



# SussexLink



April 2005

A Newsletter for the Sussex Family History Group

Vol 3 No 2

## Beyond BMD

### *More than just a catchy conference title*

The title for this year's annual conference, Beyond BMD, was chosen deliberately to reflect where we and other family history societies stand in relation to the increasing competition that we face from commercial, governmental and what I call FreeData institutions. Whether it is the BBC Family History website, 1901 Census from The National Archives, Vital Records from Salt Lake City, Ancestry.com, 1837 OnLine, FreeBMD or S&N Census data, the new entrant into the family history world has a host of sources to help, without having to join a family history society.

There is no doubt in my mind that this represents very strong competition. The literature accompanying the recent BBC series of television programmes, "Who do you think you are?", contained very few references to family history societies. Of course there have always been, and I suspect always will be, family historians who do not feel the need to join a family history society, but the growth over the last ten years of other channels of communication and means of sharing data, particularly over the Internet, seriously threatens to marginalise family history societies and significantly reduce the relevance of organisations like the Sussex Family History Group.

### *What should family history societies do?*

Although we could just curl up in our armchairs and ignore what is going on, I believe that there are three positive approaches to the competition that we face.

Firstly we must aim for a high quality service. In our journal, our website (both of which won awards last year), our meeting centres, our library, our conferences and our member services we must continue to aim for the best that we can achieve. Similarly in our collection and publication of relevant historical data we must aim for a high level of accuracy. The commercial and governmental transcriptions are renowned for their degree of inaccuracy, making publications such as the Sussex Marriage Index highly valued, even if it is not absolutely perfect.

Secondly I believe that we must work with other family history societies and the Federation both so that we can be an effective voice, as we have been recently over the proposed changes to civil registration, and so that we can make use of economies of scale in selling our publications through GenFair, and making our data available through Family History On Line.

### **Stop Press!**

2006 Conference will be held on Saturday  
March 18th at Clair Hall, Haywards Heath.

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But thirdly I would urge that we need to help family historians have a vision of family history that is more than just births, marriages and deaths, that sees the history of our individual families in the wider context of history generally - social, cultural, economic & political, but particularly the first two.

What was it like growing up in the nineteenth century? Why did two of my families migrate through London in the 1860s and 1870s? What effect did technological innovation and the increasing availability of capital have on my families in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries? Or, for that matter, the religious revival and fear of the French and revolution at about the same time? How were my ancestors affected by the harvest failures in the late 1820s? What was it like to be poor before the welfare state?

### ***Awareness of the past***

Setting the individual family's experience within the local, social, cultural and economic history has always been an important aspect of both our lecture programmes at conferences and meeting centres and our journal. It is an aspect of family history that we are well placed to foster, particularly working alongside our local record offices and local history groups. It is interesting to note that the title for the next residential Federation of Family History Societies' conference in September 2006 will be *"Putting Flesh on the Bones: a study of the common man"*.

Developing an awareness of history will not provide answers to the problems of today or the future, but it will provide both the context for our experience of the present and an understanding of the solutions that have been adopted in the past.

Brian Cutler

### **Help Needed**

The Group is always looking for people to help in many different ways. If you would like to volunteer for any of our important project work please contact Rosie Ansell ([volunteers@sfhg.org.uk](mailto:volunteers@sfhg.org.uk)).

There are a number of Group wide posts for which we are currently seeking volunteers.

- Group Secretary, to take over from Margaret Bysh in 2006
- Conference and Events Organiser
- Publicity Officer
- Education Officer

If you would like to find out more about any of these opportunities, please contact Brian Cutler ([chairman@sfhg.org.uk](mailto:chairman@sfhg.org.uk)).

### **Joan Goddard**

Joan Goddard will retire from the Group Executive at the Annual General Meeting following the Annual Conference this year. Joan was first elected to the Executive as Hon Secretary in 1993, and served in that role until 2001 when she became Vice Chairman, a post that she held until last year. Joan feels that the time has now come for her to get back to her own family history. As secretary Joan brought a new standard of administrative efficiency to the Group, whilst as Vice Chairman she took a particular interest in developing our project work and research advice. We are extremely grateful for all that Joan has done for the Group over the last 12 years.

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