

Midland Ancestors
London & Home Counties Branch Newsletter.

Vol 27: 2 April 2026

Editorial

This year's AGM will be after the July talk as I have to leave immediately after the April talk.

On Sunday 17th May a visit to The National Museum of Computing is planned. We will meet at the museum, but we need to know in advance who will be coming as the museum needs to know numbers to ensure there are enough volunteers present, and to arrange a steady flow through the museum. So please let Brian know if you are interested in coming by the 15th April using this dedicated email brian.events@techie.com. See below for further details.

Please let us know what you would like to hear about - or indeed what you could tell us about. We need to find volunteers from within the group to provide at least one in-house meeting per year. This year's October meeting is an opportunity for members to give a short presentation about how they solved a 'brick wall' in their tree. What techniques did you use? Did it involve any little-known archives or serious detective work? Alternatively, you can tell the group about a 'brick wall' you have that you would like some help to solve. Please let Andy know if you would like a slot.

Next meeting 11th April 2026:

Andrew Lound "Titanic - The Midlands' connection"

Although the towns of Belfast and Southampton claim the Titanic as their own, over 70% of the ship's interior was manufactured in the Midlands. Based on his own research Andrew tells the story of the Midlands' industrial work on the ship and the fate of the local passengers. A dramatic presentation delivered in full White Star Line Uniform, using images, audio and numerous props. Climb aboard and experience the voyage of your life.

Meetings are held at the Hyde Park Family Search Centre, 64-68 Princes Gate, Exhibition Road, South Kensington, SW7 2PA. **Doors open 10.00 talks start 11.00.**

We can stay on after the talk to do some research either on their computers or you can bring your own and connect to their Wi-Fi. We can take coffee and tea into our meetings and usually bring packed lunches and have a discussion around the table afterwards.

Nearest underground station: South Kensington (District and Circle Lines).

Buses: 14, 49, 70, 74, 345, 360, 414, 430, C1

Future meeting dates for your diary

17th May 2026 - Outing to The National Museum of Computing (see below)

11th July 2026 - Sophie Kay "Genetic hide and seek: exploring missing ancestor mysteries with autosomal DNA followed by buffet & AGM

10th October 2026 - Member day - "A brick wall in my tree"

The National Museum of Computing

The venue is a museum situated adjacent to the main Bletchley Park complex and is an independent museum with its own separate entrance and admission fee (currently £15, with some concessions). Their website is tnmoc.org.

There is a car park (Postcode MK3 6DS), but the site is only a short walk (less than 15 minutes) from Bletchley train station. Trains run from London Euston and typically take around 53 minutes. Tell the person at the entrance barrier you want to visit the Museum of Computing in Block H for directions.

It is home to the world's largest collection of working historic computers and is recognised as one of England's top 100 "irreplaceable places". It houses the functional historic computers and World War II machines, including Enigma, Lorenz, the working Turing-Welchman Bombe, the rebuilt Colossus (the world's first electronic computer), and the WITCH (the world's oldest working digital computer).

The Museum enables visitors to follow the development of computing from the ultra-secret pioneering efforts of the 1940s through the large systems and mainframes of the 1950s, 60s and 70s, and the rise of personal computing in the 1980s and beyond.

Proposed outline itinerary

- Arrive around 10:30 am when the museum opens.
- Purchase a ticket at the entrance: current adult day ticket is £15.00
- Meet in the cafe (with shop and toilets) for a brief introduction
- 11:00 am: Start the visit in the Bombe Gallery with a 30-minute talk and demonstration about the WWII code breaking machine (If you arrive after the 11:00 talk has started do not worry as the talks will be held at several other times during the day)
- 11:45 am: Move to the Tunny Gallery and then the Colossus Gallery for a 45-minute talk and demonstration of the Lorenz code breaking machines together with the world's first electronic digital computer.
- 12:30 pm: Lunch break in the cafe (hot and cold drinks and snacks available) or bring a picnic and eat outdoors (weather permitting)
- After lunch have a free-flow visit around the rest of the museum
- Volunteer guides will be available to tell you about the collections
- Other galleries to see include:
 - The first-generation gallery - early valve-based computers and the WITCH computer
 - The large systems gallery - mainframe computers
 - The pop-up gallery - temporary mini exhibitions
 - The software gallery - the evolution of computer programs
 - The PC gallery - personal computer advancements
 - The Internet gallery - the internet's history and impact
 - There are also cabinets in the corridors displaying items such as slide rules and calculators
- 5:00 pm: The museum closes

Hyde Park Family Search Centre

If you download and install a Chrome extension on your laptop (which uses the building Wi-Fi), you can search records, use commercial websites for free and

download images directly to your laptop after our meeting. In effect, with the Chrome extension, your laptop has the same premium access as the PCs in the FamilySearch Centre. This access only works, of course, if you are within the building on Exhibition Road since it is dependent on the building Wi-Fi address. Ask a member of staff about this if you are interested.

Outside of our meetings The Hyde Park Family Search Centre is currently only open on Thursday & Friday 11.30 to 16.30 and the 1st & 3rd Saturday of every month 11.30 to 16.30.

Current Committee

Andy Startin (Chairman) a.startin@midanc.uk

Helene Cox (Treasurer) zen97427@zen.co.uk

Lesley Exton (Secretary) lesley.exton@gmail.com

David Kerr david.b.kerr@btinternet.com

Brian Gubbins eric6@gmx.co.uk

If you are interested in becoming a member of the committee or would like to know what being a member of the committee entails, please let Andy know.

Sharon Hintze - Wills and Probate.

Prior to 12th January 1858 proving wills and giving grants of administration was the responsibility of the Ecclesiastical, manorial and royal courts. After this date the government took over the administration through the Principal Probate Registry with 40 district registries to cover wills of lower value. Before 1882 only men, spinsters and widows were allowed to leave wills. The ideal will is that of a person who never married and had lots of nieces and nephews etc and specified the relationship.

Sharon then looked at the differences in how wills were written before and after 1858. She looked at a few examples, including the prize winner who detailed how he had won each prize he bequeathed and a 'controlling will' where the father tried to control what his son did from beyond the grave. Including punishments that the executor was expected carry out if the son didn't follow instructions.

The reminder of the talk looked at how find and access wills using FamilySearch and other sources you might not know about. The National Probate Indexes are available on Ancestry (1858-1966), FindMyPast (1858-2019) and FamilySearch (1858-1957). They record data and place of death, date and place of probate, executor's names and value of estate. A lot of people listed didn't die in Great Britain e.g. soldiers (people who joined the military had to make a will). FamilySearch also has the images of the wills (1858-1925) which can be downloaded for free at a FamilySearch Centre.

Pre-1858 will datasets are also available on FamilySearch. Over the last 6 months a lot of data has been reorganised so if you've not looked recently, it is worth having another look. Select England, there are 154 datasets, most with images. You will need to know which Archdeaconry and have some idea of the year, but you may find a downloaded image of a will.

The main Prerogative Court was that of Canterbury with more than 1,000,000 wills held at The National Archive (TNA). Can download images from TNA for free. The other Prerogative Court was of York. These wills are held at Borthwick Institute in York (will copies £10). Images are available for free on FamilySearch. The Index is on FindMyPast.

FamilySearch can also be used if you don't know where/when a will was proved in England. Use maps to get a fix on a date and place or use FamilySearch Wiki to get a list of primary and secondary courts. Can also try FindMyPast and Ancestry to find copies of wills online.

Death Duties (1798-1903), these were payable on personal estate legacies only. Initially children, spouse, parents and grandparents were exempt. By 1815 only spouses were exempt. The index is on FindMyPast. The records are at TNA.