Really Useful Bulletin

No. 65

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Family History Federation

Supporting family historians since 1974

Welcome to 2026 and your latest edition

Lead article is *Writing Women Back In—the work of A Few Forgotten Women*

plus news from local FHS and from the Federation

includes index of lead articles Bulletin 1—64

The Federation is looking for volunteers!

Could <u>you</u> lead on events and activities being run by the Federation?

Could <u>you</u> lead on helping improve accessibility for those with disabilities?

Contact: <u>admin@familyhistoryfederation.com</u>

YOU have experience...YOU have skills...YOU can be a valuable asset

- join the Federation's executive and help all family historians

Also, every family history society is looking for volunteers—contact your local FHS

Writing Women Back In:

Family History, Silence, and the Work of *A Few Forgotten Women*

by Margaret Roberts

She sits in light and I in shade,
She gives commands, I'm underpaid.
Parallel lives: one wrapped in gold,
Mine fades in time, unheard, untold.

This short poem captures, in just a few lines, the central concern of *A Few Forgotten Women*. Sarah Wildblood was born in the same year as Queen Victoria, the two women lived lives of proximity but without parity, side by side yet remembered very differently. This is a perfect example of how easily one woman's story can be illuminated while another fades into obscurity. For family historians, this imbalance is instantly recognisable. Women appear fleetingly in records, often defined only by relationships, domestic roles, or moments of crisis, before slipping back into archival silence.

A Few Forgotten Women grew out of a shared frustration with this pattern and from a collective determination to challenge it. The project is run by a small collaborative team of family historians, known collectively as *A Few Good Women*, of which I am a member. Together, we research and publish evidence-based life stories of women whose histories risk being overlooked, misunderstood, or lost altogether. Our aim is not to romanticise the past, nor to impose modern assumptions on historical lives, but to reconstruct women's experiences as carefully and responsibly as the surviving evidence allows.

The project sits at the intersection of family history, genealogy, women's history, and public history. Like most family historians, we begin with familiar sources: civil registration, census returns, parish registers, newspapers, institutional and court records, and local archives. What distinguishes our approach is not the material itself, but how it is used. Rather than stopping at the extraction of facts, we aim to draw those fragments together into coherent life narratives that acknowledge continuity, disruption, and social context. Interpretation is unavoidable when working with women's lives, particularly where personal voices are absent, but we are explicit about uncertainty, careful not to overstate conclusions, and open to revision should new evidence emerge.

The project's website reflects this ethos. Stories are presented as memorials to women whose lives were in danger of being forgotten, and they are organised thematically as well as individually. This allows readers not only to engage with a single life, but also to recognise patterns, the pressures of repeated childbirth, the vulnerability of women without economic security, the stigma attached to illness or institutionalisation, and the ways in which poverty could tip into criminalisation. For family historians, these stories can be as useful for context as for connection, offering insight into the lived realities behind sparse or troubling records.

Public engagement is a core part of the project. Members of the team regularly give talks, take part in interviews and podcasts and contribute to events that explore women's history and genealogical practice. A recurring theme in these discussions is how easily women become marginal figures in family histories, maiden names forgotten, unmarried women side-lined, childless women omitted, and those who entered institutions reduced to a single line in an index. *A Few Forgotten Women* seeks to counter this tendency by demonstrating how women's lives can be reconstructed with care, honesty, and respect for the evidence.

Central to this outreach is our *A Few Forgotten Women Fridays*, a collaborative research day held several times a year that invites family historians and interested volunteers to work together on a defined group of women drawn from an institutional dataset or historical grouping. We announce each event on our blog and via social media and ask volunteers to contact us if they'd like to take part. Each volunteer is allocated one woman or girl from the chosen dataset and uses their research skills on the appointed day, and in the days that follow, to investigate her life as fully as possible, before reporting back with their findings. Those taking part receive an early-morning email on the day of the event with details of the women they have been allocated to research, along with any extra information and helpful hints on where to find pertinent records, Our volunteers often share interesting and unusual findings via social media and are also able to join us on our Zoom room throughout the day for support and camaraderie. The resulting narratives, published on our website, range from richly reconstructed lives with previously untold, often surprising stories at their heart, to the briefest of traces, sometimes just a name and a place, but together they form a powerful collective act of remembrance. The experience reinforces our belief that discovering forgotten women's

stories isn't the preserve of experts alone—it is something the wider family history community can actively contribute to, share in, and enjoy.

One story that exemplifies this approach is that of Sarah Wildblood, written as part of the *Forgotten Women Fridays* contribution to the *Born1819* project.

Wem Parish Church
Jennymutual - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=89997456

Sarah Wildblood was born into early nineteenth-century Britain, a society shaped by stark social contrasts. The rural market town of Wem in Shropshire, where Sarah was born, and Kensington Palace in London, birthplace of Queen Victoria, might appear to occupy entirely separate worlds, yet both formed part of the same national landscape. Each reflected a different facet of British society at a moment of profound social, political, and economic change.

Sarah was baptised in Wem on 6 June 1819, just a week after her parents, agricultural labourer William Wildblood and his wife Martha, had buried her twin brother John. It is likely the twins were born around 19 May, meaning Sarah was only a few days older than Queen Victoria, born on 24 May that same year. Sarah's baptism must have been bittersweet. Not only had her parents lost one twin, but their first child, also named Sarah, had died the previous year. This modest rural ceremony stood in sharp contrast to the lavish baptism of the future queen, held weeks later in the Cupola Room at Kensington Palace.

Sarah grew up as the eldest of nine children. Like many eldest daughters in working-class families, she almost certainly carried significant responsibility within the household, helping her mother care for younger siblings and managing domestic labour alongside her own working life. These were expectations quietly placed on women of her class, and ones that her royal contemporary would never have encountered. Family life followed familiar patterns regardless of status: marriages, births, and early deaths, including that of Sarah's nineteen-year-old sister Martha, who died of consumption in 1845.

On Leap Day in 1848, Sarah married James Jones, a quarryman. Both bride and groom signed the marriage register with their mark, a small but telling indication of limited formal education. They settled in the village of Darliston, several miles from Wem. Although they had no children of their own, Sarah and James became important figures within the wider family, caring at times for nieces and nephews, including the illegitimate son of Sarah's sister Hannah and the daughter of her widowed brother William.

Sarah's later life was shaped by further family loss and responsibility. Her parents both lived to advanced ages and died within a few years of one another, her father William spending his final days in Sarah's care, with Sarah acting as informant on his death certificate. Other events, however, would have weighed heavily. Sarah's sister Elizabeth's repeated convictions for theft as a young teenager, resulting in imprisonment, hard labour, and years in a juvenile reformatory, illustrate how poverty and vulnerability could swiftly lead to criminalisation, and how such experiences reverberated through families.

The end of Sarah's own life remains elusive. Despite numerous online family trees assigning her a death in 1884, the evidence does not conclusively support this. When her husband James died in 1888 after years of ill health, the informant on his death certificate was a neighbour rather than Sarah herself. As the story observes, *"The fact that it was not Sarah that was by his side in his final moments may suggest that James was a widower, but I cannot collaborate that fact as I cannot definitely find a death for Sarah."* Her disappearance from the record is unresolved, and the uncertainty itself becomes part of her story.

Grinshill Parish Church,
the setting of the wedding of Sarah Wildblood and James Jones. Public Domain.

Throughout the narrative, Sarah's life is framed alongside that of Queen Victoria, not to diminish either woman, but to expose how profoundly class, education, and opportunity shaped women's experiences. Born within days of each other, their lives unfolded along radically

different paths. Victoria's would define an era while Sarah's influence extended only as far as her family and local community. Yet, as the story reflects, *"there is no indication, despite the significant differences in wealth and opportunity between the two women… that their individual lives were not happy, content, and fulfilled."*

Queen Victoria's wedding to Prince Albert in the Chapel Royal, St James's Palace
by George Hayter. Public Domain

Sarah Wildblood's life epitomises the rationale behind *A Few Forgotten Women*. She was not famous, powerful, or historically visible beyond her immediate circle, yet her experiences speak directly to the realities faced by countless women of her generation. Born shortly after Queen Victoria, her life unfolded quietly in rural Shropshire, shaped by responsibility, family loss, social constraint, and the ordinary rhythms of work and kinship. Without deliberate attention, she risks being reduced to a handful of disconnected records, misattributed deaths, or assumptions repeated across family trees. In writing her story we cannot resolve every uncertainty, but it does restore her presence, complexity, and humanity.

Forgotten Women Fridays gives us a practical way to put this principle into action. By inviting volunteers to take part in researching and telling women's lives, we maintain a rhythm of discovery and collaboration that mirrors the ongoing nature of historical inquiry. Sarah's story, like many others uncovered through these collective research days, reminds us that family history is not only about names and dates, but about listening to the lives that have too often been overlooked.

The poem that opens this article captures that mission perfectly, in working together to bring obscured women into view. *A Few Forgotten Women* exists to ensure that women like Sarah are no longer left unheard and untold within history's shadows. Through writing women back into the record, we are not embellishing the past or filling gaps with speculation. We are acknowledging silence, questioning absence, and restoring balance, one carefully researched life at a time.

For full information and to follow Few Forgotten Women:
www.fewforgottenwomen.com

BlueSky: @afewforgottenwomen.bsky.social

Facebook: www.facebook.com/people/A-Few-Forgotten-Women/100087801867161/

Instagram: www.instagram.com/afewforgottenwomen/

Also:

www.fewforgottenwomen.com/who-are-we

www.fewforgottenwomen.com/stories-1

www.fewforgottenwomen.com/whatson

www.fewforgottenwomen.com/forgottenwomenfridays

The full story of Sarah Wildblood:
www.fewforgottenwomen.com/_files/ugd/d63e92_46b5064317c445f7b2551e602ae0ec1f.pdf

For details of Peter Burnhill's 'Victoria's Common Cohort', *Born1819* project see www.fewforgottenwomen.com/1819; www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMYiXSkdGYg

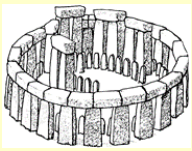
Margaret Roberts

A Few Forgotten Women Team

About the author

Margaret is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, an academic author, speaker, experienced researcher, and genealogist who specialises in sports history. She works as an independent researcher, although in recent years she has also been engaged on research projects within higher education. Her publications include a book on Victorian swimming communities, academic journal papers on women's football, teacher training, and Victorian swimming baths and their employees. She has presented on all these topics at several public history and academic forums both at home and abroad. Margaret is the editor of Britain's only online sport and leisure history magazine *Playing Pasts* [www.playingpasts.co.uk] as well as chair of the Family History Society of Cheshire, Society Liaison Officer and trustee for the Family History Federation, trustee of Devon Family History Society, independent researcher representative and trustee of the British Society of Sports History, and a core member of the *Few Forgotten Women* team.

Family History Societies



Wiltshire Family History Society

For those researching their family's history in the historic county of Wiltshire there are many sources of information, including the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, local museums and of course the Wiltshire Family History Society.

Wiltshire FHS at the 2019 Family Tree Live event

The society was founded in 1981 and has about 1,300 members worldwide. It is a registered educational charity and is a member of the Family History Federation. The society has recently become a Family Search Affiliated Library. This gives access to FamilySearch data that is not available from home computers. Further details on our website www.wiltshirefhs.co.uk

RESOURCES

The society's Resource Centre in Devizes contains many records and indexes as well as a mainly Wiltshire-based reference library. In addition to its use as an administrative centre, it is available to members to carry out their own research by prior arrangement.

The society's quarterly journal is posted to members free of charge. It includes general and Wiltshire family history articles, information for researchers, members' surname interests and programmes of branch and other meetings. The current edition, and all previous editions, can be viewed as page-turning documents by members in their section of the website.

BRANCHES

As an educational charity the society's meetings are open to everyone. Members and visitors are welcome, and there are usually talks on family history or related topics.

Meetings are held monthly in **Devises, Wilton** (near Salisbury), and **Westbury** and **Swindon**. Our **Virtual Branch** has bi-monthly meetings using Zoom. This attracts members from the UK and the rest of the world.

There is no entry charge, and non-members will be encouraged to join the society after attending three meetings. Refreshments are available at most branches as well as opportunities to seek advice and to hear about forthcoming events. For up-to-date information on venues, talks and discussions and for details of branch contacts, see the society's website or contact the Resource Centre.

BECOMING A MEMBER OF WILTSHIRE FHS

Membership is available to everyone having an interest in family history, whether or not they have Wiltshire ancestry. Amongst its benefits are quarterly journals and the publication of members' own surname interests in the journal and on the society's website. The annual subscription is £12, and membership runs for twelve months from the date of joining.

The easiest and quickest way for individuals to join is through the website.

WILTSHIRE FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY
Registered Charity No. 290284
Wiltshire FHS Resource Centre
Unit 3, Bath Road Business Centre
Devizes SN10 1XA

By Email

General – admin@wiltshirefhs.co.uk

Research – research@wiltshirefhs.co.uk

Membership – membership@wiltshirefhs.co.uk

Website and Facebook

www.wiltshirefhs.co.uk

www.facebook.com/wiltshirefhs

STOP PRESS

If you receive this Bulletin in time, don't forget that on **Saturday 24 January** East Surrey Family History Society is holding **The Fabulous Virtual Family History Show**
Sessions 10.00 to 12.00 and 14.00 to 16.00
Join online for a FREE fun day!
Go to their website to register for either or both sessions
www.eastsurreyfhs.org.uk/index.php/fair

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

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

British Association for Local History

Local History around the Yorkshire Dales
9.30am to 4.00pm
Saturday 2 May 2026

BALH is delighted to present this one-day conference at the Grassington Devonshire Institute, Grassington, North Yorkshire BD23 5AA to explore the landscapes, buildings and people of the Dales.

The speakers and topics are:

Esther Rutter, Esther is an acclaimed author and PhD student. She will share an illustrated talk on her current research working with archive material in the University of Leeds' Special Collections and the Dales Countryside Museum to research the fascinating lives and works of Yorkshire artist-historians Marie Hartley, Ella Pontefract and Joan Ingilby.

Jude Rhodes, Chair of the BALH Outreach Committee and Grassington resident Jude will share the fascinating history of a Dales barn from 1603 to the present day in the context of the local history of Grassington, North Yorkshire. A planning application reveals a wealth of detail about the barn through the Historic Building Report: Analysis and Interpretation.

Sally Robinson, Washburn Heritage Centre. Sally will speak about the Fewston Assemblage project. Prior to the construction of the Washburn Heritage Centre in 2009, skeletal remains and artefacts were removed from Fewston churchyard, known as the Fewston Assemblage. Because of its size, age and rural location the Fewston Assemblage has global significance. The project is a collaboration of commercial archaeologists and academics from the universities in Durham, and descendants and volunteers from the Washburn Heritage Centre.

David Cant, Yorkshire Vernacular Buildings Study Group and BALH Outreach Committee member. David will speak on Traditional Buildings of the Dales. The stone buildings of the Dales are a remarkable part of the landscape. They have attracted attention for many years. Pioneers in their study have included Arthur Raistrick, Marie Hartley and Joan Ingleby, and more recently Alison Armstrong and Arnold Pacey. This talk will look at the buildings and the people who built and used them.

Tickets are £8 for BALH members and £10 for non-members, this includes tea/coffee.

You are welcome to bring you own lunch or you can visit one of the options in Grassington village.

A small selection of local history stalls will be available on the day.

There is a large Yorkshire Dales National Park car park on Hebden Road, a four-minute walk away, charged at £7 per day (2025 rates – payment by card only). See website www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/plan-your-visit/essential-information/car-parks-and-toilets/.

For more information see:

www.balh.org.uk/yorkshire26 where you can book.

BALH is a member of the Family History Federation

London, Westminster and Middlesex Family History Society

'WE WERE LOCKED OUT OF THE PLACE'

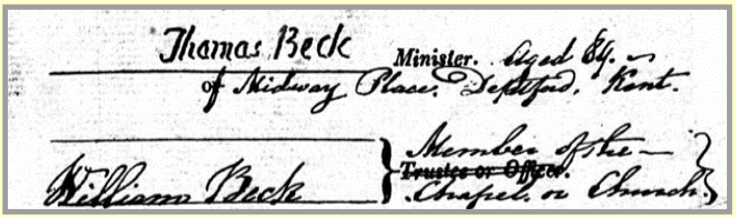
or why you should always check original documents

By Elizabeth Burling

It is always much better to have your own transcription errors - and you may just come across extra information. Sometimes absolute gems turn up, as happened to me.

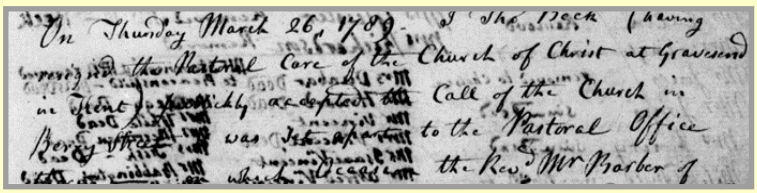
I was looking at the registers deposited by 'Dissenting Protestants', which appear in The National Archives' series RG4. I wanted to add details to our handy LWMFHS *Parish Research Guides*. These unofficial registers, which mainly date from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, were collected in by the Non-parochial Registers Commissions of 1837 and 1857 for the General Register Office. In these books, the ministers kept their own records of those they had baptised, married or buried. The registers have been digitised and are on subscription websites Ancestry, BMD Registers, Findmypast and The Genealogist.

One such item is the birth and baptism register book for Bury Street Chapel, St Mary Axe in the City of London. A 'Statement to the Commissioners' was filled in when these books were submitted to the authorities. This one is a little unusual as it states that it was also the book of births and baptisms for Midway Place Chapel, Deptford, in the county of Kent. Both chapels had an Independent congregation and, in fact, were only actually about 2½ miles apart, albeit on either side of the river Thames. The statement was filled in by two men: Thomas Beck, Minister, who notes that he is aged 84 and of Midway Place, and William Beck, described here as a member of the Chapel or Church. William is actually Thomas's son and was born in 1789. The two hands are quite distinctive.


Thomas Beck Minister. Aged 84.
of Midway Place. Deptford. Kent.
William Beck } Member of the Trustee or Officer. Chapel or Church.

In answer to 'whether the Congregation has been dissolved and if so, when', William writes, *The Bury Street Chapel was founded about the year [blank] and is now discontinued, the Congregation &c having removed to the Midway Place Chapel, which was founded about the year 1789 and is still continued*. At the bottom of the page he says he cannot at present ascertain the date of Bury Street Chapel. He notes, *Perhaps it was before 1717. Dr Isaac Watts was the Pastor about that time. After him Dr Savage, and in 1789 the Revd Thos Beck was the Pastor and continued such ever since until the congregation was dispatched to Deptford, Kent, by the sale of the Chapel about the year 1822.*

The next page is headed *Register Book of the Baptisms and Burials of Persons belonging to the Church of Christ, Meeting at Berry [sic] Street, St Mary Axe, London – and of Persons meeting for Worship at the Meeting House at Midway Place, Lower Road, Deptford, Kent.* This seems to be in William's hand too, although perhaps dictated to him by Thomas. He continues, *Memorandum relative to the above Places. On Thursday March 26, 1789, I Thos Back (having … …* and this is the next bit:


On Thursday March 26, 1789 I Thos Beck (having
the Pastoral Care of the Church of Christ at Gravesend
Call of the Church in
to the Pastoral Office
the Revd Mr Barber of

There has been much bleed through the page, making it very difficult to read but I think it continues, *resigned the Pastoral Care of the Church of Christ at Gravesend in Kent) publickly accepted the Call of the Church in Berry Street […] was set apart to the Pastoral Office […] on which occasion the Revd Mr Barber of […] Hall Meeting began with Pray'r and reading the Scripture […]. Mr Clayton […] in Pray'r, Mr Brewer preached from […] 15-30 after which Dr Davis of Fetter Lane concluded with Pray'r*.

The next bit is easier to make out. *It did not appear that any regular Church Book had been kept for some years, during the Ministry of Dr Savage – hence the Baptisms were (till the purchase of this Book) registered by me in a private Book and have been correctly copied from thence by me into this – these Registers are therefore Authentic – it will also be seen that I have extracted the Registers of my own Children from the Church Book of Gravesend and have inserted them in the first leaves of this.* This is where I found William's baptism.

At the time of my accepting the Charge of the Church of Bury Street, it consisted but of two Men Members who were Joseph Hardcastle Esq of Hatcham House, Surrey and Mr Peter Biggs, then of Pudding Lane, London, who were both chosen Deacons and have continued so ever since. The Women Members were at that time the following six persons.'

At the top of the next page they are named: Elizabeth Hardcastle who is recorded as having died on 16 December 1812 aged 81 years, Esther Mayne, Hannah Mayne 'since dead', Hannah Biggs 'since dead', Elizabeth Whitrow 'since dead' and Mary George 'since dead'. Other members are recorded with comment about what has happened to them. The fact that Mr Jones 'removed to Chelsea' is not that helpful to future researchers but Miss Libbey Field moving to Islington, might be. There are over sixty people

named here, none of which are mentioned in the digitisation of course, and then is written *The above continue with us to this Day, 4 October 1795*.

The story of the Chapel continues: *On Tuesday the first of January 1793 the Meeting at Midway Place was Opened for Publick Worship when the Revd Mr Barker of Deptford began with pray'r. Myself read the scripture. Mr Thomas Preached from Mat 16,10. And Mr Wake concluded. Revd Mr Dixon Preach'd and kept a free School therein for one Twelve Months ending on Lady Day 1795*.

There is a change of hand here, to the one I think belongs to Thomas Beck, as it matches his signature on the Statement. *Mr Stevenson borrowed money of Mr Rut and made him a Trustee of the Endowment and Mr Rut made his son another though they were not subscribers and ever since they have the Possession of it (see the other side leaf opposite for information).*

Another change of hand but is it William using Thomas's poorly trimmed quill? I can still hear Thomas's voice. *Bury Street Meeting was sold away from us at Michaelmas 1818. It had been purchased by Mr Stevenson eleven years back for £800 (I have been told along with the Houses belonging to the Estate). After this bought, about or wholly £500 of the Endowment in trust for the Use of the Minister and Congregation, was sold out of the Funds and expanded upon the place in repairs – Mr Stevenson was one of the Trust for the Endowment. We were not permitted to repay Mr Stevenson the £800 which he had given for it and thus retain the place for the use of the Congregation but Mr Stevenson sold it to Mr Heap for 1,000 Guineas. Therefore the Endowment became private property and Mr Heap on gaining the Key, given to him by Mr Stevenson we were locked out of the place, after having been prevented from seeking another place by the assurance that we should still occupy it on the Morning. Mr Heap […] to pay […] for the afternoon*.' Thomas adds, '*But reserved for himself the Rent of the Cellar*. (The records of the Sun Fire Office show that the Rev. Henry Heaps of 8 Spital Square insured the Bury Street Chapel against fire on 5 April 1819.)

It is at this point that the Register of Births and Baptisms starts. It is only page 3! On the reverse of this page is recorded *10 written. I cannot read it* before the baptism of Jonathan Mitchel and Elizabeth, Thomas's daughter, in 1787.

The writer feels compelled to carry on with his grievance. *Information of what occurred after we were locked out of our Place of Worship. I went to Mr Fletcher's Chapel – our congregation was dispersed, Mr Vincent had now the management, we sought for a place – we kept a few together by meeting in private houses – at length Mr Cook in Houndsditch offered us a small place fitted for Religious use, we hired it at Ten pound a year, it served for 40 or 50 People but it had a great inconvenience. No one could enter it but by ringing a bell. We had one to open the Door but many passed by without noting it. We used it until Mr Cook left, when a Jew took it we were obliged to Quit but several now Worship at our Chapel at Midway Place, Lower Road, Deptford, Kent.*

When the Lease was out, Bury St was advertised for Sale but the Congregation were forbidden to buy with our own Money, without the Endowment, but Mr Stevenson the son (his Father was Dead) bought it with the two houses behind for £800 and then had it at the expense of Reducing the Endowment from paying a yearly Interest on £72 10s to £52 and the subscriptions of the congregation after [blank] years Mr Stevenson sold the Meeting (a Freehold) for one Thousand Pounds to Mr Heap who would not pay until the Key was given to Him. On the Sunday next we found the Door Lock'd, we must own Heap our Landlord, must pay him Rent and he will keep the cellar which lets for £10 a year. He let the Meeting to a Person named Smith, telling him your place is Endowed. This Smith came to me to pay him and called Heap by a name, however just, I shall not mention, only said he, write the case, I will publish it.

I am frequently asked what has become of the Endowment, when we were shut out and a few met in the small place in Houndsditch. Our Aged and Wealthy Members were all Dead and others retired out of town and the remainder of the Endowment reduced from £72 to £52. It is with great reluctance, I am [constrained?] to say, Mr Stevenson not the Father but the son Borrowed money of Mr Rutt and for his Security, without the consent of any he made Mr Rutt a Trustee, who then was not a subscriber and Mr Rutt has now got his son also with him, a Trustee.

He concludes, *I am now within three months 89 years of age October 20, 184[?].* (Perhaps you can make it out?)

What a tale! The rest of the book is filled with births and baptisms (with the occasional extra comment) but most of the names mentioned in this book have not actually been transcribed because they are not births or baptisms.

The Reverend Henry Heap stayed at Bury Street Chapel. There is a 'Pulpit Sketch' of him in the *Weekly News* of 7 August 1831. It's not that flattering.

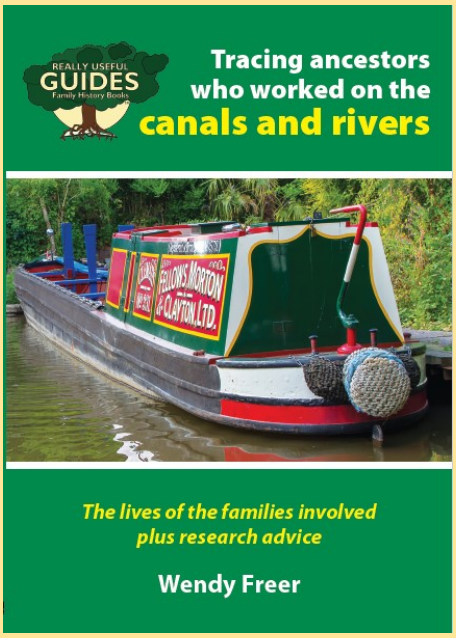
By the time of the 1841 census, Thomas was living at the Manor House, Midway Place, Deptford. He was aged 88, of independent means and not born in the county. With him were Sarah, one of his daughters, aged '35' (actually born in 1791!) and acting as his housekeeper, and Joseph, a son, aged 40 and an ironmonger. Thomas died not too long afterwards – probate was granted on his will on 26 June 1844.

Sources: Ancestry UK Findmypast The National Archives

Ed: This was such a tale that we have included it in full. It demonstrates so well what can be discovered in the actual documents but often missed elsewhere! Nonconformists regularly wrote details of their situation—always check on the inside of the covers of their books. Don't miss the gems!

News from Family History Books

SPECIAL LAUNCH OFFER FOR READERS



Tracing ancestors who worked on the canals and rivers

A5, 96 pages

~~RRP£7.95~~ **Offer £6.95**

Click here for ordering **use code CAN26**

Researching those who plied the canals and rivers can be challenge. Understanding the work and lives of the men, women and children on the boats is key to your family history.

The author explains difficulties involved in achieving the simplest of tasks in everyday life afloat, including the lack of education for children and limited medical provision, especially for pregnant women. And if you don't know what an "Idle Woman" was, then you need to read this book!

There is a chapter on pertinent records plus a specialist websites list and targeted further reading. This book will be of interest whether you have family "on the cut" or are just curious about the itinerant lifestyle of those working on the waterways.

Mrs Gibbs and daughter Valerie 1944 on board canal boat
A picture taken from the book
Ministry of Information Photo Division Photographer.
Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

About the author:
Wendy Freer is an industrial historian with a special interest in the history of canal-boat people. Before retirement she lectured in industrial, social and economic history. She has written several books, including two about canal-boat people, and she has appeared in several television programmes talking about canals and the people who worked and lived on them.

REALLY USEFUL GUIDES
Family History Books

This is the latest in the ***Really Useful Guides*** series from Family History Books.
The guides are for family and local historians.
Packed with advice and guidance relevant to each subject.

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

News from the Federation

Records published in 2025 on Find My Past and the Federation's website

As we begin 2026, it's time for a year-end summary of the collective achievements we've made in 2025 through publication of datasets with FindMyPast and also submission of surname interests to the Federation website.

Transcription Dataset Activities in 2025

- year to date we've published forty-eight separate datasets with FindMyPast which represents a big increase on 2024 when we published thirty-four datasets
- over 2.25 million new records were published in 2025
- the last few months have also been quite busy and there are another thirteen datasets, representing another 250,000 new records, awaiting publication in the New Year
- submissions were received from twenty individual FHS groups (up from thirteen last year!) and great to see a few societies submitting datasets for the first time
- Wiltshire FHS takes honours for submitting the most number (fourteen) and most varied datasets, including apprentice records, coroners' reports, vagrants' passes to name just a few
- many of the record sets have included linked images of either register pages or memorial inscriptions, adding greater interest for the family researcher
- with the help of FMP we've updated the text on the society pages on the FMP site (at www.findmypast.co.uk/partners/family-history-federation) so that information relating to each Federation member society is up to date
- we are now adding a URL link on all records that are published; this links to the submitting society's web site and should hopefully drive more traffic to FHS websites
- FMP provides usage statistics and for the year to end November there were over 315,000 users making over 3.1 million views of datasets submitted by the family history societies. This shows the reach and impact of datasets that the Federation's member societies submit for publication.

Surname Interest Database

The Surname Interest database on the Federation website (www.familyhistoryfederation.com/surname-search) now has twenty-seven societies contributing data (up from twenty-four last year). There are nearly 70,000 surnames listed in the database.

This continues to be one of the areas most frequented by visitors to the Federation website so hopefully you are continuing to see some of the benefit with enquiries flowing through to your websites via the surname interest links.

By the way, did you know that *Bulletin* readers who have joined a Federation member group can obtain a discount on their personal subscription to FindMyPast? Ask your society for details – the discount cannot be used with other discounts.

Best wishes for a safe and healthy 2026 to you and your families.

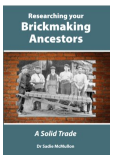
Kevin Todman
Data Manager – Family History Federation
E: data.manager@familyhistoryfederation.com

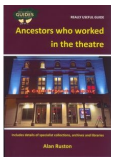
Really Useful Bulletin

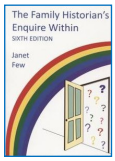
News from the Federation

Christmas Giveaways

Here are the lucky winners drawn from the emails. All prizes should be delivered by time you read this!







Brickmaking Ancestors—Kevin, Bury St Edmunds
Theatre Workers—Jill, Northampton
Latin twin pack—Allan, Stafford
Enquire Within—Nicky, Dollar; Suzanne, Biggleswade; Maureen, Horsham; Janet, Beckenham; Sandra, Sheffield; Ann, Cambridge; Debbie, Bembridge; Paul, East Budleigh; Margaret-Anne, Ashford; Barbara, Harpenden.
Mystery parcel—Sue, Birmingham; Linda, Plymouth; Ms H, Chessington; Tony, Wakefield.

Congratulations everyone—enjoy your goodies!

In memory of Peter Underwood

- and a spot of history

The Federation has only recently learned of the passing of Peter Underwood last year following a long illness.

Peter was one of the unsung heroes involved with introducing early computerisation to the Federation's family history data. Peter was a key player in the BIG-R project (Genealogical Research Directory) and instrumental in transferring it from microfiche to CD-ROM (as then called!) in 1994. The Federation's National Burial Index (NBI) was mooted in 1998. How many remember the original SHROUD software used to enter the burial data? That was Peter's creation! The first edition was issued in 2001 with some three million entries. Peter was joint co-ordinator of the NBI project along with Carol McClee. Peter was more recently involved with the project and website *Buckinghamshire Remembers* to record the county's WWI memorials.

Rest in peace, Peter.

Make a Date!!

Live events this spring—come along!

The Federation's volunteers will be out and about at two large craft and hobby shows run **by ICHF**:

Glasgow's SEC	5 – 7 March
Birmingham's NEC	12—15 March

The team and bookstall will be at:

The Family History Show – Midlands	14 March
Really Useful Show – St Ives	18 April
The Family History Show – Liverpool	9 May

NEW titles from Family History Books will be available at the bookstall which will have many titles available from various publishers. The bookstall accepts real money as well as card payments!

Come along and get a discount on your books!

Peter Calver—Lost Cousins

We are very sad to report the death of Peter Calver, founder and inspiration of Lost Cousins. Peter died on 19 January.

Following his diagnosis of bowel cancer late last year he and his wife were not expecting the turn of events when, just before Christmas, Peter was told the cancer had spread and was inoperable.

There is a wonderful tribute to Peter, his life and his work at www.lostcousins.com/newsletters2/

LOSTCOUSINS
PUTTING RELATIVES IN TOUCH

YES WE DO!

Please get in touch for a chat with
Debbie admin@familyhistoryfederation.com
Steve chairman@familyhistoryfederation.com

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.

The latest publication is featured in this edition. We are pleased to announce that there are books dealing with **Poor Law Unions** and the places they encompassed, researching **teachers and pupil-teachers**, and further down the line for production is a guide to researching **blacksmiths and wheelwrights**. The *Really Useful Guides* are packed with guidance and help for furthering research.

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

Happy browsing!

Please explore the range, and place your orders, at

www.familyhistorybooksonline.com

The *REALLY USEFUL Bulletin* is published monthly and circulated free of charge. Members of the Family History Federation are encouraged to provide information about their projects and activities for inclusion. The Federation policy is to not include paid-for commercial advertising. However, when space allows, the editorial team 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

Family History Federation: www.familyhistoryfederation.com; info@familyhistoryfederation.com
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With grateful thanks to Debbie Bradley for creating this index. All Bulletins accessible on 'resources' at Explore Your Genealogy.