

Llandrindod Wells & District U3A Lecture Meeting February 2020

Uncovering real lives from dusty documents - Gavin Hooson

Report by Clive Barrett

Chairman Roger Malvern welcomed everyone to the February meeting. He announced that there were still a few seats available for the Theatre Group's trip to Stratford Upon Avon to see "A Winter's Tale". He also announced that the Film Group's showing for this month had had to be cancelled and the next date would be Friday March 13th for the film "The Apartment". Roger then introduced the speaker for the morning, Gavin Hooson, whose lecture was entitled "Uncovering real lives from dusty documents"---- Introducing Genealogy from alternative sources. Gavin's background is that he was previously a teacher, but later worked at Powys Archives. Gavin commenced his power point presentation by stating that researchers for social family history studies can go back at least 200 years to learn how their ancestors lived. In the process of local genealogy we can find that often our ancestors became displaced after arriving from other areas. He then explained to members about the documents, pictures and maps he would be showing during his talk.

Not surprisingly in view of the fact he lives in Norton, he concentrated his lecture with a lot of material appertaining to the Presteigne/ Knighton areas. He started with a medieval document of an early account of Presthemedede (the Manor of Presteigne) in 1384 - written in Latin on parchment. It is possible to gather information about the social history of the time, for example in 1386 there were a number of empty properties in Presteigne somewhat attributive to the "Black Death" 36 years previously, whilst some people lived outside the town in healthier conditions. In 1593 it showed many burials at Presteigne, people dying because of the plague, lived short painful lives, and many children died. During the lecture I thought Gavin displayed some very interesting instructive historical knowledge. He also showed school records of the Charitable, National and British Schools, an early example of the last named was the 1869 nonconformist school in Hereford Street, Presteigne. The first ever school in Presteigne was the "Iron School" first situated near the town's main church later moving to Boultibrooke. He also showed a picture of Presteigne Fire Brigade in 1890 in front of the local tannery. He also mentioned the Knighton Guardians of 1902, showing the clear conflict between poverty and criminality - the prison and back to work scenario. I thought Gavin spoke about this with a strong sense of disgust and disquiet. The speaker went on to describe the very harsh conditions in the workhouses under the Poor Law System. However he did admit that attitudes changed after 100 years of the above harsh regimes, and that the later type of nurse employed showed more sympathy when taking care of the elderly.

The cultures of the 14th Century showed that there were Anglo Norman Barons, whilst one of the alternatives were the native Welsh Lordships such as Owain Glyndwr. Records traced by the speaker give hints or glimpses of how harsh people's lives were, e.g punishments for minor offences resulted in transportation to Australia for 10 years, and what happened in the area of now Powys at the time i.e. Ship building in North Powys, which was

shut down by the coming of the railways, the Anglo Norman way of farming the land around Llyswen in strips (1840), and the fact that landowners took over the Commons under the Enclosure Acts. In 1833 there was no town of Llandrindod Wells, only the Pump House and Rock House plus the waters and Llandrindod and Cefnlllys Commons. Of local interest he showed maps of Norton in 1817, the large 2 inch to the mile displays the true shape of the landscape. Finally Gavin showed an early 19th Century engraving of the town of Knighton by well known Presteigne artist Joseph Murray Ince, which he described as the beginnings of the tourist industry, the picture displayed horse drawn coaches, inns and scenic areas.

Following members questions, Chairman Roger Malvern in thanking Gavin Hooson very much indeed, said as a comparative stranger to the local area (he had only lived here for 20 years) the lecture had given him a new insight into Radnorshire and Powys. Next month's meeting at the Metropole Hotel on Monday March 9th 2020 will be the U3A's AGM, together with a lecture entitled "The Crime Novel: yesterday, today and tomorrow" to be delivered by Geraint Davies.