SOME INTERNET RESOURCES FOR MEDIEVAL GENEALOGY

by Chris Phillips[1]

Chris Phillips continues our regular feature on internet resources with a commentary on the PCC wills facility, a bibliographical database, and an introduction to local resources online.

Foundations (2004) ***1*** *(3): 192-193* *© Copyright FMG*

Excellent reference material is continuing to appear on the Internet[2], and - even more than previously - it's possible to mention here only a small sample of what's available.

Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) wills online

The Public Record Office[3] (PRO) has recently completed a major project to enable Internet access to scanned images of wills proved in the PCC. More than a million wills are now available, covering a period of nearly half a millennium (1384-1858) and providing a rich source of genealogical information from the late medieval period onwards. This is a "pay-per-view" service, priced at £3 for each will, but the index is freely searchable by testator's name, place, keyword and date. Of course, the wills tend to be in Latin (or occasionally French) before about 1500. More information is available at ***http://www.documentsonline.pro.gov.uk/wills.asp***

It's also worth noting that - as well as offering many abstracts and lists of documents through its online catalogue (***http://catalogue.pro.gov.uk/***), the PRO now provides a scanning-on-demand service for any of its holdings for which the reference number is known (***http://www.documentsonline.pro.gov.uk/about-sod.asp***) with images delivered by email or CD. This obviously makes these documents much more accessible to those who live at a distance from Kew, although the charges are quite a bit higher than for the PCC wills.

---

1 *Contact details:* cgp@medievalgenealogy.org.uk

2 More information on use of the internet for medieval genealogy can be found at http://www.medievalgenealogy.org.uk/

3 Now part of the UK National Archives, see http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/

Royal Historical Society (RHS) Bibliography

Another very useful resource is the Royal Historical Society's bibliography, now freely available on its website at ***http://www.rhs.ac.uk/bibwel.asp***. This amalgamates a number of existing bibliographical works, and aims at a comprehensive coverage of historical writing about the British Isles published since 1900. It contains more than a third of a million records, including references to many articles in periodicals as well as books.

There is an advanced facility allowing searches by keyword, person, place and subject. For each record, there are links to associated people and subjects, which makes it easy to browse (though sadly there are no genealogical links between people!). Note, though, that the help pages recommend using a general keyword search as well as the person, place and subject classifications, to ensure that no older works are missed.

County and local history sites

It's worth bearing in mind the increasing number of websites dedicated to local history. These come in all shapes and sizes - some covering a county or district, and others a particular place - and may be produced by academics, local authorities, historical societies or individual enthusiasts. They also vary in quality, but many include either transcripts of original records or text from older secondary works, and often there is at least some coverage of the medieval period.

One excellent example is Andrew Nicholson's *Nottinghamshire History and Archaeology* site, at ***http://www.nottshistory.org.uk/***, which includes extracts from many older books and articles. Another is *The Sussex Weald*, at ***http://www.thesussexweald.org/***, which combines published texts with transcripts and genealogical reconstructions. Two examples of sites with extensive collections of records relating to particular places are the *Cumnor Parish Record* website, at ***http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/external/cumnor/***, and *The Records of Earl's Colne*, at ***http://linux02.lib.cam.ac.uk/earlscolne/***.

These are just one or two outstanding examples, but there are very many more local history websites which contain at least some useful material. Unfortunately, as far as I know, there's no comprehensive listing of these sites, and tracking them down using search engines can require a little ingenuity to separate the historical from the present-day.