

Don't throw that out! The delights of EPHEMERA

Dr Jane Howells at *WDYTYA 2016*

Ephemera refers to (usually) printed paper and card items, not really intended to be kept – so planned to provide temporary information just needed for a short time. Various definitions can be found such as ‘the minor transient documents of everyday life’.

This short talk suggests examples of the types of things you could find and what they might tell you that would throw light on the lives of your ancestors. Some will refer to individuals by name, others will provide the context of life in a community at a particular time.

Local newspapers: look beyond the ‘births marriages and deaths columns’

- **Job adverts** – tell you something of what people actually did
- **Property sales** – contents of houses or buildings/equipment of businesses
- **Weddings and other events**– who attended

Directories: often a splendid source of **adverts**, and local **services**, as well as lists of residents and businesses

Magazines and journals aimed at a specific readership

- Parish magazines – take **adverts** too, more local (probably cheaper) than a newspaper; **obituaries** of parishioners who might not get into the newspaper; local **circumstances** such as an epidemic that might explain a period of relatively high incidence of deaths
- School magazines
- Professional journals
- News publications of societies and organisations

Posters and handbills for almost everything you could imagine: events, warnings, announcements, opportunities, (usually a specific place and date)

Programmes for theatres, concerts, festivals, pageants, exhibitions ...

Businesses: insight into the operations of a firm from

- trade cards
- catalogues
- billheads

By their very nature these types of items survive at a very variable rate.

Different repositories have different policies about keeping them. Ask at your record office, history centre, local history society, family history society, public library, museum, or the current officers of a society or group; try second hand bookshops, jumble and car boot sales.

Increasingly these materials are being digitised and made available **online**;

look in BALH's *Internet Sites Directory* as a starting point www.balh.org.uk/publications

where you will find, for example, www.concertprogrammes.org.uk

A FEW MORE EXAMPLES

John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera is a huge collection from 18th C to early 20th C held at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, available online (at a price) but try your public library service.

Broadside ballads is another digitised collection from the Bodleian www.ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk

St John-in- Bedwardine (Worcs) is an example of a parish magazine from 1870s, being digitised, www.stjohninbedwardine.co.uk/History/Archive.html

Bolton School is just one of many with a digital archive www.archiveboltonschool.org

The Fabian Society archives are kept at the London School of Economics, much has been digitised www.digital.library.lse.ac.uk/collections/fabiansociety

The Kew Guild is the organisation for people who were students or employees at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Their journal (from 1893) can be searched online to follow someone's career as a gardener. www.kewguild.org.uk

Membership records of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers are on Ancestry, but there is more in their own archives; you can search catalogue and find individuals – membership proposals for example set out their careers to date. www.imeche.org

The Ephemera Society has much for collectors, but also has some useful examples, such as an article on the Bengal Cavalry Dinner Club event in 1894, which lists all the members who attended. www.ephemera-society.org.uk

Two books by Maurice Rickards: *Encyclopedia of Ephemera* and *The Public Notice*

** NB don't forget to make your own family/community ephemera collection for your descendants*