Peterborough and District Family History Society

October 2026

From the Chair...

Spring is the favourite season for many people, but I am with John Keats in choosing autumn with its 'mists and mellow fruitfulness'.

As someone who was born just after WWII, I was always aware of the planting, nurturing and then harvesting the fruits of parents' and grandparents' labours in their gardens – a hangover of the 'Dig for Victory' campaign. An abiding memory is going into my grandmother's washhouse and seeing the apples, pears and onions laid on shelves, potatoes stored in sacks as well as the jars of jam and bottled fruits all ready to use throughout the cold winter days. And before you say 'surely they got frosted', the washhouse was entered via the back yard BUT it had a partywall with the snug and shared the chimney breast so was usually frost free.

I think we can apply this process as a metaphor for our family history research. Winter is usually the time most of us concentrate on our hobby because there is less to do outside. So in preparation for that work I think autumn is the time to look at what we have found, where the brickwalls are and plan what resources we could use to take our research forward.

Good hunting.

Alan Johnson

It is with regret that we advise of the death on 14th September of long-standing member Ewan Cappitt after a short illness. As a former chairman and current vice president, Ewan contributed much to the success of the society over the past 40+ years. A proud Lincolnshire lad from Thurlby, he will be missed.

In preparation for his obituary in the December Journal, please forward any memories of Ewan to Sadie for inclusion.

Members' Meeting

Our next members' meeting is on Wednesday 7th October 7pm

Our topic is

'Childhood Entertainment'

If you would like to share your memories or thoughts then please get in touch.

Newcastle Ancestors?

If you have ancestors from Newcastle then the Inquest Archive may help you.

The archive covers 548 inquests held between 1800 and 1839 at 75 locations.

Inquest Archive | North East Heritage Library

Have you come across an interesting dataset, or website?

Please share it with our members.

An Invitation form Thorney Museum

enquiry@thorney-museum.co.uk

Over the years, we have been happy to welcome students and older school pupils to learn about the work "behind the scenes" in museums. As an Accredited Museum with a curator who is a qualified assessor and adult education lecturer we can provide a range of experience. If you know people who would like to try some museum work, please mention Thorney Museum. We can also develop projects for Duke of Edinburgh scheme members and art students.

Zoom Talks

Please find below the programme of meetings for the next few months.

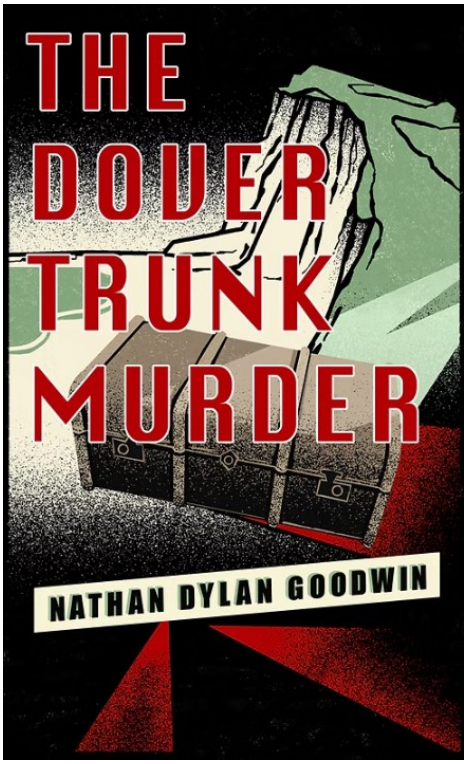
All meetings are currently being held by Zoom. Joining instructions will be sent in the week prior to the meeting.

Wednesday 7th October	**Members' Meeting**	**Childhood Entertainment**
Wednesday 4th November	**TBC**	
Wednesday 2nd December	**Maureen James**	

Moles' Feet and Dropped Gloves-Exploring Fenland Folklore

All meetings start at 7pm to allow for social time prior to the talk at 7.30pm

Book Review



Although not a family history book, I think the new book from genealogist writer Nathan Dylan Goodwin is worthy of a mention.

Nathan uses the impeccable research that we are used in his Morton Farrier books to solve *The Dover Trunk Murder.*

Dover, August 1914. Britain stands on the brink of war, readying for battle, and mobilising around the coastal fortress of Dover. While a throng of inquisitive visitors stares out at the flotilla amassing in the harbour, a severed arm washes up on the town's Shakespeare Beach.

Newly transferred from Scotland Yard, Detective Inspector Edwin Dalloway has barely set foot in his Dover lodgings when the case is handed to him. With ghosts he carries from his old life, he sets out to find the killer with the help of his new small department: Detective Sergeant Max Heller, Detective Constable Percy Fox, and an ambitious young clerk, Lily Somerset, who is determined to become Dover's first female detective. But in a town gripped by spy fever, Dalloway cannot be certain whom he can trust—not the press, not the Watch Committee, and perhaps not even the men and women serving beside him.

As war breaks out across Europe and Dover transforms into a citadel town, Dalloway begins to suspect that the case in front of him touches something older and more powerful than the war itself—and that solving it may cost more than he is prepared to give.

From the Editor…

The mornings have a distinct chill in the air now and you can tell that autumn is just around the corner.

Like Alan my thoughts have turned to produce and harvest.

Usually at this time of year my kitchen is a hive of activity. There are jams setting in jars, chutneys bubbling on the stove, and cordials being strained over muslin tents. And then there is the task of finding enough cool dark spaces to store butternut squash, apples and pears. Not to mention the soups and blanched vegetables that are jostling for space in the freezer.

But not this year!

Due to the 'wonderful' hot summer the harvest is poor to say the least. Tomatoes have loved the sun, and squashes have adored the heat, but despite all the watering I have done my allotment has borne very little fruit.

I am lucky; although my cupboards are bare of home grown produce I won't go hungry, after all Tescos is just a short drive away (there are other supermarkets available).

But what of our ancestor's?

If they weren't prepared for winter then starvation may have been a reality. You might find evidence of this if your ancestors experienced the workhouse, if death certificates show illnesses such as consumption, or failure to thrive, and from newspaper reports.

One newspaper report that I read recently was brutally frank. It reported that children as young as 4 or 5 were employed as bird scarers. These children worked 8 hour shifts standing in the freezing cold in winter trying to keep birds off of the crops. They were often without shoes, and with very little clothing the cold got the better of them and they succumbed to the worst fate, death in the field. When one little boy was discovered the employer docked the parents a day's wage.

It is these realities which can place our ancestors' lives in context. Have you uncovered the harsh lives of your ancestors? Please share your discoveries in an article for the journal.

Sadie McMullon

The Gift-DNA

Have you taken an online DNA test?

Were the results a surprise?

A BBC Radio 4 programme 'The Gift' explores this very problem.

What happens when an online DNA test reveals something surprising?

Listen to all 23 episodes on Sounds

BBC Sounds - The Gift - Available Episodes

Please consider sharing your DNA experiences with other society members.