



SussexLink



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A Newsletter for the Sussex Family History Group

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Family History and the future

There has been much debate in family history circles recently about the future of family history societies. The success of family history over the last 30 years, particularly as a retirement hobby, has brought many different organisations into the field, some commercial, some governmental and some, such as FreeBMD, promoting free access to information, and these relative newcomers sometimes appear to be challenging the role of well established family history societies.

Some FHSs have reported falling attendance at meeting centres and difficulty in recruiting volunteers to take on positions of responsibility. The current BBC TV series, "Who do you think you are?", which reaches a climax in early December with a series of family history events around the country sponsored by local radio, pays little if any attention to Family History Societies.

Little wonder, therefore, that a regional seminar recently staged by the Federation of Family History Societies attracted over 90 attendees from 36 societies. Different societies had different experiences. There were, however, some common themes - more transient membership, greater use of computers and the Internet, an increasing emphasis on entertainment rather than erudite lectures, getting volunteers, particularly to take on positions of responsibility, a greater need to help people with basic research methodology - to mention some that stand out.

One issue that was looked at in some detail was how to encourage people to volunteer for the innumerable jobs that have to be done in any organisation. I am pleased to say that over the last nine months we have been able to successfully fill a number of vacancies in SFHG, with new members of the Executive, a new Treasurer, a new Volunteers Co-ordinator and now a new Chairman and Secretary for the Chichester Meeting Centre. There are always vacancies (see Job Spot), so if you are interested in joining the team do get in touch.

Although some people at the regional seminar felt that they were at a wake, I certainly came away with an overwhelming impression that family history societies were very much alive, enthusiastic and positively grasping the challenges that change in the family history world has created. As always this type of event provides a useful opportunity to exchange ideas and explore alternative ways of doing things.

Brian Cutler

(with additional material from Trevor Hanson)

Chichester Meeting Centre

Following the AGM at their November meeting, Chichester Meeting Centre has a new Chairman and Secretary, Roy Winchester and Jeanne Stotton respectively. Our congratulations to them and our thanks to the retiring Chairman, David Steel, and Secretary, Harold Taylor. The programme will continue under Katharine Slay's management and Tony Street remains in charge of the bookstall. Chichester meet on the last Wednesday of the month at St. George's Church Hall, Cleveland Road.

Book now for

Beyond BMD

SFHG Annual Conference

Saturday 9th April 2005

Clair Hall, Haywards Heath

See the *Sussex Family Historian* or the website for more information and booking forms.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE B*ST**DS GONE?

A Family History Conference held on Saturday 30th October at the West Meads & Bognor Regis Meeting Centre

The sun was shining when the Committee and their helpers arrived at the West Meads Community Hall for the first ever Conference organised by the West Meads & Bognor Regis Meeting Centre.

Everything had been set up the evening before by a willing band of helpers so only the last minute touches needed to be done, but more importantly the urn had to be switched on ready for the influx of 100 people who were travelling from as far away as Surrey, Kent, Devon and Shropshire to hear Lady Mary Teviot and Michael Gandy talk about where and how to search for their ancestors.

At 9.15 a.m. everything was in place and people started to arrive to be welcomed by our team of volunteers, and by 10.30 a.m. the hall was buzzing with anticipation for the first talk.

As usual Lady Teviot did not disappoint with fascinating facts about the more unusual sources for family history research, i.e. Church Wardens presentments, Protestation Oaths, Manorial records etc. and the most interesting were the misdemeanours which today we find quite amusing. Lady Teviot spoke about Coroners' reports that can be found in local newspapers and I know from personal experience how rewarding these can be. We learnt that there are many records available at local record offices that can be of great use to us in our search.

The second talk was by Michael Gandy and in his inimitable style he talked about how to find our London ancestors. He gave us many ideas as to why our families moved from the country areas and also how they ended up in certain parts of London. The place in which they settled could be governed by something as simple as which railway station they arrived at. We learnt that most people in London did not attend church regularly unlike their counterparts in the country and sometimes as many as 30 babies were Baptised on the same day.

After a break for lunch Lady Teviot spoke about records from the Parish Chest such as settlement and removal orders, bastardy bonds and Churchwardens' accounts. Overseers' accounts gave more personal information and are well worth looking at, whilst records of rogues and vagabonds can be very entertaining and are definitely worth a look. I am sure that everyone who attended the conference found Lady Teviot's talks as enjoyable as always and we look forward to inviting her back in the future.

For his second talk Michael Gandy spoke about the difficulties of researching in Ireland. The Irish did not keep records as we did in England and this makes researching our ancestors quite a challenge. However Michael gave us many ideas about where to find the records that are kept in various archives and he also talked about the migration to England. One of our members telephoned me a few days later to say that due to the ideas that Michael had given she had

managed to find two of her ancestors in Ireland.

After a break for a cup of tea Lady Teviot and Michael Gandy very kindly answered questions and then it was time for everyone to go home.

I think that I can safely say that everyone seemed to have a wonderful day and we have had several letters congratulating us on how well organised we were. I also overheard several comments as to how well the two speakers complemented each other, Lady Teviot giving us lots of ideas about the records available and Michael Gandy really making us stop and think about things logically. It took us 18 months from when the idea of the Conference was first conceived and a lot of hard work by everyone and when Lady Teviot left she suggested that we should organise one every year!

Sue Kidd

Secretary, West Meads & Bognor Regis Meeting Centre

Job Spot

- ◆ Publicity Co-ordinator
- ◆ Conference and Event Organiser
- ◆ Assistant Secretary

Contact chairman@sfhg.org.uk for details

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Edited by Brian Cutler (chairman@sfhg.org.uk)