FAMILY HISTORY Federation

Supporting Family Historians since 1974

REALLY USEFUL Bulletin No 63

November 2025

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

inside find...

Lead article is *Military Memories*

plus news from local FHS and from the Federation

Really Useful Bulletin

Military Memories

by Helen Tovey

The country has recently been commemorating the Armistice, that special day each year, at the eleventh hour on the eleventh day of the eleventh month, when the guns fell silent in 1918 and we remember the fallen of the two world wars and subsequent conflicts and give thanks for the sacrifice they made.

Family memories play a unique part in our family history. Military memories can be even more special, whether you are honouring and remembering a particular person or just piecing together the past, perhaps by recalling military-related memories of your own.

Helen Tovey shares some thoughts and experiences and explains why listening to our elders is family history time well spent.

****

Helen at Little Rissington at Christmas with dolls' house made by her father from the packing cases of yet another move between bases.

How many of us have said, or heard said...*I wish I had found out more when grandpa was alive?* Who among has not come across an old battered and creased black-and-white photo of a man or woman in uniform and wondered who is that? What is their uniform? Did they survive the war?

Listening to those too few-and-far-between family anecdotes told by ancestors who once served in the armed forces is long going to remain a point of interest to us, to say nothing of finding great-grandpa's medals tucked into the legendary biscuit tin, and wondering where he served, what he saw and so on. These are incidents that will never tire with time. They are always going to be a source of curiosity and, likely, family pride too.

But these precious pieces of the past – the military memorabilia and the soldierly stories – are just one aspect of military memories. In this piece I'd like to reflect on some other ways in which military memories can be woven into our family histories, and think about ways that we can build and expand our understanding of our ancestors' lives in the Armed Forces, and what it will have meant for the rest of their families too.

Where do you come from?

Children of those in the armed forces were sometimes referred to *an army brat,* so being faced with this simple question *Where do you come from?* can leave you floundering a little, unable to give a clear answer. By the time you reach adulthood, you've very likely lived in more homes than you can count on your fingers. But if asked to give an account of your childhood, and what it was like, you'd probably be able to give a very precise answer.

My father served in the army, and by the time I was three years old (the period of my earliest memory), that little white house in Warminster was my fourth home. As an army child, you can remember precisely how old you were at any given time – because the backdrop for nearly every summer or Christmas is different to the one before. By the time I was eighteen and set off for university, I had lived in fourteen homes.

Similarly with education – military children would frequently up-sticks for new schools, maybe going to boarding school when they got a little older. This seemed totally normal at the time; my dad was often away from home for months on end on exercise and postings, so the children were too.

Army quarters

What about the poor lone mum? Her experiences would have had their own unique aspects; each house move, for instance, entailing cleaning every nook and cranny to military standards. I don't remember the mothers referring to 'moving house'; it would literally be called *marching out* – and with that would come the marching-out inspection to ensure the quarter had been left impeccably clean.

When studying the military aspects of our family history, we scrutinise old photos, noting the details on uniforms and trying to determine which young man in a sea of many in a company photo is our ancestor. But it wasn't just the clothing that was similar. It was the very inside of each of those armed forces family homes – known as married quarters—that were 'uniform' too, with army-issue sofas, tables, chairs, cups, plates, saucepans and even sheets and curtains.

I remember aged about twelve when moving to a new home, we were asked what colour we'd like the walls. Forget the rows of Dulux colour cards and don't even think about wallpaper! Green, blue, pink, or white – this was our choice. This actually felt quite exciting to have a choice… so I'm wondering whether this may have been a new venture on the home décor front for quarters in the 1980s.

With *Crittal* windows (slim steel-framed glazing windows) causing the infamous ice on the inside of the bathroom windows, and plain brickwork, these were utility homes. The local network of roads of army housing was known as the *patch*. All your neighbours were armed forces families too. Very often, if your father was away on a posting, so were all the other fathers (nowadays it would be parents) in your street.

A child's eye view

Sometimes you may have lived within the barrack perimeters - meaning that, on entering or leaving, you would have to go past the guardhouse. This wasn't intimidating; in fact it meant that as an army child, you had huge freedom to roam, even when very young. My family tell a tale that I was found, *crawling off across the grass to a nearby hangar*… and I have a sneaky feeling that this may include less poetic licence than you may imagine!

The soundtrack of life near the barracks was often marked by the bugle throughout the day; *reveille* which was wake up and the *last post* at the end of the day. The bugle was also sounded for men to *fall in* and at *meal times* summoning men to go to the cookhouse. The melodies used by the buglers for these calls always reminded me of the names of the tunes such as *Fall in A, fall in B, fall in every company* and *Come to the cook house door, boys, come to the cook house door.*

Military bases

Image in public domain

Although my father was in the army, at least two of the quarters we lived in were originally on RAF stations - Little Rissington (above) and Old Sarum. From its inception in the early part of the twentieth century, the requirements of the RAF, and army and navy too, of course, would change to reflect world events and conflicts.

See the list of former RAF stations here //en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_former_Royal_Air_Force_stations - showing initial construction dates of pre-WWII and 1940s era, with many closing or being repurposed in the 1960s to early 2000s as the cold war came to an end and the nature of the RAF changed.

Explore lists of RAF stations here too //en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Royal_Air_Force_stations_in_the_United_Kingdom and British Army installations, including barracks, here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_British_Army_installations

Changing times

If you come from a military family of some kind, these snippets above will seem all too familiar to you, but I urge you to record your own memories about this slightly unusual way of life – one that has changed over time and will continue to do so.

For instance, in the late eighteenth century, only a small number of army wives were able to *follow the drum*, living in barracks and going where the regiment was posted. Even well into the Victorian era, married quarters were a novelty, and discussion, recorded by Hansard in the early 1950s (https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1953/mar/09/married-quarters) makes for astonishing reading.

In his long and insightful speech, Mr John Arbuthnot outlines the problems regarding the insufficient provision of married quarters in that cold-war world. He cites the impact that families living apart had on those serving and how this was leading to too many useful men leaving the military early. There was also discussion regarding how any military housing built should be suitable for subsequent civilian occupation, should it no longer be needed by the armed forces.

These are broad-brush sweeping issues – the history of military family homes over the past two centuries. But reflecting on this context helps me make sense of my own wider family's history too. That photo of my granny in the late 1940s, for instance, holding my eight-month-old mum, washing hung across the fireplace in a fairly rough-and-ready empty room. Her RAF pilot husband was based in Yorkshire at the time, but, with no housing available, the young married couple had taken a single room in a farmhouse while they waited for something more permanent.

Military research and stories

As family historians, military research can provide some of the most rewarding aspects of our investigations. The details that we unearth in the records – piecing together

Rachel and Elizabeth McPherson, identical twins, both served in the Women's Royal Naval Service in WWII. Rachel is Helen's paternal grandmother. She thinks Rachel is on the left-hand side of the photo, but it can be hard determine who is who in old photos—especially twins.

clues found in records such as Medal Index Cards and Rolls, Service and Discharge Papers, Logbooks, Rolls of Honour and mentions in the *Gazette* and newspapers – can provide us with glimpses of what life was like for our military families. If we are fortunate, we may have family papers, medals and photos of ancestors in uniform, any of which can provide further snippets of information to increase our understanding of the past.

We, as the family's historian, can then weave these into tales to be passed down the generations. They are not 'memories' as such – as often we may be starting from scratch, having no actual memories passed down to us. But our tale, told and told again, and hopefully listened to by eager ears, can become a sort of military memory and integral to our family's shared sense of its history.

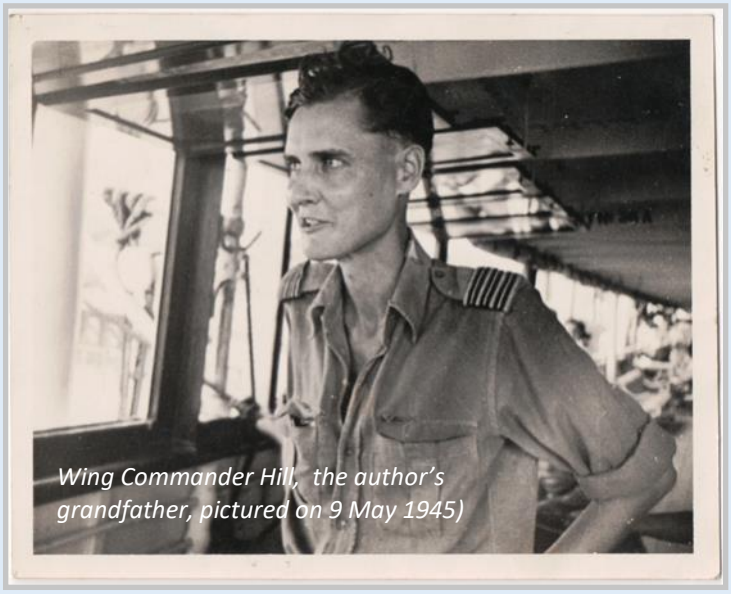
Here is an example from my own research. About fifteen years ago I found a tiny white and purple ribbon with a grey metal rose pinned in the centre in my mother's jewellery box. Completely ignorant and very curious, I knew I had to find out more. Who did this belong to? It was in fact 'Bobo's – the nickname for my great-grandfather.

It turned out he had served in the Royal Engineers in WWI and was mentioned in the *Gazette* several times; on at least one occasion, his clothing being hit when mending the wire at the front. For his *coolness under fire* he was awarded the Military Cross twice.

This was something that had never been related to me - not even hinted at, even once. Was he too modest to tell? Was it just better to leave those terrible years of war behind and move on?

But by piecing together the clues, I feel I've managed to help to give him the honour due for his service in the First World War; he was much-loved and respected by all anyway. And now, at every tiniest opportunity, such as this one, I relate the story of his bravery. So this story is part of *our* family story now. My brothers and daughters know it and I've told it to my cousins too. When my grandchildren are older, I'll tell them too of the exploits of their 3x great-grandfather. And I'll keep telling it to make sure it doesn't get forgotten again.

Many military men of that generation were reluctant to speak of their war years, for numerous reasons, and this is something that crops up time and again. So, like me, you may find that you have fewer first-hand wartime memories of your military ancestors than you feel represents their service and sacrifice. But by careful research and keen scrutiny of the records, with luck we can piece together important chapters of our family's military history and pass on the accounts to the future.



Wing Commander Hill, the author's grandfather, pictured on 9 May 1945)

Memories told by those who served

As previously mentioned, tales told by those who served – those first-hand accounts particularly of wartime – can be less than forthcoming. When it comes to even the Second World War now, most veterans of that conflict have now passed on. So those personal memories of time in the armed forces are evermore precious.

If you have records or remember their memories, make sure you've committed them to paper. If you have siblings or kin who know the same tales, ask them to write down their versions too. Each of you may recall slightly different nuggets of information, or slightly different interpretations of an account. Each of these is valuable, to try to keep the fullest and most accurate account of their memories.

As with any aspect of family history, we know we must cross-check the details that we find. It's not because we are suspicious of the past, but to check that we have the details correctly. In the course of seeking out further detail, we are sure to gain a fuller understanding of our military ancestors' lives too.

In addition to the official record collections that we typically search, try to track down personal diaries and other written accounts that can help to place your ancestors' experiences in context, and provide details that just are not included in formal accounts.

Only earlier this year, I came across an account by Group Captain Reg (Lucky) Jordan, DFC, AFC. In his book *To Burma Skies and Beyond*, he writes of looking across from his own hospital bed and seeing, *Wing Commander Hill, his emaciated body covered in ugly sores, was recovering from years of Japanese imprisonment in the Changi gaol in Singapore. Apart from being on a special diet, reinforced with vitamin tablets, he was occasionally turned onto his side to receive an injection - penicillin perhaps. One sensed his recovery would be a long haul."* Wing Commander Hill (pictured above on 9 May 1945) was my grandfather and these are details, while troubling, I find valuable to add to my understanding of my grandfather's experience as a Far East prisoner of war. (Note: my grandfather was 'only' a FEPOW from Oct 1944, so not for 'years' as Reg said.)

Putting military lives in context

Speaking of context is vital, particularly as time passes. In order for our military memories to be valued by our family today and in to the future, we need to evoke the world that our military ancestors once lived and served in. We need to decode those military records. We need to take a scant place name, vessel name, type of aircraft, as mentioned in an ancestor's record, and dig in to what that really means and explain it as part of our family narrative.

An old-style sand cart pulled by mules and used by Field Ambulance units. This is an enclosed version, whereas many were open to the weather. Public domain/Australian War Memorial

You will find memories that read like these. *They were ambulance drivers at Gallipoli – this was period when ambulances were often still horse-drawn, and donkeys were used to carry wounded down the cliff paths. Turkish snipers would pick off medical personnel.*

He was a gunner in a Lancaster bomber – with a clear turret, for good visibility of approaching enemy planes, the gunner (whether rear, dorsal or up-front – in which case they would also be responsible for bomb-aiming) was in a very exposed and vulnerable position.

There are numerous publications and blogs by military historians of every specialist area whose knowledge will help you go beyond the facts of the family history records in order to gain a fuller understanding of their war years. Regimental histories and regimental museums are of course invaluable, as are the larger national museums and archives.

Below is a short list of useful places to embark on finding out more about your family's military service. Thank you for having allowed me to share my thoughts.

TACA – The Army Children Archive - www.archhistory.co.uk/

IWM – Imperial War Museums - www.iwm.org.uk/

Ogilby Trust – Army Museums - www.armymuseums.org.uk/museum-directory/

The Long Long Trail - www.longlongtrail.co.uk/

Internet Archive – search for free digitised regimental histories.

Naval and Military Press – a vast collection of published books including numerous regimental histories www.naval-military-press.com/

The National Memorial Aboretum—www.thenma.org.uk/

The Children (and Families) of the Far East Prisoners of War—www.cofepow.org.uk/

About the author

Helen Tovey is editor of *Family Tree* and involved in the program of online classes and courses at *Family Tree Plus*.

Contact Helen: Helen.t@family-tree.co.uk

Find out more at www.family-tree.co.uk

Family History Books and Maps

The Really Useful Bulletin welcomes contributions from all Federation member organisations.

It is opportunity to promote *your* society to the extensive Bulletin readership.

Family History Societies

Cumbria Family History Society

New society website

Cumbria Family History Society was founded very nearly fifty years ago to support family historians researching ancestors from the ancient counties of Cumberland and Westmorland, and the Furness region of Lancashire. We have had a website for many years, but we now have a new simplified version www.cumbriafhs.com.

The new version does not require user passwords. There is still member-only content, e.g. our newsletters, but this access is protected by file passwords. These are communicated to our members via our newsletter or by email.

Prospective members can still join electronically and pay by credit/debit card using the excellent Parish Chest service from Family History Federation. This is also the case for subscription renewal by existing members. Our shop - the entire inventory of transcription and index publications (including downloads) is also hosted and available via Parish Chest www.parishchest.com/cumbria-family-history-society-5431.php. All our subscription and publication options are linked from our website.

We provide a calendar for our upcoming meetings, and provide a booking form. Our members can link to externally-hosted recordings of our previous Zoom events (password protected).

There is also the facility for displaying society news and announcements, and there are many pages and subpages about the society, and advice on sources and techniques for researching Cumbrian families. In addition, apart from this static content, we also have some more advanced features. For instance, we have an interactive parish map, which shows all parishes in the modern county of Cumbria, and how they relate to old county and diocesan boundaries. Each parish name is clickable, which gives more detailed information and sources.

The most useful advanced function is the Cumbrian PeopleFinder. This gives access, in a few clicks, to an index of over 630,000 dead Cumbrians. I say dead Cumbrians, as obviously we cannot list living ones for data protection reasons. But, especially, the majority of the records are related to death - burials, grave inscriptions, newspaper death announcements, and wills.

The sources are:

- Copeland Baptisms 121k records
- Copeland Marriages 64k records
- Copeland Burials 80k records
- Westmorland Burials 128k records
- Carlisle Wills *exclusive* (updated v3.4) 105k records
- Carlisle Journal Transcriptions (updated v3.4) 43k records
- Carlisle Patriot Transcriptions 42.5k records
- Westmorland Hearth Tax 1674 6.9k records
- Westmorland Window Tax 1777 3.2k records
- Westmorland Census 1787 7.5k records
- Carlisle Solicitor Documents *exclusive* 6.5k records

We cannot hope to compete with commercial platforms such as FamilySearch or Ancestry for the number of records that we index, but *all* our records relate to Cumbria. Most result from transcriptions or indexes made by our members, and some are exclusive. The wills are especially useful, as these include all individuals mentioned in a will (not just the testator).

There have already been four updates since the launch, and there are more datasets in the pipeline. The interface for PeopleFinder has also been further improved by innovative work done by one of our members to group algorithmically surname variants together. There are almost 30,000 surnames in the index, which are now presented as slightly more than 10,000 surname groups. This greatly reduces the number of names that users have to look up. For instance the name AIREY now has twenty-three variants. Before, it was necessary to do twenty-four separate searches. Now, for one click, the number of individuals retrieved has gone up from 799 to 1,321, and they are displayed together in the same table.

The society no longer publishes directly nineteenth century newspaper transcriptions done by our members (though some are indexed by PeopleFinder), but instead we embed into our website the GENEALOGY-CUMBRIA Google Group https://groups.google.com/g/Genealogy-Cumberland which covers well over 25,000 transcriptions. In addition, the same transcriptions have also been posted on list-cumbria https://list.cumbriafhs.com/mailman/listinfo/list-cumbria, a mail list server maintained financially by Cumbria FHS.

The website is continuously updated to keep content fresh. We have plenty of ideas for future developments. The most visual change in the coming months will be a rebranding to mark our Golden Jubilee next year. Hopefully, the editor will permit another article very soon from Cumbria FHS on our anniversary events. Our future is golden.

David Huddart

webmaster@cumbriafhs.com

Visit website: www.cumbriafhs.com/

The Really Useful Bulletin welcomes contributions from all Federation member organisations.

It is opportunity to promote *your* society to the extensive Bulletin readership.

Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies

IHGS unveils refreshed family history courses

For over sixty years, the Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies (IHGS), the UK's original school of family history and heraldry, has empowered people to explore their roots. As a charity, IHGS is excited to share with *Bulletin* readers its refreshed online courses and other news, all aimed at inspiring and supporting genealogists of all levels from beginners to advanced learners.

New online courses for flexible learning

It has been a busy year for the IHGS team! The team has revitalised the renowned online courses, launching a new platform to make learning more accessible and engaging. Following feedback from learners, IHGS has introduced "bite-size" courses offering unparalleled flexibility. Students can choose to focus on their own family history, and study at their own pace. From beginners to seasoned genealogists, learners can take single courses or combine them to build expertise. Topics cover essential skills like accessing census records, parish registers, creating pedigrees, and mastering palaeography.

The flagship *Higher Certificate in Genealogy*, recognised by AGRA, RQG, and CPD-certified, remains a cornerstone, equipping learners to uncover family stories or pursue professional genealogy careers. Students praise the friendly expert feedback from IHGS tutors which helps them break through "brick walls" and connect with ancestors. The courses foster a vibrant learning community, making genealogy both educational and enjoyable.

For up-to-date information visit www.ihgs.ac.uk, follow us on Instagram at ihgs_familyhistory, or contact enquiries@ihgs.ac.uk to enrol.

Unique resources at IHGS's Canterbury base

Based in historic Canterbury, IHGS can also draw on its unique library and archive. IHGS's lovely team of volunteers are supporting the development of an online catalogue; a work in progress but available on "EHive". Recent additions to the collection, like the *Kent Ecclesiastical Court Depositions Index* (1500s–1700s), enhance IHGS research capabilities. As a FamilySearch Affiliate Library, IHGS offers access to the world's largest online genealogy resource at its Northgate headquarters.

IHGS has superb professional genealogical researchers if you would rather an expert explored your family tree for you. There is also a new DNA advisory service, provided through IHGS's network of expert researchers. Contact enquiries@achievements.co.uk for details.

The second-hand bookshop offers rare genealogy and heraldry titles for enthusiasts.

Community and charitable impact

As a charity, IHGS is working hard to engage with wider audiences in a number of different ways. We are collaborating with local schools to enrich students' learning through genealogy-focused work experience, and a group of wonderful volunteers come in every week to support IHGS, from cataloguing to devising social media posts. If you are interested in volunteering please contact enquiries@ihgs.ac.uk

Explore courses and resources at www.ihgs.ac.uk

IHGS is an organisation member of the Family History Federation.
List of all members: www.familyhistoryfederation.com/find-a-society

Family History Societies

Calderdale Family History Society

Appeal for a society chair

Calderdale FHS, in common with many other voluntary societies, struggles to fill the posts that they need on its committee. We are lucky to have most individual roles covered by enthusiastic and knowledgeable volunteers, but the overall controlling role of chair is about to fall vacant.

Calderdale covers the old parish of Halifax in West Yorkshire, which is the largest parish in the country in terms of square miles. Our society has very good relationships with neighbouring family history societies, particularly Bradford and Huddersfield.

The current chairman will be eighty-five years old by the end of the society financial year in March 2026 and he feels that this age is too old for anyone carrying a responsible position within the society. Consequently, we are searching for a replacement who, so far, has not been forthcoming from within the society, despite numerous general and individual appeals.

Our committee has therefore decided to explore the possibility of offering the role to an interested individual from outside the society membership. Practically all our interaction with both committee members and membership is now done via the internet, either by email or by use of Zoom. Consequently, the role can be covered quite adequately by someone not resident in Calderdale. Indeed, currently our journal editor lives in West Virginia, USA and the membership secretary in Lancashire. In addition, a new treasurer from Devon will be taking over that role in March next year and our webmaster lives in Cambridgeshire.

The position would suit someone who not only is interested in genealogy, but is eager to take general responsibility for a thriving society with well-developed systems.

Anyone interested in this possibility is invited to look at our website www.cfhsweb.com to see what we offer as a society and also to contact the current chairman, Peter Lord, at chaiman@cfhsweb.com who can provide you with the current chair job description and would be happy to discuss the detail with you.

So, after reading this article, if you either feel that you would like to offer your services, or another member of your society would be interested, please make contact with Calderdale FHS's chairman at chairman@cfhsweb.com for more detailed discussions.

Note: FHS considering advertising for officers should check their constitution which may have clauses regarding current membership.

Information Sessions and Get-togethers

Provided on Zoom are series of *Get-togethers* and *Information Sessions* for those who are on committees of all member groups of the Federation.

It seems that not all committee members are hearing what is on, so this is what is happening in December.

If you are a committee member—or about to become one—then you will be most welcome. If you wish to attend please send an email to Debbie Bradley at admin@familyhistoryfederation.com giving your details and what you would like to attend.

Information Sessions

The final sessions in the current series

Monday 24th November 2025—7.00pm GMT

FamilySearch—Darris Williams

A talk about FamilySearch and how to use it effectively.

Tuesday 2nd December 2025—7.00pm GMT

Social Media by Joe Sanders

This will be a demonstration and discussion about various social media platforms and how you can share your society information and events.

Get-togethers

Your opportunity to talk to other societies regarding a pressing topic you would like to discuss, a different topic every month chaired by Margaret Roberts, FHF Society Liaison Officer

Thursday 4th December 2025—7.00pm GMT

What's on your mind?

Please join us as this is the opportunity for you to network with other member societies and ask them questions.

Comment from a regular attendee *'I have found the Get-togethers invaluable, it's so good to know that other societies are coming up against similar issues and sharing thoughts and concerns has been a great help. I certainty have benefited from attending'* .

News from the Federation

New records published by Findmypast

Together with other sources, our family history societies continue to provide valuable new datasets for publication with Findmypast. Here are some of the recent additions that FMP has published.

Monumental Inscriptions for Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire

Published thanks to contributions from the **Nottinghamshire Family History Society**. These records will complement the earlier October release of Leicestershire Monumental Inscriptions (also from Nottinghamshire Family History Society). Containing more than 150,000 new records, these collections provide an excellent resource for those with ancestry in the East Midlands from as early as the fourteenth century.

Kent Marriages and Banns

Provided by **North West Kent Family History Society**, these additions cover marriages and banns from St John the Baptist in Eltham between 1933 and 1940. These records are rich in detail providing details on the bride and groom including occupation and religious denomination as well as details regarding the father of both parties including name and occupation and the witnesses to the marriage.

Additions to the National Burial Index

Powys Family History Society has contributed over 13,000 new records covering sixteen churches across the counties of Breconshire, Montgomeryshire and Radnorshire. An excellent resource for those researching their Welsh family roots with records ranging between 1580 and 1851.

Fermanagh Cemetery Records

New additions to the collection of Fermanagh cemetery records for the parishes of Cleenish and Magheraculmoney in Fermanagh.

Additions to England Directories

FMP's collection of England Directories already boasts over fifteen million records and during November more than 3.5 million new records across 133 new titles were added. This will include titles such as *The Post Office Directory of Falmouth* (1882-1909), *Lake's Falmouth Directory* (1912) & *Kelly's Directories* covering areas such as Herefordshire, Berkshire, Wiltshire and Essex. FMP has recently been using machine-learning techniques to help extract millions of names which has allowed them to bring even more names than ever before to their users.

Barry Railway Company Staff Registers

The Barry Railway Company was a railway and docks company based in South Wales and was first incorporated as the Barry Dock and Railway Company in 1884. For those who had ancestors who worked for the Barry Railway Company, this new collection will help to shed more light on their ancestors' working lives.

Kevin Todman

If your society has datasets you would like to place on FMP, please contact Kevin to discuss.

Email: data.manager@familyhistoryfederation.com

Really Useful Bulletin

News from the Federation

Archives and you

As a representative for the family history community and online users, I attend meetings of the User Advisory Group at The National Archives (TNA), at Kew. My remit is to share information from those meetings with you, but to also take to the group any concerns, or observations that you might have regarding TNA. Please feel free to contact me on: archives.liaison@familyhistoryfederation.com

TNA launched an exciting development on Tuesday 4th November—the ***Document Reading Room Lab***.

The lab will be open for one year. It is a designated area within the current reading room and specially designed with space for eight researchers.

The design of the room includes lighting which minimises shadows when photographing documents. It has a bespoke carpet that echoes the original reading room tables. There are larger desks with space for a document box, a document, laptop, and notebook. The desks are also equipped with USB-A and USB-C sockets. For added comfort there is a choice of two styles of adjustable chairs.

Users are invited to use the space for their usual research, but at the same time trial the new equipment which includes a variety of camera stands and lamps. After your visit, users are invited to complete a feedback form and this will inform the design of the reading room in the future.

Please book your slot in the lab in advance or even request a seat in the lab on the day. It is really important that researchers have their say so they can influence future changes.

Sadie McMullon, FHF Archives Liaison

1926 Irish Census

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

National Archives of Ireland (https://nationalarchives.ie) has produced a short video offering a glimpse of the work taking place on the Irish census of 1926 to get it ready for release online in April next year.

You can view the video on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQn7dxNAgzk

The census does not include Northern Ireland but does cover the twenty-six counties that formed the Irish Free State on 6 December 1922.

Thank you for visiting

The final live events for 2025 to wave the flag promoting the Federation and local societies, plus promoting Family History Books have taken place!

We enjoyed meeting friends and encouraging visitors to join their local societies. The recent downturn in attendances is concerning but everyone is looking forward to a new year—and an upturn!

We thank everyone who visited our displays, bought books or stopped for a chat. We look forward to events in 2026—the first live shows and fairs start in early March—come along, have a chat, buy books and maps!

More details with dates in the New Year!

Massive price hike for copy wills

In late October the government issued Statutory Instrument SI 2025/1126 effective from 17 November 2025. This increased the cost of digital copies of all post-1858 wills in England and Wales from £1.50 to £16 each. You *have* read that correctly! A 966% price increase.

Apologies, but we did not hear in time for the October *Bulletin*. The Federation notified member groups as soon as we learned of the increase.

The wills service is available at:
https://probatesearch.service.gov.uk/

Stir-up Sunday traditions

The last Sunday before Advent is often called Stir-up Sunday. A quick 'Google' will explain how it got its name.

Does your family have a tradition for Stir-up Sunday? Do you make your Christmas pudding that day—did previous generations do so? Do you have a family recipe handed down, treasured, tweaked by each generation? Do you keep that recipe safe? Have you passed the recipe to the next generation or added it to your family history records? Keep the family traditions alive!

Really Useful Back Page

Family History Research Aids from the Experts

Parish Chest, a service from the Family History Federation, has over eighty family history societies and associated suppliers at a one-stop online shop, offering a wide range of family history materials in some eighteen categories including:

- *Parish register transcriptions and more from local FHS*
- *Memorial inscriptions information from gravestones across the country, compiled by local FHS*
- *Nonconformists: Baptists, Wesleyans, Independents, Quakers and many more nonconformist lists*
- *Wills and probate indexes of wills and administrations*
- *Folders, printing facilities, giftware*
- *..and more!*

Societies and suppliers regularly add new lines, so visit to see what is there to help you add to your family tree.

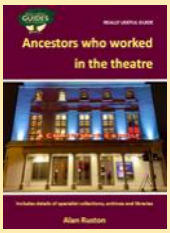
www.parishchest.com

Societies and others interested in joining Parish Chest should initially contact:
admin@familyhistoryfederation.com

FAMILY HISTORY BOOKS & MAPS
www.familyhistorybooksonline.com

Family History Books (FHB) is an online bookshop and publisher; it is owned by the Family History Federation and the aim is to provide a service to the genealogical community. Family History Books Online offers a range of relevant titles relating to family history research, plus a range of specialist maps for historians.

FHB welcomes contact from authors! Works of specific interest to family historians with wider social history topics are of interest. FHB does not publish individual family histories or fiction. If you have a book in the making, then do contact FHB via **admin@familyhistoryfederation.com**. We would love to hear from you about your ideas.



Recent publications include the well-received ***Really Useful Guide—Ancestors who worked in the theatre*** by Alan Ruston. It is just £6.95 + p&p. A delightful book about theatre, music hall and more with case studies plus an extensive section detailing local archive holdings.

In addition to its online shop FHB will be at major family history events around the country in 2026. Our team is small but we attend when we can! Visit to see all the latest titles and maps available. The stall is always very popular!

Happy browsing online in the meantime!

Please explore the range, and place your orders, at

www.familyhistorybooksonline.com

The *REALLY USEFUL Bulletin* is published monthly and circulated free of charge. Members of the Family History Federation are encouraged to provide information about their projects and activities for inclusion. The Federation policy is to not include paid-for commercial advertising. However, when space allows, the editorial team includes mentions of activities relevant to readers which are offered by other organisations—plus any relevant special offers, too.
The team is considering the option of including relevant commercial advertising for 2026.

The REALLY USEFUL Family History Show

LIVE on Saturday 18 April 2026—Burgess Hall, St Ives, Cambs.

Can FHF members get together to stage another regional show in 2026?
For more information contact: chairman@familyhistoryfederation.com

Family History Federation: www.familyhistoryfederation.com; info@familyhistoryfederation.com
Family History Federation is the operating name of the Federation of Family History Societies.
The Federation of Family History Societies is a Company Limited by Guarantee.
Company Number 2930189 (England & Wales) Registered Charity Number 1038721
Registered Office: 2 Primrose Avenue, Urmston, Manchester M41 OTY