



Berkshire Family History Society



Hi friend

Happy New Year!

If the weather forecasters were correct, today should see some of the white stuff across the UK, so here's a snowy scene from 117 years ago. My virtual walk around the streets of Hampstead Norris (Norreys) has failed to find the modern view though. Perhaps a local member could help out?

A logo for 'NEWS' where each letter is inside a colored square: 'N' in red, 'E' in yellow, 'W' in blue, and 'S' in green.



A reminder that the Society's Research Centre re-opens after the Christmas and New Year break from 10.30am on Monday 6th January.

You can find our full opening hours and details of the resources available to you in the Centre on our website:

<https://berksfhs.org/branches/>

The Royal Berkshire Archives has also now reopened after its seasonal break. You can find details of their opening hours and how to plan your visit here:

<https://www.royalberkshirearchives.org.uk/visit-us/planning-a-visit>



## New at The Genealogist

The Genealogist has just announced their release of fully searchable burial records covering almost half a million individuals from The City of London Cemetery. This extensive database provides researchers, historians, and family historians with a treasure trove of detailed biographical information.

The new records offer a comprehensive look into London's historical demographics.

Records provide rich details including full name of the deceased, precise cemetery plot location, occupation, date of burial, age at time of death, district of death registration, residential address, description of the interment and further details.

Don't forget that as a member of the Society, you can access The Genealogist for free via the Society's website. You'll find the link under "Resources".

You can find out more at The Genealogist:

<https://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/>



## A Trio of Websites to watch in 2025

A number of websites are promising new releases in 2025. We've found three of the best with some very special announcements planned.

### Ancestry

Ancestry promises a bumper year ahead with half a billion new records due to go online. 7th January brings the much anticipated 1921 census, whilst the latter half promises another tranche of Second World War service records. More parish records are also planned - including [drum roll] Berkshire's parish registers in possibly late 2025 or early 2026.

Visit Ancestry here:

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/>

### Findmypast

Spring brings an exclusive Guernsey collection which includes Second World War occupation cards and parish registers. Also, The National Archives' collection of incoming passenger lists from the USA. During the year, new parish registers are expected from Shropshire, Canterbury, Southwark, Surrey, Ireland and Manchester. We can also expect updates to collections of home children, naval records, trade directories, education records and military journals.

Visit Findmypast here:

<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/>

## FreeBMD

The largest and longest-running of the free UK Genealogy websites is planning a new-look in 2025, with the final testing now underway before its launch. The results table will be enhanced and the records section will give more details.

Visit FreeBMD here:

<https://www.freebmd.org.uk/>



## January Natter Group

**Tue 07 Jan 18:45 for 19:00**

**Led by Chad Hanna and Gillian Stevens**

**Online**

Join in this online discussion from your own home, wherever you live. Open only to members of Berkshire Family History Society.

Informal discussion group, facilitated by Chad Hanna and Gillian Stevens. Topics are chosen by the group on a monthly basis. End time varies.

This meeting's topics are: (1) Gravestones and memorials (2) anything else you wish to discuss.

Members only, free to attend, but pre-booking is required.

## Book



### Escaping Hitler A Jewish Boy's Quest for Freedom

**Wed 08 Jan 19:30 - 20:30**

**Newbury Branch Meeting and talk  
by Phyllida Scrivens**

**Online**

This is the true story of the remarkable and long life of Kindertransport boy Günter Stern, who in 1939, aged fourteen, fled Nazi Germany. In England he was cared for by two very different British families but later joined the British Army with a new name, Joe Stirling. After the war Joe opened a travel business in Norwich where he became Sheriff of the city in 1975.

Join Phyllida for this uplifting true story of survival and success against all the odds. Phyllida tells the story of Joe Stirling, with insights into her research journey, including visiting the Rhineland to find Günter's birthplace.

Booking is required.

This talk is free to members but we request a donation of £5 from non-members.

## Book



### Reading Heritage Talks Series

**Thu 09 Jan 14:00 - 15:30**

**Thu 13 Feb 14:00 - 15:30**

**Thu 13 Mar 14:00 - 15:30**

**The Centre**

The all series ticket covers all three talks in the "Reading Heritage" talks series, for the discounted price of £12.50 (members £10.00). You may also book each talk individually using the links below.

[Thursday 9 January "Jane Austen's School Days in Reading" with Joy Pibworth](#)

In 2025, we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the birthday of Jane Austen. So how better to start the year than with a talk by local historian and dedicated Janeite Joy Pibworth, exploring Austen's connections with Reading. Reading's Abbey Gateway was then home to the Ladies Boarding School which Jane Austen attended from 1785-6. With the help of contemporary sources, we shall look at the buildings, daily routines, the teachers and the local environment Jane would have become familiar with (and possibly even muse on the echoes in her writing).

#### [Thursday 13 February "Reading's Grey Friars 1233-1538" with Malcolm Summers](#)

From 1233 to 1538 Reading had two religious foundations, Reading Abbey and the Reading Franciscan Friary. This talk tells the story of the medieval friary, its friars, and their relationship with the town. It ends with the dissolution under Henry VIII, leaving us just the Greyfriars Church building as a remnant of the past.

#### [Thursday 13 March "Reading's Trams" with Dr Richard Marks](#)

Prior to the advent of buses, there was a different mode of transport. A group of innovative local businessmen launched a horse bus service, which, though rudimentary, marked the town's first foray into public transportation. Then in 1878 the Reading Tramways Company was established. This provided what we would now call an urban mass transit system, better known as the tramway. This talk will explore the origins of the company and the tram routes it established. You will learn about the routes' locations and their role in offering a novel and affordable means of transportation in Reading, transforming the lives of its residents. The talk will also delve into the connection between the Reading Tramways Company and the Wantage Tramway, which was, in fact, a light railway.

*Image: Market Place, Reading in the 70's by Antony Ewart Smith, CC BY-SA 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons*

Pre-booking is preferred, but you can pay on the door for the series ticket at the first talk, if there are spaces available.

**Book**

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## **Drop In Advice Session**

**Thu 09 Jan 14:00 - 17:00**

**Bracknell Library**



Bring your questions, problems and 'brickwalls' ... and get some new ideas and advice from members of the Berkshire Family History Society.

Free for ALL family historians wherever your ancestors came from.

**Find out more**



## **DNA Special Interest Group**

**Sat 11 Jan 14:30 - 16:30**

**Led by: Debbie Kennett**

**Online**

This special interest discussion group is aimed at those wanting to get the most out of their DNA results. It is facilitated by DNA expert, Debbie Kennett. Sessions are held quarterly, but there is no obligation to attend on a regular basis. First time attendees are always welcomed. This is a great opportunity to ask questions, to gain ideas for how you can use your results to solve questions and to share your successes with others. All levels of expertise with interpreting DNA results welcome from beginner level to experienced.

Tickets £5 (members £4). Pre-booking is required

**Book**

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**Create an enduring family tree in  
YourTrees**



**Thu 16 Jan 19:00 - 21:30**

**Tutor: Paul Barrett**

Online

Do you wish that your grandparents had kept a family history? You can ensure your grandchildren have easy access to their backstory. How durable and easily interpreted is your current family archive? Will it stand the test of time, or ultimately end up in a cardboard box in the attic? Create an enduring family tree in YourTrees and avoid these common problems.

Free. Members only. Pre-booking is required

**Book**



## **Explore the Parish Chest: beyond the registers**

**Fri 17 Jan 19:30 - 21:30**

**Bracknell Branch Meeting with speaker:**

**Clare O'Grady**

Online

Discover hidden gems within the churchwardens' accounts and vestry minutes, learn about the social economics of your ancestors' parish with Poor Law administration records and unearth scandals and tragedies in the bastardy bonds.

Please note that the meeting is in the evening on Zoom.

Booking is required.

This talk is free to members but we request a donation of £5 from non-members.

**Book**

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## **Online Family History Advice**



## Clinic

**Mon 20 Jan**

**Slot 1: 14:00-14:25**

**Slot 2: 14:30-14:55**

**Slot 3: 15:00-15:30**

**Slot 4: 15:35-16:00**

Are you just getting started in family history and wanting guidance as to how to proceed? Or are you stuck at a particular “brick wall” and need some help?

These popular family history advice sessions are online, using Zoom – so you can book a session wherever you live in the world. Sessions are 1:1, free of cost and are available to members and non-members alike.

You’ll receive help from our experienced research assistants. We’ll provide whatever help and suggestions that we can within the time frame and book a follow-on session with you if needed. Four, 25-minute, 1:1 slots are provided,

Booking is required.

### Book

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That was just a small selection from our extensive  
events programme



Our events often sell out so please book early to avoid  
disappointment

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