

‘Getting Online for Research and Publicity’

Warwickshire Local History Society third ‘umbrella’ meeting: Warwick School, 12th November 2016

Various local history societies (23) across the historic county gathered for a one-day workshop, one of the occasional conferences held by Warwickshire Local History Society for its affiliated groups. This meeting aimed to discuss both the Internet’s potential for local history research and its use by societies for publicising their interests and activities.

Professor Beat Kümin, of Warwick University, gave a keynote address on ‘**virtual parishes**’, introducing the Parish Research Network (my-parish.org). His slides demonstrated the potential of digital media, including 3-D reconstructions of local church interiors, drawn from a recent CD-ROM on ‘the English Parish Church’ (from York).

David Hodgkinson, Archivist at the Warwickshire Record Office, talked about the county archive catalogue, as well as mentioning free resources available through computers there and in local libraries, including the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Three experienced researchers, **Bob Bearman**, **Nat Alcock** and **Stephen Roberts**, then explored the potential of the on-line catalogues of other local archives and also the thematic websites provided, for example, by British History Online, the Clergy Database and the History of Parliament. Audience members commended other free examples, such as the historic British maps available from the National Library of Scotland, and the wide-ranging online access available through the Wellcome Institute Library in Euston (after a personal visit to obtain a card).

Jan Broadway spoke about the ‘Why and How’ of local society websites, especially in relation to Gloucestershire societies and progress on the county’s VCH. She introduced several free or low-cost platforms (including Wordpress and BT) that enabled the self-building of websites. We then heard about the experience of several Warwickshire groups: **John Alexander-Head** from Bidford, **Margaret Rushton** and **Mick Jeffs** from Leamington, and **Lynda Greasley** from Bedworth (the Bedworth Society). All seemed to find that their websites aided recruitment and rapidly became the main communication channel with members and others. The privacy and digital security of committee members needed thought but could be protected by email addresses like ‘enquiries@localsociety.org’ (such addresses being commonly part of the package provided by website hosts). Wider discussion suggested that social media, especially Facebook, could amplify the appeal of a website, reaching a slightly younger group of potential members. The day was concluded by **Sam Collenette**, for the County Council, presenting the website ‘Our Warwickshire’. Her team welcomed news of local events, and indeed brief pieces on the history of the county’s less-known places.

During our day we appreciated the facilities and spacious surroundings of the Pyne Room at Warwick School. The only slight downside was the presence in an adjoining room of dozens of small boys; after their rugby tournament, their noisy exuberance threatened to drown our quiet and mature deliberations!

John Wilmot (with members of organising sub-committee)