WILTSHIRE OPC NEWSLETTER

Christine's ChitChat

Hi Everyone,

May is almost upon us and the year is going faster than I thought possible, almost a third of the year has gone and I haven't got around to half of the things I hoped to have finished. I am amazed at the amount of transcriptions we have received so far this year, the Surname index is growing all the time. I hope that everyone finds it helpful and useful;

Contents

I know personally that I found relatives I didn't know existed it's a great exercise for me, well done everyone and keep up the good work. I have managed to get some transcriptions of Adult Paupers in workhouses through Wiltshire which have spent 5 or more consecutive years in the workhouse. It covers several parishes and I have transcribed them and they should now be added to the appropriate parish pages. It's quite amazing how long some people have spent there, and the reasons why they are there.

Great News

Neil MacDougall a photographer (as a hobby) has offered his services for free. If anyone would like to give him assignments for their parishes he is happy to oblige. Please contact him through Teresa. (Thank you Cathy Sedgewick for contacting Neil in the first instance.)

Please feel free to contribute to this newsletter, any stories, articles or interesting bits from your parish or your own story would be most welcome.

Cheers Chris

Teresa's Tidbit's

Hi all

Well haven't we all been a busy lot over the last 3 months or so.

We have had a total rebuild of the site which we hope you find a lot easier to navigate and maintain. We have also loaded about 150 new items to parish pages so far and this number increases daily - a full list of new items is loaded to the front page at regular intervals, and are announced via twitter as they are loaded.

We have had several people join us as OPC's and transcribers - you know who you are so a huge thanks to you all.

A big thank you must go to those of you who have helped in the rebuilding so a huge well done to John Pope, Christine Brooks and Anne-Marie Hayes - without the amount of time you all spent loading and transferring items from the old site we would certainly have struggled.

A really big thank you should also go to Susan Penter who has struggled through a period of illness to rebuild the foundation of the site.

At this point I would like to reflect on the article written by Roy Stockdill for the April edition of Family Tree Magazine. Our project features quite heavily in the article and as a result the amount of new registrations to the site rocketed with many users returning on several occasions - so your efforts are well justified.

The other thing through this article and a comment by someone made on Twitter - we have gained an Honorary Patron. He is a well know figure in the field of Genealogy so I shall leave him to tell you about his work and how he sees the OPC projects developing over the next few years in line with other projects that are on-going.

Please welcome to our "Team" - **Nick Barratt**

A Note From Nick

I've worked in the field of genealogy, personal heritage and public history since becoming involved as consultant and lead researcher on BBC's Who Do You Think You Are in 2003.

Since then, I've worked on a range of other TV genealogy formats – most recently Find My Past for Yesterday TV, and written a few books on the subject such as the Who Do You Think You Are Encyclodpedia of Family History, and Nick Barratt's Guide to your Ancestors' Lives.

My main work, though, has been representing the sector and promoting family history as widely as possible – as a key component in school history, as a driver for economic growth as part of an ancestral tourism initiative, and to integrate new technology into the sector. As a result, I now find myself with the honour of being the President of the Federation of Family History Societies, the Vice President of the Association of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives, a Trustee of the Society of Genealogists, as well as for the Foundation for Medieval Genealogy, and a regular committee member on education for the British Association for Local History, on the public history committee for the Historical Association, and presently a co-opted board member for the Community Archives and Heritage Group.

 Most pertinently to the work at Wiltshire OPC, I act as the Executive Director for FreeUKGEN, including FreeBMD, FreeREG and FreeCEN. I also hold the position as an Honorary Teaching Fellow at the University of Dundee, specialising

in house history. Other current roles include running Sticks Research Agency, filming and producing the monthly vodcast www.familyhistoryshow.net, and editor in chief for Your Family History magazine. In whatever spare time is left over after all these commitments, I'm writing a book on Greater London – due to be published later this year.

Nick Barrett

Housekeeping

Following a recent communication from an elderly user - would all OPC's please note that any item submitted that contains lists of several entries that these should be submitted either as a spreadsheet or as a table within a word document.

This will be helpful in 2 ways ;

Firstly our elderly user said she found it difficult to read the lists of Birth Marriages and Deaths on some pages as there are no guidelines to follow from side to side (presumably the lady meant gridlines). She went on to say that her eyesight is quite poor and therefore needs as much assistance as can be provided.

Secondly if the entries are in spreadsheet form with clear gridlines for columns and rows then it is easier to take the surnames out and add them to the surname index which is proving very popular. However in some cases it is time consuming to add these since we cannot copy and paste as the items are not in line. (Sometimes it means retyping the whole spreadsheet which is indeed a lengthy project.)

However with this in mind the lady who contacted us has a more valid point for the information in tables etc. We must remember we are providing a service to all who wish to use us. It may not look great on our pages but we must put our users first.

Thank you - Admin Team

Templates

If no templates are available please ask Christine or Teresa as these may be in the pipeline When linking to outside websites please take care if they are running commercial advertisements - as this is contrary to OPC membership nationwide

There are a few OPC's yet to access the new site - would anyone who has not yet done so please check their pages and links for errors

front end access http://www.wiltshire-opc.org.uk/genealogy/

and

**editing access** http://www.wiltshire-opc.org.uk/genealogy/administrator/

Only a Genealogist regards a step backwards as progress

John's Jottings

The new website now has a professional look to it and the information on the parish pages and the number of images are now impressive.
More still needs to be done. We have numerous parishes which have no specific genealogical content.

I have spent most of this year so far transcribing memorial inscriptions from photographs taken and donated by Lynne and Paul Powell - this is a quick way to record the inscriptions.

Are there any members who live near Wiltshire, and are willing to help and visit a churchyard or cemetery (some attached to the parish church are small).
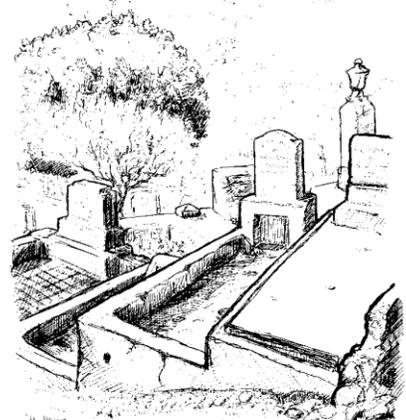
What would this entail? Some memorial inscriptions will not photograph for a variety of reasons and need to be manually documented.

I like to record the type grave marker therefore two images or more of each are required –
1) a general image of the grave marker
2) a close up of the inscription or inscriptions depending on the type of marker
3) Broadband would be required as the images would be uploaded to a digital vault
4) I am happy to transcribe the inscriptions.

Please contact me for further information and also let me know where you intend to visit to avoid duplication.

John Pope

A big thank you must go to
Lynne and Paul Powell who have kindly donated the photographs of the cemeteries, and churchyard memorials of the Chippenham area. This is an on-going project and John Pope is collating MI lists for these. Teresa Lewis will over time add the images to galleries a few of which are already completed
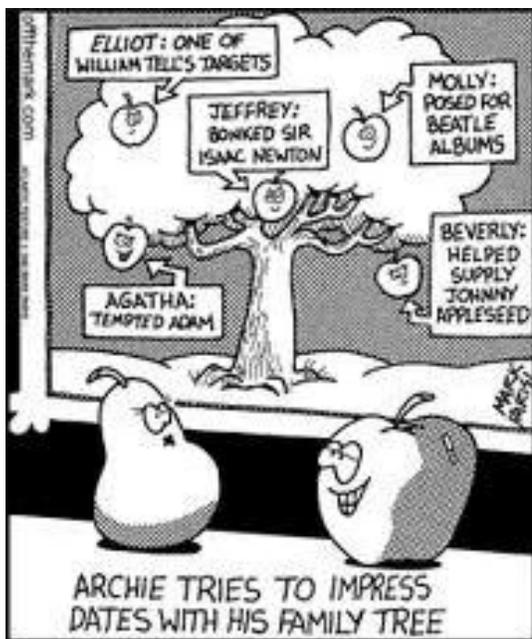
Life in the 1500's

All those sayings we take for granted are based on trials and tribulations of our ancestors.
(This is all in fun, No sources to cite, just someone with a good sense of humour.)

Anne Hathaway was the wife of William Shakespeare. She married at the age of 26. This is really unusual for the time. Most people married young, like at the age of 11 or 12. Life was not as romantic as we may picture it. Here are some examples:

Anne Hathaway's home was a 3 bedroom house with a small parlour, which was seldom used (only for company), kitchen, and no bathroom. Mother and Father shared a bedroom. Anne had a queen sized bed, but did not sleep alone. She also had 2 other sisters and they shared the bed also with 6 servant girls.(This is before she married.) They didn't sleep like we do lengthwise but all laid on the bed crosswise. At least they had a bed. The other bedroom was shared by her 6 brothers and 30 field workers. They didn't have a bed. Everyone just wrapped up in their blanket and slept on the floor. They had no indoor heating so all the extra bodies kept them warm.

They were also small people, the men only grew to be about 5'6" and the women were 4'8". So in their house they had 27 people living.

Most people got married in June. Why? They took their yearly bath in May, so they still smelt pretty good by June, although they were starting to smell, so the brides would carry a bouquet of flowers to hide their body odour.

Like I said, they took their yearly bath in May, but it was just a big tub that they would fill with hot water. The man of the house would get the privilege of the nice clean water. Then all the other sons and men, then the women and finally the children. Last of all the babies. By then the water was pretty thick. Thus, the saying,"don't throw the baby out with the bath water," it was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it.

I'll describe their houses a little. You've heard of thatch roofs, well that's all they were. Thick straw, piled high, with no wood underneath. They were the only place for the little animals to get warm. So all the pets; dogs, cats and other small animals, mice, rats, bugs, all lived in the roof. When it rained it became slippery so sometimes the animals would slip and fall off the roof. Thus the saying, "it's raining cats and dogs." Since there was nothing to stop things from falling into the house they would just try to clean up a lot. But this posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings from animals could really mess up your nice clean bed, so they found if they would make beds with big posts and hang a sheet over the top it would prevent that problem. That's where those beautiful big four poster beds with canopies came from.

When you came into the house you would notice most times that the floor was dirt.

Only the wealthy had something other than dirt, that's where the saying "dirt poor" came from. The wealthy would have slate floors. That was fine but in the winter they would get slippery when they got wet. So they started to spread thresh on the floor to help keep their footing. As the winter wore on they would just keep adding it and adding it until when you opened the door it would all start slipping outside. So they put a piece of wood at the entry way, a "thresh hold".

In the kitchen they would cook over the fire, they had a fireplace in the kitchen/parlour, that was seldom used and sometimes in the master bedroom.

They had a big kettle that always hung over the fire and every day they would light the fire and start adding things to the pot. Mostly they ate vegetables, they didn't get much meat. They would eat the stew for dinner then leave the leftovers in the pot to get cold overnight and then start over the next day. Sometimes the stew would have food in it that had been in there for a month! Thus the rhyme: peas porridge hot, peas porridge cold, peas porridge in the pot nine days old."

Sometimes they could get a hold of some pork. They really felt special when that happened and when company came over they even had a rack in the parlour where they would bring out some bacon and hang it to show it off. That was a sign of wealth and that a man "could really bring home the bacon." They would cut off a little to share with guests and they would all sit around and "chew the fat."

If you had money your plates were made out of pewter. Sometimes some of their food had a high acid content and some of the lead would leach out into the food. They really noticed it happened with tomatoes. So they stopped eating tomatoes, for 400 years.

Most people didn't have pewter plates though, they all had trenchers, that was a piece of wood with the middle scooped out like a bowl. They never washed their boards and a lot of times worms would get into the wood. After eating off the trencher with worms they would get "trench mouth." If you were going traveling and wanted to stay at an Inn they usually provided the bed but not the board.
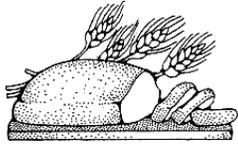
The bread was divided according to status. The workers would get the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family would get the middle and guests would get the top, or the "upper crust".

Medieval England – daily life in medieval towns

Towns. A new class emerged during the Middle Ages; the merchant. The growth of trade and the merchant middle class went hand in hand with the growth in towns. Town populations swelled during this period, particularly after the Black Death. Trade routes grew, though roads remained poor and dangerous, so most goods were transported by water.

A 15th century goldsmith's shop
Towns were built on trade, and the elite of towns were the merchants. Merchant guilds controlled town government, though they often clashed with craft guilds for power. Merchants needed stability for trade, so they supported the king and the establishment of a strong central government against the rule of individual nobles. The king, for his part, encouraged the growth of towns and trade. Town charters became a major source of royal revenue. Eventually the growth of towns and guilds led to the breakdown of the manor-centred feudal society.

Merchant Guilds. Guilds controlled the trade in a town. Merchant guilds regulated prices, quality, weights and measures, and business practices. The power of the guilds was absolute in their domain, and to be expelled from a guild made it impossible to earn a living. Each guild had a patron saint, celebrated religious festivals together, put on religious plays, and looked after the health and welfare of the members and their families.

Craft Guilds. Separate from the merchant guilds were the craft guilds, which regulated the quality, working hours and conditions of its members. There were three levels of craftsmen; masters, journeymen, and apprentices. Parents paid a fee to place a boy with a master craftsman as an apprentice. There he received food, lodging (often sleeping under the counter in the shop itself), clothes, and instruction in the craft.

Apprentices, Journeymen, and Masters. The period of apprenticeship lasted for 2-7 years, after which time the apprentice became a journeyman. The term has nothing to do with traveling; it comes from the French "journee", (day), and meant that the journeyman was paid by the day for his work. After several years as a journeyman the craftsman would submit a piece of his best work to the guild for approval. If this "master-piece" was accepted he could become a master craftsman and own his own shop.

All townsmen were free, and this provided some incentive for serfs to run away to the towns. If they could remain there for a year and a day they were considered free and could not be compelled to return to the manor.

Streets. Before Edward I all repairs to streets were the responsibility of adjacent householders. After Edward's time town councils began to take over more responsibility. New roadways were often built directly on top of the old with little attempt to clear it away. Thus repairs never lasted long. There was also the possibility that a citizen would build his section higher than his neighbour. Because of this practice street levels rose and rose. In London the original Roman roads are buried up to 20 feet beneath the street level of today.

TRADING WITH THE FOREIGNER

CORACLE

HUNTER
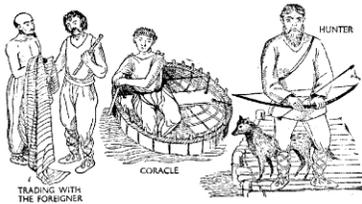
Roads were narrow, and tradesmen and householders were constantly encroaching on them. Traffic moved slowly, not least because tolls at the town gates were often paid in kind (that is, with goods rather than money), causing delays and long lineups.

Cleanliness. Sanitation was a constant concern. Open drain channels ran along the sides or down the centre of streets. Many stables opened out onto the streets and muck heaps encroached on passage. People often threw dirty water out of windows in the general direction of the drains. Dyers vats were particularly noxious when they were emptied into the street. Again the onus was on the individual householder to keep the space in front of his house relatively clean. In practice the only real incentive to do so was an outbreak of the plague or a visit of the King.

Livestock in the Streets. Pigs were another nuisance in the streets. Most people kept pigs. They were cheap, and a good source of food. However, houses were small and gardens even smaller, so pigs were often let out into the streets to forage. Stray pigs were such a nuisance that they were liable to be killed and the owner charged for the return of the dead animal.

Law Enforcement. Law and order in the town was enforced by the beadle or constables, who could call on citizens to form a night Watch. If a "hue and cry" was raised to chase a criminal all citizens had to join in or risk being fined. The penalty for the criminal was much higher. A thief found in possession of stolen goods was hanged.

Sanctuary. If a fugitive managed to reach a church they could claim the right of sanctuary there for a period of 40 days. This meant that someone would have to stand watch outside the church for the entire time to ensure that the fugitive did not escape, a duty that no one wanted. Towns could even be fined if the felon escaped. At any one time in the Middle Ages it has been estimated that there were as many as 1000 people in sanctuary throughout England.

The Curfew Bell. Curfews were imposed in towns to keep the peace. Originally the "curfew bell" was rung at 8 or 9 o'clock in the evening to indicate that it was time for smiths, brewers, and taverners to cease their working day. It became the custom that anyone abroad after that had to carry a light and have a good excuse for being out. The carrying of weapons was carefully regulated, especially where foreigners were concerned. Nobility, as usual, were exempt from these regulations. There were also laws prohibiting the wearing of masks in the street; this after an attempt on the life of Henry IV by some nobles disguised as Christmas mummers.

Fire. Fire was the constant fear of town dwellers. Due to closely packed wooden houses and inadequate water supply, fires were difficult to control and could produce widespread damage. There were other factors that increased the risks of fire; Beds were of straw and were commonly kept close to open hearths for warmth. Roofs of reeds, rushes and straw were common. It was only after 1213 that these materials were forbidden in London in favour of tile and shingles. Other places were slow to follow London's lead.

Wooden and Brick Buildings. Although stone building was encouraged, expense meant that most houses were built of wood up until Tudor times. Then, the flourishing new brick industry and a rapidly falling timber supply swung the tide away from wood as the material of choice for most domestic building. Cooks, barbers, and brewers were heavily regulated because of the risk their fires posed. Their premises had to be whitewashed and plastered inside and out.

Each householder was required to keep a full vessel of water outside his door in summer, due to fire risk. When fires did occur it was every citizen's duty to come running with whatever equipment they had. Often firehooks were used to haul burning thatch off a roof, and also to pull down adjacent buildings to provide a firebreak.

The Town Day. The day officially began with the ringing of the Angelus bell at 4 or 5 o,clock. It announced the first mass of the day and the end of the night watchman's duty. Most shops opened at 6 AM, providing plenty of early morning shopping before the first meal of the day at 9 or 10 AM.

Market Hours. Morning was the active time for markets. Things quieted down after noon, and most shops closed at 3 o'clock. Some kept open until light faded, and others, such as the barbers and blacksmiths, were open until the curfew bell sounded. Foreign merchants were heavily regulated. They had to wait two or more hours before they could enter the market, giving the locals the best of the business.

Markets were noisy, raucous affairs. Merchants had to "cry the wares" as their only means of advertising, and some had to be fined for forcibly grabbing hold of passers-by in their enthusiasm to make a sale.

Saturday was early closing day for shops. Usually noon was the close of business. Sunday, however, the "Lord's day of rest", was not kept as restful as we might think. Some trades were allowed to work after Mass, and some field work was allowed to be done before it. A few places even had the privilege of Sunday markets.

Bells and Criers. Bells were the main medium of telling time and making announcements. A Common Bell was rung to summon civic meetings, courts, and as an alarm in case of fire or attack. The town crier rang a hand bell when he walked throughout the town declaiming news and proclamations. The criers were the main source of news for town dwellers. They also had the task of ringing their bells to solicit prayers in memory of people who had paid for the privilege.