

Devon FHS AGM & Conference 2010

An introduction to our Speakers:

DEBRA CHATFIELD – “*Making the most of the 1911 Census*”

Debra Chatfield is Marketing Manager at findmypast.co.uk and was part of the team that launched the website in 2003 (then known as 1837online.com). Her genealogy career began in 1998 when she joined leading probate genealogists Title Research, reconstructing family trees to identify beneficiaries to unclaimed estates. On her very first case, one of the heirs she located turned out to be her own dentist!

At findmypast.co.uk Debra has worked on some truly fascinating digitisation projects, notably BT27 passenger lists, Chelsea Pensioner service records and the 1911 census, in association with The National Archives. In her spare time, she has researched one branch of her own family history back to 1610. On another branch she is descended from generations of Devon blacksmiths.

ROSEMARY FIRCH – “*A Family History in porcelain and pottery*”

A keen local historian and volunteer at Torquay Museum, Rosemary is an honorary life member of The Torquay Pottery Collectors Society, recognising the contribution made by her research to their archives.

She is descended from a long line of ceramic artists called Birbeck who worked in a number of the Midlands' potteries including Worcester, Coalport, Copeland and Derby. When clay ideally suited to the production of terracotta was discovered at Watcombe in the 1860's, her great-grandfather and grandfather were recruited from Stoke-on-Trent to help start a pottery industry in Torquay. The work of the Birbeck family of decorators spans the period from the late eighteenth century to the Second World War. Our speaker will share illustrations of their work from her family's collection and show how porcelain manufacture developed in this country and how the establishment of a local pottery industry made a great impact on the lives of the people of South Devon.

JOHN RISDON - “*Raleigh and the Gilberts: a Devonian Dynasty*”

Born & bred in Devon, John has a diverse range of experiences within the maritime, tourism and publishing world. He spent a considerable period in State and Adult Education, and now runs a heritage interpretation business centred on lecturing, guided walking and writing on South Devon heritage.

He will show us how the marriage of Otho Gilbert of Compton to Katherine Champernowne in 1531 began an extraordinary story, providing the English Nation with a batch of sons who were to participate in the great expansionist period of Elizabethan times, and onwards.