



SussexLink



August 2003

A Newsletter for the Sussex Family History Group

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Vital Records

The proposals for the modernisation of birth marriage and death records have caused a fair amount of debate in family history circles over the last few months, with concerns that the loss of access to some information in modern records will outweigh the benefits of increased accessibility to vital record data overall. The government has now published a further consultation document about the implementation of the White Paper, which whilst broadly confirming the proposals put forward in January, provides some clarification.

Although family historians are a significant group of users of vital records, they are probably not the Registrar General's first priority. Both the White Paper and the more recent consultation document make clear that in drafting new legislation the government has been at pains to balance the needs of a number of different groups including the individuals concerned and their close family, government departments and agencies, legitimate commercial interests and central and local registrar staff.

The driver for change is clearly the introduction of electronic record keeping, which will in itself make access to records much, much easier. And it is because it is envisaged that access will be so much easier in the future that some restrictions on the data available to the general public, and therefore to genealogists, are proposed, both to reduce fraud and to protect the privacy of individuals.

From our point of view there is a lot to be welcomed. Records over 100 years old will be treated as historic and made available to the public in full. All the records of everyone born over 100 years ago will be accessible in full, even if the person is still alive, and in the case of marriage records including the full information about the younger spouse. Modern records relating to people less than 100 years old will be available in full to close family members (still to be conclusively defined), and to authorised users from other government departments etc., but the general public will not have access to addresses, occupations or

cause of death, which is a handicap particularly to people undertaking one name studies. However, there is a suggestion in paragraph 6.4.85 that this restriction will only apply to computerised records, and so will only gradually come into effect as older records are digitised and may never be relevant to records currently more than 75 years old, as it seems unlikely that these will be incorporated into the database of modern records.

There is still some way to go before any of this becomes law and is put into effect, which I suspect will not be until after the next general election! One immediate spin off of these developments, however, has been the decision to make it possible to order GRO certificates over the Internet at the standard price (£7, so long as you have the complete reference) for four working days postal delivery. If you haven't found it, this service is available at <http://www.col.statistics.gov.uk/>.

If you would like to read more about the registration changes, or want to comment, visit <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/registration/whitepaper/default.asp>.

Sussex Burial Index

Tracking down ancestors can be frustrating, but also challenging, overcoming all those brick walls that seem to block our progress. One group of tools that we use to do this is of course indexes, and one of the responsibilities that we have as a family history group is to help create such indexes and thereby improve access to data relevant to family historians. However creating a genealogical index is itself an enormous challenge. A challenge because of the scale of such projects and the number of records involved; a challenge because of all the problems involved in transcribing old records and a challenge to make such indexes both comprehensive and accurate so that they can be of maximum benefit to people using them.

As I trailed in the June edition of SussexLink, we have recently embarked on a new challenge, the compilation of a comprehensive Sussex Burial Index. For some time Christine Payne and her team of volunteers have been doing a tremendous job inputting previously transcribed data for the Tombstones and Burials Index, and the work that Don Burgess will now be co-ordinating will continue to be added to that index. The Sussex Burial Index however will be published as it develops on Family History Online, and it is hoped that other groups

Jobs

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Yes there are always things to do in SFHG! If you would like to help just talk to any of us on the Executive and we will find you a job! I am still looking for someone to take care of publicity, someone to organise events and now someone with software programming skills to help prepare some of our databases for publication on CD. If you can help I would be delighted to hear (chairman@sfhg.org.uk).

Conferences

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Computers in Family History

October 18th 2003 Worthing High School
All you need to know about using computers in family history in one place at one time. Some places still available. £18 with lunch, £13 without. Booking forms from Murray J. Hayes, 31 Poulterers Lane, Worthing, BN14 7SS (include SAE) or at www.sfhg.org.uk.

Annual Conference 2004

March 20th Clair Hall Haywards Heath
Details will be available for October SussexLink and the December edition of the Sussex Family Historian.

Autumn 2004.

Westmeads are planning to put on a conference primarily but not exclusively for people new to family history.

that have also been transcribing burials in Sussex will be able to contribute to this. The Executive has also decided that as we publish material in this way, we will also make it available to the National Burial Index.

A challenge of this nature calls for widespread support from everyone who is able to help, particularly to transcribe and input data. Do volunteer if you possibly can, and contact Alan Stables (volunteers@sfhg.org.uk).

Standing Orders

If you pay your membership subscription by Standing Order, please respond to the letter you should have received about the change in our bankers. It is **ESSENTIAL** that you change your standing order if you want to remain a member.

Gift Aid

If you pay UK income tax, why not arrange your subscription as Gift Aid, however it is paid, and enable the Group to recover the income tax? Details from Wyn Burgess (membership@sfhg.org.uk).

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