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Sevenoaks Newsletter

THE NORTH WEST KENT FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY - www.nwkfhs.org.uk

Welcome to NWKFHS Sevenoaks Branch

Our meetings take place at Otford Memorial Hall, 28A High Street, Otford, TN14 5PQ

Doors open at 10.45 am, meeting starts at 11am - Parking: Up to 2 hours: £0.50 - Up to 3 hours: £1.00

We warmly welcome visitors and new members and aim to provide all the advice and support you may need in your family history journey.

Guests: We kindly ask for a £4 donation to support the Society's funds. Members: £2 contribution per meeting.

Hand sanitiser and masks are available at the venue. Chairs are arranged with considerate spacing for those who may still be cautious about COVID. We are also pleased to announce that we now have a hearing assistance system in place to improve the audio experience for attendees who may benefit from enhanced sound clarity.

TODAYS TALK: Ed Thompson: Shops of Otford 1960-2000

The talk looks at the buildings and scenes of Sevenoaks that are lost to time but were captured in over 80 evocative photographs. Edwin was brought up in Otford and from an early age developed an interest in railways, spending much time watching steam trains at the local station. He began to collect railway memorabilia as much of the railway was being modernised in the 1960s but it wasn't until 1980s when the canopy at Otford Station was being taken down that he felt the need to preserve the memory of the old station for future generations. At that time, he only possessed one old photograph of the building, but over time his collection grew to over 200 pictures. Next, he started amassing pictures of Otford Village and then of Sevenoaks and the surrounding villages, eventually widening out to cover West Kent and East Sussex.

His collection continues to grow and many of his photographs have been used in local history books.

NEXT SEVENOAKS BRANCH MEETING

28th March – Toni Mount: How to survive in Anglo-Saxon England – ** *Please note change of usual date* **

If you are planning to travel back to the England of Anglo-Saxon times and begin a new life without technology, how will you manage? If you were a king, a thegn or even a slave, what rights do you have under the law? Are women treated well by their husbands, and if you become sick, what are your chances of recovery? How might you earn your living, and the biggest worry: what to do about those fearsome Vikings?

All these questions and more are answered in this self-help guide for time-travellers. It explores the difficulties you may encounter and the problems that might occur, especially as you are a newcomer in this very different world. Fear not: keep this talk will help you find your place in society, learn the language and make friends. You will also meet some of the celebrities of the day, from Alfred the Great to the Venerable Bede, and humbler folk such as Tatberht of Lundenwic and Ardith the local baxter.

Learn how to make bread and tell a great story; enjoy the mead, and the beauties of Anglo-Saxon art and jewellery. And if you do find yourself involved in a Viking attack, at least you will know your assailants are well groomed - and afterwards, both sides know how to have a great time in the mead-hall!

About the Speaker: Toni is very well known to us, researches her talks impeccably and knows her subject. She is a well-known lecturer, historian and author whose books are based on her research into the lives of ordinary and sometimes extra-ordinary people through history.

DARTFORD BRANCH MEETING

7th March – Ernest Shackleton and the Endurance Expedition with Carol Harris

Shackleton was the great Irish explorer of the Polar regions but since the Poles had already been conquered by others, he decided that he should attempt a sledge crossing of the Antarctic continent. However, his ship the Endurance was soon caught in the ice. Carol will tell of the crew's incredible survival against all odds and their eventual rescue, illustrated by photographs and contemporary reports and artifacts.

Please visit our website for details of more workshops and updates and don't forget to sign up for our free twice monthly Society eNewsletter.

UP AND COMING LIBRARY WORKSHOPS

DNA and General Family History Discussion Group with Pam Goddard

11 March 10:30

ZOOM DISCUSSION GROUPS, TALKS AND WORKSHOP

ZOOM Do you have a favourite website or hints and tips? With Ann Clarke

4 March 10:30

ZOOM My Ancestors in a Wiltshire Village (and the surprises and shocks this genealogist discovered behind and beyond the paperwork) followed by discussion on your own ancestral places with Steve Maslin

11 March 10:30

ZOOM WORKSHOP Education over 18th and 19th centuries with Linda Crisp

25 March 19:30

ZOOM DNA Discussion Group with Laura Lincoln

18 March 10:30

ZOOM The Future of Family History research in the digital age with Nick Barratt

12 March 19:30

In this talk, Nick explores some of the technologies that are changing the way we research, share and create our stories – and some of the implications for working in an increasingly digital world. He will use some case studies to show the dangers and delights that our future might hold.

Broadcaster, historian, and author, Dr Nick Barratt is best known for his work on the BBC's 'Who Do You Think You Are'. A very early interest in history led to him obtaining a PhD in History, editing 13th century Exchequer documents. Nick lectures on a range of subjects from house history to Medieval history.

Tonight's focus will instead be on the future – the future of family history in the digital age.

Please log in 15 minutes before each online event and enjoy chatting amongst participants before it starts.

As this event is on Zoom, don't forget to bring your own coffee and biscuits! ☕🍪😊

All events are for members only. For further details and fees please visit our website.

Workshop leaders freely give their time, but a donation via the web shop is appreciated:

<https://www.nwkhfs.org.uk/shop/nwkhfs-shop/services/society-donation>



Participating in a North West Kent Family History workshop or discussion offers numerous benefits. It provides valuable skills for research, enhances your understanding of historical contexts, and fosters a sense of connection with your ancestry. We warmly welcome both familiar faces and new friends.

Calling all volunteers with fresh ideas! If you have a new topic of interest you'd like to see covered in our workshops, or you wish to be involved with our workshops, we want to hear from you.

Contact us through bookings and enquiries by e-mail workshop.booking@nwkhfs.org.uk

Bring Your Own Mug (BYOM)



Let's make our meetings a little eco-friendly! Please where possible BYOM to help us to save a little cost, reduce waste and make a positive impact on the environment. If this is difficult or you forget don't worry, we do have a small supply of mugs to ensure you can enjoy a drink. We thank you for your cooperation.



25 March – Library Access Update

The library will be open for members to carry out their own research on this day. However, please note that access to the books and some maps and document collections will be restricted until the Society Committee meeting has concluded. We plan on finishing committee business by 1.00pm but sometimes overrun.

We apologise for any inconvenience and thank you for your understanding.



An Invitation from the Editor

As a member of our esteemed Family History Society, we invite you to contribute to our upcoming journals in the next few months. At NWKFHS, we value the rich tapestry of family narratives and historical insights that our members bring to the table. Your unique perspective and expertise would undoubtedly enrich our journal.

Whether you have a captivating family story, compelling research, or an enlightening exploration of historical records, we warmly welcome your submissions. This is a terrific opportunity to share your knowledge and passion with fellow members.

If you are interested in contributing, please feel free to reach out to us with your proposed topic or submission. Our editor Pauline will be delighted to hear from you and will respond to every proposal. Please email theeditor@nwkhfs.org.uk - word files or simply text in the body of an email is fine. We await your proposals.



Help Needed

Many hands make light work. That is certainly true when it comes to sharing the tasks that keep our Society operating smoothly. Please see our website for monthly updates for these volunteer opportunities. Below are a few tasks where help is much needed at our Sevenoaks Branch.

Chair – Sevenoaks Branch Meetings

Barbara Phillips is currently acting Chair but would like to relinquish this post as she is also programme secretary for the branch and has other responsibilities within the Society. The chair does not have as many responsibilities as previously, as others have taken on some of the tasks. If the Branch Chair is away for a meeting, this can be managed. The job is not onerous but needs commitment.

Raffle and Refreshment Volunteers

We're looking for volunteers to help with refreshments and the raffle at our meetings. The tasks are simple and straightforward, and full guidance will be given, so there's no need to worry if you haven't done it before. All we ask is a bit of commitment and reliability to help things run smoothly for everyone.

If you're able to help out, even occasionally, please speak to a committee member at the next meeting or get in touch via the website.

We would greatly appreciate any raffle prize donations as well. Thank you – your support makes a big difference!

ON THIS DAY

February 14th is the 45th day of the year in the Gregorian calendar; 320 days remain to the end of the year.

1130 The troubled 1130 papal election exposes a rift within the College of Cardinals.

1349 Strasbourg massacre: Several thousand Jews are burned to death by mobs while the remaining Jews are forcibly removed from Strasbourg after being accused of causing the Black Death.

1556 Having been declared a heretic and laicized by Pope Paul IV on 4 December 1555,[6] Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer is publicly defrocked at Christ Church Cathedral.

1779 James Cook is killed by Native Hawaiians near Kealahou on the Island of Hawaii.

1849 In New York City, James Knox Polk becomes the first serving President of the United States to have his photograph taken.

1852 Great Ormond St Hospital for Sick Children, the first hospital in England to provide in-patient beds specifically for children, is founded in London.

1876 Alexander Graham Bell applies for a patent for the telephone, as does Elisha Gray.

1899 Voting machines are approved by the U.S. Congress for use in federal elections.

1929 Saint Valentine's Day Massacre: Seven people, six of them gangster rivals of Al Capone's gang, are murdered in Chicago.

1946 The Bank of England is nationalized.

1984 British figure skating couple Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean skate off with a gold medal at the Winter Olympics in Sarajevo after dancing to Ravel's Bolero.

1990 The Voyager 1 spacecraft takes the photograph of planet Earth that later becomes famous as Pale Blue Dot.

2005 YouTube is launched by a group of college students, eventually becoming the largest video sharing website in the world and a main source for viral videos.

Old Occupations:

- ❖ OYSTER DREDGER A member of the crew on board an oyster fishing boat
- ❖ PACK THREAD SPINNER Operator of the machine which made thread or twine
- ❖ PACKER A packer of goods such as pickles or herring
- ❖ PACKMAN A person who travels with a pack, especially a travelling salesman.
- ❖ PAINT STAINER A person who hand-printed wallpaper and usually offered a paper-hanging service also.
- ❖ PAINTRESS A woman employed in the pottery industry to hand paint the finished articles
- ❖ PANNIER A robed waiter
- ❖ PANTER Keeper of the pantry



Valentines Day Interesting Facts



The History of “Vinegar Valentines” and Insult Cards

Valentine’s Day once had a thriving market for insults, not affection. During the 19th century, people exchanged so called Vinegar Valentines alongside romantic cards. Instead of lace and poetry, these cheap postcards delivered mockery, sarcasm, and outright cruelty. Senders targeted bad manners, vanity, laziness, or unwanted admirers, often with savage cartoons to drive the point home.

Publishers mass produced these cards and sold them cheaply, which made them accessible and anonymous. That anonymity encouraged boldness. People used Vinegar Valentines to reject suitors, shame social climbers, or roast coworkers without facing immediate consequences. It was passive aggression with a postage stamp.

This strange custom reveals some uncomfortable but fascinating truths. Among the more overlooked historical facts about Valentine’s Day, the holiday never belonged exclusively to romance. It also served as a socially acceptable outlet for ridicule, resentment, and public judgment.

Vinegar Valentines eventually faded as tastes softened and postal rules tightened. Still, the idea lingers. Modern memes, sarcastic e cards, and anti-Valentine humour follow the same tradition, just with better graphics and fewer stamps.

The First Valentine Was Sent from the Tower of London (1415)

The earliest recorded Valentine arrived from a prison cell in the Tower of London, and it might be the world’s most romantic “wrong place, right message” moment. Not exactly a candlelit dinner, but still legendary. The story begins with Charles, Duke of Orléans, who wrote a heartfelt letter to his wife while imprisoned by the English after the Battle of Agincourt. In 1415, he penned what many historians consider the oldest surviving Valentine, complete with poetic longing and a touch of melancholy. The letter later ended up in a British Library in London, where it remains a symbol of enduring love.

Charles’s message showed that Valentine’s Day, even in its earliest form, had the power to cross borders, wars, and captivity. The fact that a prisoner could write a romantic note to his spouse suggests that love served as a form of emotional resistance. It also demonstrates how early Valentine traditions mixed genuine affection with cultural ritual. When people look at Valentine’s Day history facts, they often picture Cupid and chocolate. But the first Valentine shows the holiday also belongs to longing, distance, and the hope that a letter can bridge the gap between hearts.

How Richard Cadbury and Doctors Linked Chocolate to Love

Chocolate was not always romantic. It became a symbol of love thanks to clever marketing and some very convenient medical advice. Cupid did not do this. Victorian businessmen did. In the mid-19th century, chocolate was more pharmacy shelf than Valentine staple. Doctors routinely prescribed it as a health tonic, claiming it could improve digestion, boost energy, and even lift low spirits. In other words, chocolate was marketed as emotional first aid long before it was sold in heart shaped boxes.

Enter Richard Cadbury, a member of the famous British chocolate dynasty and an early advertising genius. Cadbury noticed that Valentine’s Day already existed as a sentimental holiday but lacked a signature gift. So, he connected the dots. If chocolate was good for your health and your mood, why not gift it to someone you loved? Preferably in an ornate box you would not want to throw away.

By the 1860s, Cadbury was selling beautifully decorated boxes filled with chocolates, often featuring cupids, flowers, and romantic imagery. The medical angle quietly faded into the background, but the association stuck. Chocolate became shorthand for affection, indulgence, and emotional intimacy, not because science proved it, but because marketing made it feel true.

Did You Know? The Catholic Church quietly removed St. Valentine’s feast day from the General Roman Calendar in 1969, not because he wasn’t holy, but because historians couldn’t confidently say *which* Valentine he was. Romance survived. Footnotes did not.

Source: [10 Fascinating Facts You Didn’t Know About Valentine’s Day | DEKALIST](#)



The Sevenoaks Committee: Branch Chair – Vacant

**Members: Barbara Phillips, Bernie Wilkins, Janet Rose, Barbara Attwaters,
Maureen Berry, Jon Henderson, Christine Hills**