

***Beyond the Family Tree* Conference Programme – 25 & 26 June 2026**

**Thursday 25 June**

8.45 - Registration

9.20 - welcome and housekeeping

9.30 - Keynote Speaker – Joint – 45 min with 10 min Q&A – Professor Tanya Evans - **Looking back and forward at the relationship between history and genealogy.**

I have worked at the intersection of history and genealogy for over 15 years. In that time, the relationship between the two has changed dramatically across the world with the two distinct disciplines synergising in significant ways, but it has played out differently in diverse national contexts. Academic historians are considerably more open to family history than they used to be, but some disciplinary snobbishness persists. My focus on family history and genealogy has been key to my work as part of three recent Australian Research Council-funded projects and a recently awarded project funded by the Polish government on Diasporic Migration. These projects involving extensive collaboration with family historians and marginalised community history organisations demonstrate how collaborative methodologies generate both rigorous scholarship and meaningful public engagement. I will suggest that it is time to appreciate and articulate genealogy and history's social value.

A symptom of this change is suggested by my introduction of a new unit on family history, in partnership with the Society of Australian Genealogists, to undergraduate students at Macquarie University in Sydney Australia as part of a new major on Public History and Heritage later this year. Does this signal genealogy's full acceptance within the discipline? What do individuals and society have to gain from this integration?

**Biography**

**Tanya Evans** is a public historian who specializes in family history, the history of the family, cultural heritage, history and sport, gender in sport, community, local and regional history, memory and life-stories, histories of charities and NGOs, history and the media and history in tourism. She is committed to revealing the value and significance of history for individuals and society to everyone.

She is currently working on two Australian Research Council funded projects 1. The History of Grandparenting in Australia since 1945 (2025-2028) and 2. Australians and the Past Revisited (2026-2029). She is also working on Public Histories of Diasporic Migration (funded by the Polish government 2026-2030) and the history of fitness in Australia.

Her first three books were about the history of 'illegitimacy', poverty and philanthropy. Her third prize-winning book *Fractured Families: Life on the Margins in Colonial New South*

Wales was a history of Australia's oldest surviving charity The Benevolent Society and she wrote this in collaboration with family historians and the charity. She loves teaching and producing public history and working in teams. She curates exhibitions, writes for general as well as academic readers, politicians and social policy makers and makes radio and television programs based on her scholarship. She pitches her work at a variety of audiences because her research is targeted at disrupting people's assumptions about the history of the family. Her last book *Family History, Historical Consciousness and Citizenship: a new social history* was published by Bloomsbury in early 2022.

To hear a recent radio broadcast featuring Professor Evans, visit:

<https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/bigideas/the-ethics-of-dna-testing-in-family-history-research/106219694>

10.25 – moving time (10 minutes)

10.35 - submitted presentations speakers [triple tracks – 2 speakers in each track (each: 20 minutes with 10 in Q&A)

10.35 presentation 1a – Dr Sophie Kay - **Finding Father: Lessons from DNA Testers.**

The process of using direct-to-consumer DNA testing to identify an unknown parent or grandparent can be a long, technical and emotionally challenging endeavour. So how can we best support those going through this process – and what can genetic genealogists learn from listening to the experiences of those DNA testers? An ongoing genetic genealogy collaboration hosted by The Mixed Museum (<https://mixedmuseum.org.uk/>) illuminates the emotional, ethical and practical implications of 'unknown ancestor tracing' for the people involved, with a particular focus on how mixedheritage individuals might navigate this journey.

In 2024, the Museum appointed a Scientist-in-Residence to work with a community of individuals who are either the children or grandchildren of Black American GIs and white British women. Known as the "Brown Babies" – a term coined by the African-American press in the 1940s to describe the children born to these interracial relationships during and after the war – the group has been using direct-to-consumer autosomal DNA testing to identify their fathers or grandfathers, whilst discussing their experiences collectively as the research has unfolded.

This presentation will confront the complex histories involved in the narratives of the "Brown Babies" and describe recent outcomes from a formal study of the group's experiences of DNA testing – encompassing technical, emotional and personal insights. We'll reflect on the implications of these findings for genealogy practitioners and the field of family history as a whole, and examine the vital role of community-building efforts in supporting individuals who are seeking family through genetic testing.

## Biography

Dr. Sophie Kay is a professional genealogist at Khronicle® ([www.khronicle.co.uk](http://www.khronicle.co.uk)) and obtained her D.Phil. in Systems Biology from the University of Oxford in 2015. She's the Ancestry and Genealogy

Expert for archaeology show, Time Team, and the Scientist in Residence for The Mixed Museum, where she delivers educational sessions and content in genetic genealogy. A frequent contributor to Family Tree Magazine, Sophie also authored their *Research Skills Workbook* in 2024. A member of both AGRA and APG, Sophie works on a variety of projects in both DNA and archival research for private clients and public organisations.

**10.35 presentation 1b – Dr Derek Bryce – Producing Diaspora Identity through Cultural Organisations: Scots in British Columbia, Canada.**

This presentation takes forward work by Bryce, Murdy & Alexander (2017), linking the phenomenon diaspora identities carried, enacted and experienced by visitors to ancestral destinations (in this case, Scotland) with how versions of Scottish identity are produced and consumed by hyphenated 'overseas Scots' within the diaspora (in this case, British Columbia, Canada). The study is anchored around diaspora community associations, in this case those organised around Scottish arts and culture in B.C., Canada. Semi-structured interviews were arranged with members of Scottish community cultural associations in the cities of Vancouver, Victoria, Kelowna and Penticton, B.C. to understand how they celebrate, maintain and perform 'Scottishness' as a form of remembrance and maintenance of ancestral cultural tradition and to determine if the imagined Scotland may serve as a 'symbolic anchor' or if Scottishness has become a self-sustaining cultural form in Canada.

Findings highlight views of a contemporary 'real' Scotland shaped by mythologies of place and narratives of exile and migration as well as of perceptions of a diaspora community in decline as immigration shifts to other origin points. Through analysis of stories of individual and group consumption, I examine how this Scotland of the individual and collective imagination shapes the needs of diasporic Scots as a set of anchor points in the maintenance of Scottish identity across time and space; the construction of other versions of 'Scotland' at some remove from Scotland itself and the intersection of both with other facets of identity production in overseas diasporas.

Bryce, D., Murdy, S., & Alexander, M. (2017). Diaspora, authenticity and the imagined past. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 66, 49-60.

### **Biography**

Derek is a Senior Lecturer within the Department of Marketing at the University of Strathclyde. I have been involved with research and teaching at Strathclyde since 2008. My first degree was in History, from the University of Calgary (1991) after which I embarked on a career in the corporate travel management sector, working for a range of multinational and local businesses in the UK and Canada, including American Express and Jarvis-Woodside. I returned to academic life in 2003, gaining a MSc in Tourism from the University of Strathclyde, MRes in Business Management and a PhD in Cultural Studies from Glasgow Caledonian University. My teaching and research focus in the Marketing domain focus is Cultural Heritage, Destinations and Tourism.

**10.35 presentation 1c – Dr Kate Bagnall - Ancestors and Archives: Using Genealogical Methods in Histories of Migration and Citizenship.**

In this presentation I consider how genealogical sources and family history methods can contribute to histories of migration and citizenship, through the example of the history of Chinese migration

and settlement in Australasia (Australia and New Zealand). Families are central to the patterns and processes of migration, and, for 'academic' historians like me, they can provide useful examples through which to better understand the experiences, negotiations and identities of migrants in the past. Individually and collectively, family histories can challenge previous historical assumptions about migrant and ethnic communities, and they can enable us to see personal and familial connections that sit hidden behind (often androcentric) histories that focus on economics, politics and labour (as Chinese-Australian histories have typically done in the past). For those of us studying the history of 'immigrant nations', family history as method also provides possibilities for exploring the nuanced workings and ongoing legacies of colonisation and settler colonialism.

From my earliest explorations into Chinese-Australasian history in the late 1990s, family history and family historians have informed my research practice as an academic historian. In this presentation, I will discuss my understanding and practice of 'family history as method' in the context of histories of migration and citizenship. I will consider aspects of genealogical research that I have found constructive in my work, including creating family trees (or network diagrams), using 'genealogical sources', and working with family and community historians. Although I work alongside and collaborate with the descendants of my research subjects, our starting points are different, as are our aims as researchers, our experiences and our knowledge. While not without its challenges, such collaborations provide opportunities for the creation of new knowledge and can foster deeper historical understandings and richer community engagements with the past.

## Biography

Dr Kate Bagnall is an Australian social historian whose research focuses on the intersections of migration, family and the law in the British settler colonial world. She is best known as a scholar of Chinese Australasian history – particularly histories of women, children and families – and the history of the White Australia Policy. Kate has published widely in her field, including the ground-breaking edited collection *Locating Chinese Women: Historical Mobility between China and Australia* (HKU Press, 2021), co-edited with Julia Martínez. Kate is a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Tasmania where she teaches in the History and Family History programs.

11.05 – 5 minutes between presentations for switch over

**11.10 presentation 2a – John Cleary - Resolving an NPE in an early nineteenth century Pennsylvania settler community using BanyanDNA.**

Modelling hypothetical family trees drawing upon large sets of autosomal DNA matching pairs has become an increasingly central technique for resolving unknown parentage (UP) or brick wall genealogical mysteries. Two popular software suites designed for hypothetical tree modelling are WATO and BanyanDNA, each with its own particular strengths. This talk will explore the feasibility of using such modellers to resolve distant UP mysteries by modelling a large quantity of relatively distant DNA matching data. This will be illustrated using a case study set within the early 19th century settler farming communities of the Pennsylvania-New York borderlands. As well as being close to the limits of relationships believed detectable with current autosomal DNA testing technologies, these communities were marked by a considerable degree of inter-marriage that further complicate the reconstructed relationships.

The presentation will argue that resolving such mysteries is not only satisfying for the descendants who research them but also opens up new forms of historical understanding of these communities, including of their marriage customs, ways of living and migration patterns as they moved from further east.

### **Biography**

John Cleary is associate professor in languages and intercultural studies at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, and has contributed to the programme in Genealogical Studies at University of Strathclyde. He gives talks on genealogy and genetic genealogy and is a contributing author to *DNA – A Guide for Family Historians* (2025). His chapter on ‘Family papers of the Gordon Cummings of Altyre: curating the family and the histories they tell’ will be published in *Family Papers and their Afterlives* (ed. Imogen Peck) during 2026.

### **11.10 presentation 2b – Derrick Johnstone - East Jersey Bound: Scots emigrants to Colonial America in the 1680s.**

*East Jersey Bound* is a website to disseminate postgraduate research on Scots emigrants to East New Jersey in the 1680s and help genealogists and historians explore family and other connections. It hosts a genealogical database of 600 emigrants and 2,200 kin and associates, spanning one or two generations on either side of the migration. My research has drawn on an exhaustive range of archival and secondary sources to shed light on who the emigrants were, where they came from, what influenced their decisions to leave, and what became of them.

This little-known colonial episode was successful for many Scots, in contrast to the later Darien debacle. Today they have many descendants, which is how I came across the East Jersey story when reviewing my own DNA matches. I have sought to join up family and local histories in the USA, often siloed and lacking authoritative detail on the emigrants, with those in Scotland which rarely mention them. The presentation will briefly introduce the research and website, illustrate how genealogical methods can help to reconstruct kinship and business networks, and reflect on practical issues in gathering evidence more than 300 years later and on appropriate use of AI tools.

### **Biography**

I am a Research Affiliate with the Department of History, University of Glasgow, where I graduated MPhil (Research) in 2025. My thesis, *Scots Emigrants to East Jersey 1682–1702: Motivations and Outcomes*, was supervised by Professor Karin Bowie <https://theses.gla.ac.uk/85247/>. The website, *East Jersey Bound* <https://eastjerseybound.scot> summarises the research and holds the emigrant database. Other pages feature a growing number of pen portraits, research topics, and tools for site visitors (e.g., a database user guide and glossaries of 17th century legal and other terms). I am Secretary of the Old Edinburgh Club and a member of several genealogical societies.

### **11.10 presentation 2c – Sheila and Sharon Smith - Decolonizing Genealogy: How Traditional Genealogical Standards Fail.**

Traditional genealogical research privileges documentary evidence and official records, creating insurmountable barriers for tracing families marginalized by colonial systems. This presentation examines how conventional methodologies systematically exclude enslaved peoples, Indigenous communities, colonized populations, women, and displaced groups. These absences reflect not missing histories but deliberate design: record-keeping systems served colonial administrative interests rather than preserving marginalized communities' experiences.

Standard genealogical practice demands primary sources, written documentation, and government records while undervaluing oral traditions and community knowledge. This framework assumes continuous, accessible paper trails that rarely exist for marginalized populations. Enslaved individuals appear only as property without documented family structures. Indigenous records were destroyed, never created, or exist solely in colonial languages that obscure original identities. Colonized peoples had their naming practices "corrected" by administrators, severing genealogical connections. Communities displaced by war, famine, or forced migration left fragmented traces across multiple jurisdictions.

Genealogists collaborating with these communities need innovative approaches that center community knowledge, oral tradition, and alternative evidence when official records fail or misrepresent marginalized communities.

This presentation challenges genealogists to critically examine traditional sources and argues for methodological transformation that recognizes alternative sources, validates oral histories, and acknowledges how colonial violence shaped archival silences. Participants will gain critical awareness of whose voices genealogical practice centers and develop frameworks for more inclusive, ethical research that honors all knowledge systems as legitimate historical evidence.

## Biographies

**Sharon Smith** works at Library and Archives Canada, specializing in recordkeeping and information governance. Sharon contributes to the International Council on Archives Programme Commission and ISO standards development, bringing a global perspective to ethical and sustainable information practices. She is a respected educator, community leader, and advocate for collaborative stewardship in the information profession. Sharon has presented papers at the ICA Congress, Abu Dhabi, October 2023; the Archives Bridging the Gap ICA conference, Rome 2022; and the IRMS Conference. Manchester 2023, among others.

**Sheila Smith** is the owner of Braeside Genealogy, a Toronto-based research company. She is a member of the Ontario Genealogical Society, the Society of Genealogists and the Association of Professional Genealogists, where she serves as the treasurer of the Canadian chapter. She has a B.A. (Hon.) in History and holds a Certificate in Intermediate Genealogy from Pharos Tutors. This is Sheila's first time presenting at a conference.

11.40 - refreshment break/networking/poster viewing (30 minutes)

12.10 - Panel Presentation - Joint - 45 min with 15 min Q&A – Fiona Brooker, Elsa Churchill, Dr Bruce Durie – **The History and Future of Genealogy and Family History: 20/20 Visions.**

The panellists will consider what's happened over the last 20 years in the world of genealogy/family history and where we might be heading in the next 20 years. Join us for some crystal ball gazing and historical reminiscing with our esteemed panel.

## Biographies

**Fiona Brooker** is the founder of Memories in Time and loves helping people explore their family history, interpret DNA results, and share their discoveries with loved ones. A former President of the New Zealand Society of Genealogists (NZSG), she currently serves on the board of the Association of Professional Genealogists. She has studied with the Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies, is a member of PHANZA, and is a researcher for the television series *My Family Mystery*.

**Else Churchill** is the Genealogist at the Society of Genealogists in London with nearly 40 years of experience as genealogist and educator. She lectures regularly for the Society and local groups in the UK as well as internationally. She has served on a number of boards including the Council of the British Record Society, and the Council of the Friends of The National Archives. She also served a nine-year stint as a member of the Lord Chancellors' Advisory Council on National Records and has presented evidence to Parliament on genealogical matters.

**Dr Bruce Durie** founded the Postgraduate Programme in Genealogical, Palaeographic and Heraldic Studies at the University of Strathclyde back in 2006. He has written over 30 books including *Scottish Genealogy*, now in its 4<sup>th</sup> edition and *Understanding Documents for Genealogy and Local History*. He is *Shennachie* (Genealogist and Historian) to the Chief of Durie and spent six months during 2016 as Fulbright US-UK Fulbright Senior Scottish Studies Scholar, researching *Scottish Migration into Colonial America* at St Andrews University, Laurinburg, North Carolina.

13.15 - lunch & poster viewing

14.30 – submitted presentations speakers [triple tracks – 2 speakers in each track (each: 20 minutes with 10 in Q&A)

14.30 presentation 3a – Graham Holton - **Genetic testing technologies and reference sequences: the next frontier.**

Genetic genealogy research has made real progress in identifying specific historical ancestors from medieval times for present day Y-DNA test-takers, however the quest to discover to which descendant line from an early ancestor they belong often remains unfulfilled. There are gaps which could potentially be filled by unknown SNP markers. Could the gapless sequences of the human genome now available fill the gaps in the readability of the Y chromosome and consequently the gaps in our knowledge of the genetic branching of families? This presentation will examine these issues and assess the potential for genetic genealogy of the latest developments in genetics.

The use of long-read sequencing will be described and the possibilities and challenges associated with its implementation for genetic genealogy reviewed. A further outcome of this technology has resulted in the assembling of many population specific genetic reference sequences which could

potentially complement test-results from long-read sequencing, producing greater accuracy and efficiency in the identification of SNPs.

The most obvious benefits of these advances are in the field of Y-DNA research, however outcomes for autosomal DNA research should not be neglected. So far, the comparison of DNA segments has been the principal means of exploring relationships between autosomal genetic matches. Little emphasis has been placed on the use of SNPs in this context, but will the door to the identification of ancestrally significant SNPs and structural variants in autosomal DNA be opened as a result of the developments which form the subject of this presentation?

### **Biography**

Graham S Holton is a graduate of the University of Edinburgh and currently a Lead Tutor of the University of Strathclyde's Postgraduate Course in Genealogical Studies, within the Strathclyde Institute for Genealogical Studies. His particular areas of interest are medieval genealogy and genetic genealogy and he was the editor of *Tracing your ancestors using DNA*. He has led the Battle of Bannockburn and Declaration of Arbroath Family History Projects and is responsible for the genetic genealogy research activities undertaken by the University.

### **14.30 presentation 3b – Fiona Brooker – When Objects Meet People: Integrating Family History and Archaeological Evidence in 19th Century Household Analysis.**

Two major earthquakes in 2010 and 2011 led to the demolition of the buildings on multiple blocks of the 19th century colonial city of Christchurch, New Zealand. As part of the recovery and rebuild process, archaeological teams investigated the building sites, resulting in the creation of a substantial database of material culture and site data. This database now forms the basis for the Museum of Archaeology Ōtautahi (<https://museumofarchaeology.org/> ).

This presentation introduces how family historians can and are researching the people and families who lived and worked on these sites. Using documentary sources such as electoral rolls, business and residential directories, newspapers, rate records, civil registration and church records to reconstruct the families who used the plates and bottles and to discover the business owners who dumped their rubbish at the back of their section. In addition, there is the ability to connect the often-hidden women and their children's lives to these sites and explore their lives through the artefacts.

Going beyond the family tree with this research we can add social history to the anonymous material evidence that has been collected, to find traces of the everyday lives embedded within 19<sup>th</sup> century urban communities and are able to reconnect the objects to the people.

### **Biography**

Fiona Brooker is the founder of Memories in Time and loves helping people explore their family history, interpret DNA results, and share their discoveries with loved ones. A former President of the New Zealand Society of Genealogists (NZSG), she currently serves on the board of the Association of Professional Genealogists. She has studied with the Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies, is a member of PHANZA, and is a researcher for the television series *My Family Mystery*.

**14.30 presentation 3c – Nicola Johnson - Reconstructing Class: Using HISCO and HISCLASS to Analyse Occupational Mobility in Genealogical Research.**

Occupational classification systems such as HISCO and HISCLASS have traditionally belonged to the worlds of economics and demography. This talk explores how they can instead serve as powerful tools for genealogical research - allowing us to examine family-level patterns of social mobility and class persistence across generations.

Drawing on my MSc (Genealogical, Palaeographic and Heraldic studies, 2025) experience applying these frameworks to maritime and working-class case studies, I discuss how to code and interpret occupational data within a genealogical context, using HISCO and HISCLASS systems as a method of combining genealogical research outcomes with quantitative analysis. I also address common challenges: inconsistent historical terminology, changing census categories, and the limits of standardised classification when dealing with our ancestors.

Rather than presenting findings, the focus is on practical application: how to use HISCO and HISCLASS to analyse social mobility with a genealogical study to deepen historical understanding. The approach sits at the intersection of history, sociology, and genealogy - reflecting the discipline's growing methodological maturity.

### **Biography**

Nicola Johnson is a professional genealogist and writer specialising in English, maritime, and Titanic family history. A former BBC journalist, she completed the MSc in Genealogical, Palaeographic and Heraldic Studies with Distinction at the University of Strathclyde in 2025 and is now undertaking a PhD in History with Genealogical Studies at the same university as a distance learner. Her research explores the long-term outcomes of the bereaved children of Titanic crew families, combining archival and genealogical methods to reconstruct hidden lives. Nicola's work appears regularly in *Who Do You Think You Are?*, *Family Tree*, and *Discover Your Ancestors* magazines.

15.00 - 5 minutes between presentations for switch over

**15.05 presentation 4a – Dr Iain McDonald – A discussion of phylogeography and the Y-DNA haplogroup R-U106.**

Phylogeography - the reconstruction of ancient migrations - is the ultimate goal of many people's Y-DNA testing journeys. People would like to know where their ancestors came from, and when and why they moved there: are their family Vikings? Normans? Anglo-Saxons? Romans? Ancient DNA can answer these questions for a broad population, but there are insufficient samples to represent every family, and ancient DNA misses periods of history where DNA-rich burials are scarce. These gaps can be filled in by commercial genetic genealogy databases. Unfortunately, the few phylogeography algorithms available are limited in their accuracy and frequently produce erroneous results.

In this presentation, I will discuss a deep dive through the Y-DNA haplogroup R-U106, which represents a significant fraction of western European men. I will discuss how potential origins and migration patterns can be teased out of commercial Y-DNA databases through close manual examination of individual branches and testers. The challenge then becomes translating these

manual methods to phylogeographical algorithms: I will discuss what works, what doesn't, and how this is affected by biases in the underlying sampling of Y-DNA data around the globe.

## Biography

Iain McDonald is an astrophysicist who has been working in genetic genealogy and specifically Y-DNA for nearly 20 years. He runs the R-U106 project at Family Tree DNA, specialises in age estimation methodology and is a co-author of *Tracing your ancestors using DNA*.

### 15.05 presentation 4b – Lisa Camichos - **The Orlando Plan: A Granddaughter's Journey into Family, History, and Community Aid.**

This presentation explores the Orlando Plan, a vital post-WWII relief effort for Volos, Greece, through the unique lens of genealogical discovery. Its founder was my grandfather, an immigrant from the mountain village of Pouri, whose story—and the history of the Plan itself—was lost to time until his passing in 1993. The discovery of a steamer trunk, a family archive of letters and articles, launched a personal and academic journey that became the basis of my MA thesis at Western Carolina University.

This research places a family's archival materials at the center of a significant historical event. It moves beyond traditional narratives of post-war aid to demonstrate how the contents of a single trunk can rewrite community history. By integrating these deeply personal documents with conventional records like the *Orlando Sentinel* and *New York Times*, this paper shows how genealogical inquiry can unearth the micro-histories of transnational kinship and philanthropy, often hidden within a family's treasured possessions.

This presentation directly addresses the intersection of genealogy and history, using the process of discovery to reconstruct a community's response to crisis. It provides a forward-looking model for how genealogists can leverage recovered family records to contribute new perspectives to the historical narrative, proving that one immigrant's roots—preserved in a trunk—can inspire a legacy that reverberates across generations.

## Biography

I am a self-motivated, experienced educator with over 20 years of teaching experience. I have a BA in History from Lenoir-Rhyne University, and an MA in History from Western Carolina University. I am currently living and teaching in Trieste, Italy at the International School of Trieste.

### 15.05 presentation 4c – Rony Golan - **Law and Genealogy: An Innovative Academic Course.**

Beginning in the 2023/2024 academic year, the Buchmann Faculty of Law at the Tel Aviv University introduced a pioneering course entitled Law and Genealogy. This innovative curriculum extends beyond the obvious forensic genealogy to address comprehensive legal issues arising from family ties and genealogical research.

The curriculum encompasses diverse legal domains including inheritance law (heir entitlement and priority hierarchies), personal status law (rights of adopted and illegitimate children), property and

taxation law, archive law (access to community records worldwide), evidence law involving spousal relationships, and the legal and ethical implications of DNA and genetic information in genealogical contexts.

This presentation will provide insights into the curriculum design methodology, the interdisciplinary bibliography integrating law, genealogy, genetics, and ethics, and practical experiences from teaching this unique course. The complete syllabus is available at:

[https://ims.tau.ac.il/Tal/Syllabus/Syllabus\\_L.aspx?lang=EN&course=1411775401&year=2025](https://ims.tau.ac.il/Tal/Syllabus/Syllabus_L.aspx?lang=EN&course=1411775401&year=2025) .

### **Biography**

Rony Golan is a lecturer at Tel Aviv University with 40 years of legal practice and professional genealogical expertise since 1985. He is an internationally recognized speaker who has presented at multiple International Conferences on Jewish Genealogy (IAJGS) from 2004 to 2018.

15.35 – refreshment break/networking/poster viewing

16.00 - Keynote speakers – Separate tracks - 45 min with 10 min Q&A

#### **Track A – DNA Testing Industry Representatives Panel Discussion – The Future of Genetic Genealogy.**

The panellists will consider where genetic genealogy is heading in the near to distant future. Representatives will include speakers from Ancestry and Family Tree DNA.

#### **Track B – Heather Cromar - The Healing Power of Genealogy.**

The presentation, "The Healing Power of Genealogy," explores the profound social and psychological benefits of engaging in genealogical research. It begins by acknowledging a wide array of complex and often difficult family issues that researchers may uncover, including separation through immigration, criminal behavior, divorce, premature death, addiction, mental health issues, historical traumas like enslavement, and family mysteries discovered through DNA testing. The presentation then focuses on how the research process facilitates "Healing" through solving family mysteries, locating missing records, achieving reunifications, and fostering forgiveness among estranged family members.

The core of the presentation details several key "Social Benefits of Genealogy Research". These include **Healthy Identity Development**, where high family history knowledge correlates with a stronger "intergenerational self," personal integrity, and increased emotional resilience. A related benefit is **Persistence Toward Completing Goals**, as family narratives of overcoming obstacles can teach resilience and problem-solving, which also enhances intellectual performance and persistence in education.

Furthermore, genealogical knowledge is linked to **Higher Emotional Well-Being**, promoting compassion, patience, and the ability to regulate emotions and adapt to new circumstances. This research is a mechanism for **Healing Intergenerational Trauma** by reframing ancestors' stories from victimhood to survival and is also cited as a path to **Overcoming**

**Addiction** by establishing connection. The ultimate outcome is the **Strengthening of Family Bonds** through shared stories and traditions.

## Biography

Heather Cromar has spent more than 30 years in the genealogy industry in both private research and education. She earned a B.A. in History from BYU Provo and an MSc (with Merit) in Genealogy, Paleography, and Heraldry from the University of Strathclyde. From 2018-2024, Heather was a BYU-Idaho professor and served as interim program lead over the Family History Research Program. She has also served on the board of directors for AGES. Since 2024, she has worked as an independent researcher and consultant, partnering with FamilySearch on educational initiatives focusing on belonging and the social benefits of genealogy.

### Track C – Suzanne Hoffman - **The Many Faces of Forensic Genealogy.**

Examples of probate have been found in history as far back as 4,000 years ago in Egypt. The foundation of what is today known as Forensic Genealogy has its origins in the legal transfer of property to heirs throughout history and within all segments of global society. Most of the specialties and subspecialties didn't exist 100 years ago. As the fastest growing discipline of genealogy, Forensic Genealogy accounts for more specialties and variants than any other genealogical research area. It is also the most lucrative professional discipline in genealogy.

The talk will be an overview of the major subspecialties and the fine line between the controversy that Forensic Genetic Genealogy and traditional Genealogy represent; the necessity of both, and how criminal versus civil law determines the ethical standards and governance that prevails for each sub-specialty. With ten or more subspecialties there is a place for all different aspects of genealogical research and interests. Traditional genealogy research takes on a whole new perspective when it is specific to a subspecialty. The audience is different, the paperwork could need certificate of authenticity, apostilles, and other legal oversight that most genealogists never encounter. Add to the complexity of multi-national governance and slow legal adoption of investigative genetic genealogy with or without law enforcement involvement, you have a future as uncertain as the past has been in recent years.

Traditional genealogy focuses on ancestors and the past. Genetic Genealogy relies on the present and living descendants. Privacy laws have a major impact on descendants research and GDPR has a major impact on many of the Forensic specialties. This is part of the controversy and the evolution yet to come. It is a whole new world and we have to be ready as it evolves and adapts to commercial acceptance and political support, globally.

## Biography

Suzanne L. Hoffman is the Immediate Past President of the Association of Professional Genealogists (APG), Current President and founding member of the Forensic Special Interest Group of APG, and a probate and heir researcher in Cook County, Illinois (Chicago).

With more than 10 years of probate and heir research in the second largest county in the United States, my research has focused primarily on cases that involved Eastern European and Jewish family

searches. In addition, I have done extensive work in immigration naturalization records to aid my research. I am an active educator and speaker on a wide variety of topics including history, immigration, record preservation and access, and forensic genealogy.

16.55 - end of day housekeeping

17.00 - conference closes for the day

17.30 – civic drinks reception at Glasgow City Chambers (usually up to 1.5 hours)

Delegates to find their own dinner.

## Friday – 26 June

8.45 – Registration desk open

9.00 - Welcome and housekeeping

9.15 - Keynote Speaker Joint - 45 min with 10 min Q&A – Donna Rutherford - **Shaping the Future with AI: New Patterns of Thought in Genetic Genealogy Research.**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly becoming part of everyday genealogy, and genetic genealogy is no exception. Rather than replacing established methodology, AI is reshaping how genealogists interpret complex evidence by enhancing the analytical processes at the core of the work. This presentation explores how AI can act as a reasoning partner - supporting relationship evaluation, strengthening research narratives, and helping identify conflicts or gaps that may otherwise go unnoticed.

Drawing on real casework, including an anonymised 19th-century example involving several siblings whose paternity was uncertain, the session shows how AI can highlight inconsistencies, explore alternative explanations, and help articulate the reasoning behind different scenarios. This offers a clear, practical look at how AI can strengthen both the analytical thinking and communication involved in working with DNA evidence.

AI can also support genealogists in making sense of shared-match information. With data supplied by the researcher, AI can analyse patterns, explore possible explanations, surface inconsistencies, and help articulate the reasoning behind different hypotheses. Looking ahead, emerging AI-enabled browsers and agents will allow genealogists to grant controlled access to their match lists and tools, enabling more powerful and efficient analytical support. Throughout, genealogical judgement remains central, but the scale and speed of assistance are set to increase dramatically.

Finally, the presentation looks ahead to how AI may influence genetic genealogy over the next twenty years - from AI-supported hypothesis modelling to multimodal tools capable of interpreting segment and chromosome data. As research agents mature and integrate more closely with the

tools genealogists already use, AI will become a genuine analytical partner, supporting work that currently requires significant time and manual effort. The future of the field will be shaped not by automation, but by collaboration, where human expertise and intelligent tools together enable deeper insight and more confident decision-making.

## Biography

Donna Rutherford is a UK-based genetic genealogist, educator, and speaker specialising in the practical application of DNA and artificial intelligence in family history research. She teaches widely across the UK, Ireland, and Australia, including multi-week DNA lecture series for universities and heritage organisations. Donna writes regularly for genealogy magazines and contributes to international genealogy groups, with a particular focus on complex DNA casework, unknown parentage research, and emerging AI-supported methodologies. Her work combines advanced genetic genealogy practice with a commitment to ethics, clear communication, and accessible education for learners at all levels.

10.10 – moving time (10 minutes)

10.20 presentation 4a – Dr Maurice Gleeson - **Tackling sequential Brick Walls on the same Irish ancestral line using atDNA and Y-DNA.**

This talk demonstrates a practical method for breaking through a brick wall by identifying a focused cluster of shared matches who are likely to descend from the brick-wall couple or one of their forebears. Core techniques include autoclustering, building a Relationship Chart for the cluster, and constructing a Shared-DNA Matrix to visualise connections. The process is designed so that even beginners, including those with no prior DNA experience, can follow the steps and understand the rationale.

A range of additional methodologies will be introduced - WATO Plus, BanyanDNA, triangulated segments, ancestor reconstruction, and AutoLineage - to show how each tool contributes to refining hypotheses, testing alternative scenarios, and validating the emerging family structure. These approaches demonstrate how structured analytical workflows can turn a confusing set of DNA matches into a clear, evidence-based path through the problem.

The Morgan brick wall (1800) will serve as the main case study, illustrating how autosomal DNA can resolve a long-standing genealogical dead end. The talk will also outline how Y-DNA and complementary methods may help tackle an earlier barrier in the 1600s, highlighting how different types of DNA testing combine to illuminate deeper ancestry. Overall, the session shows how both autosomal and Y-DNA can help you break through similar obstacles in your own research, and how modern analytical tools make the process more accessible, systematic, and achievable for genealogists at all levels.

## Biography

Maurice Gleeson is a medical doctor and genetic genealogist. He is an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Strathclyde and organiser of the DNA lecture series for Genetic Genealogy Ireland in Dublin and Belfast, as well as for Who Do You Think You Are in England. He also works with

individuals of unknown parentage and has appeared on Irish television as a consultant for the series *Adoption Stories*. His YouTube videos on genetic genealogy attract a wide audience.

#### 10.20 presentation 4b – Mary Virglaki - **Sailing Through Surnames: Tracing Family and Maritime Networks from Kasos to the Globe.**

This presentation presents an ongoing community-centered genealogy project that digitally reconstructs the family trees of Kasos, a small Greek island with a deep maritime legacy. The initiative has traced over 14,000 individuals, from the present day back to the late 18th century, mapping kinship across local and diasporic geographies. Through interdisciplinary methods combining oral history, archival research, and AI-assisted analysis, the project explores how kinship networks were intertwined with seafaring labor, diaspora formation, and the emergence of ship owning families.

A core challenge lies in the gaps and ambiguities of historical documentation: many individuals appear only in oral testimonies, while others are recorded under nicknames, altered surnames, or false identities. Some name changes were strategic—avoiding Ottoman reprisals or enabling employment during the construction of the Suez Canal. These naming practices, and the fragmentary nature of available documents (wills, dowries, letters, shipping logs), complicate linear genealogies. Yet they also reveal cultural strategies of adaptation and memory preservation.

The resulting database allows users to navigate dynamic genealogies interactively, linking familial ties to broader maritime networks spanning the Eastern Mediterranean, the Danube Delta, South Africa, and the Americas. By integrating AI tools for metadata enrichment and visual clustering, the project supports large-scale pattern recognition while maintaining a human-centered and ethically grounded approach.

Beyond archival recovery, the project frames genealogy as a cultural and historiographical intervention. It challenges assumptions of peripherality, situating Kasos within global maritime routes and historical transformations. At the same time, it restores voice to communities whose histories have long remained undocumented, offering a replicable model for other island or maritime contexts. The resulting digital platform allows users to navigate these genealogies interactively, linking personal histories with maritime routes and archival sources.

#### **Biography**

Mary Vigliraki is a member of the Center of Maritime History/Institute for Mediterranean Studies, and a PhD candidate at the Department of Audio and Visual Arts/Ionian University. She holds an MSc Cultural Informatics & Communication - Design of Digital Cultural Products - University of Aegean. Graduate of the Dep. Language, Literature, Language and Culture of the Black Sea Countries - Democritus University of Thrace. Her research interests encompass Archival Research - Oral History - Family Trees - Design of Digital Cultural Products.

#### 10.20 presentation 4c – Dr Imogen Wegman - **Where History and Family History Meet: An Australian Example.**

In Australia, as in the UK, USA, Canada, and many other countries, family history is an increasingly popular pursuit. The Family History program at the University of Tasmania offers Australia's only tertiary genealogical qualifications. It is led by Dr Imogen Wegman, a historian who researches colonial environmental and spatial histories and Dr Kate Bagnall, a historian who studies migration and citizenship in Australia and New Zealand in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Our online courses teach students how to research their family histories and about the creative ways they can tell the stories they find.

As researchers who work with the histories of people's lives and how they engaged with place, Kate and Imogen often share their own research and methods at family history events. During National Family History Month 2025, they discussed their methods of researching ordinary lives as part of an Australian Research Council (ARC) funded project, *Everyday Heritage*, which explores the lives of Chinese migrants and their descendants living in Tasmania at the turn of the twentieth century. During Open House Hobart 2025, an annual architectural event, Imogen also gave a public talk about uncovering the 'genealogy' of an old house. This fuzzy meeting point of history and family history is woven through the University of Tasmania's Family History program, where students learn how to contextualise their ancestors' lives into the push and pull of historical events.

In this talk, Imogen will share how she, Kate and other colleagues have developed a program that blends social and family history with practical skills and achieves a complex range of outcomes for their students. Many graduates continue onto further study, where their proficiency in the basic research skills of a historian is noted. The very nature of our program pushes us to question where the line between history and family history lies, and to ask why it is so rigorously maintained.

### Biography

Dr Imogen Wegman is the coordinator of the online Family History Program at the University of Tasmania in Australia and a Lecturer in History. She researches colonial landscape histories, with a particular focus on how colonisers interacted with their new environments. Her research uses historical cartography and other visual sources, and she is a self-professed map nerd who tries to inspire similar sentiments in her students. Imogen has a background in public history and has a passion for bringing history to diverse audiences. She is finalising a book manuscript about colonial land granting in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania).

10.50 - 5 minutes between presentations for switch over

10.55 presentation 5a – TBA

**10.55 presentation 5b – Lorna Steele-McGinn – A visual network: Using genealogy to illustrate the Highlands' connection to the Caribbean.**

The Highlands of Scotland are perhaps more commonly associated across the world with the Jacobite Risings and the Highland Clearances than the ownership of enslaved people in the Caribbean, but this lesser-discussed subject is as formative a part of our history as the Battle of Culloden or the brutal removal of people from their crofts.

Using the historic records of schools and hospitals, staff at the Highland Archive Service, as part of the larger 'Landscapes and Lifescapes' project (this was a collaborative project between academic researchers, archivists, librarians and community participants led by Karly Kehoe of Glasgow Caledonian and Chris Dalglish of Glasgow University) were able to research money remitted from the Caribbean for the purpose of investing in the establishment of Highland institutions and the improvement of Highland estates.

Taking the names of those referenced and researching their familial and societal connections, through both genealogical research and a close study of the archival record, enabled the creation of an extensive family tree; a visual representation of a network of people whose interconnections enabled them to recruit and retain plantation managers and overseers. The innovative genealogical and archival collaborative work undertaken for this project has since been used in school settings, and in numerous talks and events; the different approaches coming together to provide new ways of thinking about what family history research can teach us and how it can be used to illustrate other histories.

### **Biography**

Lorna Steele-McGinn is the Community Engagement Officer for the Highland Archive Service. Her work involves connecting a wide range of audiences to the diverse historic collections held in HAS's four archive centres through an extensive engagement programme which includes collaborations with schools, adult learning groups, HMP Inverness, care homes and numerous other organisations and individuals. 'Learn With Lorna', her online series of talks about the Highland Archive Service collections, has, to date, over 240 episodes and over 600k views from a global audience.

10.55 presentation 5c – TBA

11.25 - refreshment break/networking/poster viewing

11.50 - Keynote speakers – Separate tracks - 45 min with 10 min Q&A

### **Track A – Dr Emma Tilley - Bodies without names: How the police use of investigative genetic genealogy can provide resolution for families of the unidentified.**

In 2024, I spent six weeks conducting research in Canada, Sweden, and the United States, examining how investigative genetic genealogy is being used to resolve cold cases and to identify human remains. This work focused not only on where and how the technique is being used, but on the legal, institutional, and ethical contexts that shape its deployment across different jurisdictions.

One of the clearest findings was the extent to which investigative genetic genealogy has already transformed cold case investigations, particularly in North America. In a number of cases, it has enabled the identification of people who had died and remained unidentified for decades, and has provided families with long-awaited resolution. These outcomes point to the real potential of the technique for identification and accountability.

At the same time, the research raised concerns. In particular, disparities were observed in the DNA databases being skewed towards individuals of European ancestry. This lack of demographic representation has practical consequences, contributing to uneven case outcomes and limiting the effectiveness of the technique for marginalised communities. Furthermore, broader questions emerged around privacy, consent, and other ethical considerations.

This keynote reflects on what these findings mean for the adoption of investigative genetic genealogy in the UK. Implementation should be accompanied by clear ethical frameworks, public education, and specialist training for policing, if the technique is to be used in a way that is both effective and equitable.

### **Biography**

Emma is a UK expert on missing persons and unidentified human remains. She achieved a master's degree in Crime Science, Investigation, and Intelligence in 2018. She completed her PhD in Criminology and Policing in 2025, critically reviewing the cross-matching of unidentified human remains and missing persons reports in England and Wales. She is using her PhD findings to influence policy change and has shared recommendations with the Law Commission of England and Wales for their review into the laws that govern the process of dealing with the remains of people who have died.

Emma is an ambassador for the charity Locate International. She began volunteering for Locate International in 2020. Since then she has led investigations, contributed to 'The Missing' podcast, and is a lead contributor for Locate International's Channel 4 documentary series, 'The Body Detectives'. Emma completed her Churchill Fellowship research in 2024, visiting Canada, Sweden, and the United States to explore how the police use of investigative genetic genealogy can bring resolution for families of the unidentified. She was since invited to the House of Lords to discuss the adoption of investigative genetic genealogy in the UK.

### **Track B – Laura House - Protecting the information ecosystem: What are genealogists' responsibilities to our field and our world?**

This presentation is a high-level examination of the driving forces behind genealogists' adoption of synthetic text and image generators, the anthropomorphising and ambiguous language used to describe these technologies, and the implications for the planet, the global population, and the field of genealogy itself. The presentation is divided into four sections:

1. The incentive structures behind technologies marketed as "AI," the history of the effort to create "thinking machines," and the adoption of synthetic media machines by amateur and professional genealogists.
2. The language output by synthetic text extruding machines like *ChatGPT* and *Gemini*, the language we use to talk about these machines, and the impact these two linguistic phenomena have on our perception of the technology.
3. The ethical issues around large language models and synthetic image generators, including the pollution of the information ecosystem, intellectual property theft, the exploitation of data workers, and environmental harms.

4. Alternative approaches to exploitative technologies, such as those used by Te Hiku Media to revitalise te reo Māori, the labour rights demanded as part of the Data Workers' Inquiry, and the bottom-up, inclusive research approach promoted by the Distributed AI Research Institute (DAIR).

Listeners are encouraged to consider the following questions:

- What are our responsibilities to the field of genealogy and each other?
- How will genealogy exist in a polluted information ecosystem?
- How might we select the best tools for our needs?
- What is the impact of anthropomorphising technologies?
- What if technology is not inevitable?
- What happens if we say “no” to harmful technologies, intellectual property theft, worker exploitation, and information synthesisation?

### Biography

Laura House has an MSc. degree in Genealogical, Palaeographic, and Heraldic Studies from the University of Strathclyde and is the primary genetic genealogist on AncestryProGenealogists' international team. She talks about her work at conferences around the world and on TV, radio, podcasts, and social media. Laura also writes articles and papers on topics relating to DNA and genealogy.

Track C - TBA

13.00 - lunch & poster viewing

14.15 - submitted presentations speakers [triple tracks – 2 speakers in each track (each: 20 minutes with 10 in Q&A)

#### 14.15 presentation 6a – Michael Sager - **Analysis of ancient yDNA**

Recent advances in ancient DNA sequencing have transformed our understanding of human population history, yet significant analytical limitations persist. As our ability to sequence old, damaged, and low-quality DNA continues to improve, so too must the methods used to interpret this growing body of data. One of the areas that still lags is the interpretation of Y-chromosome results. Published aDNA studies often rely on broad haplogroup assignments or incomplete phylogenetic resolution. As a result, many ancient samples are placed on branches that, while technically accurate, provide limited historical insight and leave deeper genealogical relationships unexplored.

This presentation will demonstrate how FamilyTreeDNA's Y-chromosome database—the largest in the world—combined with its high-resolution phylogenetic framework, can substantially refine these interpretations. By leveraging hundreds of thousands of modern Y-chromosome samples, we can construct the most comprehensive Y-chromosome

phylogenetic tree available. This allows ancient male individuals to be assigned to far more precise subclades than those reported in many published studies. Such refined placement often reveals previously unrecognized migration pathways, demographic patterns, and cultural shifts. In numerous cases, haplogroups originally assigned at a broad or basal level (e.g., R-M269 or I-M253) can be confidently positioned several branches downstream, enabling sharper historical and even genealogical insights.

The session will guide attendees through a streamlined method employed by FTDNA to refine ancient Y-DNA assignments using multiple reference datasets. By pairing published ancient genomes with the scale and resolution of FamilyTreeDNA's database, researchers can extract insights that would otherwise remain inaccessible. This integrated approach offers a richer and more meaningful understanding of human history through the paternal line.

### **Biography**

I am the Senior Phylogenetic Analyst at FamilyTreeDNA. I hold advanced degrees in Biology and Zoology from Texas Tech University, where I focused my studies on phylogenetics. My master's thesis examined mitochondrial variation among populations of African dwarf crocodiles (*Osteolaemus tetraspis*) across the western coast of Africa.

At FamilyTreeDNA, I primarily work on constructing the Y-tree. I have analyzed hundreds of thousands of modern Y chromosomes and thousands of ancient samples. As a lifelong puzzle enthusiast, I find it immensely rewarding to help piece together one of the largest genetic puzzles ever assembled. With ongoing advances in whole-genome sequencing and ancient DNA methods, new discoveries emerge every day—and the pace shows no sign of slowing.

### **14.15 presentation 6b – Dr Calista Williams, Dr Dwight Tse, James Hooper and Dr Tess Davis - Exploring the impact of family history on wellbeing.**

This presentation shares early findings from an interdisciplinary study conducted by the University of Strathclyde's Department of Psychological Sciences and Health and the Strathclyde Institute for Genealogical Studies, in partnership with Historic Productions Ltd and YourTour. The research investigates whether engaging in family history activities can positively impact wellbeing.

Study participants experience a live, interactive online family history session which is followed up with a written report. This concept is based on a service offered by YourTour, where one-hour online sessions are led by expert genealogists and described as 'like having your own episode of "Who Do You Think You Are?" over Zoom.' In the study these online sessions are delivered by students on the postgraduate Genealogical, Palaeographic and Heraldic Studies programme at Strathclyde. Study participants complete a number of wellbeing surveys throughout the process including an interview with a student intern based in the University's Department of Psychological Sciences. A demographically matched control group complete the same surveys without receiving the family history session.

This partnership has fostered cross-disciplinary learning, combining genealogical research skills with psychological assessment methods. Students have gained experience presenting findings in interactive formats and producing professional reports, while researchers have benefited from insights into how family narratives can impact wellbeing. Our presentation will outline the study design, share some initial findings, and reflect on the challenges and opportunities of this collaborative approach, highlighting its value for both academic research and professional development.

### Biographies

**Dr Calista Williams:** Course Director for the MSc in Genealogical, Palaeographic and Heraldic Studies at the University of Strathclyde.

**Dr Dwight Tse:** Senior Lecturer in Strathclyde's Department of Psychological Sciences and Health. Dwight's research interests include topics ranging from positive psychology and well-being science to aging and lifespan developmental psychology.

**James Hooper:** Director of Historic Productions Ltd and the founder of YourTour, which provides immersive and interactive genealogical and historical experiences online.

**Dr Tess Davis:** Research Associate in Strathclyde's Department of Psychological Sciences and Health.

### 14.15 presentation 6c – Renee Stephens - **Recovering Networks and Marginalized Voices through the Southern Claims Commission: A Relational Genealogy Study.**

This project examines women's Unionist claims in Adams County, Mississippi, using Southern Claims Commission (SCC) records as a relational genealogical archive that reveals people and relationships largely erased from traditional historical narratives. The project developed an AI-assisted, human-directed workflow that analyzes the Adams County subset in depth and is designed to scale to the full Southern Claims Commission corpus of 22,298 claims across 12 states. This study demonstrates the method's effectiveness and shows the feasibility and value of this subset, laying the foundation for a full corpus study that will provide unprecedented genealogical and historical insights.

Preliminary findings from the Adams County project reveal that nearly one-quarter of SCC claims in the county were filed by women, whose cases contain unusually dense relational information. When analyzed through Historical Network Analysis (HNA) and close reading, these materials illuminate kinship structures, cross-plantation associations, multi-household witness networks, and the social worlds in which enslaved and formerly enslaved individuals lived and interacted. These networks have been historically rendered invisible by traditional narrative approaches.

The significance of this project is that it will enable a full analysis of the 22,298-claim SCC archive, revealing social networks and lives that have been invisible to historians and genealogists until now. Scaling this workflow to all SCC claims could recover thousands of marginalized individuals, especially formerly enslaved people and others only incidentally documented. As well as creating a transformative genealogical resource and offering new insight into the social worlds of the Civil War and Reconstruction South. By blending traditional genealogical methods, historical interpretation,

historical network analysis, and AI-assisted processing, this project transforms the SCC archive into the first truly comprehensive relational dataset of its kind, enabling the recovery of thousands of individuals and networks that have never before been accessible to genealogical or historical research.

### Biography

Renee Stephens is a genealogist and public historian specializing in women's history, Southern Unionism, and the recovery of marginalized identities in Civil War-era records. She brings more than a decade of genealogical casework experience, advanced training in forensic genetic genealogy, and over 25 years of leadership in research and analytics. Her work integrates AI-assisted data extraction, archival interpretation, and Historical Network Analysis to reconstruct kinship, labor, and community networks in the Southern Claims Commission archive. Her research has been accepted at academic conferences, and she is a published author in data analytics and quality improvement.

14.50 – 5 minutes between presentations for switch over

### 14.50 presentation 7a – Roberta Estes - **Mitochondrial DNA Advances in Genetic Genealogy: The Forgotten Tool Comes Roaring Back.**

Mitochondrial DNA, often a forgotten or neglected tool for genetic genealogists, came roaring back into view in 2025. Mitotree, five years in the making, was released, along with multiple updates, adding more than 40,000 branches to the mitochondrial DNA phylogenetic tree. This fundamentally revises our understanding of the tree of humankind and maps the path from Mitochondrial Eve to our ancestors and then to us.

The new mtDNA Discover tool, updated weekly, provides a dozen reports explaining testers' results in both a genealogical and historical context.

The new Mitotree rewrote the tree of humankind, incorporating the DNA of half a million testers. Refined haplogroups, plus the introduction of haplotypes and haplotype clusters, bring mitochondrial DNA into a genealogically useful timeframe. Additional tools, such as the Time Tree, the Match Time Tree, and Ancient DNA matches, combined with WikiTree integration, help genealogists place their results in context with other testers. Now, instead of just a list of full-sequence matches, testers have new, more detailed information for each match, plus a dozen new mtDNA Discover reports to determine where to focus their research.

Revised haplogroups and new haplotypes show testers how closely they are, or aren't, related to other matches, providing new hints and research focus, including geographic locations. Join me for an overview of the new Mitotree and Discover features and how you can apply them to genealogy.

### Biography

Roberta Estes, MS, MBA, author of the books, *DNA for Native American Genealogy* and *The Complete Guide to FamilyTreeDNA: Y-DNA, Mitochondrial, Autosomal and X-DNA*, is a scientist, National Geographic Genographic affiliate researcher, Million Mito team member, and founding pioneer in the genetic genealogy field.

An avid 40-year genealogist, Roberta has written over 1800 articles at her popular blog, <https://dnalexplained.com/>, about genetic genealogy and how to combine traditional genealogy research with DNA to solve stubborn ancestor puzzles. Roberta provides consulting and analysis to major news outlets, including *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*, as well as to documentary and educational producers such as the History Channel, and regularly presents at major genealogy conferences, including RootsTech.

14.50 presentation 7b – Dr Paula De Val Vales and Mary McKee - **From genealogy to academia: Two decades of digital transformation at Findmypast.**

Over the last two decades, Findmypast has been central to the digital genealogy landscape, providing name-rich historical records that have reshaped how individuals and professionals engage with family history. This joint presentation examines the company's evolving role, tracing a trajectory from a genealogy-first service to a key provider of historical data for universities, research institutes, and scholarly projects.

The paper will first highlight the major developments that reflect this transition, including Findmypast's contribution to landmark digitisation projects such as the 1921 Census, and its long-standing provision of large-scale datasets (particularly the I-CeM census data) used extensively by postgraduate researchers and scholars around the world. It will discuss the growing body of academic work supported directly or indirectly by Findmypast collections, including doctoral research, collaborative projects, and publications.

Building upon this context, the paper will reflect on Findmypast's recent expansion into the academic space through the development of The Social History Archive, a new platform designed to bring records primarily digitised with family history in mind into universities and the wider historical research community. Using The Social History Archive as a case study, we will explore how name-rich historical data can be repurposed for scholarly inquiry, how commercial genealogy companies can support interdisciplinary research, and what this shift reveals about the converging futures of genealogy and history, as well as the challenges such transition presents.

By looking back over twenty years of innovation and forward to new models of research engagement, this presentation considers how genealogy and history can continue to enrich one another, and the opportunities and complexities that arise from such collaboration.

### Biographies

**Mary McKee:** With over ten years of experience in the family history field, Mary McKee is Archives Manager at Findmypast, responsible for building partnerships and securing new content across the UK and Ireland. Mary holds a master's degree from Queens University, Belfast and is completing a PhD at Birkbeck, University of London, on marginalia in the 1921 census of England and Wales. Mary has appeared on BBC Morning Live, BBC Women's Hour, and Dan Snow's History Hit podcast, and has presented at conferences across the UK, Ireland, and America.

**Paula Del Val Vales:** Dr Paula Del Val Vales is Senior Content Curator at The Social History Archive. She completed her PhD on thirteenth-century queens' households at the University of Lincoln in 2024, awarded with no corrections. Her research was funded by the La Caixa Foundation, and she

has presented her work in numerous national and international conferences, including invited talks at the University of Oxford and the Institute of Historical Research. Paula has held an Associate Lectureship at Lincoln and in 2023 she undertook a placement at the British Library. Her career now centres on digital primary-source publishing, leading the curation and editorial development of new digital collections at The Social History Archive.

#### 14.50 presentation 7c – Dr Penny Walters - **You are the future's ancestor: crafting a meaningful digital legacy.**

In today's hyper-documented world, individuals are no longer solely seekers of ancestral stories—they have also become creators of future ones. From emails and social media posts to DNA profiles and voice recordings, people generate an unprecedented volume of digital information. This session invites attendees to shift their perspective: to look not only backward, but forward, and to ask a vital question "What kind of ancestor am I becoming?"

You Are the Future's Ancestor is an innovative and reflective presentation that weaves together genealogy, psychology, ethics, and emerging technology to help participants intentionally shape their digital legacy. It introduces the idea that everyday digital habits and personal narratives—if preserved or curated—may become the genealogical foundation for descendants yet unborn. What individuals choose to share, conceal, or protect today may one day define them to those who will never meet them in person, but may encounter their data, likeness, or even AI-driven simulations.

The session explores real-world tools and emerging trends, including AI-generated storytelling, digital estate planning, virtual time capsules, and voice-cloning technologies. It also confronts the ethical implications of posthumous digital presence: What does consent mean after death? Who owns a person's story in a world shaped by cloud storage and generative algorithms? Beyond critical reflection, the session offers practical action. Participants are guided through creating a Digital Legacy Blueprint—a simple, personalised plan to help curate the aspects of their life they wish to preserve, share, or protect. This includes:

- personal values and messages for future descendants
- ethical considerations surrounding AI avatars and inherited media
- strategies for organising digital and genealogical assets
- tools for documenting one's life story in accessible, engaging formats

By the end of the session, attendees leave with both a philosophical shift and a tangible product: a roadmap for becoming the kind of ancestor they would be proud to be remembered as.

#### **Biography**

Dr. Penny Walters has been a university lecturer for 35 years, currently teaching at Bath Spa University Business School, England. Penny's interest in genealogy started after having her first baby and then wondering about her own biological parents, as she was adopted. Penny has six mixed race children, who have all enjoyed discovering their roots through DNA ethnicity results. Penny lectures internationally in-person, including throughout America, Australia, Ireland, and the UK, and presents globally weekly via webinars. Penny has authored the seminal books: 'Ethical Dilemmas in

Genealogy' (2019) and 'The Psychology of Searching' (2020). [www.searchmypast.co.uk](http://www.searchmypast.co.uk)

15.20 - refreshment break/networking/poster viewing (30 minutes)

15.50 - Keynote Speaker Joint - 45 min with 10 min Q&A - TBA

17.00 –Closing remarks

17.20 – conference officially closes

18.00 - Wrap up social event – drinks and hors d'oeuvres reception to 20.00 at the Trades House, Glasgow.

### **Posters**