



Victorian Holborn - Josep Renalias, CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons



Hi friend

During 2025, we will be celebrating this golden jubilee milestone in a number of ways, the most important of which is a celebratory conference on **Saturday 7th June**. It's our first conference since 2014, so we are aiming to make it a very special experience. We hope to be able to welcome as many of you as possible.

## The Victorians

Sat 07 June

10:00- 16:30



**Wokefield Place within the Wokefield Estate,  
Goodboys Lane, Mortimer, Reading, RG7 3AE**

With a theme of “**The Victorians**”, this important conference will span social and family history over the sixty-three years of the reign of Queen Victoria. We have an impressive line-up of experts who have accepted an invitation to speak, headed up by the historian, author and TV presenter **Professor Kate Williams**.

Topics include Victorian records in The National Archives, factory work, death and the Victorians, crime and punishment, The Great Exhibition of 1851 and the Victorian soldier.



The conference is open to all.

Attendance costs £55 for members and £65 for non-members, however **book on or before 31st March, and you are eligible for an early bird discount reducing the price to £50 for members and £60 for non-members.**

The ticket price includes lunch in the restaurant, refreshments throughout the day, access to your chosen talks and to the Fair.

Non-members are encouraged to join the Society at the time of booking, to gain immediate eligibility to the preferential member rate.

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

Comprehensive details of the conference can be found on our dedicated [Conference web pages](#)

## **50th Anniversary Visits Programme**

To accompany our anniversary conference, the Society has also organised a year-long programme of visits to interesting venues of historical significance. These are in addition to our usual events programme.

The anniversary events include visits to:

- [St George's Chapel, Windsor, and the archives of the College of St George](#)
- [Basildon Park House & Gardens](#)
- [Pendon Museum](#)
- [Thames Valley Police Museum Tour & Talk](#)
- [Fairmile Hospital - Tour of the former hospital site](#)
- [Tour of the Berkshire Museum of Aviation](#)

Visit prices vary - see the individual event details.

Pre-booking is required for all.

Find out more about the Conference and it's programme, plus the associated visits on our dedicated [Conference web pages](#)

**Don't forget to [book your conference place](#) before the 31st March, if you want to take advantage of the early bird discount.**



THE  
GAZETTE  
OFFICIAL PUBLIC RECORD

**Proposals to destroy original wills will not go**

## ahead

News from the Ministry of Justice that it will not proceed with controversial proposals to digitise post-1858 wills and destroy the originals has been met with delight by family historians across the country.

The MoJ had said that this was necessary to address the £4.5 million a year cost of storing the 110 million will documents. However, the proposals were widely condemned by historians and genealogists. You may recall the Society featuring the issue and a link to a petition to Parliament in a previous In Touch. This petition, by the time it was presented to the MoJ, was signed by 15,793 people. In addition, almost 1600 responses were sent in, of which "The large majority of responses vehemently opposed any destruction of original wills".

*"There was strong opposition to any destruction of original wills or other documents. This was for a variety of reasons in terms of both a national historical resource and also for individual legal challenges. There was also a strong emotional response to the consultation, typified in the comments received on the unique nature of wills as a record of a living person's wishes for the distribution of their assets."*

*"The Government accepts the compelling case that has been made by respondents... and has therefore determined not to proceed with any reforms that involve the destruction of original wills and supporting documents currently designated for permanent preservation."*

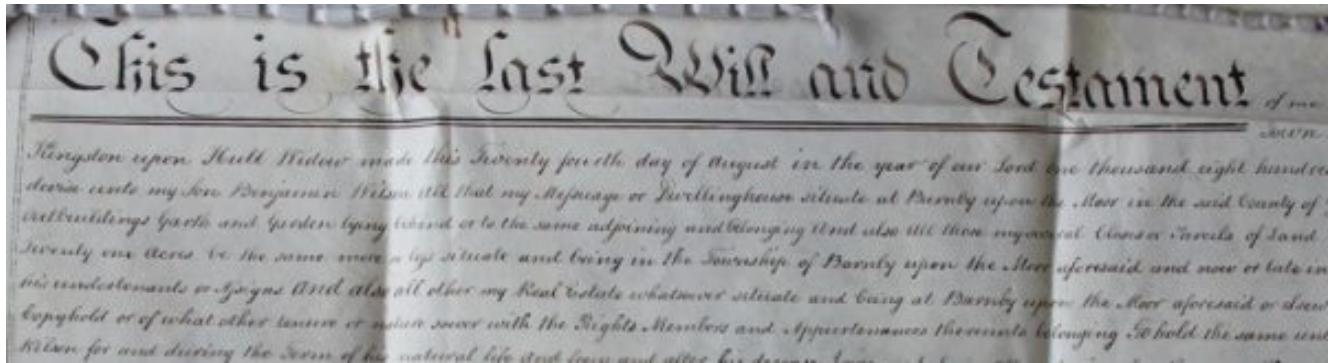
However, it noted that the decision to preserve the wills "does not address the concerns about the large and increasing costs of preserving the very extensive original will archive". It therefore warned that the government will "be giving further consideration to the fees charged for copies of wills and grants of probate", particularly the current £1.50 cost of ordering a copy of a will.

You can read more here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/storage-and-retention-of-original-will-documents>

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## Help with Wills

Continuing the theme, Wills and probate records are key tools for many family historians. If you're interested in finding out more ways in which wills can help your family research, the Society has several events coming up you'll almost certainly be interested in:

On **Friday 21st February**, the Bracknell and Wokingham Branch face-to-face meeting includes a talk by Sue Ellis on "Where there's a Will ... there's usually an argument".

Find out more about what the talk will cover here:

<https://berksfhs.org/events/where-theres-a-will-theres-usually-an-argument/>

Then on **Tuesday 8th April**, 7 - 9.30pm, Chad Hanna and Gillian Stevens begin the first of a two-part workshop on Wills. The second session takes place a week later on 15th April. Both are online.

This workshop will give you a solid basis for researching wills and probate records in England and Wales. Much of this will apply throughout the English-speaking world.

The workshop costs £20 (members £18) to attend and pre-booking is required.

Find out more and book a place at:

<https://berksfhs.org/events/wills-workshop>

# EVENTS



## **Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough** **Mon 20 Jan 19:30 - 21:30** **Abingdon Branch Meeting and talk** **by Melanie King** **Long Furlong Community Centre**

We could safely say that Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, was into 'wellness'. She relied on home remedies, including laudanum and boiled vipers. She was also a firm believer in 'taking the waters' to cure her various ailments.

After attacks of gout and 'the stone', she would, like many people in the eighteenth century, rush off to a spa for the benefit of healing waters. In her later years, when she suffered from severe itching from scurvy, she went to Scarborough for the saline mineral waters, although she continuously moaned that conditions in the small seaside town were primitive.

Despite her many ailments, Sarah lived to the grand old age of 84 – possibly because of her devotion to home made cures and English spas.

Join Melanie King, author of *The Secret History of the English Spa* (2021), to share some of the Duchess of Marlborough's adventures as she visits a few English spas.

*Image: © National Portrait Gallery*

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

**Find out more**

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## **A Potpourri of Social History Talks Winter Series**



**Thu 23 Jan 14:00 - 15:15**

**Thu 27 Feb 14:00 - 15:15**

**Thu 27 Mar 14:00 - 15:15**

**Online**

This all series ticket covers all three talks in the Winter "Potpourri of Social History" talks series, for the discounted price of £12.50 (members £10.00). You may also book each talk individually – see each separate event pages.

**[Thu 23 Jan "The Victorian Legacy – what our Ancestors did next" with Helen Baggott](#)**

We are delighted to welcome the acclaimed and popular author and speaker Helen Baggott to kick-off our online talks programme for 2025. This talk explores the lives of our ancestors through the messages that they wrote and the postcards they sent. Millworkers in Yorkshire, families affected by the first national rail strike, visitors to London and the execution of murderers are just some of the stories included in this talk. Our ancestors left a remarkable record of their lives; will you discover your own ancestors through postcards from the past?

**[Thu 27 Feb "Putting Berkshire on the Map" with John Leighfield](#)**

Maps allow us to better identify where our ancestors lived and worked and the local environment in which they spent the vast majority of their time. If you like maps – this is one not to miss. John will talk about the history of mapping with particular emphasis on Berkshire, beginning with Matthew Paris' map of Britain c. 1250 and finishing with Google and modern mapping. He will explore the various reasons why maps were commissioned and how best to interpret them.

**[Thu 27 Mar "A Walk on the Thames Path Oxford – Pangbourne" with Bill King](#)**

This is a stunning section of the Thames as it meanders its way through the countryside and past villages and towns with particularly interesting histories including Oxford, Abingdon, Wallingford and Pangbourne. Many of us will have ancestors who came from this area and were very familiar with the river, possibly using it for their leisure activities and perhaps even dependent on it for their income. Bill is a popular speaker to the Society and his journey along the Thames is richly illustrated with images.

**Book series ticket**

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## Drop In Advice Session

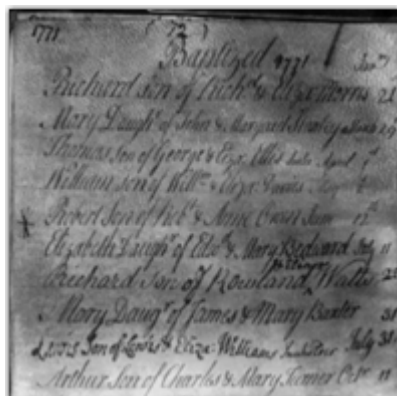
**Thu 28 Jan 14:00 - 17:00**

**Wokingham 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**



## Help! What do I do before 1837?

**Researching your Ancestors before Civil Registration**

**Tue 28 Jan 19:30 - 21:30**

**Windsor Branch Meeting with speaker:**

**Linda Hammond**

**Online**

So, you've been happily working your way back through census records and tracing your ancestors through civil registration. Maybe you've ordered birth, marriage and death certificates to help you on your way. Then you hit the 1841 census and ..... where do you go from there!

Booking is required.

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

**Book**

## Progressing Your Family History

**Thu 30 Jan 19:45 - 21:00**

**Reading Branch Meeting with speaker:**

**Debbie Bradley**





**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**



## House Histories Open Day

**Sat 01 Feb 10:30 - 14:30**

**The Centre**

Are you interested in tracing the history of your house and its occupants? Come and sit down with one of our expert advisors who will offer practical guidance and show you how to get started and progress your research.

The Research Zone will be open with access to Ancestry Worldwide, Findmypast Worldwide, the British Newspaper Archive and The Genealogist. Plus we will have our extensive collection of local trade directories available to consult.

*Image: Andrew Smith/ Wolseley Street, Reading/ CC BY-SA 2.0*

No need to book – just drop in.

**Find out more**

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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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