

## Meeting Report

13<sup>th</sup> January 2023

### **'New Year' & 'Persons of Interest'**

Roger started with the story of how HMRC came to pick a random date – 6<sup>th</sup> April – as the start of the tax year, prompted by recent research in Leek parish records of the C17<sup>th</sup> and C18<sup>th</sup>. Why are records of Baptism, Marriage and Death/Burial for 1681 shown as 1680/1 or 1681/2? Not just in Leek PRs, everywhere in England & Wales, sometimes though inconsistently, even in Leek. The answer lies in the significance of Lady Day, 25<sup>th</sup> March, which was actually New Year's Day in England from 1155 to 1752. Lady Day was the traditional day for hiring farm labourers, and another name for the Feast of the Annunciation. In 1752 the Julian calendar was at last superseded by the Gregorian, a more accurate calculation of the position of the sun to Earth, or maybe t'other way round. By this date science was making an impact, the Royal Society was asserting itself and anomalies were faced up to. This was a big one, the eleven days that never came to pass! The 3<sup>rd</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> September never saw the light of day. So from 1753 to 1800 the tax year began on 5<sup>th</sup> April. Nearly there! In 1800 there was a skipped leap day so the start of the tax year moved to 6<sup>th</sup> April, where it remains. Scotland had changed the start of the civil year, its New Year's Day, to 1<sup>st</sup> January back in 1600. There is more, about the Quarter Days of Midsummers Day, Michaelmas and Christmas Day, of the Cross Quarter Days of 2<sup>nd</sup> February known as Candlemas, famous in the U.S. as Groundhog Day, of May Day, Lammas Day and 31<sup>st</sup> October, Samhain but known more popularly these days by another name!

The **Persons of Interest** session was started by Marian, who told us about her search for great great grandmother Susannah Cobby born 1800+/- 1 year. Susannah's earliest (researched) record is in 1819 when she lived in the Southwark & Lambeth area. Altogether she had 10 children, battled the odds to raise most of them, died aged 52 after a life of struggle. Marian is tracing her female line and would like to do justice to Susannah and her courage and determination to overcome the odds, to survive and enable future generations to thrive. The Peabody Trust have been wonderful in filling some gaps. The group suggested findagrave.com, deceasedonline and findagrave (free).

David spoke eloquently about Henry Jones, tailor, of Anglesey then Bangor and Rhyl, his grandfather, 1880-1930. Having no talent for farming, the life into which he was born, Henry made his way in the world by settling for tailoring, and became highly skilled in making bespoke suits, before the days of off-the-peg. He was self-taught and gave his own children the start in life that enabled David's father to become a head teacher, in Shrewsbury. Today Henry would be delighted to know that he has Cambridge graduates amongst his great grandchildren. Henry's funeral was attended by the mayor and town clerk of Rhyl, in its halcyon days. It would have been unlikely that dignitaries would have been at the send-off if he had remained around his childhood home. David made the point that education in Wales neglected and still neglects the true history of Wales and that Welsh children, back in the day, progressed in life through self-improvement and institutions catering for adults, and in spite of formal education.

Terry presented the story of her great great great uncle William Clarke, 1831-1890, who started life as an engineer at Bedlington, then moved to Armstrong Whitworth, then set up a small engineering business in Gateshead in 1864. After partnerships with others, Abel Henry Chapman arrived in 1874, and the firm became Clarke Chapman in 1882, building cranes and heavy handling equipment, which it still does. Today it operates across the world supplying a wide range of engineered products. By contrast William Clarke's brother, Terry's ancestor, was a brass founder and initiated a dynasty of manual workers who worked in metal production. Both lines of the family created, in their own ways, the northern Geordie powerhouse of the Victorian era.

John selected a striking character, Great Aunt Sarah Louisa Wynne 1880-1959. Born and raised in Lodge, the lost village near Brymbo, Sarah turns up in the 1901 census as a maid in Moss Side, in the days when it was posh. She shows up again, on passenger lists, crossing the Atlantic again and again, between New York City and England. Doing what? As a member of the household who travelled with her boss, Conde Montrose Nast, who founded the business in 1909. In 1920 in the U.S. census she is living in Nast's NYC penthouse as a cook. Sarah returned to Lodge when her mother died and became a corsetiere, for which she had a talent. She died in 1959 and is buried in Wrexham cemetery. John's photo of her shows a beautifully coutured lady of uncertain age, with a string of pearls and a smile that suggests that she knew how to enjoy herself. Good for you, Great Aunt Sarah.

Margaret told us of her wartime experiences, when she had returned from being an evacuee in Weston-super-Mare, to live in South East England, not to her native Essex but the Hampshire/Surrey border. Her family had moved there to avoid the Blitz. Her story was about remembering potato picking. Labourers would dig the ground to expose most of the roots, women would follow along the rows, filling boxes and handling them onto carts. Little Margaret was helping, joining in and getting her hands very dirty. This was 1941. For her, it didn't happen again, as by 1942 the Women's Land Army had taken over the task. The WLA was founded in 1917, disbanded 1919, then returned 1939-1950. It's interesting that it took nearly three years for them to be deployed in some areas.

J told us of research into a family member who had been adopted. The search was successful in one sense, finding the maternal line, but not the success that was hoped for in another. Many of us have had experience of friends and family who have been through the adoption process and the situations that arise as a result. J's comments sparked off a separate discussion on DNA (Ancestry seems the best), and, possibly for a future meeting, on the incidence of illegitimacy (I have found three in my own ancestry out of 56 identified unions. That's 5.4%, close to John's rule of thumb of 5%).

Roger closed the formal meeting with his presentation of Granny Brown 1866-1944, born six months after her father died in a shipwreck, known as Polly Ingham, and was brought up in Wetherby by a kindly aunt along with three half siblings. Aunt Woolford, the aunt in question, was a 'midwife', and was highly regarded in that role. Polly married Jack and had seven children, two of whom died in infancy and one, Uncle Norman, killed in the Great War. The family moved to Starbeck and she took her own mother into the family home, despite the overcrowding. She and a friend visited the war cemeteries around Arras in 1920 and made a poignant photograph album, showing the graves 'before and after' – simple

wooden crosses initially, then the formal headstones with which we are familiar. In the album, photos of the devastated images of Arras, of local farming families living in damaged Nissen huts, of meetings with other bereaved women, looking for their husbands, sons, brothers. Granny Brown died in 1944, seven years after her beloved Jack, and was 'laid out' by her daughter Gertrude. Auntie Gertie was known and respected locally for being on hand to present a corpse sympathetically. The female roles of midwifery and laying out the dead don't appear in census returns. These services were provided before the welfare state and the formalities of the funeral parlour. They went unnoticed by officialdom, or just taken for granted. These roles have a very long heritage

Roger Brown