FAMILY HISTORY Federation
Supporting Family Historians since 1974

REALLY USEFUL Bulletin No 64

December 2025

Welcome to the latest edition of the Really Useful Bulletin

This month the lead article is

Christmas Food Traditions

plus news from local FHS and from the Federation

With very best wishes to readers all around the world

May your family tree grow well in 2026!

Shutterstock (licensed)

Really Useful Bulletin

Christmas Food Traditions

by Sylvia Levi

Turkey, roast potatoes, Brussels sprouts, and maybe parsnips or carrots, followed by Christmas pudding. And Christmas cake and mince pies at some point. We all know that this is traditional British Christmas Day food and trimmings.

There **are** other traditions, though. Do you have gammon, glazed ham or another form of pork (and argue over the crackling)? Perhaps you go for beef (our family does). You may find Christmas pudding too heavy after a big roast dinner. Trifle is a popular dessert too, if you do still have room for more. You may, however, do something completely different.

Farmers Giles's Establishment Christmas 1800. Etching by William Heath [author's collection]

It is quite well known that the meal of turkey and Christmas pudding became a fixture during the Victorian period. Dickens's *Christmas Carol* is often thought to be responsible - Scrooge transformed the Cratchits' Christmas Day by buying them an enormous turkey, while Mrs Cratchit had already cooked a splendid round pudding.

But all the foods mentioned above, except perhaps the vegetables, have origins as festive dishes going back much further. The celebratory occasions when they were eaten were not specifically Christmas either, and why there are things we now **only** eat at Christmas is quite a mystery.

First, a few general observations. Christmas meals were, and probably still are, governed by class and income. The wealthy have always been able to afford more, and more varied, food than the poor. In addition, until at least the late nineteenth century, less well-off households had very restricted cooking facilities. If they were going to have a roast dinner at Christmas, townsfolk in particular would probably use a public bakehouse. For centuries, autumn and winter were the seasons when meat and poultry were most plentiful and affordable, as animals that could not be overwintered were slaughtered, so it was possible to have that roast dinner. Pork was the cheapest meat and poultry the most expensive. Only since the 1970s or so has chicken been relatively cheap.

The original Christmas foods

Boar's Head

This is the one particularly Christmassy dish from the medieval period that we know about. Bringing in the boar's head on a great platter was an important ceremony. Why it was so popular isn't clear. Two possible explanations are that the custom began in Roman times when the boar was considered to be the king of the forest and it was often the first dish at a Roman banquet; or that, as Christianity took over, presentation of the boar's head came to symbolise the triumph of the Christ child over sin, because the boar was historically seen as a symbol of evil or a dangerous beast. The Boar's Head Feast/Festival could be at any time during the Christmas period and evolved so that it sometimes incorporated a nativity play, with the addition of knights, historical characters and shepherds and wise men.

The tradition went on until at least the seventeenth century. Having a boar's head to present in the first place was of course the preserve of the hunting classes and by then wild boar had been hunted to extinction in England. Queen's College Oxford (*right, from the* Graphic*, 1873)* still holds the ceremony every December and it can now be seen on YouTube.

The custom of eating pork at Christmas continued without wild boar and became more democratic as time went on. Brawn, often served with mustard as a side dish to the boar's head, became very popular in its own right. Originally, brawn (often called head cheese now) was basically a dish of a piece of pork back or belly meat, rolled, boiled and brined. The meat was usually stuffed before rolling, first with spices and later with herbs such as rosemary. The liquid of the brine would be beer or wine as often as water, to which large quantities of salt would be added, to preserve the meat. As time went on the amount

of salt was often reduced, to improve the flavour of the liquid. Occasionally, orange sauce was served with the brawn. (Again it would only be the very rich who could afford that.) By the eighteenth century the dish had evolved so that it was simply pig's head and trotters boiled until the meat came away and was then seasoned and compressed in a mould. It gradually lost its association with Christmas, although it can still be found marketed as a traditional food. You can watch the process on YouTube – see link at end.

Mince pies

The speciality we still eat which actually has the longest ongoing connection with Christmas is probably the mince pie. The first written recipes for a minc't (or minc'd or shred) pie appeared in English in the sixteenth century, but the pies dated from long before that. The pastry was not eaten in earlier centuries – it was just the container for the filling, and was often called the 'coffin'. From the fourteenth century onwards this began to change, and by the time of the Tudor monarchs, people were enthusiastically tucking into the pastry. It would be what we now call hot-water crust.

The filling for mince pies grew out of medieval dishes made up of both sweet and savoury elements. They would often contain meat along with dried fruits, candied peel and spices; the most popular spices were pepper, cloves, mace and nutmeg. Cinnamon and ginger were also sometimes used. And no, the spices were **not** used to disguise the taste of rotting meat. There was a general taste for these spices, dating from the Crusades. They were very expensive and much prized. The original mince pie recipes used the meat of an animal, its suet and the aforesaid fruit and spices, including sugar, which was then seen as a spice. The sugar and the suet acted as preservatives. The meat was usually veal, beef, mutton or venison and often tongue was the cut suggested, and sometimes udder or tripe. There were also recipes for fish versions! From Tudor times these pies became particularly associated with Christmas, but not exclusively so, and were actually eaten all year round. Given the cost of the necessary spices it's quite likely that those without much money kept them only for celebrations. If you object to the appearance of mince pies in the supermarkets in September, perhaps it is you who is out of step!

The idea has grown up that mince pies by Tudor times were being made in oblong shapes at Christmas, to resemble the Christ child's manger. There is actually not much evidence for that, but during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, mince pies did grow smaller generally and they appeared in a great range of shapes. As sugar became cheaper, the mincemeat became sweeter and sweeter, and the meat used was usually minced beef, and did not include offal. In the eighteenth century too, the first recipes for mincemeat without any actual meat appeared, although the tradition of using it continued well into the nineteenth century and even later.

Not quite so old Christmas foods

Christmas pudding

This is another Christmas dish which can perhaps claim medieval connections, but which developed rather later. It had its origins in plum pottage. Pottages were semi-liquid dishes based on cereal and sometimes rice. For several centuries, plum was the term used for all kinds of dried fruit. It's often said that plum pottage/porridge was based on one particular pottage, *frumenty*, where the grain (usually cracked wheat or barley) was boiled with added milk, eggs or broth, plus flavourings. It was served as an accompaniment to meat and eaten during Lent as well as at Christmas. It became plum pottage when dried fruit was added.

Taking a plum pudding in cloth out of boiling water.
Etching by R. Seymour. Wellcome Collection. Public domain

Pottages evolved into steamed or boiled puddings during the seventeenth century. Puddings were originally savoury and something like a sausage, cooked inside animal intestines. The new, advanced, technique involved putting the ingredients of the pottage, with additional flour and fat such as suet, into a cloth and/or sealed basin and steamed or boiled. This was quite simple to do and became very popular, in particular the plum version. There were occasions for a while where plum pottage and plum pudding were eaten together.

There is a story that George I asked for plum pudding at his first British Christmas in 1714. Unfortunately this seems to be a twentieth century myth that may have its origin in a *Strand Magazine* article from 1911 about the then Royal Family's Christmas "*turkey, sausages and plum-pudding. The latter, by the way, is made from a recipe that has been in the possession* of the *Royal Family since the days of George I".*

Again, although plum pudding was very much part of Christmas, it was widely consumed at other times, often with roast beef. What's more, they were usually on the same plate. Radical politicians saw this combination as part of the Englishman's birthright. In the 1830s a Wiltshire Chartist assured followers that victory in their struggle would mean plenty of *"roast beef, plum pudding and beer by working three hours a day".* Its popularity was no doubt helped by dried fruit and spices becoming increasingly available at reasonable prices.

Cookery writers began to refer to 'Christmas' pudding from the early nineteenth century but often gave similar recipes for both plum and Christmas versions. An edition of *Mrs Beeton* included seven different recipes for every pocket, from the 'Unrivalled' costing 7s 6d to one without eggs at a shilling. The nineteenth century was also when alcohol was introduced. To go back to Dickens - the Cratchits' pudding was a quintessential pudding *"like a speckled cannon-ball, so hard and firm, blazing in half a quartern of ignited brandy and bedecked with Christmas holly stuck into the top. Oh, a wonderful pudding!"*

From *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management, 1861*

By the end of the nineteenth century the Christmas pudding seems to have become **the** symbol of Christmas. For one thing, tinned ones came available, which made cooking them easier (they would only have to be steamed once, instead of an initial cooking, followed by another on the day they were eaten). During the First World War much time and effort was spent in sending puddings to the forces. The *Daily News* for example sent two-and-a-half million pounds of pudding to British troops in France and the Mediterranean in 1916; many puddings were lost when the ship carrying them was torpedoed.

Ironically for something so British, most of the ingredients originated elsewhere. Between 1926 and 1932 the Empire Marketing Board attempted to promote Imperial trade through a Christmas pudding of ingredients from across the Empire, an idea widely taken up by the public. (Recipe: https://images.nationalarchives.gov.uk/asset/11697/). Morecambe, in Lancashire, made the world's largest Empire Christmas Pudding in 1931, weighing half a ton and cooked for sixty hours. These days Christmas pudding is far less popular. Research by YouGov in 2024 showed that fifty-nine per cent of people no longer think that having one is important.

Turkey mania

So, was it Dickens who caused turkey to replace beef? Probably not. For a very long time the festive bird, if you could afford it, was goose. Goose clubs were very popular in the nineteenth century. Members paid in some money every week and, come the end of December, they had enough to buy their goose, which of course might have to be cooked in the public bakehouse.

Turkey arrived in Britain in the early sixteenth century and immediately became very popular on the tables of the aristocracy. It was large, exotic and tasted much better than other birds often roasted, such as peacock, crane and swan. It was, of course, very expensive and remained so until the nineteenth century.

Several factors combined to bring it within the reach of ordinary people in the 1830s and 1840s. Norfolk farmers undertook an extensive breeding programme in the 1830s which, coupled with the arrival of the railways, transformed the process of getting them to market and made them much cheaper. Before trains, both turkeys and geese walked to market, particularly from Norfolk to London, with their feet painted with tar to protect them – a well-known sight of the time. They lost weight during the walk and had to be fattened up again when they arrived, costing time and money.

Roast turkey was still not the obligatory main dish for many people. Paradoxically, the fact that it was now, relatively, more affordable meant that it took second place to game for those who hunted along with those who aspired to higher social status. Goose also remained very popular, and so did beef. It was the changes in the wake of the Great War that led to ever more people choosing turkey for their main dish. Families were growing smaller though, but as more people had refrigerators it was possible to keep the inevitable leftovers.

Turkey's peak popularity was probably in the 1950s and 1960s, when the cost dropped again and there was much advertising. It currently seems to be the choice of fewer and fewer people. It is thought to be quite difficult to cook, is often said to be rather dry and there is a host of other alternatives, many of which appear in both traditional and social media.

Two popular 'sides'

The one vegetable that seems to be inextricably linked to Christmas is the Brussels sprout. Why is another mystery, particularly as they contained a chemical that makes them taste bitter to some people, (sprouts without this are now available) and they can be rather indigestible, although they are at their best in winter. There is some dispute about when the sprout was first grown in Britain, but the first recipes appeared in the 1840s, including one for sprouts 'in the Belgian way' boiled for (only) 8-10 minutes and served on buttered toast with a butter sauce.

Pigs in blankets as a Christmas side dish are rather newer – they have only been really popular since the 1990s. The name is actually American and the first UK recipe for them dates from 1957. Confusingly, in America, pigs in blankets are closer to a sausage roll. Ours are, of course, sausages

wrapped in bacon and are clearly related to angels on horseback (oysters wrapped in bacon) and devils on horseback (prunes wrapped in bacon). All three were actually creations of the late nineteenth century, although pigs in blankets were then simply called sausage cakes.

Other sweet stuff

Christmas cake

It is possible that some kind of rich, spiced cake may have been eaten in medieval times, but again what we would recognise as festive cake was a seventeenth-century development. From the late sixteenth to mid-nineteenth century, a rich fruited cake was eaten on Twelfth Night - called Twelfth Cake. Originally there would have been a dried bean or a pea hidden inside it. Whoever found the bean in their portion was master of ceremonies for the night and everyone had to do what they said. Twelfth cakes were actually enriched breads, with the familiar dried fruit, cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves added. Pepys refers to Twelfth cakes several times in his diary, and to tearing his piece apart to see if he had the token. During the eighteenth century, these cakes became richer and richer, with more butter, sugar, fruit and the addition of eggs. Yeast was less necessary to get the cake to rise, and finally disappeared when bicarbonate of soda was discovered to be a good raising agent. Some Oxford colleges made an exception to the rule that the cake should be kept until Twelfth Night. Parson Woodford on Christmas day 1773 at New College noted in his diary that he had a "*fine plumb cake…as is usual on this day*".

Once more it was the mid-nineteenth century that changed Twelfth Cakes into Christmas ones. The earliest recipe entitled Christmas Cake was published in Britain in 1858, but was actually for a trifle, not a cake. The next one was from Mrs Beeton at much the same time and this one was also not for a rich fruit cake, but for a fruited gingerbread. (It's been suggested that she got the recipe from the US where this type of gingerbread was developed in the 1820s). Despite these failures, rich fruit cake, with icing and marzipan, eaten at any time during the Christmas season, gradually replaced the grand Twelfth cake, and changed its name to be specifically for Christmas. Unlike the plum pudding though, the same cake still appears at other celebrations, particularly weddings.

Right: A trifle from *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management, 1861.*

Trifle

This is clearly not exclusively a Christmas dessert but it features in many families' Christmas spreads.

Trifle is a very popular British export too and is particularly associated with Christmas in America (the Italians like it as well).

The first written recipe for something called trifle appears in Thomas Dawson's *The Good Huswife's Jewell* (1596) and was simply thickened sweetened cream, flavoured with ginger and rosewater. During the seventeenth century manchet (fine white bread) was added and in the eighteenth, almond-flavoured cake was used. Currently there are many different versions but it's easy to think that we all know the basic ingredients of a good trifle: cake, jam, jelly, custard, cream, sherry and fruit. Over the four centuries of its existence there has, in fact, been very little agreement about which of these ingredients should be included. It has even been suggested that class issues affect what goes into your trifle, i.e. whether you include jelly and/or fruit (matters of particularly fierce argument), how you decorate it and which alcohol you use may well reflect your social status.

Bon Appetit! Happy Christmas to you all.

Further reading

Annie Gray, *At Christmas We Feast*. Profile Books, 2021.

Claire Hopley, *The History of Christmas Food and Feasts*. Pen and Sword Books, 2009.

Helen Sabieri and Alan Davidson, *Trifle (The English Kitchen)*. Prospect Books, 2001.

Ivan Day's blog: https://foodhistorjottings.blogspot.com/

ITV survey including use of sixpences: https://www.itv.com/news/2024-11-11/most-people-no-longer-think-christmas-pudding-important-for-festive-table-poll

There are many other books and articles on Christmas food.

Watch

Queen's College, Oxford, Boar's Head ceremony: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZ1N4Flm7Ko

English Heritage – How to make brawn the Victorian Way: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CKkA3_dLt0

About the author

Sylvia Levi is a passionate food historian with a particular interest in what our ancestors baked. She gives talks on Christmas food of the past in conjunction with her husband, Simon Fowler.

Ed: Search "Christmas" on Parish Chest - IGS has a family tree Christmas card pack of two £6.75 plus M&LFHS has *Memories of the Salford Blitz Christmas 1940*. Search "Xmas" and NNWFHS has a recipe collection (free download).

Really Useful MAPS!

Family history groups are welcome to join the Family History Federation—see www.familyhistoryfederation.com/society-join

Family History Societies

New Zealand Society of Genealogists

The New Zealand Society of Genealogists is New Zealand's national genealogical organisation.

We can help you with your Kiwi family, wherever you are in the world!!

As a member of NZSG you get to be part of a community of amazing people with access to a wealth of information that members have researched and indexed for nearly sixty years.

www.genealogy.org.nz

Become a better researcher. Add to your skills and knowledge by using our online resources, including *Getting It Right* and the Kiwi Resources – your guide to researching in New Zealand. Find out about new research techniques and resources, or just enjoy reading our members' stories in our award-winning journal, *The New Zealand Genealogist.*

Discover new resources. Access a huge range of genealogical resources from your home, including online databases and other collections built up by our members over the last fifty years. You can subscribe to the over 16 million records on our Kiwi Collection. Visit our Library or get one-on-one email assistance from our knowledgeable and friendly volunteers.

Save money on your research Get free access to Gale Newspapers and The National Archives (UK) digitised content as well access to records already purchased by others for example our amazing (and free to members) NZSG Certificates Collection.

Share your research and skills. Publish articles in *The New Zealand Genealogist* and share short stories in our *e-KIT* newsletter. Get help, or help other members through our members' mailing list (memlist), social media platforms or join a local branch or interest group.

Help preserve resources for future researchers. Get involved in projects that preserve the historical records of New Zealand such as our new Shipping Collection project. Help transcribing old school records, or contribute to a local area project.

Take a browse around our website to see what you can find!

www.genealogy.org.nz

New Zealand Society of Genealogists
Te Rangapū Kaihikohiko o Aotearoa
Family history - Preserving our past for the future

East Surrey Family History Society

The Fabulous Virtual Family History Show

Plus special interest areas: Graham Bandy, DNA, maps

Saturday 24 January 2026

Sessions 10.00 to 12.00 and 14.00 to 16.00

Join us for a **FREE** fun day!

Go to our website to register for either or both sessions

www.eastsurreyfhs.org.uk/index.php/fair

After registering you will receive a confirmation email containing details about joining the fair.

Organisations confirmed as attending

Aberdeen & North-east Scotland FHS
Association of Genealogists and Researches in Archives
Berkshire FHS I Buckinghamshire FHS
Family History Society of Cheshire
Chesterfield & District FHS
East of London FHS I East Surrey FHS
Essex Society for Family History
Family & Community Historical Research Society
Guild of One-name Studies
Glasgow & West of Scotland FHS
Hampshire Genealogical Society I Lincolnshire FHS
London Westminster & Middlesex FHS
Quaker FHS I Romany & Traveller FHS
Shropshire FHS I Surrey History Centre
Sussex Family History Group I West Middlesex FHS

Keep checking our website for the latest information

www.eastsurreyfhs.org.uk/

Corporate Membership at the North of Ireland Family History Society

Helping you and your members to connect with your Irish Heritage

- Discounted NIFHS membership for your members
- Regular e-newsletters with research tips and resources for you to share with all your members
- Two free talks annually to your members about researching in the North of Ireland. Topics to suit you, from finding resources to DNA.

Find out more at

www.nifhs.org/membership/corporate-membership/

NIFHS, Unit C4 Valley Business Centre, 67 Church Road, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim, BT36 7LS
Registered Charity No NIC106071

Articles from FHF members are welcome. Copy date is 1st of the month of issue.

admin@familyhistoryfederation.com

London, Westminster and Middlesex Family History Society

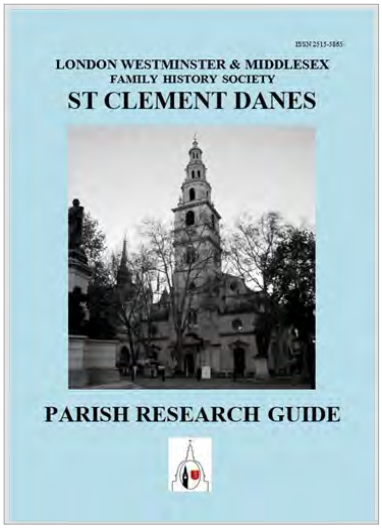
St Clement Danes Parish Research Guide

Are you researching ancestors in this busy parish just west of the City of London? We think of it now as the RAF church, the Law Courts and the London School of Economics but in 1851 the area of forty-four acres was the most densely populated part of Westminster, with the areas around Clare Market and Wych Street being particularly crowded. Clare Market was a meat market, second only to Smithfield, and infamous for the rowdy behaviour of its butchers. They usually joined in with any mobs involved in local violence, participating in the anti-Catholic riots of 1780 for example, when the Stanhope Street home of a Justice of the Peace who had committed rioters for trial the previous day was ransacked.

Wych Street and much of the parish north of the Strand became a place of abject poverty, with destitute families crammed into dilapidated medieval timber-framed houses in the courts and alleys. Drury Lane was described in 1868 as 'the wildest most barbaric portion of West London' and these slums, known as rookeries, were hotbeds of crime. This area was cleared for the building of the Law Courts in the 1870s with many families made homeless. By 1901 the population was down to 6,000.

London Westminster and Middlesex Family History Society has been creating booklets to help family historians researching in our part of north London. Out now is our revised, updated and expanded list of the main records of interest to the genealogical researcher for the area based on the ancient Middlesex parish of St Clement Danes. This parish was shared between the Liberty of Westminster and the Liberty of the Duchy of Lancaster and now forms part of the London Borough of Westminster.

This new edition has an extra sixteen pages. We have much expanded the sections on the parochial burial grounds, court records, health and hospitals, and schools and included a new one about civil registration in the area. Apart from the vital records of the various religious denominations, examples of subjects covered in this booklet are the Inns of Court and the Inns of Chancery, archives of the Royal College of Surgeons, and theatrical records. Details include where records can be found, whether they are original hard-copy records, transcriptions in books, or on the internet. This seventy-six-page A5 illustrated booklet is part of our ongoing series of LWMFHS Parish Research Guides.



We would like to blow our own trumpet here and suggest that our little *Parish Research Guide* booklets can help you find these other records and where they are located. By the way, our booklets are called 'parish' research guides because this was the way that areas were organised before local councils took over. The purpose of our small guides is to assemble in one publication a list of the main records of each of the Ancient Parishes in our area and where these can be found, whether they be original hard-copy records or on the internet, in order to inspire family historians and help locate mentions of ancestors.

Our booklets only cost £6 each

You can contact our Society via our website https://lwmfhs.org/ at: info@lwmfhs.org

The Birmingham and Midland Society for Genealogy and Heraldry

also rejoicing as

Midland Ancestors

Vice Chairman, Heraldry
Adrian de Redman, FSA Scot., FFI, Hon FHS
(07799-188628)

Meeting at 7pm on the fourth (not always the last) Tuesday of the month, except August and December. The Kingsley-Norris Room of the Birmingham and Midland Institute, Margaret Street, Birmingham B3 3BS

Open to everyone these informal meetings include an opportunity for "bring and show".

2026 will see the revival of the group after the ravages of Covid. The programme for 2027 will be agreed towards the end of 2026.

https://midland-ancestors.uk/

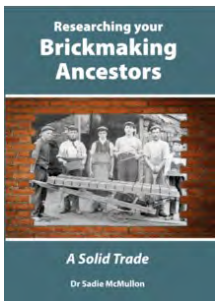
Really Useful Bulletin

Christmas Giveaways!

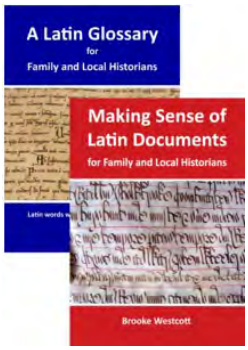
What has our elf got in his sack?

For each option, send one email to:
competitions@familyhistoryfederation.com

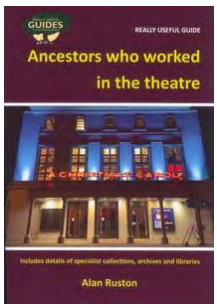
Put the key WORD given below as the subject.
You should send a separate email for each item.
To be drawn first week of January 2026.



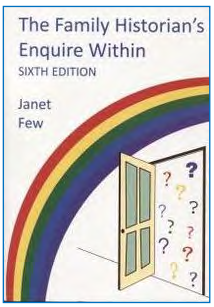
For full details of this title see HERE. Launched earlier this year!
If you would like to win a copy, send email with **BRICKMAKING** in the subject line. One copy to be won!



For the Latin twin pack details see HERE
Two extremely helpful books One twin pack to be won.
Send email with **LATIN** in the subject line.



Details of this book are HERE.
To win a copy of this fascinating book packed with details of local holdings, send an email with **THEATRE** in the subject line.



Ten chances to win a copy of this handy reference work (details HERE). Put **ENQUIRE** in the subject line.

Our elves are not saying how many mystery parcels are packed! They like to play games—but there is a full sack! Each will contain a different mix of super books.
Put **MYSTERY** in email subject line.

Happy Christmas and good luck to everyone!

Send one email for each giveaway to:
competitions@familyhistoryfederation.com

Please put your name and address in body of the email!

News from the Federation

New Records Published by Findmypast

Alongside other sources, our family history societies continue to provide valuable new datasets for publication with Findmypast. Here are some of the additions that are being published in December and early January.

New additions to Lincolnshire Workhouse Guardians' Minutes

Thanks to the contributions of the **LINCOLNSHIRE FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY,** the Lincolnshire Workhouse Guardians' Minutes collection already boasts records for several union workhouses in the county including Lincoln, Holbeach, Bourne, Caistor, Gainsborough and Boston. In January, the collection will see the addition of over 5,000 new records for Grantham Union Workhouse for the period 1863-1902, giving users an insight into the lives of their ancestors who found themselves in the workhouse (see https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/lincolnshire-workhouse-guardians-minutes)

New additions from the Northamptonshire Family History Society

January will bring the release of an array of exciting additions from the **NORTHAMPTONSHIRE FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY.** This includes over 8,000 new memorial inscriptions covering twenty-one churches and graveyards in Northamptonshire between 1402 and 2022 (see https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/northamptonshire-memorial-inscriptions). There will also be thousands of new records added to the Northamptonshire militia lists collection, covering 327 locations across Northamptonshire between 1774-1803 (see https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/northamptonshire-militia-lists-1762-1819).The Northamptonshire Land, Poll and Window Tax collection will also see an additional 82,000 records added between 1625-1805 (see https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/northamptonshire-land-poll-and-window-tax-lists). For those with ancestry in Northamptonshire, these new records will be an excellent resource for family history research.

New additions to Essex Marriages and Banns

For those with family roots in Essex, there will be over 11,000 new marriage and banns records published in January covering ten different churches in Essex for the period 1769-1940. These records will be published thanks to contributions from the **WALTHAM FOREST FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY** and will hopefully help users discover new branches of their family tree (see https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/essex-marriages-and-banns-1537-1935).

Brand new records - National Museum of the Royal Navy

FMP is thrilled to be publishing records in December in partnership with the **National Museum of the Royal Navy**. A very exciting addition for those with naval ancestors or a general interest in naval history. There will be a wealth of records to explore, including British Royal Navy Casualty Logs (1939-1945), British Royal Navy Submarine Movement Cards, Royal Naval Division Service Records (1914-1920) and British Women's Royal Naval Service Enrolment records (1917-1919).

Kevin Todman

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

Email: data.manager@familyhistoryfederation.com

STOP-PRESS: **The National Archives' fees are increasing**. Operative from 2 February 2026. Get your orders in now to avoid the increases. **www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/legal/our-fees/** scroll down the page. *With thanks to Chris Paton's blog*

News from the Federation

The Family History Federation's *Really Useful Podcasts* — Series 5

The Family History Federation's ***Really Useful Podcast*** is back for a fifth series! We have gathered many great guests together to discuss a wide range of useful topics to help with your genealogy research. All six new episodes are available on the Federation's websites as well as through the major podcast providers. **www.exploreyourgenealogy.co.uk/really-useful-podcast-series-5**

DNA: What to do with the matches

DNA is now a key part of genealogical research. In this episode our guests discuss what to do with DNA matches, once you have taken your tests. **Dr. Sophie Kay** is a professional genealogist at Kronicle, www.khronicle.co.uk/ and the ancestry and genealogy expert for popular archaeology show, *Time Team*. **Mia Bennett** is a professional genealogist at Mia Genealogy (www.miagenealogy.com/) specialising in using DNA to solve family history mysteries. She collaborates with Kathy Wilshaw under the banner MKDNA (mkdnahelp@gmail.com) on more recent unknown parent and grandparent cases.

Family History from a Gravestone

It is possible to get a great deal of family history information from a gravestone. In this episode, our guests discuss how best to go about this rewarding task. **Kelly Cornwell,** professional family historian, tutor and speaker. https://whoamiresearch.com/. **Ian Waller**, retired professional genealogist, vice chairman and education officer of the Federation, Fellow of the Society of Genealogist, former chairman of AGRA and author of various books published by the Society of Genealogists and the Family History Federation.

Hampshire

In this episode our guests consider the things good to know when researching ancestors in this county, including the work of the Hampshire Genealogical Society, www.hgs-familyhistory.com/. **Fiona Ranger** family, local, and house historian, speaker, member of BALH, OPS, GOONS, IHGS student and bookstall and liaison officer for HGS who runs www.thecurioustodian.com. **Sue Wheatley**, family, local and house historian, IHGS student, and member of BALH, OPS, GOONS who runs Cherrytree Heritage. www.cherrytreeheritage@gmail.com. Fiona and Sue collaborate as FS House History – contact fshousehistory@gmail.com / www.fshousehistory.com/.

Heirlooms: postcards, photos and papers

The items we inherit can tell us a great deal about our family histories. We discuss the objects and stories we might have and consider changes over time and gender. **Jane Hamlett** is a Professor of Modern British History at Royal Holloway, University of London where she teaches and researches the history of home, family and private life. She is a published author and is currently working on a new project on Victorian family archiving. Jane has co-curated exhibitions with the Museum of Home and Surrey History Centre. **Janet Few**, long-time family historian, president of the Family History Federation, holder of a postgraduate certificate in experimental archaeology and material culture and current custodian of the family archive, whose stories she is preserving at www.grannystales.co.uk/treasures.

Cheshire

In this episode our guests discuss researching family history in Cheshire, with particular focus on the work of the Family History Society of Cheshire, www.fhsc.org.uk. **Margaret Roberts**, Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, chair of FHSC and a trustee of the Family History Federation, Devon FHS and the British Society of Sports History, speaker and author, plus editor/owner of the sport and leisure history research website - www.playingpasts.co.uk/. **Paul Chiddicks**, is a family historian and writer based in Cheshire. Alongside his passion for genealogy, Paul has a deep interest in military history, especially the First World War, where several of his ancestors served. He also writes *Dear Paul* a regular column for *Family Tree* magazine. He is also an active member and volunteer with several local family history societies, helping to give back to the community that's taught him so much.

Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence is increasingly part of the world of family history. In this episode we discuss what AI can do to help us with our genealogy, and some of the issues that family historians may encounter with it. **Margaret Roberts**, (see above episode). Margaret hosts the monthly get-together Zoom discussions for the Family History Federation member groups. **Joe Saunders** is the host of the *Really Useful Podcast*. He is a freelance historical researcher and PhD candidate. Joe is currently vice-chair of the British Association for Local History and teaches a range of topics from wills to Chancery Court records and more for Pharos Tutors. www.joesaundershistory.co.uk.

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

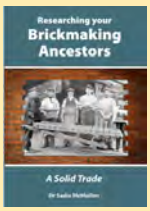
Societies and others interested in joining Parish Chest should initially contact:
admin@familyhistoryfederation.com

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.



Released in July, this volume is a wonderful introduction to the craft, industry and those who actually made the bricks. *Researching your brickmaking ancestors* is available here.

Coming in 2026 are a number of *Really Useful Guides*—topics are wide-ranging! Watch for announcements and offers when launched.

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

Happy Christmas and best wishes for 2026!

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 and put on a regional show— assistance available.
Contact: chairman@familyhistoryfederation.com

FHF REALLY USEFUL Family History Show

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