

Roots in the Forest



WALTHAM FOREST FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY
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WALTHAM FOREST FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY

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Roots in the Forest

The Journal of the Waltham Forest Family History Society

March 2026

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THE DEAN FAMILY IN WALTHAMSTOW

Barbara Burchell (née PLAYLL)

J & J Dean, Builders

J & J Dean was a firm constructing houses in the Walthamstow area from about 1900 until the 1950s, founded by brothers **John and James Dean**. John and James were the eldest and youngest sons of Thomas Dean, a policeman, who was a resident of Walthamstow, with his own interesting heritage.

Thomas Dean, Police Constable

Thomas Dean was born in Lindley, Elland, Yorkshire, on 1st December 1818. He was the son of a stonemason, **Marmaduke Dean**. Thomas Dean relocated to London where no doubt his stonemason skills could be used. However, Thomas enlisted in the police force on 9th May 1842. Thomas married **Charlotte Anmer**, who was born in Suffolk. Charlotte may well have left Suffolk under a cloud. She had been in service at Hintlesham Hall near Ipswich in 1841 but was found guilty later in 1841 of “larceny” and imprisoned for one week, which would suggest the offence was minor. Perhaps Charlotte needed a new start in London.

Thomas Dean was deployed to Walthamstow Police Station. Vestry House Museum in Walthamstow has many exhibits from the old police station, and Thomas Dean would have been a constable closely linked to operations at this police station. In the 1851 census, at the age of 32, Thomas was a policeman living in Willow Walk, Walthamstow, with his wife Charlotte and their first-born daughter **Elizabeth**. Regrettably, in 1853, their daughter Elizabeth died aged 3, by which time Thomas Dean has become a Police Sergeant. The 1861 census records Thomas as a Police Constable living at St Mary's Place, Walthamstow, with his family and now he has six additional children: **John Dean** (1852), **Fanny** (1855), twins **Thomas** and **Job** (1856) and baby **William** (1859). Two further children are born, **Henry** in 1863 and **James Dean** in 1866. Thomas Dean is discharged from the police after 24 years' service on 29th December 1866, due to “bodily infirmity arising from general debility”. His home address is given as Hertford Road, Walthamstow. Thomas benefits from a police pension of £39 17s 4d per annum.

2808

RETURN OF DISCHARGE,

To be transmitted to the Commissioners for the Metropolitan Police for the Review.

PENSIONS AND ALLOWANCES.

Mr. Slingsby Division.
 5th day of January 1867

Thomas Dean
 Police Constable was discharged from this Division on

1st day of December 1866, on account of *bodily infirmity arising from general debility*

on the *twenty-ninth* day of *December* 1866, to which day inclusive

he had received his Pay, and he is entitled to a Pension of *£ 29. 17. 4*

per annum, commencing on the *thirtieth* day of *December* 1866

Payable by the Receiver.

James Mott Superintendent.

(* Here received, or will receive, as the case may be.)

3072 LL
 9542
 7-24

For Description Paper of the Pensioner, see other side.

Form No. 59.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PENSIONER, &c.

Age when discharged	48	Years complete.
Stature	5 Feet 4 Inches.	
Hair	dark brown	
Eyes	hazel	
Complexion	fair	
Particular Mark, Defect, or Infirmity, by which he may be identified	none	
Where and when Born	Linley, York on the 1 st December 1818	
Names of Father	W. Mott	
" Mother	Isaac	
Date of Entry in the Service	9 th May 1842	
Particulars of his Service	Constable in 71 Division the whole of the period of service	
On what Diseases, &c., in which Capacity, and for what period		
Injured in the Service, and the nature of the Injury	none	
Whether Single, Married, or a Widower	married	
His present next of Kin, or legal Representative, in case of Death	Wife	
Where he intends to reside, and draw his Pension	Halford Road, Walthamstow, Essex	
His present Address	Halford Road, Walthamstow, Essex	
His usual Signature	Thos Dean	

Thomas's discharge papers

After Thomas is discharged from the police force, the 1871 census records Thomas as supplementing his income as a shoemaker. His teenage children are beginning to find employment and his eldest son John has become a carpenter, starting the foundation of his career as a builder.

J & J Dean, Builders

John Dean takes an adventurous path when he emigrates to America to use his skills as a carpenter, presumably to forge a new life there. He marries a Danish woman, **Katharine** (surname unknown), and their two daughters are born, **Charlotte** in 1875 in Illinois and **Esther** 1878, in Iowa. The American 1880 census records the family living in Des Moines, Polk County, Iowa. Tragedy strikes the family when Katharine dies leaving John with two young daughters to support. John must have decided to return to England as by the 1891 census, now aged 38, he is living at 36 Barclay Road, Walthamstow, and he has married his second wife **Mary Ann Burton** in 1890. John is employed as a joiner foreman. A photograph shows John Dean (far

right) in this employ at Osmont's Joinery Shop. There is a note accompanying this photo written by a Mr Harper:

"Osmont's Joinery Works is in a small turning opposite the gates of Barclay Road School of which I attended for some time. The gentleman on the outside is Mr Dean, of J & J Dean builders, with the trilby hat, next to him is Mr Davies when later became Davies's the wood yard in Lea Bridge Road, the third on the right is a Mr Priestly and my father James Harper (Jim) is the fourth from the right."



In the meantime, as recorded in the 1881 census, Thomas Dean continues employment as a shoemaker now living at 80 Eden Road, Walthamstow. His sons are employed in building trades: Job is listed as a house painter, and sons William and James are both carpenters. Thomas Dean dies in 1884 and is buried in Queens Road Cemetery on 16 September 1884. His wife Charlotte continues living in Eden Road, as recorded in 1891 census, with her unmarried children, Fanny aged 35 who is a dressmaker and son Job aged 38, a house painter. Charlotte dies in 1894 and is buried with her husband in Queens Road Cemetery.

In 1898 **John Dean** and his youngest brother **James Dean** went into partnership and formed their own building company, J & J Dean. By 1901 John Dean had moved to 32 Addison Road and is a builder, contractor and employer. Similarly James Dean, as recorded in the 1901 and 1911 censuses, is described as a builder, decorator and

employer living at 2 Folkestone Road, Walthamstow. J & J Dean is very much a family business.



John and James Dean, Partners, J & J Dean Builders

John Dean, founder of the firm, had no sons to help run the business. However, **James Dean** has three sons, **Frank**, **Oscar** and **John “Jack” Dean**, who come into employment with J & J Dean. The 1921 census records James Dean’s three sons as: **Frank Bertram Dean**, a builder’s manager, **Oscar James Dean**, a builder’s clerk, and **John Charles Dean**, a builder’s assistant, all working at J & J Dean. Their builder’s yard is located at Knotts Green Road, Leyton.

As family fortunes improve during the 1920s, **James Dean** and his wife, **Alice Dean** (nee **Stockley**) move to a larger house, 41 Upper Walthamstow Road. It could be speculated that the naming of a road,

close by, as Dean Gardens might have a connection with J & J Dean Builders.

John Dean dies in 1939, and his brother **James Dean** dies not long after, in 1940. James had been described in the 1939 Register as a retired master builder and was then resident at St Ouens, Grosvenor Gardens, Woodford Green.



***John & Mary Ann Dean grave**
St Mary's Walthamstow*

***James and Alice Dean grave**
Loughton Cemetery Essex*

In 1948, at the J & J Dean's 50th Year Jubilee Dinner, **Frank Dean** announces he is leaving the firm after 36 years and that the business will be run by his two younger brothers, **Oscar** and **Jack**, while he seeks prospects for business in South Africa.

J & J Dean continues to operate into the 1950s and by 1956 the builder's yard has been relocated to Ruckholt Road, Leyton. I am uncertain when the building company was wound up but none of the next generation of Deans took over the business.

The Dean family had another connection to Walthamstow. My grandmother, **Dorothy Adelaide Dean**, pictured in the family photo below, second from the left, was a sister to brothers Frank, Oscar and Jack Dean.



*James and Alice Dean's children:
Frank, Dorothy, Jack, Georgina, Oscar, c1905*



Dorothy's older sister, **Georgina**, had gone to teacher training college in Brighton but Dorothy had remained in Walthamstow and trained to be a secretary at "Walthamstow School of Shorthand and Typewriting", for which there is an advertisement on a house in Stainforth Road. At this time James Dean's family were living at 2 Folkestone Road, Walthamstow.

*Walthamstow School of
Shorthand and Typewriting*

The Playll family in Walthamstow

Dorothy Dean married into the Playll family in 1920. Their occupation was as shopkeepers, trading as stationers and newsagents. The

Playlls had moved from the east end of London to live at Sleights Cottage, 93 Shernhall Street, Walthamstow (now demolished). **William Playll** (senior) had inherited his father's, **John James Playll**'s, stationery shop at 139 Old Street, City of London. William Playll's two sons, **William John Playll** and **Henry Herbert Playll**, assisted their father with the stationery business but later traded on their own account. William had a toy shop at 199c High Street, Walthamstow. Younger son **Harry**, after his marriage to Dorothy Dean in 1920 at St Peter's in the Forest, looked for their own shop to run. They were able to purchase a newsagents and tobacconists, "Dean and Burton", located at 11 Beulah Road, Walthamstow. This business was purchased from builder John Dean's unmarried daughter, American born **Esther Dean**, and John's sister-in-law (from his second marriage), **Maria Burton**.



*Marriage photo of Henry Herbert Playll to Dorothy Adelaide Dean,
41 Upper Walthamstow Road*

*Parents left: William and Mary Playll; parents right: James and Alice
Dean*



Harry Playll

Henry “Harry” Playll was an exceptionally tall man but suffered from ill health. Harry served as an orderly in the Navy during the First World War, initially based at Chatham Dockyard, Kent, and then accompanying officers through France to Italy as documented by a series of postcards sent home from his “Active Service”, reassuring his family of his wellbeing.

He died in Connaught Hospital in 1932, aged 41, from stomach cancer and was buried in St Mary’s Walthamstow graveyard.

Harry and Dorrie Playll’s life together is documented in my grandmother’s memoir entitled “Reminiscences”. This document is a personalised, small black suede covered book with photos, which clearly shows her deep affection for her husband. Was this a popular way at that time to remember loved ones?



Dorothy Dean and Harry Playll, 1915

Harry and Dorrie Playll had an only son, **Richard Henry Playll** (my father), born in 1923. He was eight years old when his father died. Richard “Dick” Playll grew up at 11 Beulah Road, Walthamstow, helping his mother run the newsagent’s shop. He attended Maynard Road Junior School and later Leyton Grammar School. Dorrie sold the Beulah Road shop in the mid-1930s and moved to run a wool and fancy goods shop in Highams Park. Dorothy Playll (née Dean) died in 1974, aged 79, in Hove, East Sussex, to where she had moved when she retired to live near her son Richard Playll.



Playll family photo

Left to right:

*Standing: William John Playll, William Playll Snr, and his daughter,
Mary Phyllis Playll*

*Seated: Winnifred Playll (née Hills), Mary Ann Playll Snr, Dorothy Playll
(née Dean), with son, Richard Henry Playll*

*Boys: Brothers Donald and Jack Playll, the sons of William and Winnie
Playll*

***The Hop-Picker Murders*, by Nathan Dylan Goodwin, 2025, ISBN 9798298809924, £18.99 in hardback format or £6.49 in Kindle format. Available from Amazon.**

Family history research is akin to storytelling: one researches the bare bones of the genealogical facts, augments them with details from other historical sources, and tries to weave them all together to form a convincing account of the lives of our ancestors. The author Nathan Dylan Goodwin is particularly skilled in this regard, and *The Hop-Picker Murders* is the most satisfying book that I have read in his Morton Farrier series. The storyline describes the eponymic forensic genealogist's modern-day unravelling of a past investigation into deception and murder, whilst he is simultaneously confronted with two bombshells in his own life, one personal and one professional. However, those two latter aspects will no doubt feature prominently in the next volume in the series. Let's focus here on the hop pickers and Morton's latest assignment.

As someone who lived in Leytonstone E11 for 40 years and who worked in Whitechapel E1 for 35 years, I feel entitled to judge the authenticity of the east London connection at the heart of this story. The author creates credible patterns of speech of the folk from Stratford soon after World War 1, their attitudes, their likes and dislikes, and their enjoyment of life in the open Kent countryside as they go there to work in the hop fields in autumn. He has a keen eye for the detail of their deprived backgrounds in the grimy streets around Angel Lane, Stratford – a road I knew well from before 2012. He has also clearly carried out an impressive amount of research into the hop-picking process in a way that portrays a rich tapestry of the life of the workers in the past in the Garden of England, complete with occasional touches of humour. And as a family historian for over 20 years, I can appreciate Morton's skill and determination as he goes about researching the lives of murderers, fraudsters and innocent victims from 100 years earlier. He makes use of the obvious sources – BMD indexes, censuses, newspapers, maps, directories and the like – but adds into the mix some less familiar sources: police reports on habitual criminals and administrative records of early motor cars, to mention just two. The author blends all this information into a

realistic and convincing storyline that has you on the edge of your seat and keeps you guessing as to the identity of the mastermind behind the crimes that have such a devastating effect on the lives of Nellie Partridge and her fellow Cockney hop pickers.

Nathan Dylan Goodwin's writing in this latest book in the series is more assured than in previous ones. His depiction of emotions is more confident, his more focused attention to detail adds colour to the events described, his interlinking of the various facets of the story is more competent. I loved his references to aspects of East End life in the past: the songs people sang then, the food and sweets they ate, their resilience in the face of adversity. I especially loved the heroine of the post-WW1 story, Nellie Partridge, with her steely resolve to uncover how her brother Ernest died in mysterious circumstances, in an age before computers could help her. And once again I have to record my respect for how Morton Farrier is able to make such effective use of his expertise, his laptop and the resources of various archives to solve the mystery whilst at the same time being engulfed by considerable personal turmoil. All a product of the author's fertile imagination and genealogical experience, of course, and one which makes for a very satisfying read. This book will be a delight for any family historian.

* * * *

MARIA RIVA

John J Watts

Maria Riva (sometimes known as Mary) was born in Edinburgh, and Roman Catholic registers show her baptism in 1818. One of nine children who were born in Edinburgh, she was the daughter of Paul Riva, a glass blower and barometer maker from Northern Italy.

In 1835 she married Archibald Clark, a type founder. Entries are in both Church of Scotland and Roman Catholic registers. At the time of the 1841 census she is living at 8 Back Court, Richmond Roxborough, Edinburgh.

I found Maria in the Edinburgh Court records where she was accused of assault on 20th February 1846. In a house in Hastie's Close, Cowgate, Edinburgh, Maria was alleged to have fought with Isabella

McDonald, née Gray, and to have pushed or thrown Isabella out of an upstairs window, ‘being a height of 10 feet or thereby from the ground, and she fell in Hastie’s Close; in consequence of all which, she was bruised and wounded, to the effusion of blood, and injury of her person’.

It is lucky that the charge wasn’t murder! Maria pleaded guilty and was sent to prison for two months.

My connection to Maria Riva is that she is my great, great grandmother! I have been unable to find any further connection with the McDonalds, nor have I found Maria in the 1851 census. Her husband’s death in 1857 shows he had a second wife; therefore I have assumed Maria passed sometime before 1851.

* * * * *

WALTHAM FOREST FHS IN THE PUBLIC EYE

Mark Carroll

Waltham Forest FHS gained some useful publicity in autumn 2025. The aim of it was in some cases to (hopefully) recruit new members by bringing our existence and activities to a wider audience than we can ever achieve at a local open day. The idea behind it was to collaborate with a much larger organisation with a wider reach, as there is a limit to what a small organisation like ours – with around 50 members – can achieve. The three such events were:

A presentation to Lost Cousins (LC)

This genealogical organisation, founded by Peter Calver, puts people in touch when they can find members of a shared family in the 1881 census of England and Wales. One Saturday morning in October I went over to the home of our Chairman, Tim, to do a dual presentation over Zoom to 25 LC members with an interest in our area; the session was being recorded, and another 70 LC members had expressed their intention to view the event later when the recording was put up on YouTube. Peter chaired the session very professionally. I started off with a short account of the history of WFFHS and its geographical coverage. Tim then went on to show how our ‘Records’ website could be searched by means of a real-time

online demonstration. I then finished off with three reasons why an LC member might benefit from joining WFFHS. There were some questions afterwards, and the whole session lasted about an hour. Peter intends submitting an article about Lost Cousins to our Journal, so both sides have benefited from this event.

An article in the Federation's Really Useful Bulletin

The Family History Federation, of which WFFHS is a member, publishes a bulletin every month. Some of the space in each edition is given over to family history societies who wish to write about themselves or to publicise an upcoming event they are organising. WFFHS Committee submitted a 450-word article that described the society's history, its 'patch', its activities over the course of a year, its unique name-rich resources, and some of the projects it has undertaken. It was illustrated by images of local landmarks: the William Morris Gallery, the Walthamstow almshouses, and Chingford's Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge. As Secretary, I provided my contact details for any reader thinking of joining us. I don't know what the readership of the Bulletin is, but it must surely be higher than the number that reads our Journal!

A presentation at an international conference

On one weekend in October the British Isles FHS of Greater Ottawa, Canada, organised a two-day online conference on the theme of the history of the underprivileged in English and Welsh society. Somehow, the organisers had found out that I give a talk on "Life and Death in the Workhouse". Altogether there were nine presentations by experts in the field (though I hesitate to include myself in that category!) including one by Peter Higginbotham, the author of many books on the subject of the workhouse and the curator of the authoritative website on that topic. The sessions on the second day largely comprised three 'break-out' rooms on Zoom where attendees could ask questions of the experts. The whole event was recorded and made available online over the following six weeks. In my own talk the first slide included a reference to Waltham Forest FHS, but I'm not expecting an avalanche of membership applications from folk in Canada!

I found out about George a few years ago by chance as I noticed his name (with a slightly different spelling BLYTHE) on 1904 passenger lists for Canada, on Ancestry. I chased this up with an enquiry to Barnardo's and it was the correct George Blyth (1892-1917). We eventually obtained copies of his file from Barnardo's.

George Blyth was born on 17th March 1892 in Walthamstow and was my grandmother's older brother. His mother Margaret Blyth was an unmarried laundress from Walthamstow. No father was on George's birth certificate but he was reputed to be Frederick Olive, a flower seller. He died suddenly in February 1903 aged 37 in Leytonstone Workhouse infirmary, of heart failure due to complications from bronchial pneumonia. George was only 11 years old, and my great grandmother was by now heavily pregnant and unable to cope with George as he had become difficult and was mixing with bad companions.

George was taken in by Dr Barnardo's. Following his admission George spent 13 nights at the receiving house at Stepney Causeway, East London, and on 6th July 1903 he was transferred to Leopold House. On 14th July 1903 he was again moved to the Watts Naval Training School in Norfolk.

A year later on 21st July 1904 George left England aboard the *SS Southwark* and sailed to Canada. He arrived in Quebec on 31st July 1904. He was initially placed with Mr John Brittain, an English migrant, on his farm in Brantford, Ontario. Reports state that George was a good boy and settled down well to his life on the farm, doing stable work and milking cows etc. He was later indentured to William Brittain and George Franklin. He is listed on the 1911 Canadian census as a labourer.

George stayed on the farm until he was 23 when he returned to England in November 1915 aboard the *Corinthian* and joined the Essex Regiment, 7th Battalion. George was killed on 3rd November 1917 in Gaza and his name is commemorated on the Jerusalem Memorial: Private George Blyth 301070.

A TRANSCRIBING CHALLENGE

Mark Carroll

In one of WFFHS's transcription projects – marriages at St Barnabas, Walthamstow, 1932-1946 – Tim Valder-Hogg and I came across a challenge. How would you transcribe the signature of the first witness, below?

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
170	23rd November 1940.	Henry Herbert Williams	28	Bachelor.	Printer.	132, Belgrave Rd. E. 17.	Henry George Williams	Engineer.
		Viola Louise Williams	24	Spinster.	—	132, Belgrave Rd. E. 17.	Alfred Richard Williams	Compositor & Photo Engraver.

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England by Henry Herbert Williams or after same by me,

This Marriage was solemnized between us, { Henry Herbert Williams } in the Presence of us, { Alfred Richard Williams } Witness

WLLRKAN.

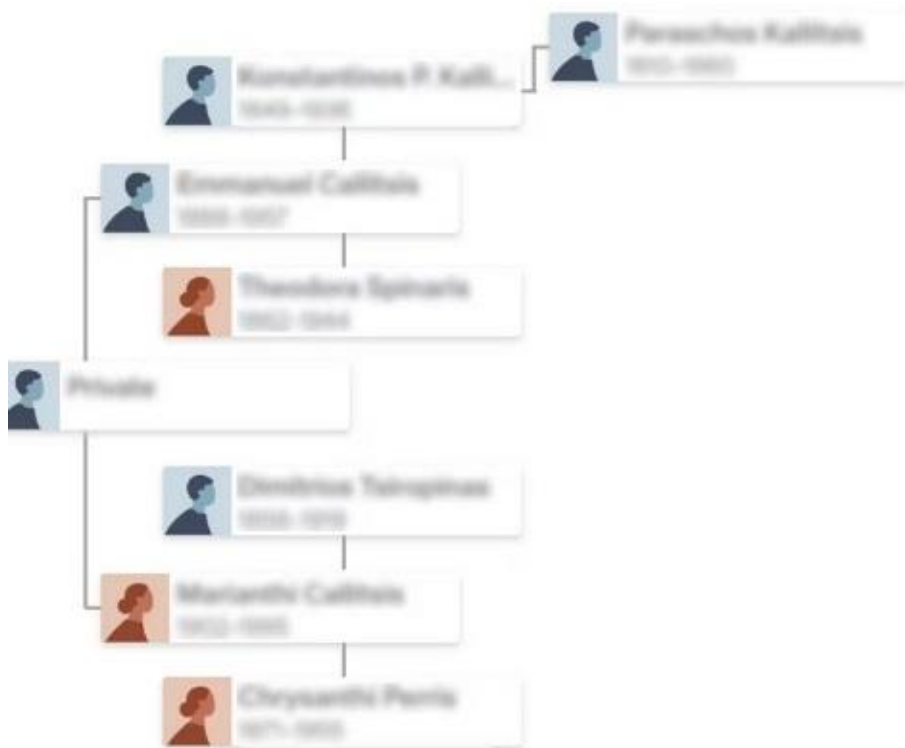
The vicar has helpfully written in the bottom margin the surname as WLLRKAN. We are taught that when doing transcribing, we should always write down what we see. But would you really transcribe that surname as Wllrkan? Surely not! There is no family tree for that surname on the FamilySearch website, nor on the Wikitree website.

Well, a search for Wllrkan online on the FreeBMD website is instructive. One finds there the birth of Albert Edward Wllrkan in 1910 in Hackney, plus several other people with that bizarre surname: Minnie (died 1910, Edmonton), Rita (born 1936, Hackney) and David (born 1943, Essex SW). Albert Edward's 1934 marriage in Hackney is not there under Wllrkan but is there – as it appears in the GRO index – under WILRKAN. In the 1911 census, Albert Wllrkan appears aged 0 living at 24 Mentmore Terrace, Hackney, with his father Kennedy, a 29-year-old widower who was working as a hotel cook and was born in Candy, Ceylon (now Kandy, Sri Lanka). It thus seems likely that Minnie (died 1910) was Albert's mother and Kennedy's wife. Kennedy himself died in 1930 in Hackney under the surname WURAKON, and Albert died in 1991 in Brentwood, Essex, with the same surname.

So, the moral of the tale is: always transcribe what you see – even if it appears improbable!

Artificial Intelligence (AI) shows great promise for many aspects of our lives, including for family history. I have been using Google Gemini 3 as an AI research tool, with some success – it is available online and is (currently) free. Recently I came across what, for me, is a novel application of this tool. Some of you will no doubt have used Ancestry DNA, where a match indicates some level of shared heritage. These matches often have an associated family tree, but unless one has an Ancestry subscription, the individuals in the tree are shown online as being blurred in order to conceal their identity. Could Gemini ‘unblur’ these folk and reveal their names?

One DNA match of mine on Ancestry was Heather Gould, with 94cM of shared DNA. Her family tree in its blurred online format is shown below. Not very helpful, you might think.



I asked Gemini the following question: Can you please identify the blurred names of the individuals on the associated family tree? Its answer came back as shown below:

- **Top (First Generation):** Paraschos Kallitsis (1813–1890).
- **Second Generation:** Konstantinos P. Kallitsis (1849–1936).
- **Third Generation (Parents):** * Emmanuel Kallitsis (1888–1957).
 - Theodora Spinaris (1892–1944).
- **Fourth Generation (Children/Spouse):**
 - One individual is marked as **Private** (likely still living or restricted by the tree owner).
 - Dimitrios Tsiropinas (1856–1919).
 - Marianthi Kallitsis (1902–1995).
- **Bottom (Fifth Generation):** Chrysanthi Perris (1871–1955).

Gemini then made some observations and offered further help: *The names and dates suggest a family of Greek heritage. Interestingly, there is a significant age gap between some individuals on the same horizontal level (such as Marianthi Kallitsis and Dimitrios Tsiropinas), which often indicates a tree showing multiple branches or marriage connections rather than a simple direct descent. Would you like me to help you cross-reference these names with historical records from Greece or the UK?*

I contacted Heather Gould and it turns out that her great-grandmother Harriet Orriss was the older sister of my maternal great-grandmother, Ada Orriss, and hence we are third cousins. So the blurred family tree that Ancestry uses in this situation is a generic one that has no relevance to one's own family. Nevertheless, this example does illustrate the power of AI for revealing details of blurred writing. Perhaps you can put Gemini to good use for the same purpose?

Introduction

Do you know what the FAN Club principle is in relation to your family history research, and why it might be significant and useful to you? The FAN Club is not an organisation – despite its name – but a tool or strategy which can provide you with new insights that might help you to break down a ‘brick wall’; you might also see it called ‘cluster research’. Whatever its name, it is based on the fact that each of our ancestors did not exist in isolation, nor just within their own family, but in a wider community or network of people.

By applying the FAN Club strategy to your research, you are trying to build a broader context to the lives of your ancestors. Understanding the community reveals migration patterns, social status and life events, thereby turning data into stories. When direct evidence (a single document that answers a research question) is missing, the FAN Club approach helps build a case through indirect and circumstantial evidence. It is particularly useful for solving difficult problems, such as differentiating between people with the same name, establishing identities, finding maiden names, or determining an ancestor’s place of origin. This article explains what the FAN Club principle is and applies it to two London families in order to demonstrate how it works in practice.

The FAN Club

In this case FAN stands for **F**riends + **A**ssociates + **N**eighbours. Some people include another F – **F**amily – and you might think you already know all the relevant family members; however, see later for an example of the discovery of new family members. Bear in mind that we are talking here about the wider family, which might include in-laws and step-relatives. Who are these FAN Club folk, and where does one find sources of information about each group?

1. *Friends*: Self-explanatory, but not necessarily neighbours or associates. They could be drinking partners in the local pub, or fellow church parishioners, or players at the local sports club, or regular shoppers at the local street market. They might appear in the historical records as a witness to a marriage or a will or be listed as members of the football team in a newspaper report of a match.

2. *Associates*: One thinks here of co-workers, business partners, employers, landlords, fellow soldiers or co-defendants. One can find evidence for them in the records of trade directories, Army personnel, court proceedings, newspaper reports, the London Gazette, amongst others.
3. *Neighbours*: Next-door neighbours, of course, but also people in the same street and in the local community. Such folk are often used as witnesses to a will or a christening. You can also find them in census records and electoral registers, in parish registers or on official documents.

You can find more information about the FAN strategy online at sites like:

<https://www.theoccasionalgenealogist.com/2018/03/genealogy-fan-club-cluster-collateral.html>

<https://www.legacytree.com/blog/cousin-next-door-using-fan-club-principle>

<https://www.genealogyinaction.com/blog/6-places-to-look-for-fan-club-members>

There are also numerous YouTube videos that will take you through the process, such as:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXODnErW XFw&t=92s>

How to do it

1. *Identify a target*: Choose the ancestor you're stuck on.
2. *Find their community*: Look at census records (search pages around your ancestor), land records, wills, obituaries, and marriage certificates.
3. *Note key people*: Write down names appearing frequently with your ancestor or nearby (eg witnesses on a marriage certificate, godparents in a baptism record).
4. *Research the FANs*: Investigate these new names, noting their connections back to your main ancestor.
5. *Use software*: Some genealogy software can help track these connections (eg Roots Magic).

By researching the whole FAN Club, you uncover the web of relationships that defines your ancestor's life and unlocks hidden clues, making it a cornerstone of advanced genealogical research.

The FAN Club in action

Here is a hypothetical example that illustrates how the FAN Club principle might be applied in practice (adapted from the LegacyTree website mentioned above, with thanks).

Your ancestor is Sarah DAVIS, who married Harold JOHNSON. The witnesses at the wedding were a Thomas SMITH and David Johnson, a known brother of Harold's. Thomas Smith was enumerated next door to Harold and Sarah in a later census. Your research question is: *what was the maiden name of Sarah Davis and who were her parents?* At this point you appear to have little to go on: neither witness shares a surname with Sarah, so they do not help, and Thomas seems to be just a neighbour, right? Wrong!

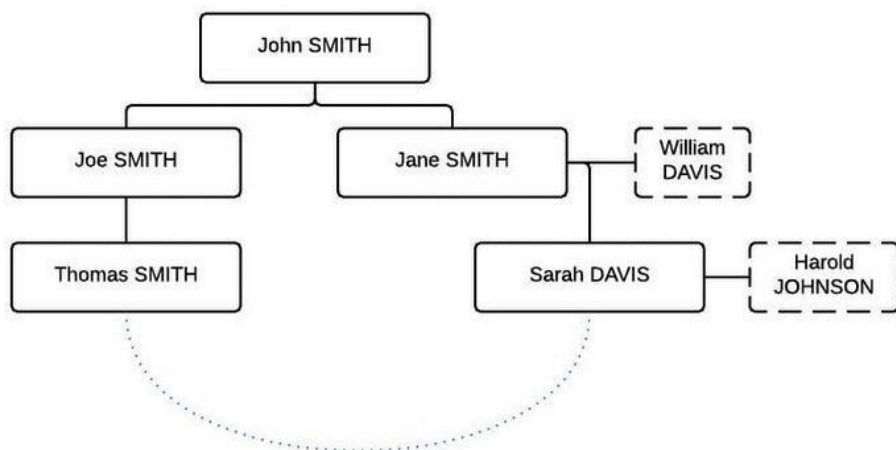


Figure 1. Family tree of Sarah Davis

With further research into the members of Sarah's FAN Club, you will arrive at the family tree shown above. You will have found that Thomas Smith is the son of Joe Smith, who inherited land from his father, John Smith. In his will, the list of John's beneficiaries includes a familiar surname: we find that he made a bequest to "my granddaughter Sarah Davis, heir of my daughter Jane Davis". So that apparently unrelated neighbour who witnessed Sarah's marriage was actually her cousin. And now you've identified Sarah's mother, her maiden name, and the name of *her* father.

The Burnside letters



Figure 2. The Burnside letters

This case study concerns an old leather pouch containing letters to the BURNSIDE family of London written over the period 1830-1849 (Fig 2). Some of their authors were family members themselves, others came from a Daniel MACMILLAN and from a J A CROWTHER. The key individuals mentioned in the letters include the following:

- *Family members:* Mr William Burnside and his wife Jane; their children Anne, William (known in the family as “Will”), Jacob and James (“Jem”); and some married paternal aunts of William Burnside.
- *Non-family members:* Mr BARRON, Mr MORLEY, Mr SEELEY, Sarah MASON, Mr Crowther (Thomas and J A), and Daniel Macmillan.

A simplified family tree is shown below (Fig 3). Place names also appear repeatedly in the letters: 6 Lansdowne Place, Bloomsbury, London (the Burnside family home by 1835); Dumfries and Edinburgh, Scotland; Stanmore, Middlesex; Dublin, Ireland; and various towns and cities in Europe, including Wiesbaden, Germany, where the Burnside family took a spa holiday in 1843.

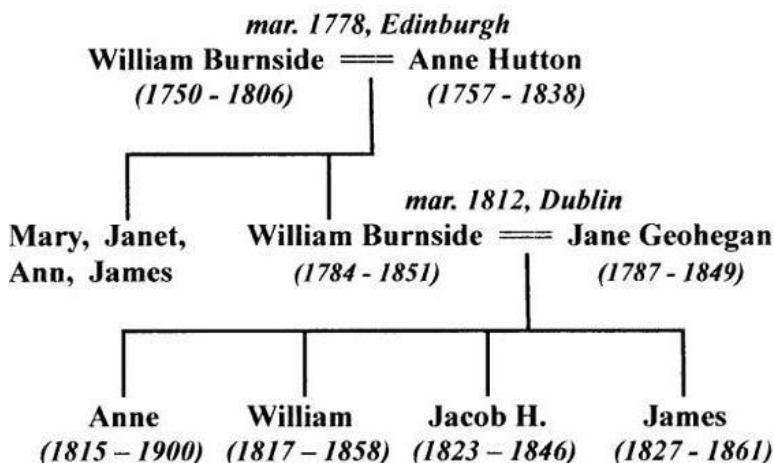


Figure 3. Burnside family tree (part)

So how can the FAN Club principle be applied to the Burnside family, and in particular, can it explain the significance of the non-family members? How do they fit into the broader context of this wealthy family from central London? Some early (2016) research of mine had already shed light on the two Mr Crowthers and the Mr Seeley, but not on the other non-family members.

Mr Crowther

The patriarch of this Burnside family, William (1750-1806), was the church minister in Dumfries, where he knew as one of his parishioners the famed Scottish poet, Robert BURNS. His older brother, John Burnside, had moved from Scotland to Nottingham, England, where he had set up a lace manufacturing business. Online records show that John was part of the business community there, as was a Thomas Crowther; they both made donations to charitable causes, and hence Thomas was an Associate of John's. It is this same Thomas who was taken by coach by Mrs Jane Burnside one time to Stanmore, as mentioned in her 1830 letter, and so he was also a Friend. Furthermore, William's son, William junior (1784-1851), in his will left his Bible "which originally belonged to my friend Thomas Crowther, to his son James Addington Crowther". He also mentions in the will his wife's maiden name and that she was from Dublin – though it is difficult to read the court-hand script at that point (*see below*). James Addington himself appears to have been

informally adopted by the London-based Burnside family, as mentioned in one of the letters written by him from 6 Lansdowne Place. The take-home message here is that wills can be very informative resources for the FAN Club.



Mr Seeley

William Burnside (1784-1851) migrated to Nottingham to join his paternal uncle John in the lace industry there. Around 1820 he moved again, this time to London, where he became a publisher. The surname Seeley crops up several times in the letters and it is easy to see why: the publishing house of R B Seeley & W Burnside was very successful in London over the period 1826-1847. Here is a business Associate as a member of the Burnside FAN Club. There are many sources online that mention the publishers Seeley & Burnside, but a particularly informative one is the London Gazette. For example, in its issue of 4th January 1848 a notice describes the dissolution of the partnership of Robert Benton Seeley, William Burnside and George Seeley (ref 1). Furthermore, Jane Burnside mentions in her letter of 1830 as having spent the whole day with Mrs Robert Seeley – the married women are invariably referred to by their husbands' forenames! Here is another example of a family Friend who also has an Associate link.

Mr Barron

In the 1843 letter sent from Wiesbaden, Jane Burnside mentions several times that a Mr Barron is with her party there and that he runs a school in Stanmore. But why would you take a teacher with you on a foreign holiday? Evidence that the relationship is much closer comes in part from the 1851 will of Jane's husband William, who names as his executor "my friend Rev John August Barron of Stanmore, Middlesex". A quick search of the 1841 census of England soon found this John Barron and his wife Emily (born Ireland) and over 20 children. One of his pupils was a James Burnside aged 14 – the youngest son of William and Jane (see Fig 3). In fact, this John

Augustus Barron (1797-1866) was more than just a Friend and an Associate, for he was also a Family member by marriage. Online (ref 2) there is a family profile which shows that in 1828 in Dublin he married an Emily Geoghegan (1807-1861), sister to Jane (later Burnside). Of course, one needs to check any genealogical information that one finds online, but in principle this research into Mr Barron, the Friend-Associate-Family member, has opened up a whole new branch of the family tree of Jane Burnside née Geohegan (the surname is spelled in various ways in the historical records) – a branch that includes 11 siblings and her parents.

Daniel Macmillan

This man puzzled and frustrated me for many years up to 2025, for both his names are common ones. He wrote two of the letters to the Burnsides – one to Anne and one to William (1784-1851) – soon after the premature death of Jacob at the age of just 22. One letter was sent from Hastings, Sussex, where Daniel Macmillan was on holiday, the other from Cambridge. In one he refers to Jacob as having been his “intimate friend”, so in 2016 I surmised that they had perhaps been university students together.

153	Twenty fifth of June 1846 Broughton Hospital.	Jacob Henry Burnside.	Male	23 yrs	Assistant to a Bookseller	Natural, most probably from Meant disease. Lived about 5 minutes.	Wm Payne - Coroner. Brunswick Square	Twenty birth of June 6 1846.	William Payne Registrar.
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Figure 4. Death certificate of Jacob Burnside, 1846

Jacob’s death certificate (Fig 4) refers to him as being an assistant to a bookseller, a trade related to his father’s publishing business. In desperation I carried out a Google search for “history + Macmillan + London + publishers”. The first ‘hit’ named a Daniel Macmillan (1813-1857) as having been the founder of the great global publishing house of Macmillan (ref 3). A short biography of him recounted that he was born in Scotland but moved to Cambridge; he worked for the publishers Seeley & Burnside in London from 1837 to 1843 and established his own publishing firm in 1844 with his brother Alexander. So, Daniel Macmillan was a member of the Burnside FAN Club as both an Associate and a Friend. When researching

businesspeople, the London Gazette and trade directories can be informative, but sometimes a simple Google search will do the trick!

Sarah Mason

In his 1849 letter from Rome, Italy, James Crowther concludes by asking William Burnside (1784-1851) to pass on his regards to “Sarah + MASON”. One takes these two persons to be a Mrs Sarah Mason and her husband – possibly a married couple employed by the Burnside family as servants at Lansdowne Place. William’s 1851 death certificate (Fig 5) reveals that a Sarah Mason was the informant and was present at the death – hence an Associate, though one closely involved with the family.

Place		Age		Profession		Cause of Death		Signature	
360	1851	March	William	Male	66	Gentleman	Informant of the death 2 years Residence of Late Personified Informant of Personified	Sarah Mason Present at death 6 Lansdowne Place P. Burnside	John Morley Registrar

Figure 5. Death certificate of William Burnside, 1851

Mr Morley

A Mr Morley is mentioned several times by Jane Burnside in just one letter, sent in 1843 from the family’s spa holiday in Wiesbaden. He gives the 16-year-old Jem lessons there (no details stated) and has a brother Richard who is not with the party. He offers to provide the Burnside family with “a bottle of Champagne”, and according to Jane, “he has taken such pains to make us comfortable here”. Perhaps he was just the proprietor of the hotel where the Burnside party was staying, and hence an Associate? Once again, the name Richard Morley is too common for successful searching in the usual online genealogical sources, and the FAN Club principle breaks down at this point.

Neighbours

The Burnside letters do not refer explicitly to any neighbours, the N in the FAN acronym. However, the coroner who confirmed the death of Jacob and signed the death certificate was William PAYNE of Brunswick Square (see Fig 4). That square can be seen on an 1833 map of central London as being adjacent to Lansdowne Place, where the Burnside family home was at that time. Hence William Payne was a Neighbour (as well as an Associate, perhaps, by virtue of his

medical practice in Bloomsbury). Clearly the local neighbourhood is important when researching any family, so the following examples from my own research will illustrate that point.

My mother, the then 15-year-old Margaret ORRISS, had her home destroyed near Whipps Cross – on the borders of Leytonstone and Walthamstow in north-east London – by a German bomb in October 1940. The family moved at some point by 1944 to rented accommodation at 51 Forest Drive East, Leytonstone. Next door at number 49 was the Carroll family, which included at that time a 21-year-old James. The young Neighbours evidently got on very well, for they married in September 1947 at St Peter's-in-the-Forest church near Whipps Cross. This example also addresses the research question: how did the two young people in any marriage get to know one another?

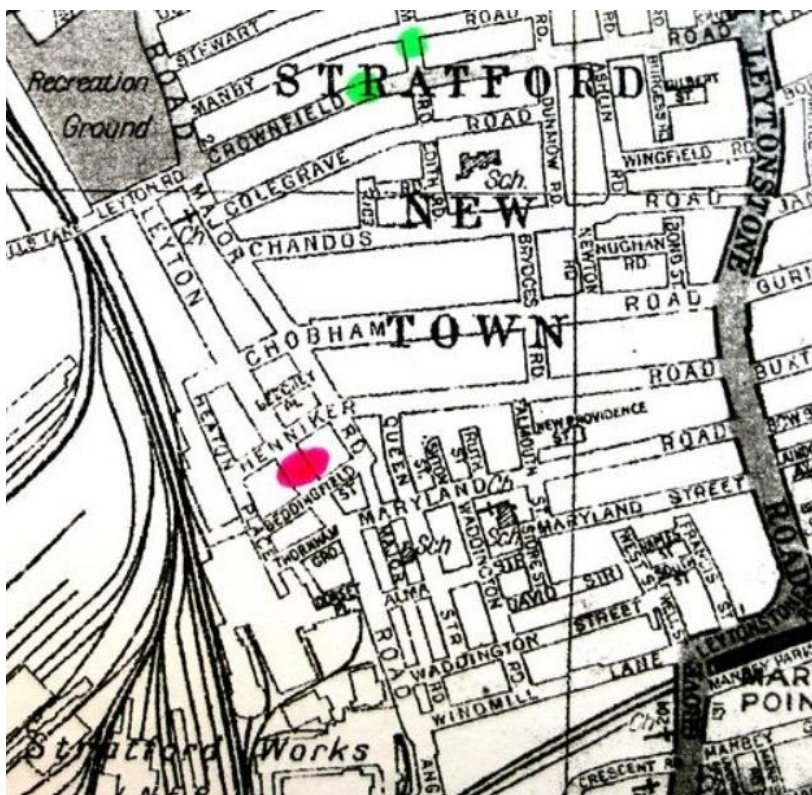


Figure 6. 1930s map of Stratford New Town

My maternal grandmother was born Ada Louise SMITH (1899-1988), and within the extended family she had a paternal uncle called

James Ridge Smith, a printer's assistant. In the 1921 census of England, James and his family can be found living at 26 Beddingfield Street on the borders of Leytonstone and Stratford – see Fig 6, where the street is just below the pink blob. They are also there in the electoral registers for the area in the 1920s and 1930s (ref 4). During that time various adult Smith children moved into and out of the family home. Then in 1938, two doors down at no 22, appear James's son William Henry and his daughter-in-law Alice Jane (née HARWOOD) – so these Neighbours were also Family. It is of course not unusual to find family members in the past sticking together within a close community, and this phenomenon is also true when it involves migration abroad – the so-called “pull effect” from a ‘founder’ emigrant.

Where did James's unusual middle name of Ridge come from? At the time of his birth in late 1871 the Smith family was living at 3 Redcross Court, off Golden Lane in the present-day Barbican district of central London. In the 1871 census of England, we find that next-door at no 4 was a widowed 68-year-old Irish laundress, Ellen RIDGE. Perhaps James's parents chose their neighbour's surname as his middle name, if she had acted as midwife at the birth?

Conclusions

Are you now convinced that you need to pay attention to the FAN Club principle in your own family history research? If so, you will have to keep good records. You need to note down in some systematic way lots of details: who were the witnesses, the beneficiaries and the executors of every will; the witnesses to a marriage or the godparents at a christening; the other people living in the same street; the business partners; and so many more – not just the names and places, but also how each individual was or might have been linked to your ancestor. You will also need to widen your research activity to access sources beyond the usual BMD indexes and the censuses. Remember that keeping an open mind is important here in order to avoid ‘confirmation bias’, where you focus on evidence that supports your research question, but you ignore evidence that does not. Yet with all these caveats, the FAN Club strategy might still help you break down the ‘brick wall’ associated with a particularly stubborn ancestor – for if you cannot smash through it, perhaps you can go *around* it?

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(Available: <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/20812/page/15> [accessed 22 Nov 2025].)
2. Profile of Emily Geoghegan, personal ID: M9QY-GN6.
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3. Encyclopaedia Britannica: entry for Macmillan Publishers Ltd.
(Available: www.britannica.com/topic/Macmillan-Publishers-Ltd [accessed 20 Nov 2025].)
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COVER PHOTO – THE CROSS OF SACRIFICE IN CHINGFORD CEMETERY

Kathy Unwin

There are 144 Commonwealth burials from the 1914-1918 war and 186 from the 1939-1945 war, in Chingford cemetery. There is also one non-war service burial. The WWII graves not marked by headstones are named on a low screen wall memorial (see below). Many servicemen are buried under the memorial or close by. Many WWI servicemen in common graves are buried on War Grave Lawn.



Every year on the Friday before Remembrance Day local school-children lay wreaths on the Cross of Sacrifice in Chingford cemetery. They also place individual flowers on the war graves. Last year 250

children attended. After a short service the children went to individual graves and were told a little about the person whose grave they were laying flowers at.

Details of the people in the Commonwealth War Graves have been compiled and here is an example of the information to be found:

Name: Roy Stanley Clark

Rank: Sgt

Unit: RAF Melpal – 75 NZ Sqn Flight Engineer (RAF Melpal was located near Ely, Cambs and opened in June 1943)

Date of death: 22 April 1945

Age: 22

Type of grave: Commonwealth headstone/private memorial

Wife: May Ethel Eileen Clark of Clapton, London

Parents: Charles Herbert and Henrietta Gertrude Clark

Report of death:

Whilst flying in a Lancaster bomber number NF 935 from RAF Melpal in Cambridgeshire in a flight of 21 aircraft. The task of the mission was to attack and bomb Bremen, Germany. Over the target there was 5/10th cloud and the bombing was satisfactory. On the return trip flying at 17,500 feet the aircraft was hit by Flack while flying over Wilhemshaven which was at intervals moderate but very accurate. Sergeant Clark died of injuries he received. All other crew uninjured. Sergeant Clark was the 1139th and last casualty in 75 NZ squadron over five years. The squadron only carried out a further 2 bombings missions before the end of the war.

Our website has a search page for CWGC monuments and photos of most of these monuments are available to members. Information about Commonwealth War Graves can be found on: www.cwgc.org.

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THE LAST WORD

Kathy Unwin

Please note that in-person meetings will no longer be held at Brookscroft Road after the March meeting because of a rent rise. The

May meeting will be held at Friday Hall. Please check the diary for more details of meetings.

Some of you may be interested in the following talks:

Midlands Ancestors' London and Home Counties Group

We are a small and very friendly group eager to help newcomers and the experienced researcher alike. We are very keen to open our doors to more people, members and non-members alike.

Meetings are held at the Hyde Park Family Search Centre, 64-68 Princes Gate, Exhibition Road, South Kensington, SW7 2PA.

Doors open 10.00 talks start 11.00.

For those attending, the research facility will remain open for research after the meeting.

Most meetings are free to attend but donations, towards the running of the group, are welcome.

There are four meetings a year and still to come are:

11th April 2026: Andrew Lound "Titanic – The Midlands' connection"

11th July 2026: Sophie Kay "Genetic hide and seek" exploring missing ancestor mysteries with autosomal DNA followed by buffet & AGM.

10th October 2026: Members Day – "A Brick Wall in My Tree: I solved one/I have one"

Obituary

Sadly, Stan Britten died in 2025. He was a long-standing member of the society, joining in 1985, and was Treasurer from 2002 until 2019. He became interested in family history after his wife Beryl took a course on the subject. They enjoyed going out for research, visiting buildings and landmarks and spent time going through church, parish, and county records.

Stan was born in Chingford in 1928 and lived in Walthamstow all his life apart from when he did his national service in the RAF as an Aircraft Instrument Engineer. During this time, he served in Suez and in Berlin during the Airlift. After his discharge he returned to his job in the Stock Exchange.

**Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month
(except August) at 8 pm on Zoom or in:**

**Friday Hall, 56 Friday Hill E, London E4 6JT
(please note venue may change for June)**

Subscription rates

<u>UK:</u>	Individual £15	e-journal £12
	Household £18	e-journal £14
	Institutions £15	e-journal £12
<u>Overseas:</u>	£19	e-journal £12

DIARY

- 14 Apr** **Talk on Zoom – When Harry met Dotty – Nick Barratt**
- 12 May** **Workshop in Friday Hall – WFFHS records – Tim Valder-Hogg**
- 8 Jun** **Talk on Zoom – A historical trip along the Thames – Dr Peter Ross**
- 14 Jul** **Workshop – Researching common names – Mark Carroll (venue to be confirmed)**
- 2 Aug** **Summer lunch and walk in North Chingford – Joanna Moncrieff**
- 8 Sep** **Talk – Forensic genetic genealogy – Dr Penny Walters**

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The Society covers an area largely defined by the River Lea, M25 and A11/A104 roads, this includes the London Borough of Waltham Forest, comprising the old Essex metropolitan boroughs of Chingford, Leyton and Walthamstow, and extends to Waltham Abbey in the north

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Family History Society

If undelivered, please return to:
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