

Encouraging the study of family history since 1976



in Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire & the Isle of Ely

THE JOURNAL



www.chfhs.org.uk

www.facebook.com/CambridgeshireFHS

instagram : [cambsandhuntsfhs01](https://www.instagram.com/cambsandhuntsfhs01)

VOLUME 32 : 2

SUMMER 2026

CAMBRIDGESHIRE & HUNTINGDONSHIRE FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY

PRESIDENT: ELIZABETH STAZICKER MA (OXON), DIPL ARCHIVE ADMIN, FRSA

HONORARY VICE-PRESIDENTS: NED WAYNE & CAROL NOBLE

A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY HISTORY FEDERATION

REGISTERED CHARITY No. : 278815

The Cambridgeshire & Huntingdonshire Family History Society exists to encourage the study of genealogy, heraldry and family history within the old counties of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely, and Huntingdonshire. We reformed on 1 January 2020 when the separate family history societies representing Cambridgeshire (est.1976) and Huntingdonshire (est.1984) amalgamated into a single organization.

We actively support established guidelines for good practice and aim to promote considered, informed and quality research. Our projects teams continue to work to scan, transcribe and index name-rich resources of genealogical interest, to enable researchers to pursue their county ancestors wherever they happen to now live. Volunteer researchers will offer their collective opinion on almost any query.

< o > < o > < o > < o > < o > < o >

For latest news, and updates

WATCH THE WEBSITE & NEWSLETTER & FACEBOOK

CONTACT US (for additional contacts/services see p51-2

All general correspondence via the Secretary, please :

secretary@chfhs.org.uk or by post to

CHFHS Secretary, 15 Castle Hythe, Ely, Cambs., CB7 4BU

ALL CONTRIBUTIONS BY EMAIL TO THE EDITOR, OR THE SECRETARY BY POST. **PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU HAVE OBTAINED CORRECT PERMISSIONS FOR PUBLICATION OF IMAGES SO AS NOT TO INFRINGE COPYRIGHT (private photos; book/web sourced)**
Additional guidance for contributors can be found on the CHFHS website

We aim to publish The Journal quarterly : mid-late Jan / April / July / Oct
You can submit material for publication at any time. We will include it in the next available issue (please be patient, space is finite and we will keep you posted)



CAMBS & HUNTS FHS JOURNAL

VOL 32 : 2

SUMMER 2026



Welcome to the Summer edition of the CHFHS Journal—with an eclectic mix of articles and reports. An important date for your diary is the upcoming AGM at Huntingdon Archives, which also marks our 50th Anniversary.

Feature articles in this issue include—two short pieces from regular contributor, Ian S. describing the successes coming out of curiosity and persistence; Fiona L brings us the first part of the lives of a C16th brewing family in Cambridge; Anne K recounts her research experiences in decades past; and finally, further reflections on the past fifty years of family history and our society, plus a report from the recent EA Fair—with a montage of snaps illustrating what a great day it was—*see you next time!!!*

Regular updates include—research surgeries, the latest dates for the programme of the new monthly research Zooms, and meetings/talks diary; reports of past talks; book reviews—& much more. As part of our 50th Anniversary Year in 2026, we hope to be participating in more research days around the county—watch out for dates/venues to be announced via the website, newsletter and facebook.

Print too small?? Swap to the e-journal—it can be **enlarged** to suit all vision !!

CONTENTS—Vol 32 : 2 (Summer 2026)

Chairman “First Words”	2	The 1871 Cambridge Bigamy Case :	
Save The Day : 50 th Anniversary AGM	5	an obscure genealogical connection	
AGM Agenda	6	<i>By Ian Stephenson</i>	24
Minutes 2024-25	7	EA ‘Really Useful’ Fair : snaps & reports	26
Chairman’s Annual Report	10	Ambrose Purchas : C16 brewer of Cambridge	
Accounts 2025	14	and his descendants (pt 1)	
Forenames & A Few Names	15	<i>By Fiona Ligonnet</i>	31
Reflecting on 50-Years of Family History	16	Zoom Research Surgeries Diary	36
Terry On The Airwaves	18	F2F Library Research Surgeries Diary	37
A Brickwall Inadvertently Surmounted		Meetings & Talks Diary	38
<i>By Ian Stephenson</i>	19	Talks Reports	40
Family History : Then & Now		Recent Research Enquiries	50
<i>By Anne Kirkman</i>	22	CHFHS Services & Contacts	51-2

cover photo : CHFHS 1976-2026 : 50th Anniversary

© Cambs & Hunts Family History Society and its Contributors

ISSN 0309-5800



A WORD FROM YOUR CHAIRMAN



50 years of family history

From its first meeting in November 1976, our Society has developed and grown so that there are now more than 3500 recorded people who either are members of the Society, or have joined our events, or bought from our shop. I hope to see many of you at our celebration event in Huntingdon on 23 May to take part in our AGM, hear Mia Bennett's talk "Hidden in the Small Print", see the exhibition and enjoy a celebration lunch. Room capacity is limited, so please book as soon as possible. Those of you who cannot be there, can of course join both the talk and the AGM by zoom.

Society 50th anniversary publication

Over the coming months we will be putting together a publication about the Society highlighting the past 50 years. We welcome contributions from members about their memories, significant events or anything else that you feel should be included in the booklet. These should be sent to me chairman@chfhs.org.uk before the 30 June please. Each member including those living overseas, will receive a posted printed copy, so please make sure your address is accurate.

I thought I would use this column to reflect on some aspects of the past 50 years.

Major advances—

Huge growth in online content. 50 years ago, we went to parish churches or county archives repositories to access original documents. If we were "lucky", we could see copies on microfilm, winding the film back and forth to the hoped for information we wanted to find out. Fiche was more flexible, as it could be moved in various ways, but we relied on the quality of equipment as well as the readability of images themselves. Now, we can work from home, accessing millions of records to develop our knowledge and family trees.

Advanced searching. We can now use a range of search strategies that

allow us to consider alternative spelling, transcription errors, different databases so that we can make judgements about what we have found and how well this fits our family. I well remember winding through a series of library microfilms of Canterbury to find my third great grandfather in 1851 I considered myself fortunate to find the entry after about three hours study but was very aware I might not be successful. Thousands of leads to consider now appear on our screen in microseconds.

Image enhancing. We can now change size, enhance sharpness, zoom in on parts of the picture, save the results, and share with others. A great contrast to photocopiers and the uncertain quality of film or fiche printers.

Seeing the work of others. The growth of family history to become one of the most widely taken up leisure interests means that we can make contact easily with both near and distant relatives living overseas or near to us. We can give them access to what we know, learn from their work and move forward together. The number of social media exchanges taking place could not have been predicted or foreseen 50 years ago.

Health benefits. It is now recognised but not widely publicised that family history has significant health benefits including research stimulating the brain and the social interaction with others. Linked to this, DNA testing plays a key role in identifying health risks but can also find lead to finding cousins.

Not always for the better—

Family gatherings. Christmas, birthday, weddings and other events were opportunities to meet as an extended family; many lived quite near each other, and the swapping of family stories was part of the ritual. My mother's grandmother was the centre of our family, and her seven children provided a huge circle of people of all ages, seating at a series of temporary tables as many of the family as possible. I am writing this in Bulgaria where our grandson now lives, so meetings have to be planned and scheduled to fit round all other commitments.

Handling original records. The thrill of opening a parish register, looking at centuries old mentions of our ancestors and thinking about their life, has now been replaced by working from online images or even transcripts of varying degrees of accuracy. Remote access, advances in conservation, and recognition of the unique importance of sources all contribute to their long-term survival for future generations.

Copying from others. As more family trees are published and shared, it is easy to accept what others have done without any checking, and obvious

that many people do this – who can get the most people in their family tree? Despite this, other family members will have different perspectives, and may have robust knowledge unknown to you. Examples will include tracking migration over time, different family photos.

Lack of response. Letters sent through the post usually elicited a response within a reasonable timescale. Online requests offering to share previously unknown content however carefully worded are often not answered; this is partly because it is easy to contact a wide number of people, but indifference, time, failing to check mail regularly all play a part.

The thrill of detection. Searching now determines the way we receive leads and the serendipity factor from browsing such things as library shelves is much less possible.

In summary

Despite the decline of many traditional opportunities, the range of approaches and sources we can now use to explore and document our family history has grown exponentially since 1976. In 2026, the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) will give us new ways of looking at evidence, as well as new ways of making mistakes. The balance between personal privacy and the benefits of sharing without which there would be no family historians is something else to watch. Advances in ancient DNA will continue and enable us to take our family history even further back.

The next 50 years will be worth keeping a close eye on, as have the past 50.

Society reserves, future projects

The Society has significant reserves that we will allocate to future projects. I would welcome suggestions and ideas for future work, so we can follow these up. Please email me chairman@chfhs.org.uk.

David Copsey

The Society offers condolences to the family of :
Margery YOUNG, Chair of March Branch

*An appreciation of Margery's contribution to the Society
will appear in the next issue*

*Save The Day
Sat 23 May*



CHFHS
1976-2026

AGM 2026 Huntingdon Library

Exhibition of documents by Hunts Archives : 10.30-12.00

AGM : 12.15-12.45

Buffet Lunch & Celebration Cake : 12.45-14.00

Talk by Mia Bennett : 14.00-15.30

‘Hidden in the Small Print’ by Mia Bennett

Discover how little details can reveal the answer to your problems.

*This talk looks at where additional information may be hidden
within documents that you have already viewed.*

*It takes you through different ways of
examining and viewing records to get more from them.*

Often it is these small clues that can help break through brickwalls.

Both the AGM and the talk will be broadcast on Zoom. We need to be quorate for any decisions to be ratified, so please do try to attend either at Huntingdon or on Zoom. However, we are limited to 50 guests at the Library so booking will be essential for those that wish to attend in person on a first come, first served basis.

**Bookings for zoom and separately for attendance at
Huntingdon Library are open on the website.**

**Please email secretary@chfhs.org.uk if you wish to
attend in person.**

**Confirmation of in-person attendance will be required
so that lunch and refreshments can be ordered.**

**Cambridgeshire & Huntingdonshire
Family History Society
AGM 2026**

Saturday 23 May 2026 at 12.15pm

@ Huntingdon Library & Archives, & By Zoom

AGENDA

- 1) Apologies for absence
- 2) Acknowledgement of member organisation representatives
- 3) Minutes of the Live / Virtual AGM held on 17 May 2025
- 4) The Chairman's Report
- 5) Financial Report for 2025
- 6) Election of the President
- 7) Election of the Officers and other members of the Executive Committee (Trustees)
- 8) The appointment of an Independent Examiner of the Charity's Accounts for the forthcoming year in accordance with clause M3
- 9) Annual Subscription
- 10) Discussion and decisions on any submitted motions (Motions for submission to the AGM shall be in the hands of the Secretary at least fourteen clear days before the Meeting, not counting the day of the Meeting)
- 11) Any other business, at the discretion of the Chairman

GETTING THERE :

Huntingdon Library & Archives, Princes Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3PA
See map on back cover (OpenStreetMap)

PARKING :

<https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/streets-parking/parking/car-park-locations-and-information> (or consider using P&R from St Ives/Longstanton)
Mill Common 'Long Stay' is just across the road : see map on the back cover

GUIDED BUS (The Busway) :

thebusway.info/routes-times.shtml

Route B from Cambridge—calling at both St Ives and Longstanton P&R sites
Route T1 from Cambridge—calls at Longstanton P&R (quicker than the "B")

**CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND HUNTINGDONSHIRE
FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY**
Draft Minutes of the Annual General Meeting (hybrid meeting)
Saturday 17 May 2025 at 1.15pm
Cambridgeshire Archives, Ely

David Copsey introduced our President, Elizabeth Stazicker who took the Chair and welcomed all to the meeting. 20 joined by Zoom and 25 in person

Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Margery Young, Carol Noble, Ian Stephenson, Wendy Siddles, Terry Garner, Graham Webster, Meegan Ferguson, Jane Gilmour, Louise Smith, Fiona Knight, Pearl Townsend

Acknowledgements of member organisation representatives.

John Bownass Huntingdon Branch, David Edwards March Branch, Littleport Society

Minutes of the AGM held on 11 May 2024 via Zoom and at

Cambridgeshire Archives

The Minutes of the 2024 AGM had been placed on the members only section of the website and advertised in the last Journal. Their acceptance as a true record was proposed by Pam Dowell seconded by John Bownass and agreed. There were no matters arising.

Chair's report

The Chair's report as published on the members only section of the website was read out by the Chair. A brief summary of the main points follows:

An overview of the Society's activities including monitoring changing national and sector developments; and a thank you to all, particularly project volunteers and committee members.

Exhibitions & Shows: The St Ives show in April last year was a great success and it is hoped to run another one in 2026; During 2024 the Society had stands at local events in Steeple Morden, Huntingdon & Cottenham and the Suffolk FHS Fair in Ipswich

Meetings & Research Surgeries: From December 2024 Zoom meetings have been reduced to one each month and can be booked on the website. Furthermore, an email to all those consenting to receive such communications is sent a link 48 hours prior to any meetings. Members should check and can update their preferences on the website to ensure that they receive email notifications about all Society activities, <https://>

www.chfhs.org.uk/your-account?section=profile. Most meetings are recorded with the consent of the speaker and may be available for a limited time only. Research surgeries are held at Cambridge, Ely, St Ives, March, Bar Hill with the Huntingdon meeting being replaced by one in St Neots from January 2025. These research surgeries are not recorded, so attendance needs to be in person. On line research surgeries are held monthly – see website for dates and times; each has a local focus, is held twice, but is not recorded.

Much of the website is working really well and we are working with Beachshore to ensure full functionality of the Name & Place function.

Membership numbers remain healthy. Members who have not updated their standing orders will now receive an e-Journal if an email address has been provided but where no email address is registered the membership will be suspended. No changes will be made to Membership rates for 2025. Mentoring for new members is being offered. Our Membership Secretary for the past 7 years, Joan Bennett is standing down and has been replaced by Sue Asbee.

Further member visits and tours of the Cambridge University Library and Cambridgeshire Archives took place in the Autumn.

Partnership work: The cataloguing of the Manchester Papers is continuing; It is hoped the Ancestry/Archives/Society project to digitise the Parish Registers will launch later in 2025.

Following an approach from the Society, all Cambridgeshire Libraries are now part of the Family Search Affiliate Libraries and public library members can now access a large number of original images but only of the library computers;

University Library: a number of projects are being undertaken including the Spinning House records work on the Consistory Court papers.

Donations were made to 14 local Museums.

Continuing links with the County Library Service include using venues for surgeries and talks

Projects: An initial meeting to make Fenland District Council Cemetery burial records more accessible has been deferred due to the need for a Council software upgrade.

.New content is being added to the Shop as it becomes available.

Jane Gilmour has been made a life member in recognition of her past involvement with the Society.

The report acceptance was proposed by David Edwards and seconded by Lisa Constanti and agreed.

Financial Report

The Treasurer summarised the main items of income and expenditure.

The 2024 accounts are available on the members only section of the website and have been examined and checked by Peter Rasberry of Clenshaw Minns. Their acceptance was proposed by Gill Shapland and seconded by John Nicholas and agreed.

Election of President

Elizabeth Stazicker agreed to continue as our President; proposed by Les Potts, seconded by Mary Naylor and agreed.

Election of Officers

The list of officers of the Society is on the members only section of the website and all officers have agreed to stand for a further year in their respective roles including those of Branch representatives. There had been no other nominations. Acceptance proposed by Max Stone, seconded by Bruce Frost and agreed.

Appointment of Independent Examiner of the Charity's accounts of the forthcoming year in accordance with clause M3.

It was proposed by John Bownass, seconded by Max Stone and agreed that Peter Rasberry of Clenshaw Minns should continue in the role of Independent Examiner.

Annual Subscriptions

No change. Proposed by Sandra Beasley, seconded by Sue Day and agreed.

Constitution

No change.

Submitted Motions.

None received.

Any other business.

John Bownass requested that in future years a longer period be allowed between the talk and the AGM. The President thanked the Archives staff for hosting the meeting; preparing the venue; putting on a comprehensive display including a list of all documents that the Society had purchased or donated to the Archives department; and giving up their Saturday to attend.

The meeting was closed at 1.45pm.

Cambridgeshire & Huntingdonshire Family History Society

Chairman's Report 2025/2026

1 Overview

2026 is the 50th anniversary of the Society. The first meeting took place in November 1976, and the first journal was published in February 1977. Throughout the past 50 years, the Society has evolved and continues to be a significant influence on the family history community. We regularly monitor changing national and sector developments in the light of our overall aims, as set out in our constitution, linked from the front page of our website. Again, I must thank you all, and particularly our project volunteers and our committee members, all of whom have a key role in ensuring that the Society continues to be seen as a leading organisation in family history. The Society does not employ any staff, so the huge amount of time, energy, expertise and hard work that our volunteers all give deserves public recognition. This year, the time gap between the speaker's talk and the AGM itself has been increased to ensure technical continuity and access both in the room and remotely. I have used the same headings for my report as in previous years although the order has been changed.

2 Meetings and Surgeries

The monthly afternoon face to face meetings in March library and the online meetings on Wednesday evenings continue to provide opportunities to learn from speakers and to meet other members. The online talks are recorded with the agreement of the speaker and then added to the members' section of the website for those unable to attend, and for future reference, although sometimes for a limited period only. Attendance averages around 30 people each month, but publicity of the July talk in the Lost Cousins Newsletter resulted in an attendance of more than 120. The online research surgeries focussing on a specific local Poor Law Union are well attended and the range of questions asked, and the ensuing discussion encourage sharing of local knowledge, information and stories. Monthly surgeries at Cottenham, Ely, March, St Ives and St Neots provide the chance to bring questions and to find answers to family research. Between all these meetings, members and non-members can ask our team of researchers for help. Many of these questions involve significant time and research skills to try to track down the information asked for. The Cambridge surgery has not had good attendance for some time, so from January 2026 it has been replaced by the opportunity to make an appointment.

All these events can lead to new members joining the Society, and to donations to further Society work.

3 Exhibitions and shows

The Society attends family history exhibitions and events in local communities. During the past year, we have had a stand at many venues including Denny Abbey, Houghton and Wyton, Huntingdon, Ipswich, Meldreth and St. Neots. All these events need a considerable amount of work to prepare, provide a staff rota, answer questions and liaise with others attending, but they are all well appreciated by members of the public, many of whom may not be aware of the Society.

I am writing this before the second regional Really Useful Show at St. Ives on April 18th organised by the East Anglian Group of the Family History Federation. Members of our committee notably our Publicity Officer and Secretary have led the enormous volume of work that goes into holding a successful fair with exhibitors and people attending from across the region and further afield. The last fair, the first after Covid, was a great success and I feel sure this will be too. More than 80 tables have been booked. Our Treasurer ensures that all the finances of this event are managed.

4 Partnership work

In July 2025, the long-awaited publication of all the parish register images for Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire held in the two archives offices at Ely and Huntingdon alongside Society transcripts of these registers went live on the Ancestry website. We receive regular payments from Ancestry as does the Archives service and are looking at the impact this has on our membership. Seeing the original image allows researchers to decide for themselves the significance and content of the original entry as well as publicising both the Archives and Society. We are currently looking at adding new content to the Find My Past website, from whom we also receive regular payments for the content we have previously provided.

The images from the three Spinning House volumes at the University Library are now freely available worldwide on the Cambridge Digital Library website, paid for by the Society. Our volunteers are currently working on creating a catalogue entry index to more than 1800 entries, first brought to our attention by a Society talk from one of our members in 2024, and the Projects Officer took part in a radio interview publicising what the Society is doing. Members attended a guided tour of the Curious Cures exhibition in the Library led by the exhibition curator. This provided a great insight into the medical issues for our ancestors in the medieval period. Free membership of the University Library continues to be available for Society members.

The Archives service are continuing work to provide a catalogue of the Duke of Manchester papers in their collection, an article in our journal shows the progress and the impact of this work. The Society pays for an additional

member of staff for one day each week so this major gap in the Archives catalogue can be addressed. We monitor ebay and bid for important documents to be added to the Archives collection. Recent successful bids have added a handwritten census, land ownership and boundaries document for Elm parish, and early deeds for the Falcon Inn in Cambridge. The cataloguing of the large volume of Evans and Co solicitors' records is continuing; a spreadsheet of records indexed to date covering a large number of names has been added to the Society website; on completion, the full listing will be included in the County Archives catalogue.

The Library Service decided not to renew its subscription to Find My Past for financial reasons, and just to continue with Ancestry. This has an impact on our surgeries most of which are based in libraries, so the Society will now pay for this. As I write, this, the BACS transfer has just been made, so the availability should resume very soon. All libraries in the County continue to be Family Search Affiliate Libraries, allowing much fuller access to Family Search content than can be accessed from home.

5 Website

Regular meetings continue between committee members and Beachshore who host the Society website. Contiguous parish maps and lists have been enhanced, including those over the county border. Additional content includes new parish registers transcriptions, historical directories, church images, document and artefact retention guidance, and a clarification of the expenses claims procedure. The website remains a key part of Society business – future events, bookings, past recorded talks, policies, sales, journals and newsletters, membership management, committee and AGM papers. The website includes several million names in searchable databases. It is hoped that the online templates for Wismus to progress and the import function for Name and Place will soon be ready.

6 Membership

During the year, Chris Norton took over from Sue Asbee as Membership Secretary, in addition to his shop responsibilities. The statistics of new members joining show that membership remains healthy. Some new members are taking advantage of the offer of free mentoring by a member of the committee. Facebook and other social media platforms encourage people to join the Society and are a valuable source for reaching large numbers and highlighting new developments. There are still a few members whose standing order payments are for outdated amounts. After several reminders, their membership is changed to e-journal or reading just the newsletters on our website where we do not have an e-mail address. We are not proposing any change to membership rates.

7 Projects

Several attempts have been made to arrange a meeting with Fenland District Council to discuss photographing the burial records for seven cemeteries and creating searchable transcripts for both the Council and our members. This would be a significant project for encouraging people to visit the area, to increase heritage awareness, and the Society would make a significant donation to the Council. The Society would undertake all the work. Despite contacting several people, lack of response means that it has not been possible to arrange this meeting.

Photographing further records at the Huntingdon Record Office allows more work to be undertaken, records transcribed and added to our website. Many of these records are not part of the Ancestry content.

8 Accounts and Independent Examiner for 2026

Our Treasurer has prepared the 2025 accounts, and these are independently examined by Peter Rasberry from Clenshaw Minns. We are proposing that Peter continues as our independent examiner for 2026.

9 Honorary Life Memberships

We have about 20 HLM's in recognition of the significant and long last lasting work that they have done for the Society. We are proposing that Joan Bennett is made an Honorary Life Member, she spent more than seven years in the important post of membership secretary.

10 Committee nominations

Each of our committee members has a key role in Society work and has confirmed their willingness to be nominated and seconded. The split between nominated and co-opted members fits the structure of our constitution, but all committee members have full voting rights. There are no changes to our constitution.

11 Five-year plan

We are still considering offering the Duke of Edinburgh awards as a family history experience and opportunity to foster an interest by young people. The five-year plan is on the website and the committee will be thinking about future work and projects at forthcoming committee meetings. We welcome suggestions and ideas to inform our decisions.

David Copsey
Chairman, March 2026

Cambridgeshire & Huntingdonshire Family History Society
Charity Number 278815

Financial Statements
for the year ended 31 December 2025

Income statement

	2025	2024
	£	£
<u>Income</u>		
Membership sales	10,974.00	11,707.00
Sales, downloads and tokens	7,974.95	8,247.24
Donations	178.50	189.50
FFHS royalty income	13,594.47	16,329.57
Miscellaneous income	-	12.24
	<u>32,721.92</u>	<u>36,485.55</u>
<u>Cost of sales</u>		
Opening stock	744.70	819.50
Bookstall purchases and expenses	-	-
Closing stock	(635.80)	(744.70)
	<u>108.90</u>	<u>74.80</u>
Gross profit	<u>32,613.02</u>	<u>36,410.75</u>
<u>Expenses</u>		
Journal printing and expenses	6,216.49	6,178.13
Printing and stationery	204.28	801.12
Postage and telephone	100.15	110.71
Website	4,383.74	6,529.56
Fairs and conferences	20.00	35.00
Hall, speakers and branch costs	1,413.01	2,080.58
C.R.O. and other donations	6,504.87	22,696.00
Accountancy	846.00	810.00
Paypal and gocardless commission	492.30	464.05
General expenses and travel	1,485.98	1,336.45
Subscriptions, donations and expenses	1,526.22	899.52
	<u>23,193.04</u>	<u>41,941.12</u>
<u>OTHER INCOME</u>		
Interest received	4,725.94	5,391.04
Investment gains/(loss)	<u>4,725.94</u>	<u>5,391.04</u>
<u>Net (loss)/profit</u>	<u>14,145.92</u>	<u>(139.33)</u>

**Financial Statements
for the year ended 31 December 2025**

Statement of financial position

	2025	2024
	£	£
<u>Current assets</u>		
Stocks	635.80	744.70
Cash at bank and in hand	136,526.62	121,111.80
	<u>137,162.42</u>	<u>121,856.50</u>
<u>Current liabilities</u>		
Trade creditors	1,160.00	-
Net current assets	<u>136,002.42</u>	<u>121,856.50</u>
<u>Capital and reserves</u>		
Brought forward at 1 January 2025	121,856.50	121,995.83
(Loss)/Profit for the year	14,145.92	(139.33)
	<u>136,002.42</u>	<u>121,856.50</u>

Forenames and few names in family history, a few pitfalls

Anyone who has dealt with older parish records will have become aware that although family surnames get passed on, with perhaps a few spelling variations over time, first names also tended to get repeated within families.

In the earlier, records the pool of commoner 'Christian' names was notably small. Throughout the Tudor period for example John (20%), William (13%), Thomas (13%) and Robert (6%) accounted for half of all boys' names. It was not quite so concentrated in girls' names but Elizabeth (14%), Ann (11%), Joan (9%), Margaret (9%) and Alice (9%) made up half of the names. An early runner Mary lost popularity in Queen Elizabeth's time, and Oliver similarly in the 17th century.

These popular names continued throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, with a few newcomers like George (after the Hanoverian kings) and Sarah becoming popular. The tendency for children to be named after parents or grandparents meant that cousins frequently had the same names (causing puzzlement for family historians). When two Williams with the same surname both married a Sarah and produced children, which same-name child is which? Also, the insistence of giving a child a particular name, coupled with the high child mortality, might cause two or three 'John's' to be baptised and buried before one survived, also confusing historians' chronologies.

REFLECTING ON 50-YEARS OF FAMILY HISTORY—2

By Cambs & Hunts FHS Editorial Team

In this, the 50th Anniversary year of the founding of the then Cambridgeshire Family History Society, it's worth taking a little time out to consciously reflect on just how far we have come in the those five decades and to appreciate the evolution of some of the resources which we perhaps now take for granted. Some of us will have been doing research for many of the intervening years, if not longer, others for a far shorter time, and all but the most recent converts will have seen great changes in the way we are able to research our family history. The longer we have been involved, the more changes we will have seen in the ways in which we are able to conduct our research—including: the ever-growing range of available records, better and easier access to them, resources to help find and use records and the adoption of technology to help widen access to, and search, records.

Second in this series is a brief overview of civil registration & censuses

As many of us will well know, the **civil registration** “system” was introduced in mid-1837 for the recording of births, deaths, and marriages (BMDs) by the state through a network of registration counties and districts. Most of us are also probably aware that, over the intervening decades, a number of changes have taken place in the names and boundaries of many districts—which the unwary researcher might find confusing or misleading

Dating from the same period, **censuses** set out to record individuals on a household basis—ie. all those dwelling together on census nights as distinct from all those in a family group (some individuals from a family may be elsewhere on the night and, therefore, should be recorded in that household).

Apart from 1841, census recording very largely followed the same districts as used by civil registration; 1841 used “hundreds” as the basis for recording. The significance of districts has perhaps been somewhat lost in modern searching—with the biggest advancement in recent years being the ability find people by name/age/birthplace/location through nation-wide databases from online providers. Manual searching prior to digitisation, largely revolved around the use of surname indexes produced by family history societies on a district-by-district basis across their respective counties, and then to use findings to home in on entries on rolls of microfilm (which would otherwise have had to be searched through browsing). District names do appear in database results, and can be useful in helping to localise results and pick up

other family in the same area (potentially useful if many hits are returned from searches).

As the population grew through the C19th and into the C20th, districts were reorganised/subdivided such that the same place or address might appear under different districts in different censuses. It's also worth remembering that owing to routes taken by enumerators, adjacent streets or even the opposite side of the same street (and therefore, perhaps, neighbouring relatives), may appear widely separated in the records.

How have some of the more significant points and subsequent changes played out across our area of Cambs and Hunts?

- registration districts (RDs) were made up of a grouping of parishes
- many districts covered the same or similar places as Poor Law Unions
- “registration” counties (groupings of registration districts) were not necessarily the same areas as “standard” counties, because—
- registration districts sometimes crossed the borders of standard counties—such as : Newmarket RD; Royston RD;
- districts’ names might be popularly associated with the neighbouring standard county, but contain a number of parishes from the other side of the boundary—such as Royston (Herts); Newmarket (Suffolk)
- Searching on just the standard county name might miss places in cross-boundary districts that are in the neighbouring county
- conversely, results listed under districts more commonly associated with the neighbouring county, might be thought of as not relevant and mistakenly discounted—eg. Barrington and Foxton in Royston RD
- significant reorganisation took place across districts at county level in 1884, 1935, 1965, 1974, 2007
- many individual places got swapped between districts at other times
- one significant anomaly in our area is the Chesterton RD—from formation in 1837 through to abolition in 1935, the district completely surrounded Cambridge RD—and can cause considerable confusion among researchers until they “get it”

All these records are now available online via a number of providers—whose search options and results formats differ slightly. It's sometimes worth playing these differences against each other to optimise the range of returns, particularly if the person sought is not found from your first choice of provider.

All the changes can be found listed at www.ukbmd.org.uk/reg/ or by following the links from district names in FreeBMD results

TERRY ON THE AIRWAVES—

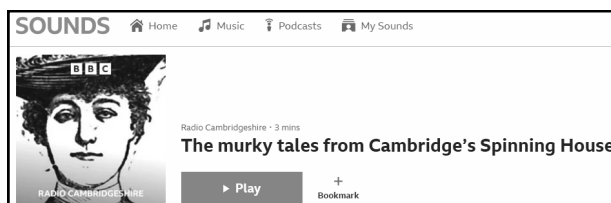
The Spinning House Project

by Editorial Team

In recent weeks, Terry, the CHFHS Projects Officer, has appeared on local radio to showcase the society's collaboration with the University Library to transcribe the registers from the 'Spinning House'.

You can listen to Terry's interview on 'BBC Sounds' via this link :

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0n5xzgc>



Why is it always the women that get punished?



There's also a follow up article on the BBC Local News Cambridgeshire website¹ which outlines the background to the project. As you may know, the society had a talk by Caroline Biggs based on her book about the 'Spinning House'² which drew on a collection of records held by the University Library³. It became evident that this collection of name-rich records, which details the some 6,000

unfortunate women whose only "crime" was to be out and about in the town of Cambridge after dark, was uncatalogued at an individual level. In collaboration with the UL, Cambs & Hunts FHS has undertaken to transcribe details of the entries in the "Committals Books".

Interestingly, the young lady depicted in the BBC's publicity (as illustrated above), Daisy Hopkins, challenged her supposed guilt and won her case. This resulted in the "system" being abolished in 1894, and the landmark case is still referred to today⁴.

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crrxzperg5ko>

² Caroline Biggs "The Spinning House" (History Press, 2024)

³ <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/spinninghouse/1>

⁴ <https://adminlaw.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/HABEAS-CORPUS-A-NEW-CHAPTER.pdf>

A BRICKWALL INADVERTENTLY SURMOUNTED

by Ian Stephenson

When I began my exploration of my family tree some ten years ago I was disappointed when I came to a brick wall. Perhaps not appreciating that when one brick wall is overcome then inevitably further brick walls will follow. But I soon came to relish the challenge they presented. Often not in overcoming the wall, but in making what sense I could of the little evidence that there was and whether apparent coincidences could provide some reasonable speculative outcome.

This story, whilst not involving characters from Cambridgeshire nor Huntingdonshire, shows what can be discovered with some curiosity, a few dollops of luck, and a bit of persistence. It concerns my 4x great-grandfather Hugh Alexander. He was born in Scotland, married in Liverpool and subsequently moved to Lancaster where he was employed as a joiner at the castle (then functioning as the prison) for over 50 years, dying in 1856 at the age of 91. He is one of a very few of that generation of my ancestors to feature in the 1851 census; where, unfortunately, as was often the case, his place of birth was just listed as Scotland. Eight years, or so, ago that brick wall looked insurmountable. At the time I put his estimated birth year into a couple of databases and came up with two possibilities in the relatively nearby county of Ayrshire. One could reasonably be disregarded, so the other stood as a speculative possibility - I was well aware of the likelihood that other Hugh Alexanders might have existed but not then, or maybe at all, be in the readily available records.

Jump forward to this year and a prospective short stay in Lancashire presenting me with an opportunity to visit Lancaster, see the castle, and some of the streets where Hugh and his wife Ellen had lived, and to see if there was anything interesting in the local studies section of the city library. A review of the documentation I had previously gathered identified six abodes relating to the couple (three streets still in existence; two since demolished yards, and a district without any street detail). But it occurred to me that their death certificates might list additional abodes and that for completeness I should get hold of them before my visit. Both death certificates had them still at the address given in the 1851 census, but also identified two informants of their deaths unrecognised by me.

The informant of Hugh's death was readily found to be the husband of his youngest daughter, but that for Ellen was a little more elusive. Fortunately,

that person being one Elizabeth Brownsword, had an unusual surname. A newspaper search found a report of her death with the fortuitous addition that she was the daughter of the late John Alexander; surely then, the explanation of her presence at Ellen's deathbed was that she was her niece, and Hugh and John were brothers. I had remembered that I had previously identified another Alexander in Lancaster, a William Alexander. My interest being raised because both Hugh and William had children baptised at the 'High Street formerly Mount Street Independent Chapel' and that William's marriage record identified his occupation as a joiner, the same as Hugh's. Could they have been brothers? Was it William's presence that drew Hugh and his family to relocate to Lancaster?

Now, a close look into both John and William identified that John's children were also baptised at the same chapel as Hugh's and William's. More importantly, John's marriage record recorded that he too was a joiner and that William was a witness to the marriage; and further, William's marriage record had John as a witness. Perhaps the clincher was the marriage bond document for William which was signed by both William and John. And at that point I had expected to leave it - Hugh, John and William were most probably brothers, but I couldn't find any reliable burial or death records for the latter two with which to further a search for their parents. The speculative Ayrshire link would remain a possibility.

However, I was intrigued by the Mount Street / High Street Independent Chapel and wanted to understand more: the implication was that it was one building and that the street name had changed at some point. Or was it that the chapel had originally been located in Mount Street and subsequently the congregation had moved to a new building in the High Street? My initial search didn't provide an answer (I later found that the street name had indeed changed). But it did provide an unusual surname associated with the early days of the chapel: the Rev Peter Samuel Charrier; so, I decided to make a newspaper search on him. That, unexpectedly, led me to an article that stated that the Rev John Alexander of Norwich had been an early pupil of the Rev Charrier. Surely, this John had to be related to my three Alexander 'brothers' of Lancaster. And so it proved to be, John was the son of William Alexander. I eventually found them together in the 1841 census, along with their wives, in North Meols, Lancashire. Although the lack of detail in that particular census can make identification difficult, I had a stroke of luck as John's wife had the fairly rare Christian name of Priscilla. Moreover, in the census record both John and William had the title of Rev. I hadn't previously seen any reference to William Alexander as a minister. I didn't realise it at the time, but that was my breakthrough.

Previously I hadn't bothered with a newspaper search on either William or John Alexander (although I had for Hugh) as both were common Christian names the number of results was just too large. But a search for 'Rev William Alexander', which I limited to Lancashire newspapers, might I thought be more promising. And so it turned out to be, for the first result (of over 8,000) was the Liverpool Albion of 1856 with an advert for the *Memoirs of Rev William Alexander* by his son John Alexander of Prince's-street Chapel, Norwich. I searched out a copy of the memoirs on the web. That small 295-page book, confirms that Hugh, John and William were indeed brothers and provided details of their parents. They had not originated from Ayrshire, but from the smaller county of Wigtownshire; that detail allowed me to find the brothers' birth and baptism records on Ancestry.

Oh, and there is an, albeit slight, link to Cambridgeshire. For, the 27 Jul 1832 Cambridge Chronicle and Journal has an advert for: *Cambridgeshire Sunday School Union. On Sunday Evening Next, July 29, 1832, a sermon will be preached at Downing Street Meeting-House, in aid of the above Society, by the Rev. John Alexander, of Norwich ...* - as noted above, John was Hugh Alexander's nephew. Its intriguing to ponder whether that sermon was heard by Robert Peters (my Cambridge 3x great-grandfather) who was a member of the Downing Street Independent Church and may well have started his ministry at the Waterbeach Baptist Church by that time¹.

¹ See article in the Summer 2021 edition of The Journal: *Robert Peters of Cambridge (1798-1880) Part 2*.

MORLEY and PLEDGER families of the Ickleton/Gt Abington area

Do you have interests in these families??

We have been given (anonymously) pedigree trees for these families

Please contact secretary@chfhs.org.uk for further details

USED PRINTER CARTRIDGES — —DONATE THEM TO CHARITY

visit the recycling website & print free postage label

www.recycle4charity.co.uk/Send-your-cartridges.aspx

FAMILY HISTORY : Then & Now

by Anne Kirkman

Reading the latest edition of the CHFHS Journal, the article Reflecting on 50 Years of Family History reminded me of my early years as a family historian when research was very different from what it is today.

My father was very interested in his forebears in Tynedale, Northumberland and as a young woman living in London in 1959 while he was in Newcastle I was soon enlisted into doing his research. As mentioned, records were very London-centric. My first task was to visit Somerset House to look for a marriage certificate. As I remember one was allowed to look through five years at a time, paying for this. However as the indexes were kept on a dark and gloomy gallery out of sight of the staff desk, I have to admit that I managed to ignore this limitation. On finding the index entry, a further 3s/9d was required to get a copy of the certificate which was delivered immediately. I must add that on the morning I spent there, I was the only researcher in the building. That certificate of marriage of my father's great grandparents paved the way to compiling an extensive tree of my father's side of my family, and led to my lifelong interest in family history.

The next step was a series of visits to the Record Office in Chancery Lane where the census returns from 1841 to 1861 were kept. Here one had to put in a request for the census required, and after what was probably about 15 minutes wait but seemed longer it was produced by one of a number of cross elderly women employed to chase up the records which were housed somewhere underground. The BMD records moved over the years from Somerset House to Kingsway and then to a building in Clerkenwell, and finally to the GRO, but I enjoyed the physical contact with the indexes, and the fight for access to a slope on which to consult them, as by then the interest in family history had increased enormously. The Census records of course finally came to rest in the National Archive at Kew.

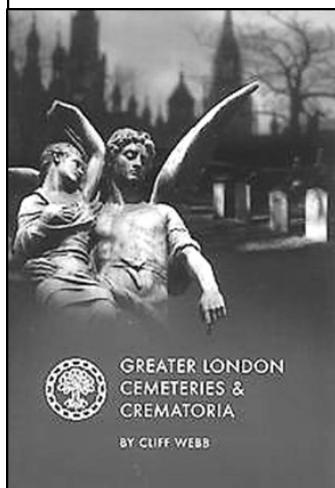
Before the arrival of PCs many more visits to various locations were needed. When I settled in Cambridgeshire in 1968, parish incumbents still received a number of requests for help from researchers. Our own rector in Willingham was totally uninterested and when he discovered my hobby was only too pleased to hand these over to me. This led in two cases to prolonged contacts with Australian family historians, one of whom became a good friend that I was able to visit in Queensland much later on.

When my neighbours in Willingham discovered my interest I was asked several times to do research for them. You must realise that in the 1970s many parish records were not housed in local record offices, but were kept more or less securely in the Church or vicarage. I believe incumbents were obliged to let researchers have access to them, but this was interpreted in different ways. My own experience locally ranged from sitting in an icy and ill lit church being watched like a hawk by a church official, to a cosy session in a vicarage kitchen where the vicar served me coffee and complained at length about his problems with his newly adult son.

Happily some experiences have stayed the same in the last sixty-five years. There's nothing beats kneeling in a damp graveyard to successfully decipher a memorial inscription, followed by lunch at the pub next door.

Lastly but not least I'd like to sing the praises of the staff of local Record Offices. In all my years visiting Record Offices from Orkney to Hampshire I've never come across anyone who was not friendly, helpful and well informed.

We often get enquiries about finding burials in the London area—this booklet by Cliff Webb, from the Society of Genealogists, may help you ...



The seventh edition of this valuable book lists the cemeteries and crematoria of London with their addresses, including websites where available, and the location and date range of their burial registers.

Locating the burial place of a nineteenth-century resident of the Greater London area is far from an easy task. While many burials continued in the local churchyards of the outer London parishes, burials in the inner London churchyards or burial grounds were discontinued at various dates in the 1850's and no parish burial registers were maintained thereafter. Subsequently most burials for inner London took place further away, at non-denominational cemeteries established by either commercial companies or local government bodies.

£5-99 from <https://www.familyhistorybooksonline.com/>

THE 1871 CAMBRIDGE BIGAMY CASE —

an obscure genealogical connection

By Ian Stephenson

Occasional I come across obscure connections in my family tree with people who were known of in their place and time. This is one which I thought I would share with readers of The Journal. In the Winter 2021 edition I told the story of the 1871 Cambridge Bigamy Case, the subject of which was John Bewley who was born in Ireland in 1837; Bewley was convicted of fraud and bigamy, spent time in jail then disappeared. At the time, my interest in the case was due to my 3x great uncle, Ebenezer Peters, being the Cambridge Registrar of Marriages. He had officiated at Bewley's bigamous marriage, been instrumental in his later apprehension and had initiated the court proceedings against him.

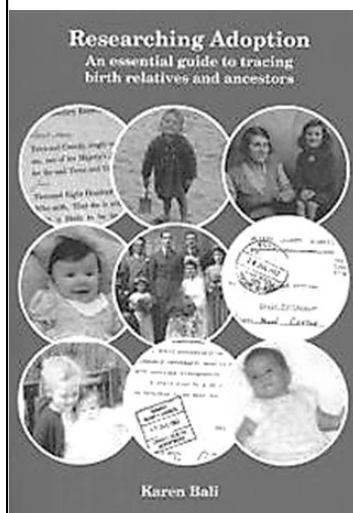
Now, a few years after writing that article, I was seeking (successfully) to verify a DNA match which culminated in shared 5x great-grandparent ancestors of Cumberland origins. That showed a John Bewley Holliday to be my second cousin four times removed; he was born in 1839 in the parish of Holme Cultram, on the north-west coast of Cumberland. His father, Jeremiah Holliday, remained unmarried for his whole life and John Bewley Holliday was his illegitimate son. The relationship was recognised in Jeremiah's will where John Bewley Holliday was recorded as his adopted son. The Bewley name was vaguely familiar and I eventually realised that I knew it from the Bigamy Case; I also remembered that John Bewley of that case was of Cumberland origins. Bewley was not, I thought, a particularly common name; could there be a connection ?

Fortunately, tracing back both Bewley lines was straightforward. Starting with bigamist John Bewley, his father, another John, had been serving in the army in Ireland when the son was born. The 1851 census for Penrith shows John senior pensioned from the army and born in Carlisle circa 1803 and his army service record gave his birth parish there as St Cuthbert. That led to his baptismal record giving John junior's paternal grandparents as George Bewley and Jane Bowman, who married in 1803. George lived a long life with 1851 and 1861 censuses giving his birth circa 1782 in Holme Cultram (referenced above). George's baptism in Holme Cultram is recorded in 1784, but notes that his birth was in 1782; his parents were George and Eleanor Bewley. Returning to John Bewley Holliday, and also investigating

the 1851 census, he is found living with his maternal grandfather, John Bewley. The census records this John Bewley as born circa 1787 at Abbey Holm, a principal settlement within Holme Cultram parish; baptism records give his parents as George and Mary Bewley. It seems that John Bewley's and John Bewley Holliday's grandfathers were born five years apart with the same father, George, but the former to his first wife, Eleanor, and the latter to his second wife, Mary. Thus bigamist John Bewley and John Bewley Holliday were half-second cousins.

That makes John Bewley the half second cousin of my second cousin four times removed. At the time of the 1871 trial there was not even a remote connection between Ebenezer Peters and Bewley, that would only come five decades later with the marriage of Ebenezer's great nephew (my maternal grandfather) joining together the two family trees. Thus to Ebenezer Peters, John Bewley is the half second cousin of the second cousin twice removed of the wife of his great nephew - a convoluted connection, but a connection, nonetheless.

We often get enquiries about tracing birth parents and siblings—this booklet by Karen Bali from the FamilyHistoryFederation is ...



“... an essential guide to tracing birth relatives and ancestors”.

This is a guide for anyone who wants to research an adoption in the family. If you were adopted, adoption rules to someone in your family or an ancestor was adopted, this guide can help. It examines methods resources for researching family mysteries deep in the past plus ideas, advice and guidance for linking up with birth relatives. Packed with useful information, Researching Adoption is a must for anyone who wants to discover where they came from and more about their genetic heritage. .

“A short, concise, but packed book of information, this is well worth adding to the family history library.” Chris Paton, The British GENES blog.

A5, 48 pages, ISBN 978-1-906280-52-9

£4.95 from <https://www.familyhistorybooksonline.com/>

EAST ANGLIA ‘REALLY USEFUL’ FAMILY HISTORY FAIR SAT 18 APRIL @ ST IVES

With the support of the Family History Federation, the East Anglia Group hosted a second Family History Fair at The Burgess Hall in St Ives. Some 45 societies and organisations from across the region as well as further afield, took part. We welcomed over 500 visitors—some of whom also travelled considerable distances—demonstrated the interest out there in attending “live” events in the areas where ancestors were based. The ticketed talk by Donna Rutherford on DNA was very well attended, and the Q&A Panel session proved to be equally popular (see p.28). Some 200 prize draw forms were returned.

The CHFHS Editorial Team spoke to a number of exhibitors, stallholders and visitors about their day—all were very excited about the event and pleased to have the opportunity to be there. A special thanks go to the organising committee drawn from societies across the EA Region, as well as to the helpers-on-the day, for all the effort they have put in to making an event for everyone to enjoy; and, also to the Burgess Hall staff for facilitating a great venue. www.my-history.co.uk were unable to attend but supplied catalogues of the products they carry, and a box of large tree charts, to give away..





Families In British India Society

Fenland Family History Society



Peterborough & District Family History Society

Northamptonshire Family History Society



Getting Started With 'DNA' by Donna Rutherford

Internationally renowned expert, Donna Rutherford (pictured with CHFHS Chair, David Copsey) gave an insightful overview on using DNA testing alongside the paper trail in research. Topics included : what DNA is; pros and cons of different types of tests and providers; how DNA passes and recombines between generations; and, the basic technique for interpreting results by understanding matches, clusters, centimorgans, genetic origins/journeys; and how to begin to start estimating relationships, and perhaps break down brickwalls or find foundlings' families.



Visit Donna's website for the handout, and additional information and guides donnarutherford.com and facebook.com/groups/AncestryUKDNA

Free Resources and Q & A Forum

A panel of experts from the region (L-R : Donna Rutherford, Jim Lees, Dianne Sutton, Lisa Constanti, Angela Malin) presented some broad ideas for "free" sources and resources, including :

- use library access to Ancestry/FindMyPast
- FHSs & local history or heritage societies
- museums & local studies libraries
- Family History Federation guides
- CyndisList / GenUKI
- FreeBMD, FreeCEN, FreeREG



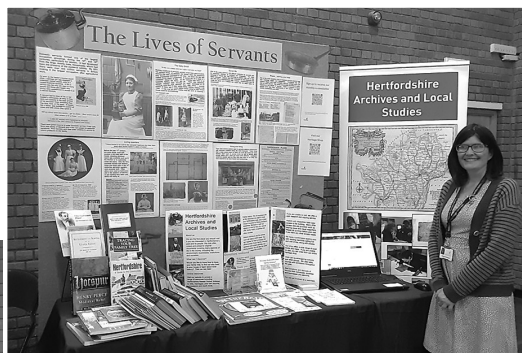
Questions from the audience on a variety of topics, which included :

- *tracing an adoptee born in Ireland*
(a tangent to this topic was that the 1926 Irish Census went live today!!)
- *an explanation of "search angles" in connection to tracing birth families*
- *researching workhouse records in south London area*
- *how to claim war medals and replacing ribbons*
- *some ideas to help find more about a man "b.West Indies" in mid C19th*
- *some thoughts on how AI could feature in family history research*

Herts Archives & Local Studies



Cambridgeshire Archives



Pharos Tutors

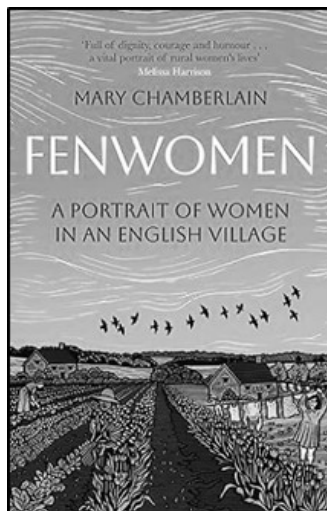


Family History Federation



R A Longley Publications & Genealogical Supplies





Fen Women

by Mary Chamberlain

50th anniversary edition of this modern classic, with a new introduction

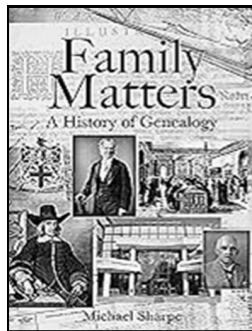
"Full of dignity, courage and humour, and as fresh and insightful as the day it was written, FENWOMEN is a vital portrait of rural women's lives - not only as they were lived in the 1970s in one Cambridgeshire village, but in the generations before it, all over the country, and reaching forward into today's world, too"
MELISSA HARRISON

REVIEW FROM WELL-KNOWN ONLINE BOOK SELLER :

Mary Coe recalls summers spent gleaning in the fields, laudanum-soothed babies strapped to their mothers' backs. Ann Sharman, married and pregnant at seventeen, imagines another life outside the village. Eighty-six-year-old Sybil Hayhoe looks back with pride at her years in service, while the village postwoman is sharply aware of her unequal wages. Girls aspire to be housewives, hairdressers or nurses - except Fiona, who dreams of training horses.

Told through the voices of ordinary women, Mary Chamberlain's portrait of an isolated village in the Cambridgeshire Fens remains as vital and thought-provoking as on its ground breaking publication in 1975. A feminist answer to Ronald Blythe's *Akenfield*, it vividly captures the rhythms, hopes and tensions of women's lives in a working-class rural community, and offers a unique snapshot of an almost-vanished England.

'Fenwomen is a fascinating insight into 20th-century rural life' *The Times*



"Family Matters : a history of genealogy"
by Michael Sharpe (Pen & Sword, 2020)

An insightful account and timeline of the evolution of genealogy/family history, and a fascinating read against which to set the story of Cambs & Hunts FHS.

AMBROSE PURCHAS —

16th Century Brewer of Cambridge & His Descendants [pt 1]

By Fiona Ligonnet

At present, the history of my North Yorkshire Purchas family starts with Ambrose Purchas, burgess and brewer of Cambridge, although it should be possible to delve further back in the 16th and perhaps 15th centuries. Just in the last year additional dates have emerged from the Saffron Walden and Thaxted (Essex) parish registers.

The spelling of the name has evolved over the years and in Ambrose's time is often spelt Purkiss or Purkys, and all the variations need to be used when searching through the records. There are several families of Purchas recorded in and around Cambridge, Thaxted and East Anglia

Ambrose (I) was born c1535 and died late in 1595, since his will¹ was probated on 19.01.1596. We do not know the maiden name of Alice, his first wife, only that she was buried at Saffron Walden, '*Alice Pancrase wife of Ambrose Pancrase buried*' on 10.01.1585. He married secondly, a widow Helen (Ellen) Gybb and the four sons of her first marriage, Jeremy, John, George and Adam, are mentioned in Ambrose's will.

By this first marriage to Alice, there were six sons, Thomas (I) baptised 1574 at St John Thaxted. William 1575, Henry 1577, John 1580, Philip 1582 and Ambrose (II) 1583 were all baptised at St Mary the Virgin, Saffron Walden. Thomas survives and is well documented as Mayor and MP for Cambridge. William, Henry and Philip are all mentioned in their father's will of 1595; John must therefore have died before 1595. William's own will of 1634 survives. The son named Ambrose listed as a minor in his father's will, is presumably the child born in 1583.

By Ambrose (I)'s second marriage to Helen Gybb, widow on 10.05.1585 at St Clement's, Cambridge, there are two known children, Edward baptised on 12.4.1586 and Mabel on 25.8.1588 both at St Clement's. Edward married Ann Thornton on 28.7.1611 at St Giles, Cambridge and she died after 1663 since she is mentioned in the will of Elizabeth Barnes her half-sister-in-law. They had four children all baptised at St Clement's. Mabel married Jas. Myton on 14.4.1611 at St Clement's and had 9 children of whom at least 4 survived as they are mentioned in the 1638 will of her half-brother Alderman

Thomas (I) Purchas MP, *'Jas. Myton all he owes me, Mabel wife of Jas Myton £10'* and the 4 children of Mabel 50 shillings each.

There is an Ambrose Purkish son of Ambrose of Cambridge brewer, who was apprenticed to a London Brewer in 1611. If this was Ambrose (II) then he would have been aged 28 years at the date of his apprenticeship which would be very old. *"Over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries apprentices in London became younger - the age they started fell from nearly eighteen in 1600 to 15.5yrs in 1800"*². Very late apprenticeships in other livery companies are recorded³ although not by the Brewer's Company. Given the very complete baptism records that exist for the children of Ambrose (I)) it is unlikely that there was a second son named Ambrose. He would have had to be born in or later than 1589, but before the 1596 date of his father's probate. However, in over 100 years of researching this Purchas family of Cambridge, records for only two and not three Ambrose Purchas' have been found.

For the present we are unable to unravel the connection between the Ambrose (II) born in 1583 and the Ambrose listed in the register⁴ of the Worshipful Company of Brewers, London as *'Purkish Ambrose, son of Ambrose Cambridge, Cam Brewer to Philip Allford 21 May 1611'*. No record exists of this apprenticeship being completed. Apprenticeships were actually quite flexible at this period with fewer than 50%⁵ of private apprenticeships being completed. Although it seems unlikely that there were three Brewers in Cambridge at this time, all named Ambrose we have no evidence to identify the Ambrose apprenticed to the Swanne Brewery in London in 1611.

In the Annals of Cambridge⁶ there is reference to Ambrose (I) as one of the two Treasurers of the Town with a list of their disbursements for the year to Michaelmas 1594. This included payments to *'the Lord Chamberlyn's players, a present gyven to the Earle of Essex, and for carryenge away of dunge in dyvers places, when the Lords were here at lent commencement'*. These accounts were submitted by his widow and executrix, Ellen (Helen) since both he and his fellow Treasurer William Styth, had died in that year. Interestingly the Lord Chamberlyn's Players played almost continuously in London between 1594 and 1603 unless an outbreak of the plague forced them to go touring⁷. They were the most important company of actors in Elizabethan and Jacobean England for whom Shakespeare wrote many of his plays.

Ambrose (II) is described as a brewer, and his marriage to Mary Swanne on 8 October 1615 recorded at St Clement's. They had two daughters, Mabell

baptized 25.10.1618, buried two days later, and Lydia baptized 30 December 1621 Lydia married Isaac Cox on 26.11.1646 dying just 3 years later in 1649 following the birth of her son Isaac. She had received an inheritance of £6.13.14 under the will of her uncle Alderman Thomas (I) Purchas MP. Ambrose (II) next appears in the records living in the Parish of St Giles where he was buried on 21 August 1631 and his will⁸ probated 13 September 1631.

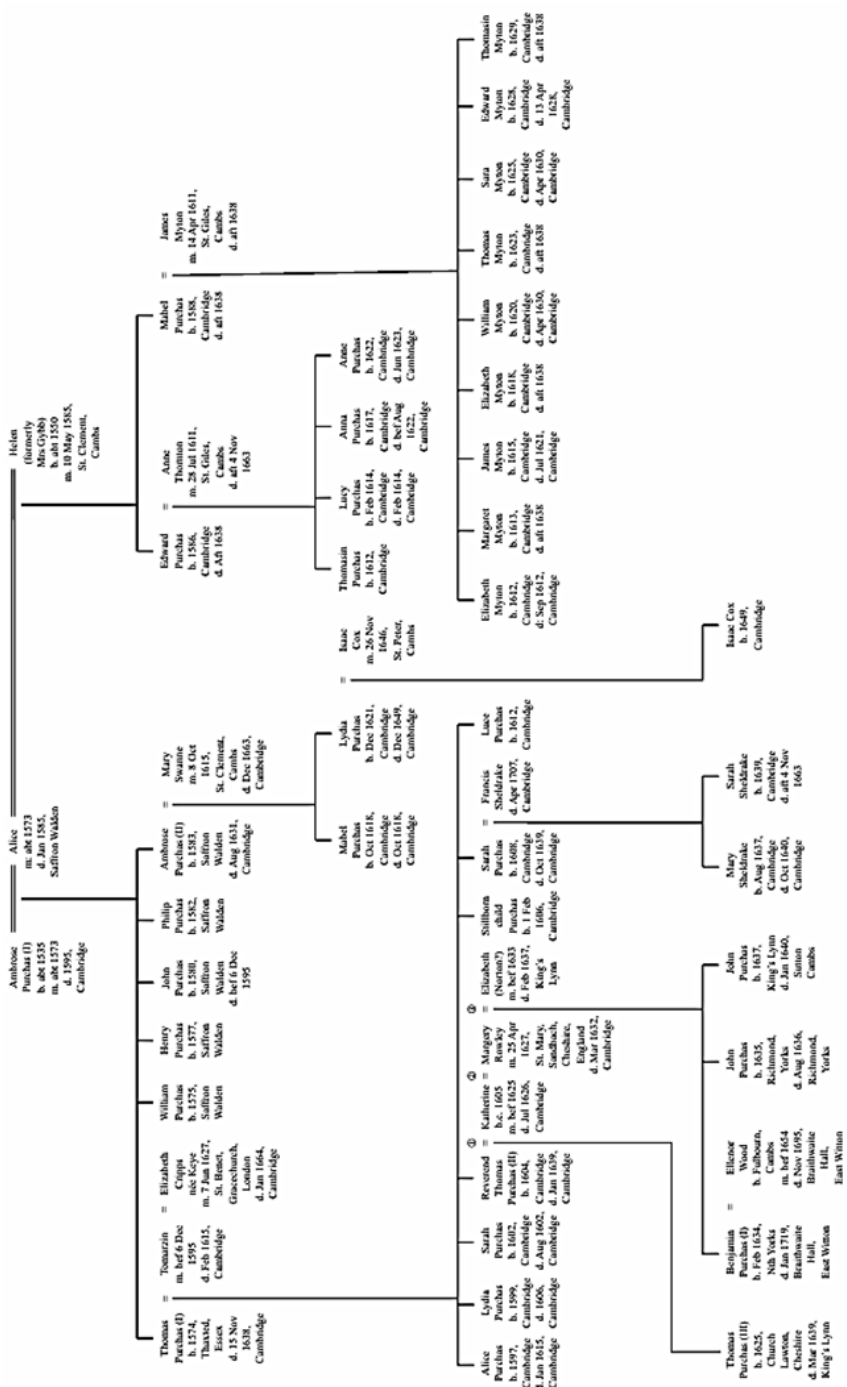
At this period the Brewers Company would have had regulatory control over brewing and brewers and the price of ale/beer. Their jurisdiction only covered London and there is reference to Ambrose son of Ambrose of Cambridge only because he was apprenticed in May 1611 to a London Brewer, Philip Allford, joint owner of the Swann Brewery in Whitechapel. Philip Allford had died by 1614, when his widow remarried, so the apprenticeship may have continued under his widow or been cut short. The brewery must have been of some importance since his successor Samuel Cranmer⁹, who had married his widow Margaret, went on to acquire estates in Warwickshire and Buckinghamshire and was appointed a Sheriff of London and Middlesex.

Hops were introduced into English ale/beer making of the first time in the early 1500s and this had a radical effect on ale production. The hop had been introduced by Flemish immigrants. Ale was very low in alcohol and drunk even by children since water was often brackish and bad tasting. *‘in 1590 each man in England had a daily ration of a¹⁰ gallon of beer’*. With the introduction of hops into beer making the strength increased, beer could be kept fresh longer and the profit for brewers went up and the number of breweries too. In 1564 Norwich had¹¹ *‘5 common ale breweries and 9 common beer breweries’*.

At this period breweries and brewing in Cambridge came under the jurisdiction of the University¹² and there may be mention of Ambrose (I) and his son Ambrose in the records of the Vice-Chancellor's Court. Ambrose (I) must have had an important role in Cambridge being a Burgess and elected a Treasurer in 1594. His eldest son Thomas (I) followed him as Treasurer in 1607 and was Auditor for 10 years between 1609 and 1636. There were still Purchas brewers in Cambridge in the 18th century although not descendants of either Ambrose.

Ambrose (I) wrote his will on 6 December 1595 shortly before his death :

- He left his eldest son and heir by his first marriage the sum of £5 to be paid one year after his death & his best bed *“to be delivered to him after my death”*.



- *To William Purkys, my sonne the sum of £10. Five pounds one yeare and £5 two years after my death”.*
- To his other sons:- £8 to Henry, £5 each to Philip, Ambrose and Edward to be paid at the age of 25 (?) years.
- To his daughter Mable he bequeathed £5 and one milk bullock to be paid at the age of one and twenty or date of marriage.
- His wife Helenn was required to enter into an “*obligation for the bringing up of Philip Purkis, Ambrose (II) Purkis, Edward Purkis and Mable Purkis my children until.....attain lawful ages before specified in my will*”.
- There were other bequests to the Gibbs family, the four sons and a grandson Thomas, from Helen's first marriage.

His wife Helen, Richard Joanes hisand friend and his son Thomas (I) to be his executors.

There is a record at St John's College¹³ showing that his widow obtained a license “*to alienate the lease of the Great Barn nigh to the Cross, Huntingdon Way*”, leased on 29.3.1592 by Ambrose from St John's College, Cambridge, for 20 years at a rent of 33/4d and 2 ½ quarters of wheat. Perhaps this was the site of the Purchas brewery and she wished to assign the lease on his death. No other mention has been found of the Purchas brewery in Cambridge although there should be records in the university library.

The second part of this story will continue with Ambrose's eldest son, Alderman Thomas Purchas born 1574 who continued in his father's footsteps as an administrator in Cambridge being elected twice as Mayor and as Member of Parliament for Cambridge Town before his death in 1638.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Suzanne Tyson-Butterworth (also a Purchas descendant) for so tirelessly checking and adding to many of the Purchas family dates included above and for the updated family tree. We all owe a debt of gratitude to the late Arthur Purchas who, almost a hundred years ago, gathered so much of the information working from original parish registers and my parents, Sonia and Anthony Chapman-Purchas who continued the search.

This article was originally published in the Genealogists' Magazine, Journal of the Society of Genealogists, vol 35, number 1, March 20025

REFERENCES

- ¹ Ely Diocesan Records CU Library Arthur Purchas transcript.
 - ² T Leunig, C Minns & P Wallis. J.E.H. Santa Clara vol 71. Iss.2. 2011 pp 413-43.
 - ⁴ Brewers' Company Apprenticeship Register 1531-1685
 - ⁵ Maarten Prak & Patrick Wallis eds. *Apprenticeship in Early Modern Europe* ch. 9. CUP 2020
 - ⁶ Annals of Cambridge vol 2 ed C H Cooper 1834: pp 537/8
 - ⁷ Wikipedia: The Lord Chamberlyn's Players.
 - ⁸ Archdeacons of Ely Probate records 1513/1857 & C.U. Library ref 1631 Arl: 127
 - ⁹ Genealogical Memoirs of the Kindred Families of Thomas Cranmer.
 - ¹⁰ Sutherland D: Raise your Glasses: MacDonald 1969 p 16
 - ¹¹ Cartright M: World History Encyclopedia. Food & Drink in the Elizabethan Era
 - ¹² Records held at the University Library
 - ¹³ Thin Black Book, St John's College: Cambridge Treasury
-

ONLINE HELP & ADVICE WITH CHFHS—

Zoom Research Surgeries : May '26—Dec '26

Once the present round of “area” research zoom sessions come to an end—we will be continuing with monthly online research surgeries, via Zoom, but to a slightly different format to the area sessions.

Going forward, each session will run once a month, and be alternated between 2nd Wed mornings and 2nd Thurs evenings so as to optimise the opportunity to attend. We invite **any** topic—so, get your questions together. If you wish to, queries can be submit in advance to give the research team the opportunity to look into potential solutions ahead of the session—

—or just join in on the day, and see what topics come up.

MAY **Wed 13 10.30-12.00**

JUNE **Thurs 11 19.30-21.00**

JULY **Wed 8 10.30-12.00**

AUG **Thurs 13 19.30-21.00**

SEPT **Wed 9 10.30-12.00**

OCT **Thurs 15 19.30-21.00**

NOV **Wed 11 10.30-12.00**

DEC **Thurs 10 19.30-21.00**

Advance questions can be sent to secretary@chfhs.org.uk, please.

RESEARCH SURGERIES—scheduled locations/dates/times

CHFHS volunteers hold regular help & advice sessions at society meetings and at public libraries around the county
there are no charges for these services
enquiries : secretary@chfhs.org.uk

Ely Library	3 rd Wed alternate mths	Jan / Mar / May / July / Sept / Nov	drop in between 10.00-4.00
Norris Museum St Ives	2 nd Wed alternate mths	Feb / Apr / Jun / Aug / Oct / Dec NB : Dec '25 to 12.30 only	drop-in between 10.30 & 3.30
Cottingham Library	3 rd Mon <u>every</u> mth	Jan / Feb / Mar / Apr / May / Jun Jul / Aug / Sept / Oct / Nov / Dec	drop-in between 1.00-4.00
St Neots Library	4 th Thurs <u>every</u> mth	Jan / Feb / Mar / Apr / May / Jun Jul / Aug / Sept / Oct / Nov / Dec	drop-in between 2.00-4.00
March	1 st & 3 rd Tues <u>every</u> mth	TWICE MONTHLY	drop-in between 10.00-4.00

**** Cambridge Central Library and Bar Hill Library **** ...
from Jan 2026, we are no longer providing a drop-in research surgery at these venues.

If you are unable to attend any of the locations, we can offer a zoom call or a pre-arranged meet-up to look at your queries.

Please contact the Secretary to arrange a date/time/place to suit :

email : secretary@chfhs.org.uk



**As part of our 50th Anniversary
Celebrations in 2026**



we hope to set up a number of additional special research days around the county—

**—look out for date/venue announcement via the
website/newsletter as events are finalised**

MARCH PROGRAMME Wednesday Face-2-Face Meetings		1st Wednesdays at 2.00pm March Library, March enquiries : march@chfhs.org.uk
Wed 6 May	Longthorpe Tower, Peterborough with Don Chiswell <i>One of the most important medieval buildings in England, not only for its unique wall paintings (giving an insight into the Medieval world), but as a rare example of a tower house in the south of England, and for the family story it encapsulates.</i>	
Wed 3 Jun	A—Z of Cambridge with Sarah Doig <i>A quirky alternative to Cambridge's rich history from dipping into a wide variety of stories—such as books, oysters sold at the largest fair in Medieval Europe, and famous residents</i>	
July	Outing to Archives at Ely <i>Please contact the email above for further details</i>	
Aug	<i>No meeting</i>	
Wed 2 Sept	Operation Market Garden with Richard Gibbons <i>The presentation relates to Montgomery's attempt to end the war quickly in 1945, intentions, plans, the failure of the attempt, and the aftermath</i>	

CAMBRIDGESHIRE ARCHIVES @ ELY

Open Day, Mon 20 July, 1-4

The Archives hope to encourage more awareness of local history groups and societies and be an opportunity to share knowledge, expertise, and resources. We would like to offer those running a stand the chance to take a behind the scenes tour of the Archives.

The afternoon will be run as a drop-in event across 3 hours with no booking necessary. Visitors will be able browse at their leisure and have access to Searchroom sources such as transcripts of parish registers as well as online sites such as Ancestry. **IF YOU'RE IN THE AREA—DROP IN & SEE US**

St Neots Living History Festival

Sat 5 September, Market Place at St Neots

further information to follow

CAMBRIDGE PROGRAMME

3rd Wednesdays of the month at **7.30pm**
enquiries : programme@chfhs.org.uk

Cambridge Branch talks are Zoom only—book via the website

Wed 15 Apr	When The Saints Go Marching In with Eric Jackson <i>This talk is the story of all those saints we know so well, or think we do! St George, St. Patrick, St. Valentine, St. Christopher and many others, their stories and legends brought to life in this fascinating talk.</i> <i>The talk is presented in a non-religious manner so will suit all audiences. Why do we send Valentine's Day cards, what is the connection between St. Nicolas, aka Santa Claus, and why do we exchange gifts at Christmas? Why and how did a Greek soldier become the patron saint of England? All these stories and more in this illuminating talk.</i>
Wed 20 May	Thorney with Dorothy Halfhide <i>The talk will outline the history of Thorney, from its origins as a religious settlement on an island in the Fens, through its rise and fall as a Benedictine monastery, but particularly looks at the development of the area from the 1630s onwards. Thorney was a centre for the drainage works spearheaded by the Earls of Bedford. As part of the settlement and development of the area a large number of French, Fleming and Walloon families came here, some via Hatfield Chase in Yorkshire. Thorney Museum has a wide range of family trees put together by our late Curator, Jim Gregory, which we can share in pdf form with enquirers.</i> <i>Dorothy will also look at some of the stories and enquiries we document at the Museum, and encourage people to visit the village, the Abbey and our Museum.</i>
Wed 17 Jun	Is Artificial Intelligence a help or a hindrance to photo restoration and research with Steve Gill <i>AI is revolutionizing photography, but is it truly beneficial? In this talk, Steve will explore AI's role in restoring old photos—highlighting its flaws—and contrast it with its powerful potential for historical research. Join him to discuss whether AI is a tool or a troublemaker in photo preservation! He'll also be taking you through some ways you can understand and date your old family photographs.</i>
July	<i>To be confirmed—see the website and newsletter for topic</i>
Aug	No meeting

MEETINGS REPORTS

*Don't forget that many of the talks
are recorded and available in the
members area of the website*

WHAT'S IN A NAME

WITH DENISE BATES

(CAMBRIDGE ZOOM MEETING : JAN 2026)

For our January talk Denise Bates gave an insight into some of the reasons our ancestors gave their children unusual forenames. Her sources for the talk can be found in parish records, well before civil registration, and some, perhaps of biblical origin – Ephraim, Levi, Amos - are now archaic, but have always been recognised as forenames. Naming patterns based on religious practice (ie naming after grandfathers for boys and grandmothers for girls), or to mark a son's position in the family (ie Octavius for the 8th child). In many parts of the country surnames were, and still are, used as a forename to keep a maternal name in the family, or to recognise a godparent or benefactor. Alternatively, it may be a mother's way of naming the father of an illegitimate child on the birth certificate.

Denise identified three categories of name that fall outside this, plus a small number that do not seem to fit into any category, possibly recorded incorrectly.

Tribute names - Defined as naming a child after a person the parents admired - usually this was a famous person or fictional characters – Elizabeth (Queen), Florence (Nightingale), Francis (Drake) Henry, William, Charles (Kings), Wendy (Peter Pan), Alice (in Wonderland) etc. Between the First & Second World Wars, film stars and their characters replaced politicians and military leaders – Rita, Scarlett, Roy etc.

Commemorative names - Defined as names which originate from an event, incident, or place – Alma, Pretoria, Sebastopol, Jubilee etc.

Localised names - Defined as names which are usually found in a particular place, or amongst people who share a certain attribute.

Gender - Gender is not necessarily obvious from the name, many children also had a traditional name and usually girls' names ended with A – Roberta, Wilhelmina etc although some names were unisex.

Social class - Names of heroic individuals and some regional names straddle the class divide. There are instances of children whose parents were from working class families being named Queenie, Royal, Princess, King, Duke etc.

Living with an unusual name - Unusual does not mean embarrassing although some parents had had second thoughts by the time of the child's first census and either used a diminutive or changed the order of the name - eg Mary J instead of Jubilee Mary

Conclusion

Unusual forenames add to other knowledge about public feeling, sometimes for just a few weeks and offer insight into the interests, values and character of the ancestors who chose them

Sources Used - On-line GRO Indexes: www.freebmd.org.uk; parish records and censuses: family history websites; <https://demos.flourish.studio/namehistory/> for frequency of forename usage since civil registration in 1837

Reported by Muriel Halliday

COUNTY & LOCAL SOURCES AT THE SOCIETY OF GENEALOGISTS

WITH SUE GIBBONS

(CAMBRIDGE ZOOM MEETING : FEB 2026)

Sue Gibbons is a former librarian at the Society of Genealogists and was an ideal speaker to provide an overview of the various materials available, including military records, taxation documents, probate jurisdictions, and maritime sources, particularly highlighting county and local sources.

The meeting would be recorded as usual but would only be available on the CHFHS website for one month. In addition, Sue agreed to send a PDF of her slides for distribution to our secretary.

Sue then presented a very comprehensive overview of genealogical resources available at the Society of Genealogists library:

- Various types of records including military discharge papers, quarter session records, immigrant records, county histories, land ownership documents, manorial records, and maritime sources. Unique sources such as the Trinity House petitions for merchant seamen and the Gazettes for government-related news.

- Newspaper archives, school and university registers, taxation records, and probate jurisdictions.

- Resources for genealogical research, including local administrative units, poor law unions, and parliamentary constituencies. She explained the significance of parish churches and the creation of new chapels, as well as the importance of marriage licences and non-conformist registers, tombstone inscriptions and the Society's collection of Monumental Inscriptions. Census records, directories, and poll books, and a collection of local and county-wide directories.

- Sue also discussed the Society's access to various online resources, including Ancestry and FindMyPast, and recommended purchasing a £15 gold monthly membership for access to these resources and the ability to visit the Society for free

Sue emphasized the importance of searching by place names as well as surnames when researching genealogy.

Sue talked about their move to a new smaller building in Wharf Road and that many resources have been digitized and are now available online. Sue emphasized the importance of pre-ordering materials and using the library's video tour for orientation before making a personal visit.

The discussion touched on membership benefits, including talks and workshops, and the challenges of accessing physical materials due to limited opening hours. David and other participants raised questions about the library's accessibility and the society's awareness of these issues.

Reported by John Bownass

THE “PEOPLE, PLACES, POWER, PROGRESS” CIRCLE

WITH SUE PAUL

(MARCH MEETING : JAN 2026)

Sue Paul was our speaker at the January meeting. She started by giving a health warning on being hooked by genealogy whilst researching family history. Her family history started by tracing her paternal grandfather that took 4 years, that was over 20 years ago.

The title was 'People, Places, Power, Progress Circle', relating to stories of her family that she has traced working in the paper manufacturing industry around the Industrial Revolution. Sue emphasised this is not simply about elite papermakers who had followed a seven year long apprenticeship, traditionally from the age of 13, but also about the human aspects of power and the workers' progression, both moving around the country and changes due to advances in technology.

Earlier talks by Sue have been about her Bowrey family, this time the relationship is more distant and led her in unexpected directions. Sue discovered some family members living in Helpston (1868), near Peterborough, (well known as the home of the poet John Clare); they had moved there from Reading. Sue remembered that her husband used to buy paper for his school from Helpston and they were a paper making family. She soon realised that the migration from Reading was for occupational reasons and investigated further.

She found a couple who married at High Wycombe All Saints in 1785, no occupation was given in the register. When, thirteen years later Buckinghamshire men were being recruited to fight against Napoleon, the husband was named as a papermaker. Sue researched further and found the earliest progenitor, Henry, was at the villages of Wraysbury and Horton.

The couple who married at High Wycombe had 3 sons, all worked in the paper industry and moved multiple times in several directions, appearing not

to follow each other. Helpston, High Wycombe, Reading, Hemel Hemstead, St Neots, Snodland and Taverham are all sites of historic paper mills.

At the time of the Industrial Revolution families were generally moving into larger centres, however, the paper industry was situated in more rural settings and consequently workers migration followed a different pattern. Paper workers tended to be peripatetic rather than staying loyal to a mill.

A papermaker made individual sheets at the vat, his was the most skilled and prized role. Paper was, and is made from a tangled layer of cellulose fibre. The papermaker dipped a large-framed mesh into a vat filled with the fibres suspended in water. They lifted the frame for 'the shake', a sharp movement back and forward and side to side to entangle the fibres. The frame was then passed to the layer and the process repeated.

Papermakers traditionally served a 7 year apprenticeship, access to this was usually to his eldest son who had been employed in the mill since childhood gaining a thorough understanding of the industry.

92 year old Harry Granville took part in an oral history project. He explained how he started work in 1910 – it was unique to the individual and unalterable

"Well you see, the papermaking trade, in my days you had to be a papermaker's son to go apprentice, unless you were fourteen and a month old when another apprentice reached his last year. I was lucky, see? I was fourteen years and a month, then they took me on as an apprentice, you see? I was not a papermaker's son... you start pitching felts. You see, the man that was throwing the felts, well he used to have a boy help him, see? Then I went laying. That was laying the paper after it comes round. Then eventually, of course, I took the vat man's job. I was making paper for three shillings and eight pence a day. Handmade paper for three and eight a day'.

The vatman's shake was impossible to teach, it was unique to the individual and unalterable. You needed to be relaxed to do it and not everyone mastered it. Granville went on to explain:

'The way I picked it up was at a breakfast time, see? I'd sneak out to one of the vats and try my hand see? That's how I learned'.

The skill of a papermaker was too valuable for him to be put to any other work.

The paper mill industry required power to beat the pulp. Millwrights did everything from managing the water course to maintaining the fabric of the mill. Waterpower drove the earliest papermaking machines which, over time took over all the manufacturing stages. As the nineteenth century

progressed steam power replaced water and millwrights became engineers. Men carried out the traditionally skilled work of paper making whereas other processes were carried out by women and children. Although lower paid, their skills were nonetheless valuable. Women in the home understood textiles and their skills were essential when paper was made from old rags as it was extensively until the adoption of esparto grass around 1861 and wood pulp from 1879.

Women could rapidly remove seams trimmings and fastenings whilst the nimble fingers of children could work fast enough during crucial finishing processes. Some children went on to become papermakers.

With industrialisation, the papermaker was the first to have his role replaced by the new Hollander machine. Although, this did not replace the role of beaters. It was decades before the quality of machine made paper was sufficient for all purposes. Hand-made papers existed alongside machine-made up until the end of the twentieth century.

Paper worker families demonstrated the dichotomy of aspirations of middle-class respectability with their curtains and visible signs of literacy alongside the working-class markers of wife and child employed outside the home.

Sue went on to talk about Marchant Warrell, a skilled papermaker who showed strength of character and independence with the introduction of the papermaking machine, seen a threat by some. He was not afraid of new technology despite conflict known as the Swing Riots at the time.

At least five generations of Warrell's family continued in the trade at Two Waters and Apsley mills and further afield. One became chief engineer at John Dickinson and Company. Many of Marchant Warrell's family stayed loyal to the mill whereas other descendants emigrated to Europe, North America and Australia. The family demonstrates an ability to survive the rapid changes of the introduction of technology.

Reported by Linda Peckett (from notes supplied by Sue Paul)

CHFHS NEWSLETTER

—are YOU a subscriber?



If you haven't yet signed up to the free CHFHS newsletter, why not do so—right now—by visiting the website home page www.chfhs.org

Sign up to receive the latest details on upcoming talks and research surgeries, local events with a genealogical slant, and on-going feature series “spotlighting” local surnames and villages histories.

VICTORIAN RURAL WOMEN

WITH CHARLOTTE PATON

(MARCH BRANCH : FEB 2026)

Charlotte Paton gave an interesting talk on Victorian Rural Women, the majority of them were very poor although paintings of the time show warm, idyllic, pastoral scenes, many by the artist Helen Allingham. The baser side of life was avoided in the pictures. Reality was very different for most women.

Housing was appalling, living in poverty made life nearly impossible. The middle class looked on the poor as feckless. Most of the women could not read although stories were published in the 'penny dreadfuls', read mainly by men.

People moved away from their villages to find work. If the men were injured or killed in the factories the women had to manage the best they could, the alternative being the workhouse. This would mean returning to their place of birth being the only workhouse they could go to.

Thomas Hardy describes conditions in his book 'Far From the Madding Crowd' where Fanny had to return to the workhouse. The Swing Riots were an uprising by agricultural workers in protest at the harsh working conditions, beginning with destroying threshing machines. Their anger was directed at the tithe system thought to cause misery and at rich farmers lowering workers wages. Although women were barely mentioned, the punishment they received was the same as for the men.

Employing women and girls was cheaper than employing men. On farms they cut sheaves of corn from the threshing machines. Charlotte told us of a newspaper report of a girl who lost her leg when she fell into a threshing machine. Although they could ill afford it, other women clubbed together to help her. Children, known as little gleaners picked up spilt wheat from the ground to take home.

Chapels gave women somewhere to go to meet with other women. In later Victorian times women would be alone in their homes if there was no agricultural work for them after the men had gone to work and children at school. It would have been silent, no music, no radio and no telephone. Ghost stories became common place, it can be seen why with darkness and silence broken by strange noises. The village shop was another important source of companionship for women as well as for food. They could provide flour, salt, herrings and other basic food that could be afforded. The hawker or pedlar took news to rural areas, he could make repairs and sold goods from a basket including ribbons, and pins.

The pinny (apron) was a daily item for women and girls to wear to keep their clothes clean, saving on washing and more work. Children would have to stay in bed whilst their clothes were washed. Wearing an apron continued into the 20th century. When WW1 came about the Ministry of Agriculture wanted women to grow more vegetables.

Pictures of the time show a clock in the house, a luxury to have even though the floor was just the earth. Time only became standard when the railways came in. Before this the church clock was the only source of knowing the time. The first bank holiday was in 1871. 75 trains went to Hunstanton taking people to the coast for the first time.

Girls from poorer families went into service. Some women collected laundry from the big house to do at home, and returned it when clean. Women bought lotions and potions aimed at keeping the men well and in work. Laudanum was given to children to suppress them whilst their mothers worked. Poppy tea (opium) was also given to children to quell hunger pains. After 1850 a doctor could no longer put accidental death on a baby's death record, when they may have been dosed with sedatives. After that the women were tried but juries did not find them guilty.

Reported by Linda Peckett

THAT RINGS A BELL

WITH MIKE WABE

(MARCH MEETING : MARCH 2026)

Mike Wabe gave a lively and entertaining talk at the March meeting entitled 'That Rings a Bell', the story of the town crier. Mike is currently the town crier for Watton in Norfolk and a member of the two overarching bodies: the Ancient and Honourable Guild of Town Criers and the Loyal Company of Town Criers. All town criers must be a member of one, both of which employ codes of conduct and working practices. He was dressed in full town crier regalia, sewn on the back of the cape were the crests of both associations, he also brought two different bells. Dave Edwards also brought along the March town crier bell, not being used currently. There was no need for a microphone at this meeting – Mike's voice, 'Oyez, Oyez', has been recorded as 112 decibels – Concord was recorded as 109 decibels. Mike explained that he trains to project his voice rather like an opera singer does, and does not shout. Town criers would have been a familiar sight and sound of our ancestors as this was the way of finding out the news and forthcoming events.

Mike explained the livery of a town crier which has not changed over the centuries. A tricorne or bicorn hat, wool overcoat with a short cape, a jabot,

waistcoat, breeches, white stockings and buckle shoes. The livery is expensive, today can be as much as £7 - £8 thousand pounds. The bell historically a Fiddian bell, made of brass with a chain clapper renowned for producing a loud, clear and resonant sound. Other bells have a solid clapper producing a different sound.

Currently there are 250 town criers in the country, whereas there would have been tens of thousands in the past as every town and village would have had one. Homer's Illiad tells of Stentor whose cry was as loud as 50 men, hence, a stentorian is a person with a loud and powerful voice, very useful on the battlefield. Town criers were well established before 1066 and held an important position in England from 1077 onwards. A scene on the Bayeux Tapestry depicts heralds proclaiming the death of Edward the Confessor and crowning of William 1. From the 17th century until today town criers have held a public official position, called upon to be present at civic and public events. Today they can be hire for private events, such as weddings as a toastmaster or other functions.

Messages proclaimed by the town crier were not always welcome. In 1635 it was their duty to give the news of a twelve fold increase in taxes! Literacy was poor amongst the population so information printed on paper was not very useful. However, part of the town crier's duties was to pin notices up at a coaching inn or a post in the market square. This may be the origin of mail being known as post.

Mike's friend, David Mitchell is the town crier for Chester. Chester is close to the border of Wales and the only place to still have a regular midday proclamation at a fixed place every Tuesday to Saturday during the summer months. In the past this was an important town for a town crier as in 1403 during the Owain Glyndwr revolt, town criers were strictly restricted in Wales as they were thought to be acting on behalf of the English Crown. Mike and David are putting a database together of names of town criers, often these have not been recorded although their presence is recorded in newspaper articles. This is not helpful if trying to trace any town criers in the family. However, the town of Clare in Suffolk has all town criers recorded from 1612, these are available at the Suffolk Records Office in Ipswich. Clare has reinstated their town crier when the market was reinstated.

A Bellman is not the same as a town crier. Bellmen worked at night. They had four roles, police, fire, weather and time. At night they would apprehend thieves as well as giving the message 'All is well'. Whereas a town crier made proclamations during the day. There were no locks on door in those days making it easy for burglars to walk into houses.

In his 1660 diary, Samuel Pepys records that the bellman Isaac Wragg who

had a dog and carried a lantern and bill hook. The bill hook was treated with pitch and used to pull down burning thatch.

Early church clocks only had one hand – the hour hand, hence the time being told as for example ‘past eight o’clock’. St Michael’s Church at Coningsby, Lincolnshire is the world’s largest clock of this kind, dating back to the 17th century with a 9ft hand.

At St Sepulchre church, Newgate (the largest parish in the city of London) which stands opposite Newgate Prison, a bellman gave announcements of executions. Eight convicted prisoners were put on a cart at a time, driven the 3 miles to Tyburn Gallows (or Tyburn Tree) with the public lining the streets. The ‘triple tree’ was erected in 1571, a permanent structure of a horizontal wooden triangle supported on 3 legs allowing many prisoners to be hanged at once. The last hanging took place here in 1783. Before the hanging the prisoners would be given their last mug of ale, then put on the cart. Hence the phrase ‘on the wagon’, no longer drinking.

Samuel Finley Breeze Morse (1791-1872) was an American artist and an inventor who developed Morse code and the electric telegraph system. The Morse Code machine was refined, working with Alfred Vail in 1838 and the telegraph first message was sent in 1844. These developments, along with newspapers changed how news was communicated. Bad news always travels fast, the death of Elvis Presley, JFK, Princess Diana and the late Queen were all publicised within minutes.

Town criers, all modelled on the English town crier spread across other counties including Australia, New Zealand, Bermuda, Canada, Holland and the USA.

Beetty Dick (1693 – 1773) was a very early female town crier in Dalkeith, Midlothian, Scotland she used a dish and wooden spoon to alert people to listen and charged 1d per cry.

An English female town crier was Mary Ann Blaker in Chertsey. In 1914 her husband Albert was called up to fight in WW1 and handed on the task to Mary Ann. When he returned in 1918 he wanted his job back, she refused, keeping the position until she retired in 1940 at the age of 71.

Brenda Willison has been the town crier in Newmarket for many years. She started her career in 1987 as deputy town crier in Peterborough.

Mike concluded by telling us about some amusing things that have happened to him since becoming a town crier, including being asked by a little boy, ‘did you used to be alive?!’ Judging by his voice alone, Mike is very much alive.

Reported by Linda Peckett

AI FOR FAMILY HISTORY : WHAT IT CAN (& CAN'T) DO FOR YOU

WITH LINDA HAMMOND

(CAMBRIDGE ZOOM : MARCH 2026)

How can the advances being made in 'Artificial Intelligence' support research in the field of family history? Linda's talk endeavoured to provide an up-to-date guide of what can be done currently with AI and gave examples of the various different ways the application of AI to people's family history data might assist them in their work.

Linda first emphasised the difference between the action of search engines, e.g. Google, that computer users are already very familiar with and the new AI tools which don't just extract data like search engines but 'knit' the data acquired from multiple sources together to produce more of an overall narrative by creating 'likely' results. Some AI tools like Chat-GPT are already in common use for many computer users.

There are several different AI tools now available. Linda gave an assessment of several currently available and pointed out which ones have particular strengths when dealing with certain types of records. AI tools can read old documents and handwritten records (e.g. in censuses and parish registers) much faster than manual transcription, allowing for better search ability. AI can analyse large datasets to identify potential family relationships and validate family trees.. It may for example suggest alternatives to surname spellings, AI tools, by indicating possible new links, can thus help people's research by suggesting new family links to aid research. Geographical data may also be utilised to propose reasons for particular actions.

One major use for AI is for photo enhancement. Old family photos can be recreated with a considerably improved image quality that can bring the photos 'to life'. Creases and tears can be digitally 'removed' and blurry facial features sharpened. It is possible that previously unsuspected lost relatives may thus be more easily identified from their passing family resemblance and apparent age!

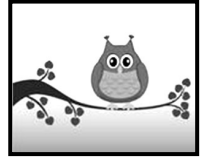
Linda stressed that AI does however have to be treated with some caution. As it is based on learned pattern recognition, AI sometimes invents plausible but entirely false records, names, or locations – these are termed "hallucinations" or false information. Not all these errors are very obvious. AI must be treated as an aid to research not a replacement. Consequently AI-generated insights still need to be checked wherever possible against primary historical records. The strategy must be to never accept the first answer supplied by AI as 'gospel'.

Reported by CJ



RECENT RESEARCH ENQUIRIES

we are not just all about Cambs/Hunts !!



The Research Team can be contacted in a number of ways—local library surgeries; events and fairs; facebook; email to the research team; by letter to the secretary; zoom sessions. Over recent months, we have received a wide variety of enquiries on a wide variety of topics ranging from simple “how to ...” queries from newer researchers, to complex “last resort” problems which have long-flummoxed their owners—from the local to down under and beyond. Recent receipts via the research surgeries and forum include:

- Seeking the origins of a Mary HALES who married Thomas HINKINS at Ickleton in 1768; Mary died a few years later.
- An enquirer looking for the location of Dr Longworth’s house at West Wrattling as listed in the 1911 census.
- Seeking the location of Abigail’s Lane in Gt Shelford—an answer has since been posted say that it’s now known as Tunwells Lane
- Seeking confirmation of the parents of a William HART of Holywell-c-Needingworth, born about 1826 possibly somewhere else
- Looking at what might have happened to a John CANWELL, born 1747, who married Ann RUSSELL in 1769 at Yelling. Ann died, and was buried at Yelling in 1774; their son William, born 1772, spent his whole life in Yelling and died there in 1819. The question is one of what became of John and is a brickwall still to be overcome
- An enquirer trying to find the now adult children of their father’s half-siblings from an earlier marriage, with a view to re-establishing contact
- We were asked to help find the location of a grave at Oakington of someone who died in 1947. The relevant entry was found in the burial register. As it happens, a gravestone had been erected and the transcription features in the CHFHS MIs Collection with the location being marked on the accompanying sketch map of the churchyard.

REMEMBER—we’re here to help, so don’t hesitate to ask

Our thanks continue go to everyone who has sent in contributions—whether as articles about your families and researches, or just shorts pieces, please keep it coming—getting something down on paper to share “the story” with others is the key. Family history is so much more than just genealogical facts, it’s the stories which we either know or have deduced from the raw facts, and these need to be written down. Apologies if your piece hasn’t appeared as yet, it’s very much a jigsaw puzzle to fit the material into the available pages.

The Editorial Team

MEMBERSHIP

The Society offers a regular programme of meetings designed to appeal to the specialist and beginner alike; the quarterly members' journal is also available, if preferred, as a digital download. The UK subscription, due on joining and annually thereafter, is £12, and includes the member's partner. The overseas subscription is £17, which gives airmail postage of the Journal. If you chose to receive the e-Journal, the annual subscription for all locations is £9 (we also offer a life membership for x10 annual rate). Subscriptions/renewals may be made online through the CHFHS website via debit/credit card or PayPal, or by DirectDebit; alternatively, sterling cheque/etc payable to *Cambridgeshire & Huntingdonshire Family History Society*, should be sent to the Treasurer. Changes of address/email and members' interests to the Membership Secretary, please. See p52 for contacts.

SEARCHABLE RECORDS & SHOP

“Cambs & Hunts Database” When fully operational, the new CHFHS website will feature a brand new records search and retrieval system (replacing both “AncestorFinder” and “SuperSearch”). On offer will be a basic search facility freely available to all comers, and the records database with searchable access to over 5m of CHFHS's online transcribed records from across Cambs & The Isle of Ely and Hunts. The database is **available to all members** and accessible via the website members area. Additional records not suitable for the database format can be found as browsable pdf files.

CHFHS SHOP Search the publications listings on the website to see what's available for particular parishes and locations (CDs and/or downloads). Additional material not suitable for the database is also available as CDs and/or downloads. Also shop via: www.ParishChurch.com (incl books).

RESEARCH SERVICES

The Society will undertake a limited amount of help for members who have reached a sticking point in the work. This can be done in two ways :

- # general enquiries can be addressed to the Secretary by email secretary@chfhs.org.uk (or by post, with an SAE please)
- # more detailed requests should be sent to our Research Team, preferably by email, via the request form on the website research@chfhs.org.uk

We will attend to requests as our time allows. We ask that you remember we are all volunteers, so please be patient and reasonable in your requests.

Please supply as much information about the topic/person as possible (such as the sources of “facts” you already have, and which records/resources have already been consulted (eg. BMDs, census, wills, parish registers, a family tree, Ancestry, FindMyPast, FamilySearch, etc)

CAMBRIDGESHIRE & HUNTINGDONSHIRE FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY

COMMITTEE 2025–26 (T : TRUSTEE)

CHAIRMAN : (T) David Copsey [postal correspondence via the Secretary, please]
email : chairman@chfhs.org.uk

VICE-CHAIRMAN : vacant

SECRETARY : (T) Muriel Halliday, 15 Castle Hythe, Ely, Cambridgeshire, CB7 4BU
email : secretary@chfhs.org.uk

TREASURER : (T) Les Potts, 11 Woburn Close, Flitwick, Bedfordshire MK45 1TE
email : treasurer@chfhs.org.uk

MEMBERSHIP SEC : Chris Norton [postal correspondence via the Secretary, please]
email: membership@chfhs.org.uk

MINUTES SECRETARY : (T) Wendy Siddles

PROJECTS CO-ORDINATOR : Terry Garner

email : projects@chfhs.org.uk

CHFHS SHOP : Chris Norton [mail orders via the Secretary, please]

email : shop@chfhs.org.uk

WEBMASTER : Pam Dowell

email : webmaster@chfhs.org.uk

NEWSLETTER & SOCIAL MEDIA CO-ORDINATOR : Karen Orrell

email : newsletter@chfhs.org.uk

JOURNAL EDITOR : (T) Caroline Norton [postal correspondence via the Secretary, please]

email : editor@chfhs.org.uk

PUBLICITY : Karen Orrell

email : publicity@chfhs.org.uk

RESEARCH OFFICER : Lisa Constanti [postal enquiries via the Secretary, please]

email : research@chfhs.org.uk

MARCH BRANCH CHAIRMAN :

email : march@chfhs.org.uk

CAMBRIDGE BRANCH PROGRAMME ORGANISER : vacant

email : programme@chfhs.org.uk

EDUCATION OFFICER : (T) Caroline Norton

email : editor@chfhs.org.uk

ARCHIVES & LOCAL STUDIES SERVICE LIAISON : (T) Gill Shapland

email : archives@chfhs.org.uk

COMMITTEE MEMBER & MARCH BRANCH REP : David Edwards

email : march@chfhs.org.uk

TECHNICAL ADVISOR & HUNTINGDON BRANCH REP : John Bownass

email : hunts@chfhs.org.uk

ALL OTHER, & POSTAL, CORRESPONDENCE TO THE SECRETARY, PLEASE

SELECTED RESOURCES TO ASSIST RESEARCH IN CAMBS & THE ISLE OF ELY AND HUNTS

www.chfhs.org.uk

visit the CHFHS website to find listings, links and information

OVER 5m TRANSCRIBED RECORDS

SIGN UP TO OUR E-NEWSLETTER

MEMBERS' ACCESS TO DATABASE

VISIT THE SHOP

VISIT 'COFFEE CORNER' & LIBRARY

REGISTER FOR ZOOM TALKS

ACCESS TO EXCLUSIVE MATERIAL

NEIGHBOURING SOCIETIES

FENLAND, Lincs, NORFOLK,
SUFFOLK, ESSEX, HERTS, BEDS,
NORTHANTS, PETERBOROUGH

SOME E-NEWSLETTERS TO FOLLOW :

CAMBS & HUNTS FHS

ANCESTRY

FINDMYPAST

THE GENEALOGIST

FAMILY TREE MAGAZINE

WDYTYA MAGAZINE

FAMILY HISTORY FEDERATION

SOCIETY OF GENEALOGISTS

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

LOST COUSINS

CAMBS ASSOC FOR LOCAL HISTORY

HUNTINGDON LOCAL HISTORY SOC

CAMBRIDGESHIRE ARCHIVES

OFFICES AT :

CAMBRIDGE

HUNTINGDON

& ALSO : THE WISBECH MUSEUM

CAMBRIDGESHIRE LIBRARIES

LOCAL STUDIES COLLECTIONS AT :

CAMBRIDGE

HUNTINGDON

WISBECH

& : ELY, MARCH, ST IVES, ST NEOTS

MUSEUM OF CAMBRIDGE

WISBECH MUSEUM

FARMLAND MUSEUM

BURWELL MUSEUM

MARCH MUSEUM

RAMSEY RURAL MUSEUM

ELY MUSEUM

CHATTERIS MUSEUM

WIMPOLE HOME FARM

WICKEN FEN & COTTAGE

MIKE PETTY'S '*FENLAND HISTORY*
ON YOUR COMPUTER'

CAMBRIDGESHIRE COMMUNITY

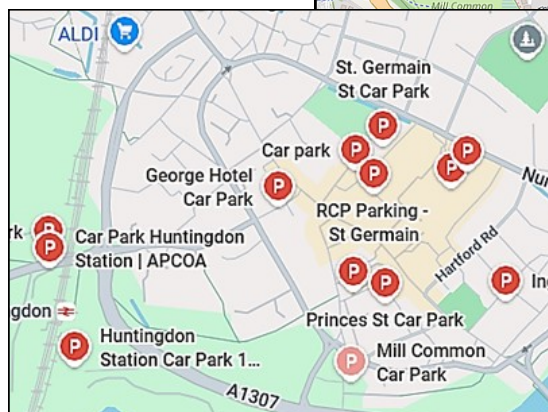
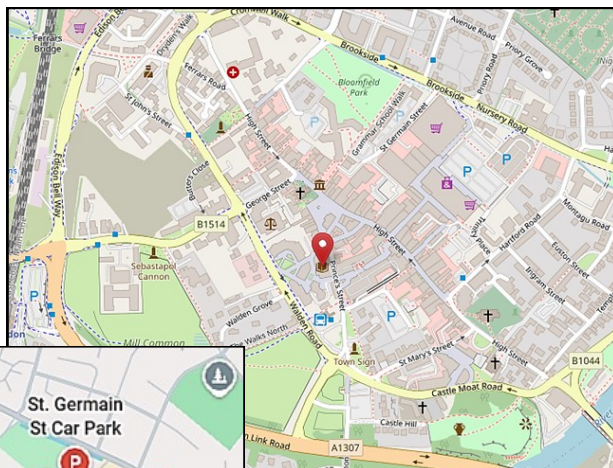
ARCHIVE NETWORK

CAMBRIDGESHIRE HISTORY

ROLL-OF-HONOUR

HUNTINGDON LIBRARY & ARCHIVES

Princes Street, Huntingdon PE29 3PA



The CHFHS Journal is printed/distributed by

www.graytones-printers.co.uk

*If you like what you see and need some printing done
... give them a call ...*

Unit 17, King Street Industrial Estate, Langtoft,
Peterborough, PE6 9NF

T:01778 560261 E:mail@graytones-printers.co.uk



GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATIONS (2018)

Members' names and addresses are kept on a computer file to facilitate distribution of the Journal. Please inform the Membership Secretary if you object to having your name on the list.