

Open Data and Family History

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1 Content

In the UK, genealogy and family history has always been considered a pastime or hobby of the recently retired. However there in the last decade there has been an explosion of interest in the subject, due partly to media coverage (via programmes such as Who Do You Think You Are, BBC1) that shift the emphasis onto personal heritage, encompassing an emotional and geographical journey to discover and engage with ones roots, thus experiencing history from the 'bottom up' in a relevant, contextual, emphathetic and skills-based way; and increasingly because the Internet has brought millions of digitised datasets, indexes and transcriptions, previously locked away in archives, into the homes of a new generation of history explorers. Combined, this has created an entirely new landscape in which a range of modern historians operate alongside the dataset holders and the commercial companies that provide the means of access to digitised records, and this presentation will explore the genesis of this environment, the impact on how history is researched and disseminated, and the challenges ahead. For example, there are concerns about how issues such as open data and access to material are dealt with in an increasingly monetised space, so groups such as the Open Genealogical Alliance have formed to look at alternative outcomes to the ones being created at the moment.

2 About the Author

Dr Nick Barratt obtained a PhD in history from King's College London in 1996, editing the 1225 Exchequer pipe roll and several Exchequer receipt rolls from the 1220s when the National Archives: Public Record Office maintained a site at Chancery Lane.

Nick started work in television whilst working at the BBC as a specialist archive researcher for a number of programmes. Barratt has made numerous TV appearances, and his credits include House Detectives, Invasion, Omnibus and the BAFTA-nominated Seven Wonders of the Industrial World. Since 2002, he has moved into presenting, History Mysteries, Hidden House History and So You Think Youre Royal on television, and Tracing Your Roots for Radio 4. He also presented the research strands for BBC's Who Do You Think You Are? DVD.

He is the executive director of FreeBMD.org.