



# Sevenoaks Newsletter

THE NORTH WEST KENT FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY - [www.nwkfhs.org.uk](http://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: The life of Helen Thomas and Otford in the 1920s with Alan Williams**

### **The life of Helen Thomas and Otford in the 1920s with Alan Williams**

Helen Thomas (1877–1967) was the widow of renowned poet and prose writer Edward Thomas, who was killed in action at the Battle of Arras in 1917. Edward, described by former Poet Laureate Ted Hughes as “*the father of us all*”, is widely celebrated for his influence on modern poetry.

Following Edward’s death, Helen lived for several years at Forge Cottage on Otford High Street, just a short distance from where NWKFHS now meets. During her time in Otford, she became acquainted with many notable cultural figures, including author D.H. Lawrence and composer Peter Warlock. More than just a widow of a famous poet, Helen was also a mother of three, a writer in her own right, and a passionate advocate for her husband’s literary legacy. In this illustrated talk, Alan Williams explores Helen’s life both before and during her years in Otford, placing her story within the broader context of village life in the 1920s.

Alan Williams is a local resident, living near Otford with his wife and children. A lecturer by profession, Alan is also a passionate member of the Otford 1940s Society, and many of his talks reflect his deep interest in 20th-century history. Alan is a familiar and well-regarded speaker at our Sevenoaks branch, and we look forward to welcoming him back once again.

### **NEXT SEVENOAKS BRANCH MEETING 13<sup>th</sup> December**

#### **Christmas in the Middle Ages with Toni Mount**

Christmas without turkey, roast potatoes, crackers, cards and Father Christmas!

But for those of you coming to listen to Toni, there will be sausage rolls, mince pies, tea and coffee.

Toni earned her Research Master’s degree from the University of Kent in 2009 through study of a medieval medical manuscript held at the Wellcome Library in London. She is a well-known lecturer, historian, and author whose books draw on her research into the lives of ordinary—and sometimes extraordinary—people throughout history. A familiar and much-enjoyed speaker, Toni has visited us many times before, and it will be a real pleasure to welcome her back. She is based in Gravesend and always brings history to life with warmth, humour, and fascinating detail.

#### **Last Month’s Talk:**

We were thrilled to welcome back Melanie, a long-time favourite at our Sevenoaks meetings. Her talk, “*A Spy for Love*”, told the remarkable story of a man who turned to espionage to win the woman he loved. Melanie’s storytelling, vivid visuals, and fascinating historical detail kept the audience captivated from start to finish. It was an entertaining, informative, and thoroughly enjoyable session – a perfect reminder of why she’s such a popular speaker.

We look forward to welcoming you to more of our upcoming talks and events.

**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.**

## DARTFORD BRANCH MEETING 6<sup>th</sup> December Cribs, Cards and Christingles with Mark Lewis

Today's talk explores our colourful Christmas traditions and customs, how they came into being, and how they are celebrated today. Mark will also include some of the lesser-known seasonal folklore including Jesse Trees, Chrismsons, Mumming Plays and Wassailing.

Mark is a freelance artist, designer-silversmith, semi-retired university lecturer and public speaker. He is a member of the Folklore Society with a particular interest in unusual local customs and rituals and in 2013 he published a book on the folklore and popular customs of the church. Mark is also passionate about lighthouses and is currently the Education Officer of the Association of Lighthouse Keepers.

### UP AND COMING LIBRARY WORKSHOPS

DNA and General Family History Discussion Group with Pam Goddard

10 December 10:30

### ZOOM DISCUSSION GROUPS, TALKS AND WORKSHOP

**ZOOM** What keeps me going? Should I leave that brick wall alone? with Ann Clarke

3 December 10:30

**ZOOM** DNA Discussion Group with Laura Lincoln

10 December 10:30

**ZOOM TALK** Unlocking Your DNA with speaker Donna Rutherford

11 December 19:30

**ZOOM TALK** Organising Genetics with Donna Rutherford

10 December 19:30

**ZOOM WORKSHOP** Let's talk about Christmas Family Traditions with David Cufley

17 December 19:30

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, biscuits and mince pies!** ☕️ 🍪 😊 🎅

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.nwkfhs.org.uk/shop/nwkfhs-shop/services/society-donation>

**Highlight Zoom Talk**  
*Getting the most out of FamilySearch.org*

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of October we were fortunate to hear from Darris Williams, Co-founder and Manager of the FamilySearch Wiki, who revealed just how powerful this free genealogical tool can be. His talk was truly eye-opening, showing us how to navigate the vast records of the Family History Library and make full use of the Wiki and other recent technological advances. For anyone researching their family history, the session offered practical tips and insights that transformed the way we think about uncovering our roots. If you missed the talk, it was recorded, and we strongly encourage you to watch—it's full of eye-opening insights you won't want to miss.



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@nwkfhs.org.uk](mailto:workshop.booking@nwkfhs.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.



### 26 November – 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 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@nwkfhs.org.uk](mailto:theeditor@nwkfhs.org.uk) - word files or simply text in the body of an email is fine. We await your proposals.

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## 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.

### Transporter - Sevenoaks & Dartford Branch Meetings

Sevenoaks & Dartford need someone to bring the Bought -in-Books to the meetings. When not required they can be housed in the Society's lock-up off of Thames Road, Dartford. One does not need a big car boot. Any monies involved are the responsibility of the individual branch and do not concern the person who brings them. The job is not onerous but does need 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!

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## ON THIS DAY

**November 8<sup>th</sup> is the 312nd day of the year in the Gregorian calendar; 53 days remain to the end of the year.**

**November the eleventh** month of the year, was the ninth month in the old calendar of Romulus c 750 BC.

November retained its name from the Latin *novem* meaning "nine"

**1520** Stockholm Bloodbath begins: A successful invasion of Sweden by Danish forces results in the execution of around 100 people, mostly noblemen

**1602** The Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford is opened to the public

**1605** Robert Catesby, ringleader of the Gunpowder Plotters, is killed

**1745** Charles Edward Stuart invades England with an army of approximately 5,000 that would later participate in the Battle of Culloden

**1892** The New Orleans general strike begins, uniting black and white American trade unionists in a successful four-day general strike action for the first time

**1895** While experimenting with electricity, Wilhelm Röntgen discovers the X-ray

**1920** Rupert Bear, illustrated by Mary Tourtel makes his first appearance in print

**1927** Ken Dodd is born, English singer and comedian (died 2018)

**1972** American pay television network Home Box Office (HBO) launches

**2013** Typhoon Haiyan, one of the strongest tropical cyclones ever recorded, strikes the Visayas region of the Philippines; the storm left at least 6,340 people dead with over 1,000 still missing

## Old Occupations:

- ❖ **NAGSMAN** A person who schools horses, usually for his employer
- ❖ **NARROW WEAVER** A weaver of ribbons, tapes, etc
- ❖ **NEATHERD** A person who has the care of cattle; a cow-keeper.
- ❖ **NECESSARY WOMAN** A servant responsible for emptying and cleaning chamber pots
- ❖ **NIGHT SOILMAN or NIGHTMAN** One who emptied cesspits, ash pits and backyard toilets
- ❖ **NIGHTWALKER** A watchman or bellman
- ❖ **NIPPER** A lorry boy, a young person employed by the carter or wagoner to assist with the collection and delivery of goods
- ❖ **NOB THATCHER** A wig maker

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## THE STRANGEST WILLS

Numerous strange bequests could be mentioned as rivals for the claim 'What is the strangest bequest made in a Will'. In 1936 it was reported from a continental country that a young man had been left £30,000 which was to come to him as firewood which he must chop and sell himself. Another man was left a fortune on condition he never read a newspaper. A woman left her relative "Nothing save a bag of sand to rub themselves with". A husband left his wife "One pair of my trouser, free of duty and carriage paid, as a symbol of what she wanted to wear in my lifetime". A very different spirit was shown in the will of a London solicitor who left £200 to a former client "as some compensation for an unfortunate investment which he had once made for her".

Source: *How Much Do You Know?* Harold Wheeler (ed) Published by Odhams Press Limited

**Anonymous donation "to clear the national debt"** - A public-spirited donor made a half-million pound bequest to Britain back in 1928, which is now worth more than £350m. Unfortunately, the anonymous donor was very specific about how the money should be spent: it should only be passed on once it is enough to clear the entire national debt. Sadly, the total national debt currently stands at £1.5tn and so the country can't touch the money.

**\$12m to a dog** - In 2004, billionaire hotelier Leona Helmsley left instructions for her \$4bn (£2.5bn) fortune to be spent caring for dogs, having apparently re-thought an earlier draft that left it to the poor. Her nine-year-old Maltese, Trouble, received \$12m (£8m) in the will, with her grandchildren either cut out or ordered to visit their father's grave annually in order to inherit their share. Trouble's inheritance was later cut to just \$2m (£1.2m) by a judge, although the dog still needed to go into hiding amid death and kidnap threats.

**A new husband** - For some embittered spouses a last will and testament is actually a last chance to insult their life partner one more time. So it was for German poet Heinrich "Henry" Heine who left his estate to his wife, Matilda, in 1856 on the condition that she remarry, so that "there will be at least one man to regret my death". Ouch.

**A daily rose** - US comedian Jack Benny left an unusual but touching instruction in his will when he died in 1974. "Every day since Jack has gone the florist has delivered one long-stemmed red rose to my home," his widow Mary Livingstone wrote in a magazine, shortly after his death. "I learned Jack actually had included a provision for the flowers in his will. One red rose to be delivered to me every day for the rest of my life."

Source - [10 OF THE STRANGEST WILLS OF ALL TIME - Certainty Estate Planners](#)

**Be sure I'm dead** - Wealthy Hannah Beswick's fortune was ultimately inherited by the doctor who embalmed her body when she died in 1758. Terrified of being buried alive, the old lady instructed in her will that Dr Charles White ensure that she was not. In fact, he didn't bury her at all. He mummified and wrapped the old lady in tar-infused bandages, leaving her face uncovered and peeping out from a grandfather clock. Once a year, according to the wishes in her will, he formally examined his patient to confirm she was still dead. Dr White left the mummy to a doctor friend in his Will and it was later bequeathed to a museum. Hannah was finally given a proper burial in Manchester in 1868, when it was agreed beyond certainty – 90 years after she died – that she was dead.

Source - [Weird Wills And Testaments & Unusual Bequests | Funeral Guide](#)

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**The Sevenoaks Committee: Branch Chair – Vacant**  
**Members: Barbara Phillips, Bernie Wilkins, Janet Rose, Barbara Attwaters,**  
**Maureen Berry, Jon Henderson, Christine Hills**

