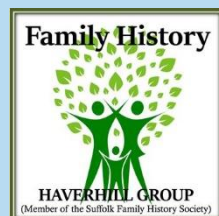




NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2026



SUFFOLK FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY - Registered Charity No 1087748

Next Meeting:

Thursday 10th September 2026 at 7.30pm

Old Independent Church Hall

**A glimpse into the life of
a Registrar of**

**Births, Marriages &
Deaths with Kim Case**



The Brothers Who Changed the Depths

Tempted by a visit to the Diving Museum at Stokes Bay several years ago—only to find it closed for an extended refurbishment—disappointment turned into curiosity. The museum holds one of the earliest surviving firefighting and diving helmets, a remarkable device created by two brothers whose ingenuity changed the course of underwater exploration. Their story is one of invention, courage, and maritime history woven deep into our coastline.

Charles Anthony Deane (1796–1848) and John Deane (1800–1884) grew up in Deptford, the sons of John Deane, a mariner and shipbuilder, and Elizabeth Thompson. Part of a bustling family of eleven children, the brothers were educated

at the Royal Hospital School in Greenwich, now home to the National Maritime Museum. Both were enrolled in 1812, preparing for lives shaped by the sea.

Charles spent seven years as a merchant seaman before returning to shore as a caulker at Barnard's Shipyard. It was here he confronted a serious problem: how could fires be fought safely inside the smoke-filled holds of ships?



John, meanwhile, joined the East India Company at just fourteen, serving for seven years. In the early 1820s, he famously used a modified knight's helmet—connected to a fire brigade pump—to rescue horses from a burning stable. This dramatic moment sparked an idea that would change everything.

In 1823, Charles patented the Smoke Helmet, designed to protect firemen working in suffocating conditions. The brothers quickly realised its potential beneath the waves. By 1828, they had adapted the helmet for underwater use, sealing it and supplying air through a hose. Paired with a watertight suit developed by Augustus Siebe, the Deane helmet became the first practical diving apparatus.

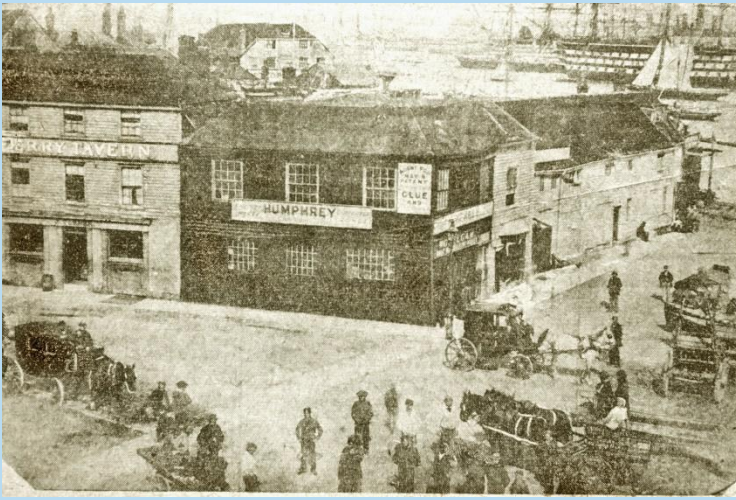
John Deane

After private trials on the Thames failed to attract Admiralty interest, the Deane brothers turned to

Admiral Sir Richard Goodwin Keats, Governor of Greenwich Hospital. His support opened doors. Soon after meeting him, the brothers wrote to the Admiralty offering to demonstrate their apparatus from a vessel moored—by Keats's permission—off the steps of the Royal Hospital at Greenwich, directly beneath the Admiral's residence.

With such an invitation, the Admiralty could hardly decline. Their attendance led to formal trials at Sheerness Dockyard in 1829. Following successful demonstrations of the helmet, Charles and John Deane established a diving industry in the town, marking the beginning of commercial diving as we know it.

The Deane brothers soon proved the power of their invention through daring salvage operations. Their first commercial venture was diving on **Carn Brea Castle**. This East India merchant ship was wrecked off the Isle of Wight on 5 July 1829 while bound for India. The Deanes salvaged copper tiles worth £100,000, funding further development of their diving equipment.



The wrecks of the Solent proved profitable, and John moved his family to Gosport in 1835, where they lived at 72 North St. His wife died in 1844 and was buried in Holy Trinity Church just a stone's throw from the family home.

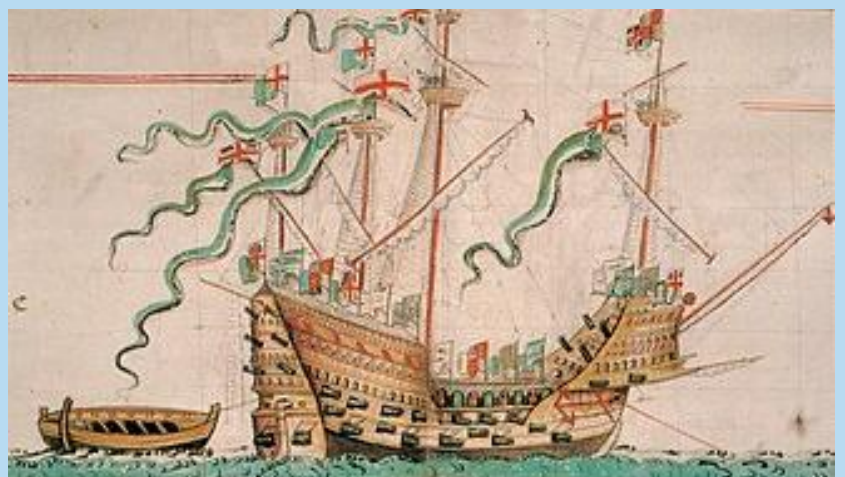
Gosport c 1856

The **Royal George** sank at Spithead with the loss of over 900 lives in 1782. After decades of failed attempts to clear the wreck, Charles and John began work in 1834 using their air-pumped diving helmet. Over two years, they recovered 28 cannons, earning salvage rewards from the Board of Ordnance.



During these operations, local fishermen asked them to investigate an obstruction snagging their nets. John's dive revealed timbers and guns belonging to Henry VIII's flagship, the **Mary Rose**—the first time its resting place had been identified in centuries.

In 1836, John Deane became the first person to dive on the **Mary Rose** (sunk 1545) using the helmet. He recovered cannons and timber beams, marking one of the earliest examples of underwater archaeology.



In 1840, the shattered remains of the Royal George were destroyed in a massive controlled explosion that rattled windows across Portsmouth and Gosport. Some of the salvaged bronze cannons were melted down to form the base of Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square.

The Deanes didn't just invent equipment—they pioneered underwater methodology. They mapped wreck sites, used tools underwater and coordinated surface support teams as can be seen in the painting of the dive on the Royal George.

These practices evolved into today's standard procedures for underwater construction, inspection, and recovery. Their high-profile successes proved that salvage diving could be commercially viable and strategically vital, paving the way for naval and civilian diving units.

Every modern deep-sea operation—from oil rig maintenance to shipwreck exploration—owes something to the ingenuity of Charles and John Deane. Their helmet, their methods, and their courage opened the door to the underwater world.



The Deane smoke helmet that launched the global underwater industry is in The Diving Museum. It is the only surviving example in the world.

And now, finally, the Diving Museum has reopened, its Deane helmet is waiting for a visit—an extraordinary reminder of two brothers who dared to breathe beneath the sea.



Open/Research Day

We recently held a successful open/research day at the Haverhill Library. I am sure all those who attended were pleased and satisfied with the help they were given and will hopefully be able to attend our Wednesday sessions.

Many thanks to all our researchers, those manning the front desk and of course the staff at the Library for their help on the day.

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

Suffolk Family History Society News

(For members and non-members)

Upcoming zoom (all at 7:30 pm UK time):

26 Oct. Mike Wabe Witches and Witch Hunting in East Anglia

I am sure those who heard Mike speak at our last meeting will be keen to join this zoom presentation.

Registration information for Mike's talk is here [Click here to register for Mike's talk](#)

AGM will take place on 13th October at 7.30pm on Zoom.

Only Society members can vote on resolutions etc. Please contact Andy Kerridge Chairman of the Society to declare your interest in attending and he will forward a link closer to the date.

chair@suffolkfhs.org.uk

Events you might be interested in:-



I can personally vouch for an interesting experience using the Virtual Reality headsets. Well worth a visit if you are local to Haverhill. Spaces limited so book early and don't be disappointed.

To complement the experience the Local History Museum will also have on display 'Exploring Victorian Virtual Reality with Original, 100 Year Old, 3D Images' using photographs and stereo viewers.

Haverhill Family History Group

2026 Programme of Meetings & Events

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

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