

## **Report on the 8<sup>th</sup> December Meeting**

The meeting began with the reappearance of the group's first leader, the evergreen **Peter Butler**. He's back in the fold again, and to regaled us with stories of some recent discoveries about his family. These featured an eminent tenor of Polish descent, well known for his Gilbert & Sullivan roles, a desertion and divorce which took seven years to complete, some references to the Victoria Hotel in Swanage and a post war pub in Uppingham, all illustrated by photos and newspaper articles bringing these characters and events to life. We very much look forward to more from you, Peter, thanks you, welcome back.

Next, the shy and retiring **Allan Jones** stepped up and delivered a remarkable and comprehensive account of Wills and where to find them. Did you know that only 40% of people in England and Wales make a will! That the threshold before taxation is £270,000? Allan produced several wills documents and summarised a number of them, revealing the different ways in which male and female beneficiaries were treated in days gone by, with males receiving about twice the value from wills than the females. Examples such as nothing going to a surviving wife if she remarried. Certain servants were often beneficiaries of a lump sum. Go to <https://probate.search.gov.uk> (for England & Wales) to find a will, for which a copy is a mere £1.50, what an extraordinary bargain! Allan confessed his addiction to applying for wills – and why not, there are worse habits, and more expensive ones, too! Another excellent performance, thank you, on one of Allan's numerous specialised subjects.

The meeting was closed with a taster of a subject soon to be covered by that terrific double act, Mary Gracie and Jenny Collis. Jenny showed us the voluminous and bewildering stream of prose that was revealed as the will of Lady Jane Stanley, which Jenny and Mary will distil and present in early 2024. They have another one too, the will of the father of a local celebrity. Who? Ah, there's a fascinating back story to this character, a man who has made such a unique contribution to Knutsford's appearance, in a good way. You will know of him as Richard Harding Watt. Watch out for when we get to hear more about Lady Jane and RHW.