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## Talking about History

Introducing a wide range of informative and entertaining talks that are ideal for group meetings of all ages and interests

### Illustrated talks on Peterborough and its surroundings

#### A brief history of Peterborough

Starting as a small group of hovels in the shelter of the monastic settlement Peterborough has been an ancient market town, a cathedral city, an industrial town and a new town [twice] in its 1500 year history. A chance to travel through time without moving from your chair.

#### A history of Peterborough Cathedral & its precincts

Despite destruction by the Danes, sacking by Hereward, closure by Henry VIII and desecration by Parliamentary soldiers in the Civil War, Peterborough cathedral and its associated buildings remain to tell us a story of 1500 turbulent years of Christian presence. This illustrated talk tells the story of its past & 'looks' inside what is now perhaps the most complete Romanesque great church in Britain.

#### A Virtual Tour of Medieval Peterborough\*

In the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century Abbot Martin le Bec laid out a brand new town in front of his Cathedral. If he came back today he would still recognise the streets and the layout. Come on a tour of what he did and what he left - the beating heart of Medieval Peterborough

#### Victorian Peterborough\*

In the reign of Victoria Peterborough underwent dramatic change - railways, brick making and civic status - plus an influx of immigrants and visitors. An entertaining overview of progress, change and a less than complementary comment about a bun on Peterborough station!

#### Down by the Riverside

Before the roads improved and the railways arrived, the River Nene was Peterborough's link with the outside world. Relive this world through the records of the past - and the words of the people who lived there.

#### Housing the Railway workers of Peterborough

The Victorian era saw the arrival of the railways to Peterborough - and with them a rapidly increasing workforce and their families. How and where were they housed, and what remains of this housing now? And what was the local social impact of the revolution that changed Britain?

#### The Life and Times of Thomas Barrass

For half a century Thomas Barrass was Pastor of the Baptist church in Peterborough. Bishop Magee called him the 'Non-conformist Bishop of Peterborough' and by 1900 over 5% of the population of Peterborough were members of his church. Not a story of religion, but the story of an outstanding man of his time.

### **The Inns and Taverns of Peterborough\***

An integral part of city life for hundreds of years, the story of the hostelries, their landlords & landladies, the beers, the brewers and the 'goings on' give a different view of the 'real' life of Peterborough.

### **Peterborough Ghosts\***

An Anzac soldier, a frightened Monk, the man who tidied his shop after his death, a noisy poltergeist and a dog who still leaves footprints - just some of the many tales you'll hear that will make you look at Peterborough in a different light!

### **The story of the Proby family of Elton Hall\***

The Proby family have owned Elton Hall since the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century. Paintings by Reynolds and many other major artists, furniture from many periods and a history that involves Ireland, the Napoleonic wars, the Navy and politics..

### **The Cecils, Burghley House and its Park**

The splendid house of the Cecil's is worth a visit at any time but this illustrated talk gives you a chance to 'meet' the family, 'see' some of the paintings and furnishings, and hear the story of house and park from the comfort of your meeting place.

### **The story of the Norman Cross Prisoner of War Camp\***

'Home' for many thousands of Napoleonic prisoners of war at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This illustrated talk tells the story of the camp, its inmates & the politics of the whole affair.

### **St Guthlac, St Pega & the first Croyland Abbey**

The story of the saints and the first 200 years of one of Fenland's great monasteries - and of Peakirk

### **Swings of fortune in Rural Mechanisation**

The story of the effects of the Swing Riots on one particular Huntingdon craftsman; and his part in the mechanisation of farming in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Stamford, the Deepings and the River Welland in between**

A story of wealth, trade, riots and disputes, flooding and much more

### **The life & times of John Clare**

John Clare - the Northamptonshire 'Peasant' Poet - is now regarded as one of the greats of English descriptive poets; his work is now in the National Schools Curriculum. Poverty, fame, employment, enclosure, the militia and life in an asylum shaped his life and writings. This talk concentrates on that life and the changing rural world in which he lived.

## Out in the Fens

### Parish Religion in the Fens

The story of non-monastic religion in the isolated parishes of the fens. How two late Victorian churchmen brought their own very different solutions to the problems of their parishes and how the non-conformist groups reached out to the wide spread Fenland parishes.

### Non-conformist religion in the Fens

The independently minded Fen dwellers had their own opinions on religion. As a result the Fenlands became a stronghold of non-conformists views in early modern times. This talk tells the story of the successes & failures of the many strands of non-conformist worship over the past 400 years or more.

### The great Fenland monasteries\*

An old rhyme goes: *Ramsey the rich of gold and fee, Thorney the flower of many fair tree, Crowland the courteous of their meat and their drink, Spalding the gluttons as all men do think: Peterborough the Proud as all men do say, Sawtre by the way - that old Abbay gave more alms in one day - than all they.* But what are the REAL stories & what about Ely?

### Drugs in the Fens

The widespread use of Opium brought both relief and misery to the population of the nineteenth century Fens. This talk tells of the myths, facts and potions that surround the drug and the life of which it was so much a part.

### Riotous Behaviour in the Fens before the Civil War

Public rebellion and protest against invasion, the drainage of the Fens, lack of food, farming mechanisation and many other oppressions over the years are brought together to shatter any illusions of perfect rural peace in this part of Eastern England.

### The Civil War Sieges of Crowland & Kings Lynn

A patronising letter caused the long-standing animosity between Spalding & Crowland to erupt into hostage taking, a failed attempt at their recovery and no little farce. It also provided Oliver Cromwell with his first taste of siege warfare. The story of King's Lynn & its Royalist supporters cost the town a fortune in fines and status - but it came out OK with the Restoration.

### Bread or Blood

The hungry and unemployed rebel in the 19<sup>th</sup> century - and suffer hangings, transportations and hardship. The social cost of changes in rural life.

### Windmills, Wind pumps and Millwrights

Grinding corn & lifting water - the windmill has played a vital part in the lives of fen folk. Without the highly skilled work of the millwright they could not have been built, maintained or repaired - and life would have been harder still for the fen dwellers of eastern England. This talk provides a graphic insight to the dedicated and dangerous life that revolved around this picturesque landmark.

### William Harrison - the Fenland Poet

One year after his death, a talk about the life of William Harrison caused over 400 people to cram into a room in Ely with as many prevented from entering because of lack of space - and yet he is virtually unknown today. With poetry that has been compared favourably with John Clare and 40 years as the Superintendent of a large area of Fenland, the story of William Harrison combines sadness, humour, rebelliousness and a revealing insight into life in the Fens through three-quarters of the nineteenth century.

## Not just local

### **Witchcraft Ancient & Modern**

From seventeenth century hysteria to twentieth century 'happenings' - with much in between. This talk introduces the audience to beliefs as old as mankind, and how to create potions to protect the individual from becoming a victim to a spell.

### **The story of Woad**

From the blue-painted warriors that frightened the troops of Julius Caesar to an important crop of the 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in the fens - the story of Woad is an integral part of the history of these islands.

### **Some ladies named Elizabeth from History**

Not Queen Elizabeth I or II but other ladies named Elizabeth, from all walks of life, who have made their own impact on life in their time and beyond.

### **Social History through Art**

Over the centuries artists have captured elements of social life in their work; both as the prime subject or as secondary information to augment the message of the whole. This talk takes you behind the image into the 'real' world depicted by the artist.

### **To serve them all the day**

The story of domestic servants in the mansion, the 'big house' and the middle class home. By the end of the Victorian era over one & a half million people were in 'domestic servitude'. This is a brief peek at their life and their expectations.

### **The 19<sup>th</sup> century poor of London's East End**

The story of William Booth, Beatrice Webb, Octavia Hill and their nineteenth century fight to increase awareness & improve conditions. A fight against the odds.

### **The Patron Saints of Great Britain**

The story of Saints David, Patrick, George and Andrew - their origins, the celebrations and the awards named after them.

## Come for a walk in the garden

### In a Monastery Garden

For 550 years monastic settlements were established all over England. Each had gardens to provide vegetables for sustenance; herbs for taste, fragrance and medicinal use; flowers for fragrance & beauty and areas for tranquillity & contemplation. Based on original records of many kinds this talk takes you through Medieval Monastic gardening from the Glastonbury Thorn to the importance of herbal based enemas.

### People with designs on the Landscape

An illustrated overview of landscaped parks and formal gardens from medieval times to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - Capability Brown, Humphry Repton, their predecessors, successors and imitators.

### Estate villages

While the landowners changed their surroundings the workers often suffered - but not always. Discover what happened when compromise or 'necessity' intervened.

*The following illustrated talks present individual parks & gardens as they appear today, providing all the benefits of a guided tour, and the story behind their creation without leaving the warmth and comfort of your meeting place.*

**Holkham & Houghton** - two north Norfolk estates with much in common but their own complete individuality - each an expression of the power, influence and wealth of their founder.

**Wimpole Park** - a 2½ mile avenue, a folly, the remains of medieval open fields, man-made lakes, formal & walled gardens and much more

**Chatsworth** - fountains & cascades, rock gardens & an underground railway.

**Stowe** - a classic example of a politically inspired landscape, and the training ground of 'Capability' Brown.

**Rousham** - un-commercialised & virtually unchanged for 250 years. Gardens, statues, walks & peace.

## Traditions, Celebrations & Superstitions

Twelve months of the year, twelve different talks about just what it says in the title - the superstitions from the past that we still follow today and the traditions for celebration.

### Traditions, Celebrations & Superstitions for:

- **New Year** celebrations & superstitions across Britain
- **Candlemas & Valentine's Day**
- **Easter** - from Shrovetide to Easter time
- **Midsummer**
- **Hallowe'en**
- **Christmas** - from Stir-up Sunday to Twelfth Night.

## Social History and not just for Family Historians

Brian Jones - Talking about History 2009

### **The Poor and the Poor Laws**

The way communities and officialdom have coped with the problem of poverty shed light into all sorts of murky corners of life - and well meaning actions - in Britain over the past 300 years. The workhouse, the apprenticing of pauper children, the 'eighteenth century child support agency' and the funding of the whole subject are just some of the elements of life at the bottom of the 'pecking order' covered in this informative and entertaining talk.

### **The story the Censuses tell**

Every ten years since 1801 [except 1941] the national census has recorded a snapshot of life in our islands. A mainstay of the Family Historian's hobby, the census returns provide a fascinating insight into so much more as this talk illustrates.

### **England & Wales as revealed in the 1911 Census**

Released early under the Freedom of Information legislation [Scotland will not be released until January 2012] this is the first census to tell us about people we knew. It also gives us a fresh & revealing insight into life at the time - accommodation, women's voting protests and much more.

### **Births, Baptisms, Marriage, Death and Burial**

It is not just what the official records tell us, but also what they don't! Where do you go if your ancestor does not appear to have been born, married or died? As well as looking at the 'normal' records this talk suggests some other stones you may wish to look under. The rhythm of life and death as told through the various records available to anyone who cares to look. They tell us more about past lives than any formal history book.

### **Tithes, Enclosure and Taxes**

Inescapable elements of life over the centuries. A disturbing window on rural life in years gone by. For most of history relevant to family historians land was the keystone of their life. If they didn't own it they may have rented it. If they did neither, it is probable that they worked on it. Many family history answers lay in the soil - and this may help you uncover some.

### **Rebels, Rogues, Crime and Punishment**

The life and times of individuals on the edge. A fascinating insight into some heroes and villains - depending on which way you look at it. Most of us want to find a black sheep among our ancestors. In this talk we look at some of the records that may lead us to him - or her!

### **Oral Family History**

How many family historians think about talking to their relatives too late? Talk to the living about the family - but don't interrogate them, it gets you nowhere. This talk introduces you to the dos and don'ts of oral research - and can help make it fun & informative for both sides.

### **Religion and the family history sources it can provide**

So many sects, so many changes of sources - together they can leave the family historian bemused to say the least. In this talk we unravel some of the mysteries and in doing so may well unlock a few more previously impassable doors.

### **Taxes**

Taxes are inescapable elements of life over the centuries. It is extraordinary what things have been taxed, and what useful records they leave for the family historian.

### **Wills & Probate**

It is amazing how many people actually made wills, and how many of these can be traced and read. As well as telling us who left what to whom, these documents can confirm or deny family links that we thought we knew for certain, or uncover ones we never knew existed at all.

### **Other records many rarely use**

Manorial court rolls, local and national elections, local social and community groups, business papers - all of these can be a treasure-trove of information for the family historian. This talk provides an overview of just what each can provide - and may well uncover another avenue for finding more about your family's past

### **This day/week/month in times gone by**

What DID happen in the past? A very different look at some of the well known and not so well known events and happenings in this country over past centuries.

A different set of subjects for every day, week & month of the year.

*[Please book one of these talks at least 8 weeks in advance of required presentation as each one is prepared 'as required']*

Items above marked \* have associated field trips available. These can be arranged in conjunction with an illustrated talk or treated as a 'free standing' event.  
Please ask for details.

If none of the above talks are just what you want please let me know what you would like and I'll see what can be done!

## **A little bit about me**

The Lincolnshire Free Press once described me as a 'Quirky Historian' - I am certainly different from many people's idea of a historian. I believe history should be fun to hear about and learn about. All of my talks have a light-hearted style - but they also have a serious message about the past that is relevant to the present and the future. For many of the people involved in the events covered by my talks life was far from funny - but that is no reason for dry talks and lectures.

My interest is in 'the history of real people' and how they lived their lives at various stages through the past 1000 years or so - what affected them, what caused the ups and downs in their life. The history in these talks is presented in an entertaining way - but it is all underpinned by hard fact and research.

I have studied and researched Modern Social History with the Open University and English Local & Regional History with the University of Cambridge, culminating in 2004 with a Master's Degree in the subject.

Passing on my knowledge and enthusiasm for history is now a major part of my life. I give talks to social groups, associations and the like throughout East Anglia, Lincolnshire and the East Midlands and run multi-session courses in a wide range of history based subjects for the WEA (Workers Educational Association) and community organisations. I also tutor for the University of Cambridge on their Community Programme

I am an accredited guide for Peterborough City's Heritage tours on many facets of the city's long history, including the Ghost and Crime & Punishment Walks. I also work as a guide at Burghley House and Elton Hall, a country house to the west of Peterborough.

All talks/presentations are illustrated using a laptop computer and image projector. Single talks are designed to run for around an hour but can be modified to suit your requirements.

**For more information, availability & to make a booking contact:**

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