



NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2026



SUFFOLK FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY - Registered Charity No 1087748

Next Meeting:

We now have our summer break. The next meeting will take place on Thursday 10th September 2026 at 7.30pm when we welcome back Mike Wabe, a very popular speaker.

Our Programme Secretary has been busy looking for speakers for 2027. Here are just some of the highlights that we can look forward to next year!

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| January | The Semi-Pro Sixties with David Caulfield |
| April | Japan: the Last Shogun to the Present Emperor
with Neil Dickinson |
| September | The Alternate History of Audley End through stories of
women with Fiona Wilkinson |
| October | 'Persons of Quality' - The Story of BSE Athenaeum
with Adrian Tindall |

Who can remember these comments – Do you still use them!

“I’m not made of money!”

“Because I said so.”

“Don’t make me come in there.”

“Were you born in a barn?”

“Money doesn’t grow on trees.”

“If all your friends jumped off a bridge, would you?”

“This isn’t a hotel.”

“Go outside and play.”

“You’ve got food at home.”

“Don’t sit so close to the TV.”

“Call me when you get there.”

“Be home before the streetlights come on.”

“Close the door — were you raised in a barn?”

“Back in my day...”

“Turn that music down!”

“Stop crying or I’ll give you something to cry about.”

“Do you think I’m made of money?”

“No means no.”

“Eat your vegetables.”

“Go ask your father/mother.”

“Don’t use all the hot water.”

“You break it, you buy it.”

“I’m not your maid.”

“If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all.”

Sudbury Quiz

We had a great time with the Sudbury group, joining in with their annual quiz. We were able to send along two teams who surprised everyone, not least ourselves, by finishing 1st and 3rd!

Many thanks to Helen, Sheila and the team for their hospitality. We really enjoyed the afternoon and look forward to returning next year.



Haverhill Show

What a glorious day. It was nice to meet so many people interested in what we do as a group. A huge thank you to all those that came along to help out during the day.



Occupational hazards were a grim fact of life for many of our ancestors. Their health often suffered because of the work they did.

Before you complain about the monotony of a desk job, spare a thought for Victorian workers — people who laboured long before anyone dreamed up occupational health and safety rules. In that era, survival meant improvisation, and countless men, women, and children took on dangerous, filthy, or downright bizarre jobs just to earn a few coins.

Pure finders had a job that sounded clean but was anything but. They roamed London's streets collecting dog faeces — known as "*pure*" because tanners used it to soften and clean leather. With leather in constant demand for everything from horse tack to boots and bookbinding, *pure* was a steady, if grim, commodity. Collectors haunted areas where stray dogs gathered, scooping up the droppings and stashing them in a covered bucket to sell on. Some wore a black glove to protect their scooping hand, while others decided a bare hand was easier to wash than a filthy glove.



Leech Collectors Leeches were once in high demand, used by doctors and quacks alike to treat everything from headaches to "hysteria." The grim job of collecting them usually fell to poor rural women, who waded into stagnant ponds and let the creatures latch onto their legs. Once enough leeches were clinging on, the collector would peel them off and drop them into a jar to be sold. Because leeches can go a year without feeding, pharmacies could store them until needed. Unsurprisingly, leech collectors often suffered blood loss, infections and whatever else lurked in those murky waters.

Toshers worked in Victorian London's vast, overburdened sewer system, combing through raw waste for anything valuable that had slipped down a drain. It was brutally dangerous work: toxic gases pooled in the tunnels, walls collapsed without warning, rats swarmed everywhere, and a sudden release of water could sweep a tosher away in seconds. Because of these risks, they usually worked in small groups, easy to spot in their canvas trousers, pocket-laden aprons for stashing finds, and lanterns strapped to their chests. Most carried a long pole with a hoe on the end to probe piles of sewage for lost coins or jewellery — or simply to steady themselves in the dark. After 1840, entering the sewers without permission became illegal, but rather than give up the trade, toshers just shifted to late-night or early-morning forays. Despite the stench and danger, the job could be surprisingly profitable, with plenty of dropped silver spoons and stray coins swirling around in the muck.

Funeral mutes were essentially hired mourners. Dressed head-to-toe in black and carrying a cloth-covered staff, they stood silently outside the home of the deceased and then walked ahead of the coffin during the procession. In **OLIVER TWIST**, Oliver briefly gets stuck doing this bleak job for Mr. Sowerberry.



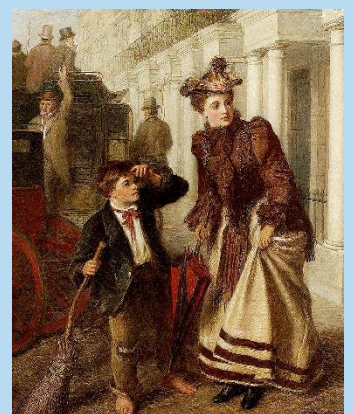
Matchstick makers had a deceptively simple job: cutting thin wooden sticks and dipping their tips into white phosphorus — a chemical as toxic as it was useful. In Victorian factories, this work fell mostly to teenage girls who endured brutal hours, often 12 to 16 a day, with barely any breaks. They were made to eat at their workstations, so phosphorus dust inevitably contaminated their food. Many developed “phossy jaw,” a horrific condition where the jawbone became infected and slowly rotted away, leaving them disfigured and in constant pain.



Mudlarks scraped together a living by combing the muddy banks of the Thames (or other waterways) for anything they could sell. Like toshers, they sifted through filth for scraps of value, but instead of sewers they worked the river’s edge — a job considered even lower on the social ladder. Most mudlarks were children, gathering whatever the tide left behind: rags for papermaking, driftwood for fuel, and the occasional coin or bit of jewellery washed into the river. It was a grim, messy trade, and dangerously unpredictable. For instance the Thames is tidal, and its sudden surges could easily sweep a child away or trap them in the sucking mud.

Rat catchers made their living hunting down the swarms of rats that plagued Victorian streets and homes, usually with the help of a small dog or a ferret. They often caught the rats alive, since they could sell them to “ratters,” who staged brutal pit fights where terriers were timed on how quickly they could kill a batch of rats. It was dangerous work: rats carried disease, their bites caused nasty infections, and the sheer number of them made every job a risk. One of the era’s best-known rat catchers was Jack Black, who worked for Queen Victoria. Interviewed in Henry Mayhew’s **LONDON LABOUR AND THE LONDON POOR** (1851), Black described using a cage that could hold up to a thousand live rats at once. They’d stay alive for days as long as he fed them — but if he forgot, they’d turn on each other, leaving him with nothing to sell.

Crossing sweepers were the young entrepreneurs of Victorian streets. These children claimed a patch of road and, whenever a wealthy passenger stepped down from a carriage, they hurried ahead to clear a clean path through the mud, manure, and general street filth. They were barely a step above beggars, relying entirely on tips for their income, but their services were often genuinely useful — Victorian streets were a mess. Sweepers worked in all weather, dodging horse-drawn cabs and omnibuses while trying to keep their patch clear enough to earn a few coins.



Suffolk Family History Society News

(For members and non-members)

Upcoming zooms (all at 7:30 pm UK time) are:

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|------------------|-----------|--|
| • 13th July | Janet Few | Are you Sitting Comfortably?: Writing up your family history |
| • 22 Sept (TUES) | Liz Yule | Illegitimate Ancestors |
| • 26 Oct | Mike Wabe | Witches and With Hunting in East Anglia |

Please register for Janet Few's talk using this link: [Link to register](#)

Please register as soon as you can, **Registration will close at 18:00 on Monday 13th**

The link will also be on the website (members need to be signed in) on the Events Page - go to Society events and then Zooms

Janet Few is an experienced and well-known British family, social and community historian who has lectured at conferences across the English-speaking world and at sea. She is an author of both historical fiction and non-fiction, as well as many magazine articles. In addition, she has worked with the UK 'Who Do You Think You Are?' television programme. As an educator, Janet runs online genealogy and social history courses for Pharos Tutoring and Teaching. She is currently serving as the President of the Family History Federation and is actively involved in several other family history organisations.



Haverhill Family History Group

2026 Programme of Meetings & Events

10 Sept	Paranormal East Anglia Suffolk	Mike Wabe
Sat 19 Sept (TBC)	OPEN DAY at Haverhill Library (CB9 8HB) 10am – 3pm (TBC)	Ourselves
8 Oct	A glimpse into the life of a Registrar of Births, Marriages & Deaths	Kim Case
12 Nov	Restoring a Lancaster	Kelly Bennett + 1
10 Dec	Christmas Quiz A light-hearted social evening with refreshments	Ourselves

Wednesday afternoons, help with your Research at Haverhill Library 2 - 4pm

Guided use of the Internet, especially for newcomers or those 'stuck'

telephone 01440 848095 to book your place