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SUBSCRIPTIONS are now due. $30.
HFHG bank account.38-9008-0466762-00.
Name as reference or cash to Treasurer.


Levin Post-office 1903

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COMMITTEE

Kevin Miles	021 1364 075 President
Brian Bernon	027 286 4186 Secretary
Prue Theobald	021 234 5621 Treasurer
Ian Meyer	06 368 0602
Cathy Holmes	021 338 227
Lynn Williams	Librarian

Thompson House
4 Kent Street, Levin
Monday 26 October 2026
1.30pm

Members share their findings on land records research

November meeting
Monday 30 November 2026
12noon
End of year Christmas Shared Lunch
Secret Santa

President's Message

Thank you to those who have generously donated items for our raffle prize. We will have the raffle draw at this month's meeting. Also a thank you to those who offered time to sell raffle tickets. We only just have coverage at New World on Tuesday 20th. Three slots have just the one person. If anyone is available to come either 1 to 2pm or 2 to 3pm to assist it would be appreciated.

Could we get an indication of interest in going to the Ohakea Museum for a visit on Wednesday 4 November in the morning and then on to the Alexander Library in Whanganui in the afternoon Please let us know with an email to horofhg@gmail.com

The committee is planning the meetings for next year. If there are particular topics of interest that you might like to hear a speaker on or something you might be prepared to present to the group, could you please let us know.
Kevin

Age On The Go

It was good to see so many people at Age On the Go, at the Levin Event Centre on Friday 16 October.

Our Family History stand attracted a number of inquiries about our group, meetings and a few about membership. There was also interest the Heritage Room.

The Historical Society scanned images of Peter Graham's paintings also attracted attention.



AI and Genealogy: New Tools for Solving Old Mysteries

Artificial intelligence may sound futuristic, but guest speaker Lisa Lightband showed our family history group that it can be a practical research companion today.

Lisa has now delivered her talk on AI and genealogy several times around New Zealand.

Her central message was both enthusiastic and cautious: AI can save time, suggest new lines of enquiry and add context to family stories, but its answers must always be checked.

Lisa became interested in AI while completing a master's degree at Massey University.

After attending an AI summit following the release of ChatGPT, she began developing community education courses and experimenting with AI in personal and professional projects.

In 2025, she was invited to speak at a UNESCO Creative Cities Network conference in Paris.

Useful—but not automatically trustworthy

Lisa asked us how familiar we were with AI, from "never used" through to "confident user". Most described themselves as dabblers or moderately confident.

She then asked how much we trusted AI on a scale from zero to ten. Most answers fell between four and six; Lisa rated her own trust at just two.

She said that low score does not mean she avoids AI. Instead, she treats an AI response much as a genealogist treats a family story: as a clue rather than proof.

AI systems can produce convincing but incorrect information—often called "hallucination"—especially when evidence is missing. Names, dates, relationships, quotations and sources therefore need independent verification.



Large language models such as ChatGPT generate answers by predicting likely words from patterns in the material on which they were trained. They do not "know" facts in the same way a person does.

The quality of the result also depends on the quality and specificity of the prompt: the familiar rule "garbage in, garbage out" still applies.

From a family name to a research plan

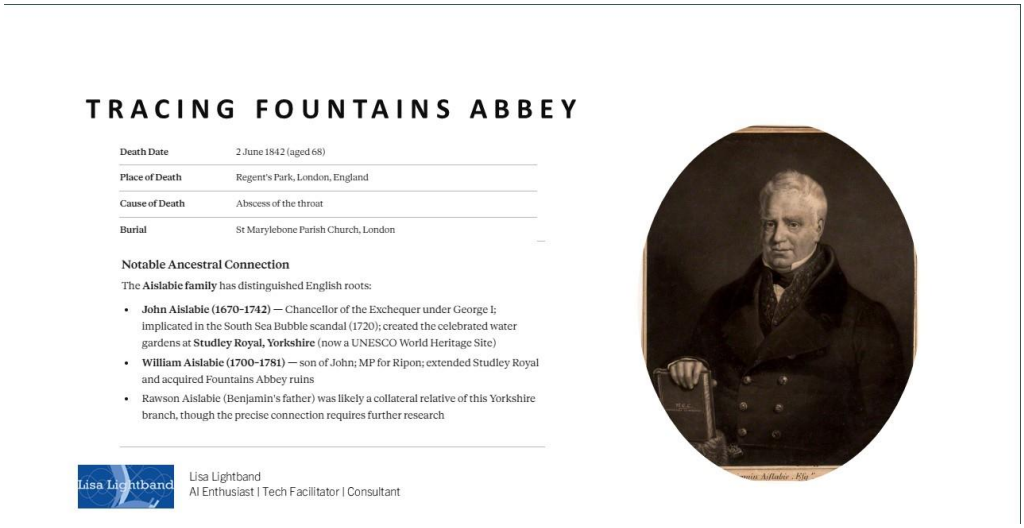
Lisa's presentation grew from a dinner-table question about the name "Wales" in George William Wales Lightband.

She asked AI to suggest why Wales might have appeared as a middle name. One possibility was that it preserved a maternal surname.

More importantly, the AI proposed practical next steps for testing the idea. This ability to generate hypotheses and turn them into a research plan was a breakthrough for her.

Testing family legends

One family story claimed that Lisa's ancestors had inherited Fountains Abbey and were related to Dr Livingstone. Her early research had also taught her the danger of treating online hints as facts, particularly when several people shared the same name. (*to p.3*)



TRACING FOUNTAINS ABBEY

Death Date	2 June 1842 (aged 68)
Place of Death	Regent's Park, London, England
Cause of Death	Abscess of the throat
Burial	St Marylebone Parish Church, London

Notable Ancestral Connection

The **Aislabie family** has distinguished English roots:

- **John Aislabie (1670–1742)** — Chancellor of the Exchequer under George I; implicated in the South Sea Bubble scandal (1720); created the celebrated water gardens at **Studley Royal, Yorkshire** (now a UNESCO World Heritage Site)
- **William Aislabie (1700–1781)** — son of John; MP for Ripon; extended Studley Royal and acquired Fountains Abbey ruins
- Rawson Aislabie (Benjamin's father) was likely a collateral relative of this Yorkshire branch, though the precise connection requires further research

Lisa Lightband
AI Enthusiast | Tech Facilitator | Consultant

For a more disciplined test, Lisa used AI to build a profile of Benjamin Aislabie Esquire, a relative for whom substantial public information was available. The resulting profile was largely accurate and even identified a possible cause of death. She then created a reusable genealogy profile template that could guide research into other ancestors. One participant at a Whanganui summer school later used the template to help complete a family history book.

Lisa also used Gemini's Deep Research feature to examine the supposed connection with Fountains Abbey through John and William Aislabie.

Within about ten minutes, the research found no evidence of the claimed direct relationship. Alternative explanations—including a cousin's marriage, a missed inheritance and illegitimacy—were also investigated without confirmation.

Although the family legend was not proved, the process revealed more about the family's changing fortunes and difficult historical connections, including links with the slave trade. A negative result can still deepen understanding.

Putting an ancestor into context

AI can do more than search for names. Lisa used it to reconstruct the likely wartime world of her grandfather, who was born in Scotland, emigrated to New Zealand, served as a leading aircraftman in the Royal New Zealand Air Force and worked as a banker.

The AI suggested the kinds of home-service duties he may have performed and described blackouts, drills, military activity and the possible role of banking during the war.

Some of this matched family memories, while other details offered fresh context.

The important distinction is between documented fact and plausible reconstruction. In a finished family history, researchers should label speculation clearly and cite the records that support confirmed events.

Reading historical photographs

Historic photographs are another promising area. Lisa demonstrated how an AI tool could examine an image for clues about transport, clothing, buildings, businesses, infrastructure and community life. Colourising or enhancing a photograph may reveal overlooked features, such as a parked vehicle or seasonal clues.

However, generated or enhanced images can also introduce errors: people may disappear or change, tree branches may look unnatural, and signs may contain nonsense text.

Keep the original image, record what was altered and check every observation against other evidence. AI enhancement should be treated as an interpretation, not as a restored original.

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Protecting privacy

Lisa recommended a cautious “100-year rule” when deciding what to share with an AI service.

Avoid entering identifying information about living people, including full birth dates, addresses, health information, DNA-match lists, passwords and login details. Ask permission before using another person’s family information. When possible, substitute broad descriptions and decades for exact personal details.

Public records, old photographs, research notes and theories may be suitable, but researchers should still consider copyright, cultural sensitivity and the terms of the service being used.

Information behind a login or paywall is not automatically available to an AI model, so researchers may need to provide lawful extracts and explain their provenance.

Choosing a tool and writing a prompt

Lisa outlined popular AI tools including ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Microsoft Copilot and Perplexity.

Their strengths vary and change with updates, so begin with free versions, ask several models the same question and compare their responses. Ask each model about its knowledge limits and suitable tasks.

A good genealogy prompt should include the known facts, identify uncertainties and specify the desired output. For example: create a timeline, identify contradictions and suggest five record sets that could test the relationship. Separate facts from hypotheses and explain what evidence would confirm each hypothesis. Follow-up questions and corrections often improve the result.

When asking for sources, remember that an AI may invent or misstate them. Some research-oriented tools provide inline references, but every citation should still be opened and checked. Wherever possible, work back to original records rather than relying on an AI summary or another family tree.

Resource: Lisa’s genealogy template: ancestor.lisasaicafe.com. Session code: “Poor Familiar”.

STORIES FROM OLD PHOTOS

This photograph offers a vivid snapshot of daily life in a mid-century provincial town (circa 1940s–1950s) in New Zealand or Australia. It highlights a town in transition between traditional local commuting and the post-war rise of automobile culture.

Transportation & Mobility

- **Bicycle Culture:** Bicycles were a primary, everyday mode of transport for commuting, errands, and personal mobility. In the bottom-left foreground, a dedicated bicycle parking area is marked directly on the road surface with stencil-painted **"PARKING"**, filled with neatly lined-up bicycles. A cyclist is also captured riding through the center of the street.
- **Motor Vehicles:** Cars are parked in **angled parking bays** along both sides of the main street. The vehicles—predominantly 1930s and 1940s American and British sedans—indicate the growing reliance on private automobiles while maintaining an orderly urban layout.

Community & Daily Rhythms

- **Pedestrian Life:** A mother pushing a classic high-wheeled vintage pram, accompanied by another woman, crosses the road at a pedestrian marking. The relaxed pace of the street suggests a close-knit, walkable community centered around local shopping and errands.



Heritage Room news

by Kevin Miles

I have had more success finding out about the midwife I mentioned in the last newsletter. I fell into a trap of thinking she had a middle name Maud but was looking at the wrong person.

Papers Past provided me with the key information to confirm her name and her husband.

Nellie's maiden name was McCracken and she had a son Alexander in Palmerston North to Albert Edward Watson when she was 17.

The following year they married in Christchurch and Albert worked on his father's property as a groom at Yaldhurst Upper Riccarton. They then lived in Bulls before coming to Levin about 1911.

Nellie had seven children who all later married in Levin. They lived in York Street and Cambridge Street with Albert being a horse trainer. Her husband died in 1920, her youngest child was 3 at the time. She had been working as a midwife from 1911 and was formally registered in 1922.

She lived in Bristol Street and eventually at 19 Wilton Street at the site of the current Sunshine Kids Daycare and Te Timatanga Hou Kindergarten.

Dr Thompson thought very highly of her as a midwife and nurse. The library's Kete has a photo and article about her.

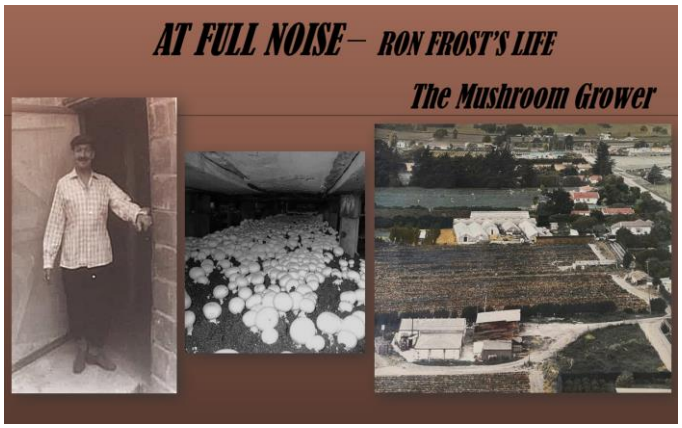
Motor racing and mushrooms and much more

Bruce Batten was guest speaker at the Horowhenua Historical Society meeting at Thompson House on Sunday 18 October.

Bruce is in the process of having a book published on Levin identity, Ron Frost MBE. The man behind Levin Motor Racing and responsible for bringing the World's best drivers to the town, contributed in a number of other ways.

Bruce touched on many of these but his talk focused on his contribution to a large mushroom farm on Fairfield Road, next to where Fairfield School is today.

It will be a book well worth reading.



Exhibition: e Tāone o Ōtaki: 1920 – 1989
Ōtaki Town: 1920 – 1989



Ōtaki Museum's current exhibition tells the story of how Ōtaki developed and changed through the 20th century — the fourth in the series on the development of the town. Themes include commerce and industry, new services provided, organising for community benefit, Whakatupuranga Rua Mano: Generation 2000, education and health, impacts of overseas wars and some of the people who had an impact on the town.
Otaki Museum, 49 Main Street, Ōtaki open Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays (except public holidays) 10am to 2pm. Entry free of charge.

"Incorrigibles" subject of Wellington NZSG talk

At the Wellington Branch meeting of the New Zealand Society of Genealogists on Wednesday, 19 August, independent scholar and consultant historian Delwyn Blondell discussed "incorrigibles", the subject of her 2024 PhD research.

She explained that, as New Zealand grew, ideas of respectable behaviour became increasingly rigid. Those who repeatedly broke social laws or moral codes were pushed to society's margins and often remembered only for their alleged vices. Examples included baby farmers such as Minnie Dean, people in informal or bigamous marriages, ageing prostitutes and girls considered difficult in reformatories.

Some left substantial official records as the State developed systems to control their behaviour; others remained almost invisible and difficult for family historians to trace. Delwyn showed what could be uncovered about these lives and what their stories revealed about the society that had sought to control them.



Police photograph of Christina Lawson, whose lengthy criminal record included charges under the Vagrant Act and for drinking.

Upcoming Genealogy Congress

The 18th AFHO Congress on Family History, hosted by NZSG in February (first time in Wellington since 2009).
• Keynote speaker: Johnny Pearl (DNA Painter website, from Wales).
• Panel discussion with Catherine Bishop ("Women Means Business"), Charlotte McDonald ("Garrison World"), and Julia Bradshaw (women in the goldfields).
• Early bird registration: $395 until mid-November; day registrations available.
• Congress coincides with NZSG's 60th anniversary, Congress's 50th, and Ancestry's 20th in Australia/NZ.
• Attendees encouraged to share learnings with the group; event is rare and significant for New Zealand genealogists.

PALMERSTON NORTH NZSG September 2026.

Irish research- replacements for microsites

Those of you doing Irish research may be aware that many of Archives' microsites are out of action indefinitely. But all is not lost! You can still view images of the 1901 and 1911 censuses via the NAI catalogue.

Family Search and FindMyPast also have various options for viewing documents that used to be on the microsites, some with transcripts only, but others with images available.https://accreditedgenealogists.ie/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/NAI-Genealogy-Micro-site-Replacements.pdf

HUTT VALLEY NZSG

The Salvation Army War Cry often published requests for missing friends and family, so it' s worth checking here for those ancestors that vanished.

The British Newspaper Archive has a new website. The changes are outlined here: https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.com/blog/new-edition-british-newspaper-archive

Georgian Army Officers makes available and searchable digitised Army Lists published between 1790 and 1820. It allows access to the military careers of approximately 50,000 officers who served in the British Army during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. A shattered skeleton in Scotland' s Stirling Castle is the first confirmed death from trebuchet in the archaeological record. Otago Punch (1866-1867) Punch in Canterbury (1865) Punch, or the Auckland Charivari (1868-1869) Punch, or the New Zealand Charivari (Dunedin).

Bibliography of Published New Zealand Family Histories – compiled by Tony Millett. A listing of separately published histories of families with descendants in New Zealand. All of the histories are indexed by author, title, keyword and family names; many are also indexed by founder names; country, county and town of origin; ship on which the family arrived in New Zealand; year of arrival; and region and place of main settlement in New Zealand. Some records also include the surnames of the families into which the first generation of descendants married.

FEILDING BRANCH NZSG
Blue eyes Genetic research confirms that every blue-eyed person on Earth shares a single common ancestor who lived approximately 6,000 to 10,000 years ago in the region surrounding the Black Sea.

A landmark 2008 study from the University of Copenhagen revealed that blue eyes are caused by a specific mutation in the HERC2 gene. This mutation acts as a switch that reduces the activity of the OCA2 gene, decreasing melanin (brown pigment) production in the iris and diluting brown eyes to blue.

Before this mutation occurred, all humans had brown eyes. Because every blue-eyed individual tested carries the exact same genetic switch at the identical location in their DNA, geneticists concluded the trait traces back to

one specific individual. https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1C5EvN3Xec/

Websites
• https://hastings.recollect.co.nz/nodes/view/10167 Hastings District Libraries Recollect photograph collection - 267 pages of photos.
• https://tapuaka.wgtn.ac.nz/ Victoria University of Wellington Recollect photograph collection.
• https://coachhousemuseum.nz/articles/our-stories/feilding-scenes-1928---part-1 Black & white video of original Feilding Scenes from 1921.

• https://www.feildingheritage.nz/item/ Photographs taken from the NZ hospital Ship Marama from 1915 to 1917 by William (Bill) Yates. William came to New Zealand age 12 and started as a Messenger boy at the Feilding Post Office… (Compiled by Betty Williamson, William's daughter)
• https://mhnsw.au/indexes/immigration-and-shipping/assisted-immigrants-index/ Museums of 6 NZSG - Feilding Branch Newsletter October 2026 History NSW Assisted Immigrants Index 1839-1896.
• https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WvOtsbv-vg The Truth About FindAGrave Genealogy with Amy Johnson Crow. [North Shore newsletter Issue 5 June 2026]
• https://inlovewithnetherlands.com/2640/how-to-trace-your-dutch-ancestry-step-by-step-guide2026/ How to Trace Your Dutch Ancestry – Step-by-Step Guide. [PNth newsletter September 2026]

180 years ago A Scottish doctor named David Ramsay built up a collection of objects from different parts of the world and in 1842, he donated his collection to the Perth Literary and Antiquarian Society in Scotland.

One Māori cloak would eventually stand out from everything else. When experts looked closely at it they realised it was covered in the feathers of the kākāpō, the huge, flightless and incredibly rare parrot found only in New Zealand.

It is believed to be the only known complete Māori cloak made entirely from kākāpō feathers anywhere in the world.

Known as a kahu kākāpō, making something like this would have taken an enormous amount of skill, individual feathers were carefully worked into the cloak. But there's one massive mystery.

How did this particular cloak leave New Zealand? Who originally made it? Who originally wore it? How did David Ramsay end up with it?

This incredibly important Māori taonga travelled halfway across the world during the early years of European settlement in New Zealand; by 1842 it was already in Scotland.

Country Calendar
Watch Feilding High School students getting hands on experience on the farm, and the legendary house shearing competition in an episode of Country Calendar that screened on Sunday 13 September 2026.
https://www.tvnz.co.nz/player/tvepisode/country-calendar-s2026-e29-farm-studies

The Manawatu Journal of History Issue 22, 2026 This edition covers a range of stories including two about Feilding. One is written by Simon Johnson, exLibrarian Feilding Library titled From Drill Hall to Civic Centre in Feilding, and the other by Dorothy Pilkington is An early Feilding surveyor and his gun-toting wife.

To order, send name, address and the number of copies wanted to email manawatujournal-sales@inspire.net.nz. $25 each

NEW PLYMOUTH GENEALOGY
Great Taranaki News from "Papers Past". The additional years (1946 – 1953) of the Taranaki Daily News that Len and Heather Jury helped fund are now available on Papers Past. "Google" Papers Past NZ. Enter Taranaki Daily News in the search engine, then select the dates that you want to research.