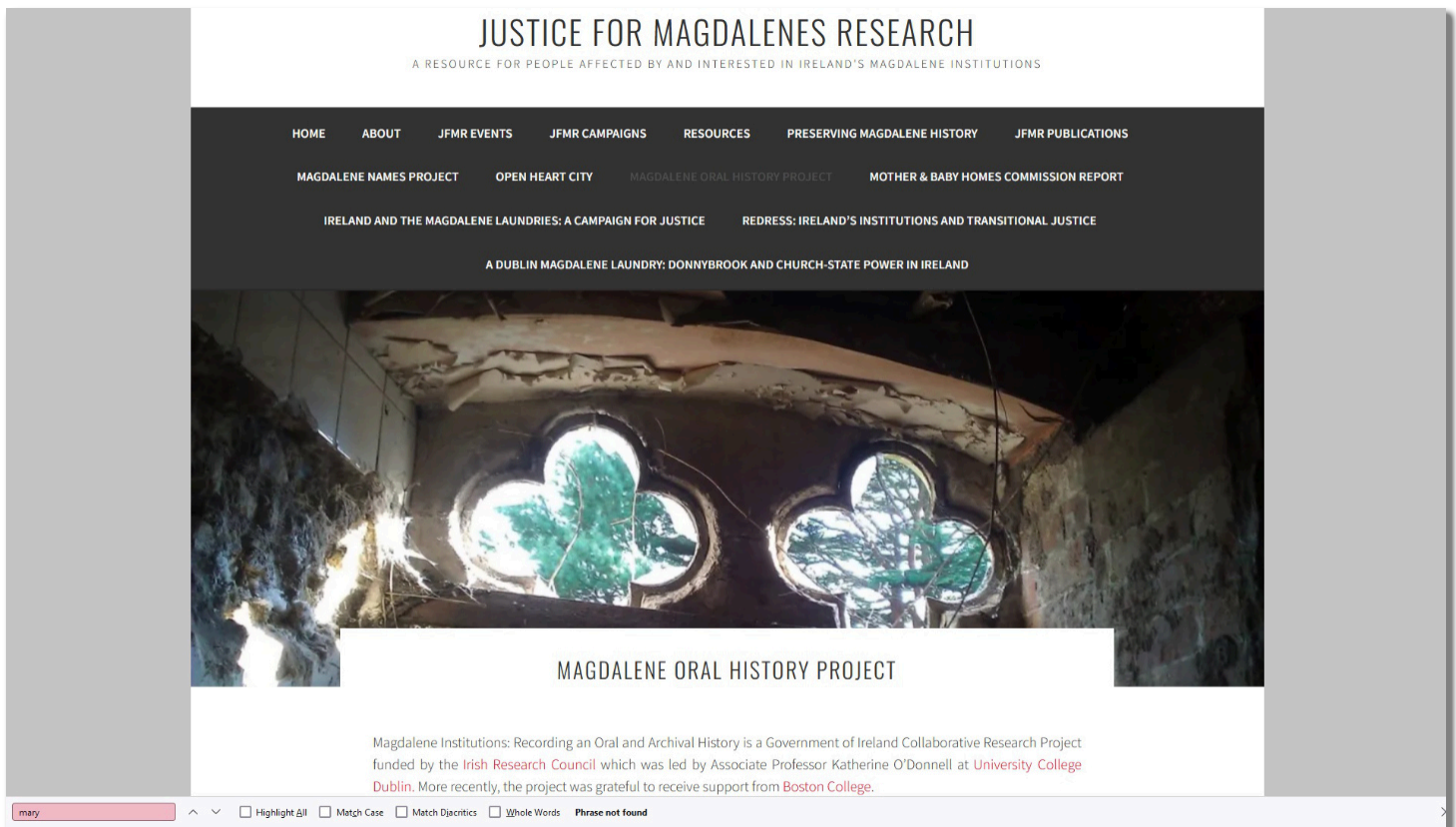
bring comfort to their broken hearts. Thus the young you never fell perhaps but once, is saved from further contamination, and thus also the more hardened and confirmed are matched from those tempters of hell—who take advantage of their hungry and forlorn condition. . . .

And once within the Institution what a change! A life of useful labour and penance for the past—a life of contentment which they never found in sin—a life of prayer for those who helped to deliver them from temptation, and a life of gratitude to the good Lord for all his Mercy. Thus the old life with all its misery and sin has passed away, and through God's grace they are no longer their former selves.

The Magdalene laundries were as feared as the workhouse system by communities for over two centuries. However, it was not until the sale of land in 1993 at the former laundry site at High Park, Drumcondra, run by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, that the true horror of such institutions finally came to light. A mass grave

containing 155 women was discovered, of whom only 75 had registered death certificates. (Similar mass burials have also been found at former Magdalene institutions at Glasnevin in Dublin, St. Laurence's in Limerick, and at Bohermore in Galway.) All were cremated, but the resultant scandal opened up to the world the scale and trauma of the laundry system, eventually leading to the Irish Government's "Inter-Departmental Committee to Establish the Facts of State Involvement with the Magdalene Laundries" (<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/a69a14-report-of-the-inter-departmental-committee-to-establish-the-facts-of/>), and the Taoiseach's state apology in 2013. The payment of compensation to hundreds of surviving inmates has since followed.

It is estimated that more than 10,000 women were trapped within the system in the nineteenth century, with the numbers from the twentieth century simply unknown; the religious orders involved continued to refuse to provide access to



The Justice for Magdalenes site has many useful resources, including the Magdalene Oral History Project.

the relevant registers for those based within the institutions after 1900. From 1922 onwards, following Partition, ten laundries operated in Waterford, Cork, New Ross, Galway, Limerick, and Dublin, with the last to close being at Sean McDermott Street (previously Gloucester Street) in Dublin, in 1996. Amongst the state and corporate clients using the laundry services provided by the institutions were the Irish Army, Guinness, the Bank of Ireland, and Áras an Uachtaráin, the Irish president's official residence. In Northern Ireland, a similar institution continued to run in Belfast until 1977.

In 2022, the Irish Government announced that the former Magdalene laundry premises at Dublin's Sean McDermott Street, known as St. Mary's Refuge, would be converted into a National Centre for Research and Remembrance (<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/0319a-national-centre-for-research-and-remembrance/>), although at the time of writing, controversy continues with regards to access to records for

those who spent time in such institutions. According to the Government's website, the new centre "will stand as a site of conscience to honour equally all those who spent time in Industrial Schools, Magdalen Laundries, Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions, Reformatories, and related institutions." The new centre will include a museum and exhibition space (to be developed by the National Museums of Ireland), an archival repository and research centre (as part of the National Archives), and a place for reflection and remembrance. The complex will also include social housing, local community facilities, and educational facilities to contribute towards efforts to rejuvenate the north-east inner city.

The separate Justice for Magdalenes research platform (<http://jfmresearch.com>) offers a host of useful resources for those interested in learning more about the subject, including a Magdalene Oral History Project and Magdalene Names Project, as well as information concerning the

Mother and Baby Homes Commission. The campaign's publication, *Ireland and the Magdalene Laundries: A Campaign for Justice* (IB Tauris/Bloomsbury, 2021) outlines the long journey to uncover the state's role in perpetuating the system for so long.

You can also read more about Magdalene institutions across Ireland and Britain via Peter Higginbotham's Children's Homes site at <https://www.childrenshomes.org.uk>.

**My new book, Researching Ancestral Crisis in Ireland, will be published in the UK by Pen and Sword in February 2024, and in the US in April 2025. The book can be pre-ordered via <https://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk/Researching-Ancestral-Crisis-in-Ireland-Paperback/p/51770> (UK) or <https://www.penandswordbooks.com/9781036110376/researching-ancestral-crisis-in-ireland/> (USA).*

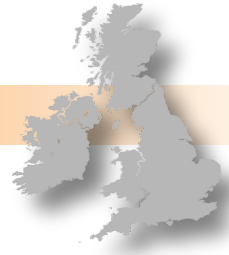
Based in the Ayrshire town of Stewarton, Northern Irish-born Chris Paton runs the Scotland's Greatest Story research service (<https://scotlandsgreateststory.wordpress.com/>) and the daily Scottish



*GENES genealogy news blog (<http://scottishgenes.blogspot.com>). Amongst his many publications are *Tracing Your Irish Family History on the Internet (2nd edition)*, *Tracing Your Irish Ancestors Through Land Records*, and *Tracing Your Belfast Ancestors from Pen and Sword*, as well as *Sharing Your Family History Online*. Chris also tutors short courses through *Pharos Teaching and Tutoring Ltd*, including two Irish-themed courses, *Progressing Your Irish Research Online* and *Researching Irish Land Records*.*

Uncover your *English* roots

Paul Milner, FUGA, M.Div.



Finding Ancestral Places on the Map of Great Britain

When working with ancestors, it's important to put them in the correct location. Location is important because it helps us put their home in proximity to the local church, their workplace, and their other relatives. It also helps us find other records for that location. If we are looking in the wrong place, we will never find our ancestors or their collateral relatives.

It is certainly easier to find places now that many of the maps and tools are online. For this article, I am going to create two examples and highlight some of the issues involved. The first example is a rural place with a common name. The second example is looking for a place that no longer exists in a major city.

National Library of Scotland Digital maps

For me, the National Library of Scotland Digital Map Collection at <https://maps/nls.uk> is the go-to location for any online maps of Great Britain, see fig. 1. When entering the site, you will see many categories of maps: ordnance survey maps; maps of whole countries; county maps; estate maps; town plans and views; coastal/admiralty

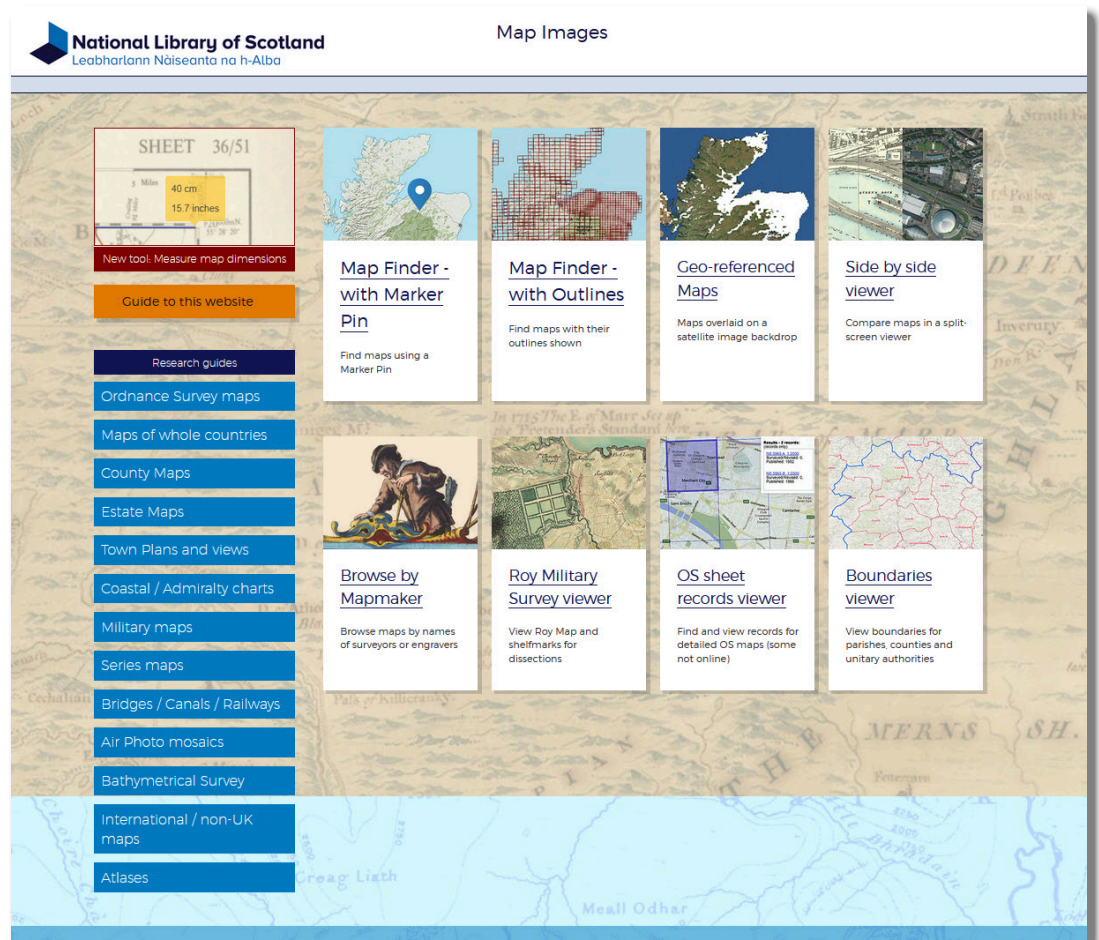


Fig. 1. Map Images landing and navigation page upon entering the National Library of Scotland digital map collection. CC-BY NLS.

charts; military maps; series maps; bridges/canals/railways; air photo mosaics; bathymetrical surveys; international/non-UK maps; and atlases. In addition, there are eight large boxes for using the maps: map finder—with marker pin; map finder—with outlines; geo-referenced maps; side-by-side viewer; browse by map maker; Roy military survey viewer; OS sheet records viewer; and boundaries viewer. If you are new to the site, look in the top left for the “guide to this website” and the “research guides.”

Ordnance Survey Maps - Six-inch England and Wales, 1842-1952

The most comprehensive, topographic mapping covering all of England and Wales from the 1840s to the 1950s. Two editions for all areas, and then regular updates in the 20th century for urban or rapidly changing areas.

Browse the maps:

- [As individual sheets using a zoomable map of England and Wales](#)
- As a [seamless zoomable overlay layer \(1840s-1880s\)](#) on modern satellite imagery and OS maps
- [Compare 1st edition \(1840s-1880s\) with 2nd edition \(1888-1915\) side-by-side](#)
- As a [seamless zoomable overlay layer \(1888-1915\)](#) on modern satellite imagery and OS maps
- As a [seamless zoomable layer \(1888-1915\) side by side](#) with modern satellite imagery and OS maps
- [By map sheet number](#) (eg. Oxfordshire IX.NW) – county text lists



See also:

- [Guide to abbreviations](#) – alphabetical list of standard OS abbreviations
- [Guide to symbols](#) – OS Characteristics Sheet (1897)
- [Characters of writing](#) – OS Lettering Styles (1897)

Fig. 2. Landing page for Ordnance Survey Maps – Six-inch England and Wales, 1842-1952. Start with the seamless zoomable overlay layer (1888–1915) on modern satellite imagery and OS maps. This is the version that has been fully indexed. CC-BY NLS.

I have used all the different maps and research strategies over time and for different purposes. For most general searches and lookups, and for these examples, I go to the Ordnance Survey maps. This very large collection covers all of Great Britain, at a variety of scales, at various time periods. Read carefully the coverage notes for a particular scale as not all locations are covered at all scales, for all time periods.

Searching for a Rural Location—Waterloo

This methodology can be used for any location

Search Options and the Results

In the top left, there is a search box with four choices, see fig. 3.

The first box is for searching by modern place name. With this gazetteer, you are searching the names from Nominatim using OpenStreetMap names. Added to this, for Scotland only, is the *Definitive Gazetteer for Scotland*, developed by Bruce M. Gittings of the University of Edinburgh. The OSM gazetteer is stronger for larger settlements and street names. The Definitive

within Great Britain—England, Scotland, and Wales, regardless of size. I am not going to address Irish locations in this article.

The first warning to any location search is NEVER ASSUME that there is only one place by that name in Great Britain. When you look at search results you have to ensure you are looking in the correct place. I am actually going to choose an extreme example, but it was relevant to my own research.

I am looking for Waterloo. You are all familiar with that location. Yes, it's the battlefield in modern-day Belgium, just south of Brussels, where in 1815, the British army and its allies, under the leadership of the Duke of Wellington defeated Napoleon. One of the effects of that victory is that many patriotic soldiers returned to England and named numerous places Waterloo. Probably the most familiar place with the name in England would be Waterloo Railway Station in London.

I know my county. I am looking for Waterloo in Northumberland.

In this example, Google is not my friend. It first assumes that I want to drive for nearly 10 hours from Waterloo in Belgium to Northumberland. Not too far by American standards, but a very long way by British standards. There are other options, but confidence is low in this example, and I would not be sure the results are correct.

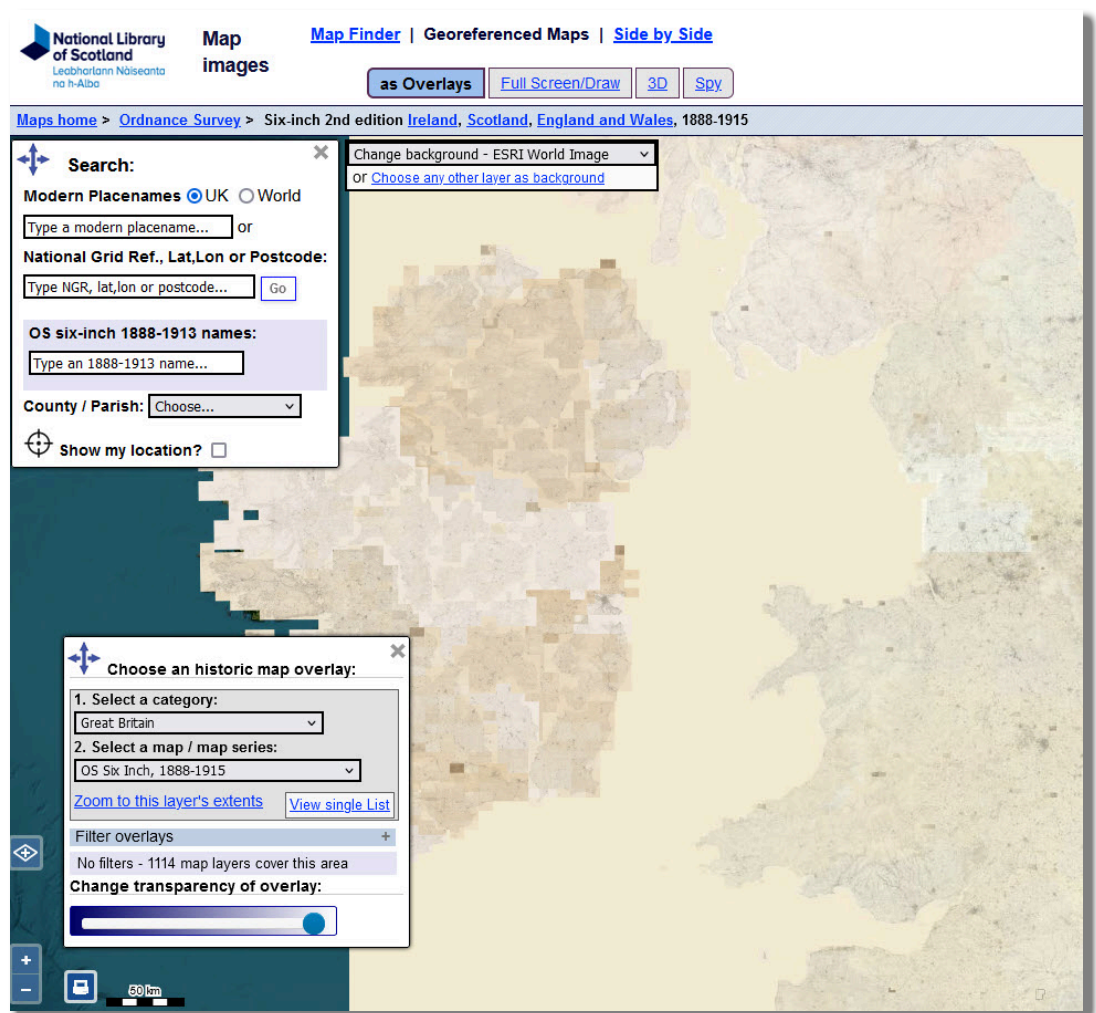


Fig. 3. Initial landing page after selecting map to be viewed, showing the search box in the top left with two different gazetteers. In the bottom box you can change the maps to be viewed and it will stay on the selected location.

In this example, I go to the Map Images page and select Ordnance Survey maps. I can either jump to the section for “England, Wales and Great Britain” or just scroll down until I find the correct section. (It’s after a big Scotland section.) There are a variety of scales to choose from. Generally, and certainly, in this example, I should choose the six-inch-to-the-mile scale (1:10,500), the 1842–1952 option, as it covers all of Great Britain and is fully indexed, see fig. 2. You then have a variety of options—first and second editions, individual sheets, or seamless overlay, or with side-by-side views of the first and second editions, or with modern satellite images. For place location, I start with the seamless zoomable overlay layer (1888–1915) on a modern satellite image. Select that option.



Fig. 4. Waterloo, Waterloo Cottages and Waterloo Farm in Blenkinsop Parish, Northumberland, as shown on OS 6-inch to mile map. CC-BY NLS.

Gazetteer is strong for smaller rural features in Scotland, such as farms, hamlets, mountains, hills, streams, rivers, and lochs. For Scotland, they are combined into one dataset. This means that when searching in England or Wales, you are searching only the OSM names.

The second option is something you are not likely to know on your initial search—it gives the ability to search by National Grid Reference; postcode; or latitude and longitude.

The third option is to search all place names on the OS six-inch scale map, 1888–1913. This database was a result of the GB1900 project, which marked all locations shown on the six-inch-to-the-mile maps of Britain (1883–1913). This was a volunteer project resulting in over 2.5 million names being collected. It's also why I want to start my initial search with this particular map.

The fourth search box allows me to limit my search in the OS six-inch database to a particular county or even a parish. Be very careful with the last choice as your location may be just across the parish boundary.

As I type Waterloo in box one, the modern directory, the results are displayed dynamically, changing as I continue typing. The results show 20 results for Waterloo, none of which are in Northumberland. If I keep typing, seeking Waterloo Farm, I get an additional 10 results not in the original list. Again, none are in Northumberland.

If instead I type Waterloo in box three, the OS six-inch database, the results are again dynamically displayed. This time there are 40 results for Waterloo, with an additional 34 if I type in Waterloo Farm. This time I see two entries for Northumberland:

Waterloo – Thirlwall, Northumberland

Waterloo – Blenkinsop, Northumberland

In this case, I want the second option, Blenkinsop. While in the menu, if I make the selection, it takes me to the appropriate map. The pull-down menu is very sensitive and easily disappears. So, I type in the box, “Waterloo.” Then in the box below, I choose the county—Northumberland. A parish box then appears, so I

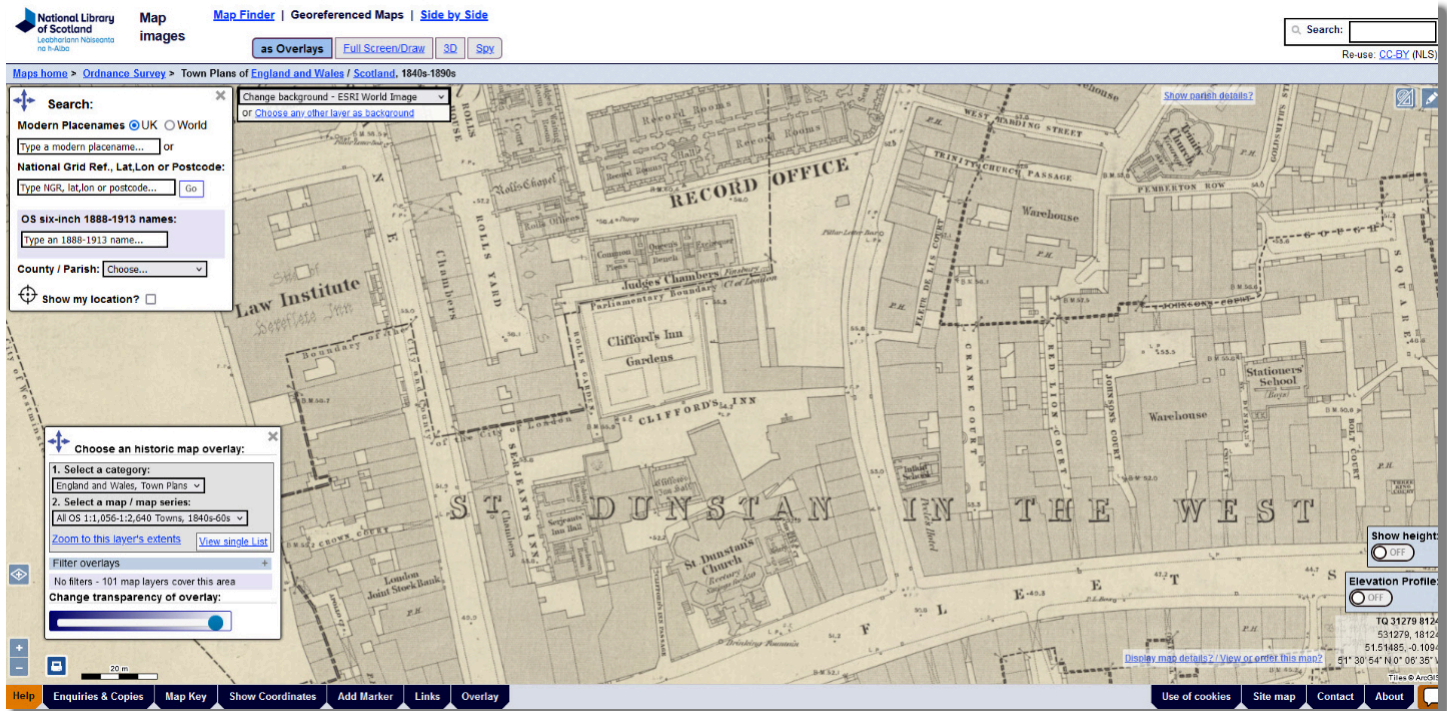


Fig. 5. Clifford's Inn, in St. Dunstan in the West Parish, London as shown on the detailed OS 1:1,1056 – 1:2,640 scales. Note the internal details on some of the buildings such as the Public Record Office at Chancery Lane. CC-BY NLS.

choose “Blenkinsop.” This takes me to the map of the whole parish, so I will need to carefully zoom in to find Waterloo. Looking at this map in fig. 4, I can see Waterloo, Waterloo Cottages, and Waterloo Farm all in close proximity to one another. You can find the full map at <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/#zoom=17.0&lat=54.96774&lon=-2.51759&layers=6&b=ESRIWorld&o=100>.

Searching for an Urban location—that no longer exists

The modern search gazetteer used above is good for locating modern street names and locations. But what if the place no longer exists? Recently, another ISBGFH board member and I were talking about Clifford's Inn in London. Clifford's Inn, the first “Inn of Chancery” was founded in 1344, and it was refounded 15 June 1688. It was dissolved in 1903 and the original structure was demolished in 1934. The original gateway still survives. Clifford's Inn was the first Inn of Chancery to be founded and the last to be demolished. So, the Inn has a long illustrious history, but it will not show up on modern maps.

I tried to locate Clifford's Inn in both the modern gazetteer and the OS six-inch gazetteer with no luck.

My colleague mentioned that it was just off Fleet Street, a long busy street in London. I did not want to be searching the full length of the street. I went to the shelves in my personal library looking for photographs of the building and more location information. I found some great exterior shots of the buildings in *Lost London 1870–1945*. I had an 1896 copy of *Baedeker's Guide to London and its Environs*. Clifford's Inn was a major landmark, but what was near it? As with many guidebooks, you can literally walk the streets. It mentioned Fleet Street and Chancery Lane, with a major landmark, likely to still be there—St. Dunstan in the West parish church.

Now I could have also gone online, and a quick search for Clifford's Inn leads me to Wikipedia. This tells me that Clifford's Inn is “located between Fetter Lane and Clifford's Inn Passage (which runs between Fleet Street and Chancery Lane) in the City of London” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clifford%27s_Inn).

Returning to the National Library of Scotland map site and searching in the modern gazetteer produced lots of Fleet Streets and St. Dunstan, but Chancery Lane in London appears first on the list.

Selecting the first option on the list takes you to an appropriate map and then you can zoom in. In the lower left box you can choose a historic map overlay from the menu. Ideally, for an urban area you want the most detailed scale possible. You can select different maps, and it will keep the location steady on your location. This enables you to make changes to find the best map to suit your needs. If you select a scale that is not covered by the map you will get the current ESRI satellite view, though the background can be changed. When you have found the map you want and positioned it to meet your needs, you can then copy the web address to your notes and return to this exact image any time you need to. If you would like a closer look at this image, Fig. 5, you can find it at <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/#zoom=18.9&lat=51.51476&lon=-0.11023&layers=117746212&b=ESRIWorld&o=100>.

From the image, you can easily locate Clifford's Inn Gardens and Clifford Inn, with St. Dunstan's Church to the south, facing on to Fleet Street.

Paul Milner, FUGA, M.Div., lives in Chicago, Illinois, but is originally from the coast of Cumberland (now Cumbria) in northwest England. Paul has specialized in British Isles genealogical research for over 35 years. He teaches week-long English and Scottish research tracks at the ISBGFH British Institute, Institute of Genealogical and Historical Research (IGHR), and Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy (SLIG).

Paul is a recipient of UGA Fellow Award (2018) and the David S. Vogels Jr. Award from FGS (2019). He is the author of six publications providing how-to guidance for English and Scottish researchers.

The strong, dark dashed line to the north of the gardens shows the City of London's boundary with Frindsbury. Further north in large letters is the Record Office. You can see the internal details of the building, with all its separate fireproof rooms. This building was important, as it was the former Public Record Office at Chancery Lane. The contents were moved to the Public Record Office at Kew, which was later renamed The National Archives. Some of us have been doing family history long enough to have actually visited and researched at the PRO on Chancery Lane.

Conclusion

The National Library of Scotland online map library is the largest and best and should be your starting point for locating any place of ancestral interest in Great Britain. Don't assume there is only one place by that name; there may be many. I have tried to show how to use the search tools and provide an introduction on to how to work around them. There is much more to explore on this site. Take the time to read the "Guide to this Site" and the "Research Guides." Happy hunting.



Paul is currently the book review editor for the BIGWILL newsletter and retired review editor of the FGS FORUM. He is currently on the board of the International Society for British Genealogy and Family History (ISBGFH), the past president of the British Interest Group of Wisconsin and Illinois (BIGWILL), and a past board member of the APG, FGS, and GSG. Paul focuses on British Isles resources and methodology on his blog at www.milnergenealogy.com.



King James VI Hospital

Many of the Scottish records that can help us with our research are not actually held in archives, but instead remain in private hands. For a university project several years ago, I was able to gain access to a remarkable set of records in Perth, which helped to explain the rapid development of the city in the nineteenth century. By good fortune, they also helped with my own family history research.

The King James VI Hospital in Perth was first founded by a Royal Charter on 9 August 1569 by the young infant king's regent, the Earl of Moray, and reconfirmed by the king himself on 29 July 1587. Its given remit was to raise revenue on behalf of the burgh's poor from lands previously held by the church in the town prior to the Scottish Reformation of 1560—to act as both a feudal superior and a charitable institution. The new Protestant church would oversee the institution, with the day-to-day work carried out by an annually elected hospital master, whose key duty was to collect the rents and “feu” duties payable to the hospital by the many tenants and tradesmen residing in the lands of concern. Although the hospital no longer has this role, following the abolition of feudalism in 2004, it still operates as a charitable entity to this day.



The King James VI Hospital building in Perth, Scotland, now houses tenants rather than patients, author's collection.

In 2008, whilst studying for a Postgraduate Diploma in Genealogical Studies at the University of Strathclyde, I made an application through the National Register of Archives for Scotland (<https://catalogue.nrscotland.gov.uk/nrasregister/welcome.aspx>) to try to gain access to the records for an academic project. My plan was to document the Hospital's role as a feudal superior in the nineteenth century, and when given permission to do so, I spent many weeks visiting the institution to copy and analyse its records.

Feudalism was the principal basis by which property was held in Scotland for hundreds of years, the practice finally ending with the Abolition of Feudal Tenure (Scotland) Act 2000,

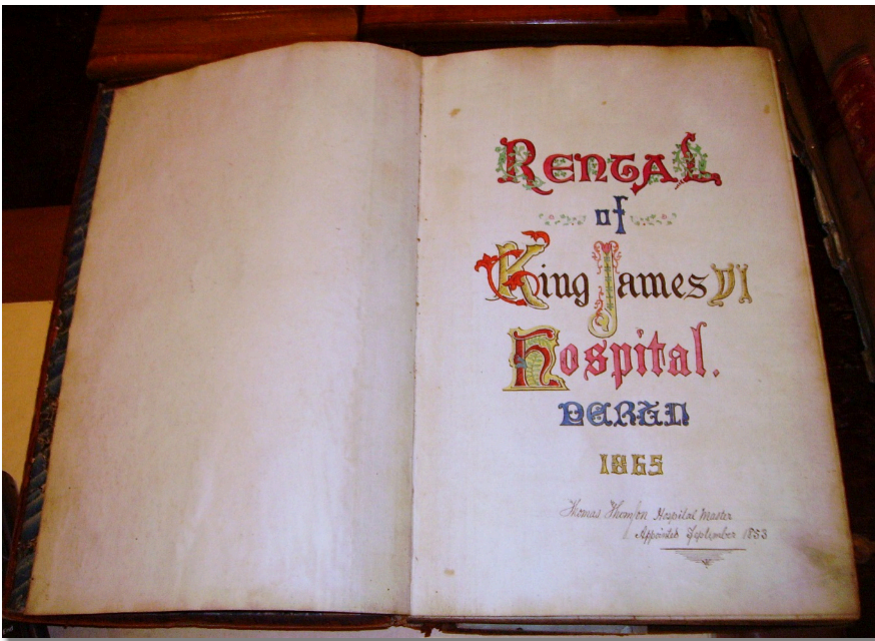


This map of Perth from 1773 shows the lands of Blackfriars and Spey Gardens which would be developed in the nineteenth century. The map was contained in R. Milne's 1891 publication, "Rental Books of King James VI Hospital, Perth."

which finally came into force in November 2004. Feudalism concerned a series of relationships between "vassals" and "superiors," with the monarch being the highest superior in the land, holding Scotland on behalf of God. Areas of the country were then parcelled out in "feus" to various high-ranking nobles or institutions, who duly became the monarch's "vassals," paying a "feu duty" for the privilege to use the land in a manner agreed to by the monarch, now their "superior." In turn, these vassals could then carve the land up further, and become superiors themselves, with their own vassals. All of the feus created were heritable, meaning they could be inherited. I discovered that the hospital held

several "chartularies" documenting the creation of many feus from its lands, as well as rental books recording the income derived from tenants in additional owned properties. By examining the documents, I was able to work out the pivotal role of the hospital in Perth's rapid regeneration in the early 1800s and to determine the income that it was able to earn on behalf of the poor.

Before understanding the hospital's position in 1800, I first had to look at the immediate history which preceded this point. I learned that in 1760 the management team of the hospital at that time had conveyed a large area of Perth known as "Blackfriars" to a Lord John Murray of Pitnacree at a ridiculously deflated price. As Murray



continued to pay an annual feu duty to the Hospital, he in turn parcelled the land up further into smaller feus and duly made an enormous profit from the money subsequently charged from his own vassals. With the land's potential value increasing, in 1793, Murray then conveyed his lands to a developer called Thomas Anderson. Sensing that the land's value was significantly increasing, both an alarmed kirk session and hospital manager demanded a new financial arrangement. The two parties came to a new agreement, which included the go ahead for a major residential

One of the rental books of the King James VI Hospital, author's photo.

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An 1868-69 list of trustees and administrators for the hospital lists Dr. William Henderson as the elder representing the East Kirk of Perth.

[\[Welcome\]](#)[\[Browse\]](#)[\[Search\]](#)[\[Help\]](#)

You are in: Catalogue search> Welcome

Sunday 10 November 2024 17:06

Page options:[Print this page](#)[Previous page](#)**Records updated:**

18 October 2024

Welcome to the NRAS online Register.

This database contains the fully searchable details of all items in the catalogue of the National Register of Archives Scotland.

The NRAS does not hold any of the records listed in its surveys
Only some of the surveys on the Register are currently available online

The Register**What does the online Register contain?****Which surveys are not available on-line?****What should I do once I have identified items I would like to consult?****What should I do if the owner refuses access?****The Register**

The National Register of Archives for Scotland (NRAS) was established by the Scottish Record Office (now the National Records of Scotland) in 1946 to compile a record of papers of historical significance in private hands in Scotland. The principal aims of the NRAS are to locate such papers and to encourage their care so that their loss and destruction may be avoided. The Register now contains over 4,200 surveys of private papers including the records of landed estates, private individuals, businesses, law firms and societies. [\[top\]](#)

What does the online Register contain?

Surveys of papers in private hands and private papers deposited in libraries and museums.

- Where the owner has given permission, the full catalogue is available on-line.
- For all others, a summary of the contents of the collection is available but the full catalogue can only be consulted in the National Records of Scotland, the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh and The National Archives in London.

Many owners are unable to deal with a large volume of enquiries and for this reason have asked us to restrict enquiries to non genealogical searches. Where this applies, the survey has been marked accordingly. [\[top\]](#)

The National Register of Archives for Scotland catalogue is accessible through the main National Records of Scotland website's Catalogues and Indexes page.

development plan—Anderson wished to develop Blackfriars even further.

Five years later, however, Anderson suddenly went bankrupt. Rather than looking for someone to buy the lands, his creditors sold them back to the Hospital. Wisely opting to continue with Anderson's development scheme, the charitable body soon made a substantial profit. The Blackfriars development was a major success, creating some of the town's most iconic streets, such as Rose Terrace, and it was not long before the Hospital wanted to try something similar with some of its other holdings. In 1803, it agreed to a development proposal from the provost of Perth, Thomas Hay Marshall, for the southern area of the town. In this, the Hospital agreed to convey to the burgh council a part of the building's own extensive gardens, in return for part of the town's own adjacent Spey Gardens. A major street plan to the south of the town centre was created, with many new feus identified and put up for sale. Further plans were created from the gardens in

1830 and 1836, and at another area known as Carr's Croft in 1869.

From a personal point of view, the hospital's role as a superior for Carr's Croft was something that immediately grabbed my attention, as in the first half of the nineteenth century my 4th great-grandfather William Paton had resided at a row of thatched cottages there. William was a weaver, and from earlier research, I knew that from 1797 to 1847, the Weavers Incorporation of Perth had held the cottages on a fifty-year lease from the Hospital before the control of the lands had reverted back to the hospital. The 1841 census had shown William still resident at Carr's Croft in that year; he had moved there in the early 1790s, but the burial register for his death in 1849 showed that he had later moved to nearby South Street. Why had he moved?

A rental book for the cottages, established by the hospital in 1847, was able to show me that William had already moved out by then. However, William's brother John, also listed as a

resident at the cottages in 1841, was found to be still there, paying an annual rent of £2 15s to the hospital. The description of many of the houses showed that they had been allowed to virtually fall to ruin in the last years of their management by the then destitute Weaver's Incorporation. As many of the tenants listed in the 1841 census were still listed in the rental book, I was also able to identify the house in which William had himself resided, which by 1856 had been noted as "now in ruins and unlet." The situation was the same for many of the cottages—"in very bad order at front," "this tenement fell one stormy night in November 1848," and "now in ruins and unlet" being just three examples. It seemed clear why William had moved and why the land was later ripe for redevelopment.

But there was another exciting discovery to be made. On another branch of my family, my 5th great uncle, Dr. William Henderson, something of a family hero of mine, had made several appearances within the hospital's chartularies. As an elder in the kirk session of Perth, he was duly identified as a witness on many of the feu charters recorded within it. He was also noted as a tenant within an adjoining property to one being purchased in the town's Rose Terrace in 1826, confirming that he had resided there some fifteen years earlier than I had previously determined from other sources.

When I exclaimed my delight at these discoveries with the then hospital manager, he disappeared from his office and moments later returned with some cards listing the trustees of the institution in the late 1860s. William was named amongst them, proving that he had had a substantial involvement with the body for most of his adult life.

There is no automatic right to any records that are held privately, but many institutions are willing to provide access. The National Register of Archives for Scotland cannot compel records holders to make their collections available, but if you are able to make a successful application, the rewards may be there to be collected, for

these are records that will almost certainly never see the light of day online.

** My full dissertation on the role of King James VI Hospital as a nineteenth-century feudal superior is freely available to read online at <https://scotlandsgreateststory.wordpress.com/free-items/>.*



*Based in the Ayrshire town of Stewarton, Northern Irish-born Chris Paton runs the Scotland's Greatest Story research service (<https://scotlandsgreateststory.wordpress.com/>) and the daily Scottish GENES genealogy news blog (<http://scottishgenes.blogspot.com>). Amongst his many publications are Tracing Your Scottish Family History on the Internet, Tracing Your Scottish Ancestry Through Church and State Records, and Sharing Your Family History Online from *Pen and Sword*, as well as Down and Out in Scotland: Researching Ancestral Crisis from *Unlock the Past*. Chris also tutors short courses through *Pharos Teaching and Tutoring Ltd*, including Scottish Research Online and Scotland 1750–1850: Beyond the Old Parish Registers.*

Chailey: A Study in Sacrifice

It is fitting that I should be writing this, my final article for ISBGFH, on Remembrance Sunday. As a young boy I remember standing on parade in my cub scouts and later scouts uniform as the exhortation was read at the local war memorial. Back then, in the 1970s, there were not only First World War and Second World War veterans who attended this annual commemoration, but Boer War veterans as well, and I will always remember the clink of their medals as they marched down the church

aisle carrying various standards. Today, the Boer War and Great War veterans are long dead, and the men of the Second World War are all in their nineties or older. Before long there will be none left who can actually claim to have served their King and Country in a World War.

My interest in the First World War was sparked by my paternal grandfather who, along with his four brothers, all volunteered to fight for their country. Five of them went to war, four came home, and my grandfather, who was really very deaf by the time I knew him, rarely spoke of his service in France and Flanders. His death in March 1980, when I was 17, inspired me to go on the hunt for other veterans I could interview, and it was a newspaper appeal in 1981 that led me to Chailey, a village in Sussex which, until that point in time, was completely unknown to me. A man called Joe Oliver contacted me to say



Hickwells, Chailey, c. 1915. Nurse Edith Oliver, left. Commandant Margaret Cotesworth stands on the right. Author's collection.

that his aunt Edith had nursed at two VAD hospitals during the First World War, and would I be interested in seeing the album she had kept at the time?

This article explains how the research developed and shows the leads that I pursued. Remember that in 1981, there was no internet and no PCs as we know them. I was still studying for A-levels and hammering out transcriptions on a portable typewriter. Mobile phones had yet to be invented, and taking photos of the album pages had to be done at a photographer's studio. It was hard going, and today it would be so much easier to do the research because we have so many more resources available to us.

First steps

There were various entries in the album, which referred to Chailey and Newick, and I discovered

early on that these two locations were in what is now East Sussex. Edith Oliver was the daughter of a prison warden at Chelmsford prison and, probably tiring of life in Essex, she had answered an advertisement for a Lady's Companion in Chailey. The lady in question was Margaret Cotesworth, and she would become the Commandant of the local Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) which was officially designated as Sussex 54 VAD.

Having understood where the "action" had taken place, my next step was to transcribe the details of all the people who had left their words in Edith Oliver's album. The vast majority of these men, it turned out, were sick or wounded soldiers. Some gave great information including their regimental numbers, whilst others just gave a name. There were photographs too: photographs of "Hickwells," "Ades," and "Beechlands"—names which at the time meant nothing to me—and photographs of soldiers and nurses.

Hickwells and Beechlands turned out to be the locations of the two convalescent hospitals where the ladies of Sussex 54 VAD nursed their patients, whilst the owners of Ades, a country pile located in Chailey, also owned Hickwells. All three properties still survive today.

First visits to the Public Record Office

Today, it has never been easier to research a First World War serviceman. All of the major family history websites have published pretty much everything there is to publish that relates to this conflict, and Ancestry and The National Archives publish the majority of the First World War unit diaries. Back in the 1980s though, it was a very different story. To view a campaign medal index card, for instance, you had to request the relevant fiche from a service desk. Pension records in WO 364 and service records in WO 363 had not, by this time, even been accessioned by the Public Record Office, let



Recuperating soldiers in fancy dress at Hickwells, Chailey c. 1915, author's collection.

alone microfilmed. If you wanted to make an enquiry about a soldier, you had to write to the Ministry of Defence. And if you wanted to make an enquiry about a man who lost his life during that conflict, you had to write to the Imperial War Museum.

Leaving university in 1985, I found employment in London and would spend most of my holidays and Saturdays trailing backwards and forwards from Chelmsford to Kew. In due course, the service and pension records would indeed be microfilmed, and then it would be a case of finding the relevant reel and painstakingly scrolling through it in the hope that you might find one of the people you were looking for.

I see that there were 176 soldiers who left their details in Nurse Oliver's album, and for each of those men I physically checked, during numerous visits to the Public Record Office, medal index cards, pension records, service records, medal rolls, and silver war badge rolls. Today, if I were doing it again, I could find digital images for all of those series on Ancestry. I could also find records online in other series: medical records in MH 106 and widows' pension records in PIN 82 on Findmypast. Census records were not easily available when I was conducting this research, but by the time I came to publish



Frostbitten feet at Hickwells, Chailey c. 1915, author's collection.

material online, all census returns up to 1901 had been published and I was able to use some of the information I found in these returns in my own research. Since that time, census returns for England and Wales in 1911 and 1921 have also been published, as has the 1939 Register, and if I were still actively conducting research into Chailey's convalescents, I should also be checking these sources.

Expanding the research

I realised quite early on that telling the story of Chailey's convalescents was only telling part of the story. What about the women who nursed those convalescents and what about the Chailey community generally? I decided to extend my research, and I got a great "leg-up" from old copies of Chailey parish magazine, found in a cupboard in the local church, which routinely published the names of parishioners who had joined the Colours. That was my starting point, and I transcribed the names of the men, month by month, following this through with more visits to The National Archives to look at medal index cards, medal rolls, service records, and so on. The VAD hospitals looked after "other ranks" but in affluent agricultural Chailey, there were a number of men who joined the army as officers, which in turn meant looking for officers' pension records in series WO 374 and WO 339. Some of

these men would later be killed in action or would die of wounds, but it would be many years before I would find their obituaries and photos in school or university rolls, many of which I now have on my bookshelves.

There were over 600 men from Chailey who served in some capacity during the First World War, and whilst I never met any of these men nor, for that matter, any of the patients or the nurses, I did correspond with some relatives, and much later, on two separate occasions, I visited Chailey to interview two men who had lived in the village for decades and who had memories of village life during and after the First World War.

I purchased books on Chailey: village guides which in some cases gave background information about some of the local characters and where they worked.

The British Red Cross Society helped me with background on Sussex 54 VAD, as did newspapers, and I paid multiple visits to the newspaper library—which in those days was located at Colindale in north London—and to the East Sussex Record Office, where I poured through local newspapers that were not at Colindale. Today, some forty years after I was doing my research, many of those newspapers I was poring over page by page—and leaving a growing pile of dust and newspaper flakes as I did so—are available online as part of the British Newspaper Archive, whilst the British Red Cross Society has published personnel cards and made these freely available.

Visiting Chailey and Newick

I made a point of visiting Chailey and the more research I did, a bigger picture emerged. Sussex 54 VAD had operated their first cottage hospital from a house called Hickwells on Cinder Hill in Chailey, and later moved to a much bigger location at Beechland House—or "Beechlands"—in neighbouring Newick. I wrote

to the occupants of both properties and ended up visiting them in their houses. They had no idea that their property had been pressed into service during the First World War and for my part I was fascinated to tread the same floors which had been walked upon decades earlier by sick and injured soldiers and their nurses.

I also visited the nephew of one of Chailey's leading VAD lights, Frances Isabel Blencowe. Frances nursed at Netley Hospital in Southampton, overseas in Serbia, and latterly at a hospital for Royal Flying Corps officers in Chailey. She too had kept an album, and her nephew kindly lent it to me. Many of the photos in Nurse Oliver's album also appeared in Frances Blencowe's album, but Frances also had photos of wounded Royal Flying Corps pilots, which opened up more research possibilities for me.

The never-ending research project

I always say that there has never been a better time to conduct family history research, and tomorrow will be better still. This is thanks to the likes of Ancestry, FamilySearch, Findmypast, MyHeritage, and others who between them publish millions of records each year. At the time of writing, Ancestry has just begun to publish Second World War records online, but there is still so much to be published for the First World War.

My research into the men and women who are connected with Chailey is far from complete and never will be. I am content to leave it where it is for now and perhaps pick it up again as time allows. I do recall keeping an Excel spreadsheet that had all the named personnel occupying a row each, and with columns then allocated for medal index cards, service records, etc. so that it was then relatively easy to check off potential sources for each man. I did it the hard way on visits to various locations but today, much of that work can be done from home.

I would also always encourage researchers to let the research come to you. Publish your research


online where people can read it and contact you. Set up searches on eBay so that if anything relevant is offered for sale, you'll be notified about it. I have bought and sold medals to Chailey men and convalescents, and I still have a postcard in my collection that was sent to a Chailey soldier who was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

In addition to the albums I have seen that were owned by Nurse—and later Commandant—Frances Blencowe and Nurse Oliver, other people came forward with albums that their ancestors had kept. I was able to add to my Chailey story with details from another nurse's album, and from an album kept by the headmaster of Newick School who religiously recorded the details—often with a photo—of his former pupils.

They would have been laying wreaths at Chailey's war memorial today, commemorating the 50 men from the First World War who did not come home. And it is fitting that I should close this article with four simple words: **WE WILL REMEMBER THEM.**

Editor's note:

We are grateful for Paul's years of writing and presenting for ISBGFH. We wish him all the best as he moves on to new adventures.



Paul Nixon is a British military historian and author; the proud great-great-grandson of a Crimean War colour-sergeant; and the grateful grandson of a First World War veteran. Paul has a forensic knowledge of British Army regimental numbers and is the driving force behind the British Army Ancestors website at <https://britisharmyancestors.co.uk/>.



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1 Jan. 2024 Revision