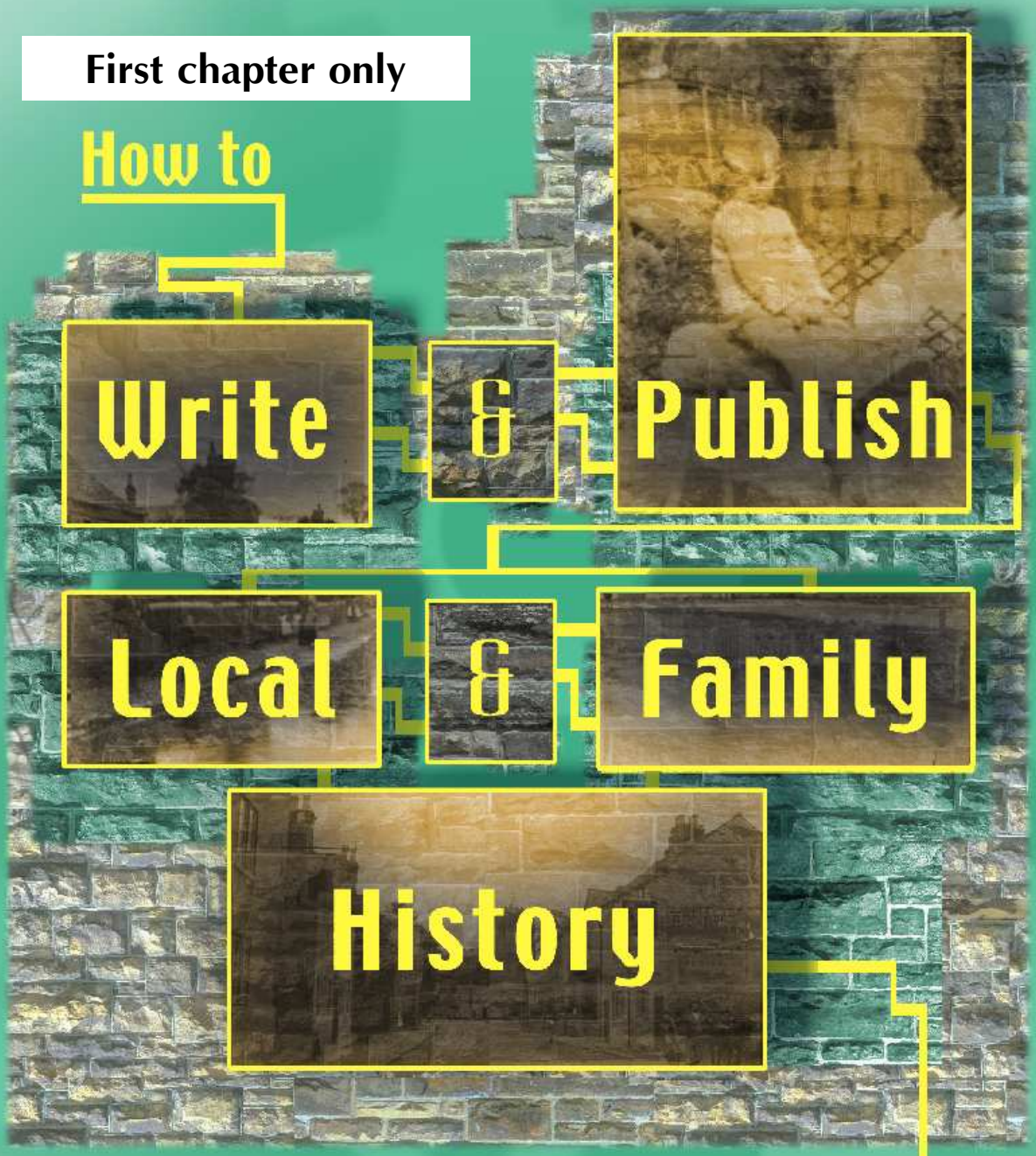
First chapter only

How to Write & Publish Local & Family History Successfully



Bob Trubshaw

Preface to 2026 PDF edition

This free-to-download PDF contains the opening chapter of a much more substantial work, *How to Write and Publish Local and Family History Successfully*, which was published in 2005 as an greatly-extended version of an earlier book published in 1999.

The blurb for 1999 book described it as containing the sort of information I would have liked to have easily found when I started publishing ten years previously. As I type these words I am now looking back on thirty-five years of writing, editing and publishing.

The book published in 2005 is available as a free PDF (www.hoap.co.uk/how_to_write_and_publish.pdf). However much of the advice I offered in 2005 needs significant revisions. With one key exception. The opening chapter is still relevant over twenty years later.

For this free PDF I have deleted references to CD-ROMs and various references to computer software which are no longer relevant.

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Orston

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Chapter One

GETTING STARTED

What to write about?

Most people using this book will already have specific ideas on what they want to write about. However defining the topic or subject is a crucial step.

Local history research that is not well-defined risks becoming too big and complicated. Worse still, the process of research may become endless. Bear in mind that trying to track down all the details of a comparatively small village and the key inhabitants may initially seem a reasonable project but usually proves to be beyond the scope of most researchers. If research reveals large amounts of information then, sadly but all-too-often, the researcher loses interest in preparing it for publication so the effort is largely wasted. Some subjects may require access to original documents which are in difficult handwriting or Latin. Unless palaeography and translation skills are already developed then this could prove to be a stumbling block. Other projects may require access to documents stored in archives many miles from home.

A full appreciation of all the relevant sources is impossible at the start of any project. What is essential is a real interest in the subject. Local history is ultimately about people so the subject must be approached as, or transformed into, human history. Family history too needs to be about the human history – which is most certainly not the same as long lists of names with their associated dates of births and deaths, spouses and offspring.

The convergence of local and family history

The eighteenth century antiquarians who pioneered local history were mostly concerned with the descent of the manor and the pedigrees and houses of the landed classes. Nothing was said about the lives of the tenants, the 'ordinary' people who made up much of the population. This bias towards manorial history is reflected in many village histories, whereas urban histories give disproportionate attention to the leading figures of trade and industry. This bias is not simply because there is comparatively little written about 'ordinary' people, but more because considerable

effort is needed to track down the records of such people to create some sort of social history.

However such effort is exactly what family historians revel in. Once the research extends beyond merely tracing descent through the male line then a more rounded account of the family becomes an exercise in social history. Once a number of such social histories of families have been researched (and, ideally, published) for a given place then the 'missing' history of ordinary people can be added to the traditional 'manorial history' of a village or the accounts of merchant families in towns. Appropriate family history and local history research thereby converge to produce a more complete social history.

Book, booklet or web site? One-off or series?

What is the difference between a book and a booklet? In most senses there is no difference apart from the way it is bound together because the same concepts apply to preparing both. Clearly a booklet is something less substantial than a book, but there is considerable middle ground.

However, another subtle overlap comes in. There is nothing to stop you producing booklets as a series (perhaps covering different aspects of a town) or producing them at regular intervals. In the last case you have, to all intents and purposes, a regular magazine. This brings yet another overlap – that between magazines and newsletters. Again, the difference is really one of size as publication involves similar considerations. At the other end of the scale, there are no fundamental differences between a book and annual journals or transactions. In this book all types of periodicals are considered to be the same as any other type of publication, except for one or two specific details, such as ISBN numbers (see page 122).

A research project may generate so much information and so many illustrations about a comparatively specialist topic that a book would be prohibitively expensive. A project may also be open-ended, and generate more and more information as others become aware of the author's interests. In such cases a web site might be the only affordable way of publishing the research.

So – book or booklet, web site, one-off or series, magazine or newsletter – this book will help you publish them all. For convenience, I will normally refer to the final item as a book, except where differences are important.

Self-publishing or group publishing?

For similar reasons of convenience, I will write as if one individual is doing the publishing. This does not mean that a local history society cannot be a publisher – many already are and hopefully this book will help many more.

Local history publications are often the result of collaborative work by a village history group. From the publication perspective this is not really important, although clearly there are a number of collective decisions which will be have to be made. However,

it also means that some of the more onerous tasks (such as typing, proof reading and selling) can be shared.

Group research

If you are a member of a local history society or an adult education class then considerably more can be achieved (and more fun enjoyed along the way) if research is divided into overlapping projects.

In one successful project a number of people collaborated to research the history of the six largest families involved in the late eighteenth century enclosure of their village. These families inter-married, sold land and houses to each other, and otherwise interacted through the years. So those concentrating on, say, the 'Smiths' needed to liaise with those researching the 'Jones' or the 'Browns'. The result was a comprehensive study of the leading nineteenth century land-owning families, which in turn provided a detailed insight into village life at the time.

Another project straddling family history, social history and local history researched all the families living in a village in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when it was nationally-important for pottery production. This built up a complex insight into the way families intermarried, how newcomers were integrated in the community, and how property rights were transferred. Among the surprises was the extent to which widows continued producing pottery after the death of their husbands, suggesting that these were typically 'family businesses' in which wives and daughters played a major part. (This research has been published as *Ticknall Pots and Potters* by Sue Brown and Janet Spavold, Landmark Publishing 2005.)

The benefits of collaborative efforts such as there are quickly apparent – different skills can be brought to bear, duplication of effort should be minimal, and the whole quickly becomes greater than the sum of the parts. The only possible problem might be that the group is so successful with its research that the sheer quantity of information becomes difficult to summarise or analyse! One incidental but nevertheless important benefit is that this approach provides a framework in which those group members who have little or no experience of local and/or family history research benefit from the expertise and guidance of more regular researchers.

The importance of oral history

Since the 1970s oral history recordings have begun to take the prominent place they deserve as a source of information for local and family history researchers. The types of recollections recorded by oral history should be regarded as quite distinct from documentary and photographic records. They are expression of individuals' memories. As numerous academic studies have shown, human memory is not 'objective' but subtly shaped by what we have been told happened and, to a varying extent, by what we think *should* have happened.

The basic assumption of all oral accounts is that the person is not so much telling you what they did, but *what they want you to think they did*. Frankly this remark applies

to documentary sources too, which also can be 'selective', intentionally forged, or rely on hearsay (i.e. rely on oral history!). Just as documentary sources may contain unintended errors (local newspapers being notoriously prone to such problems) so too people's memories are fallible.

When interviewed people do not simply recount what they did – they also reveal what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did. Memory is not something simple and transparent; rather memories are an intricate processes of recall which repeatedly selects, shapes, and reshapes the original experiences. Most people will, consciously or otherwise, tell the interviewer what they think the interviewer wants to hear. In most cases people will recall only events which they regard as distinctive or unusual, or which present the teller in a good light.

In general, although oral history can provide some details about events that would otherwise be forgotten, overall oral history tells us less about specific events than about their *current meaning* to the person interviewed. Even if the person being interviewed has only a limited awareness of wider historical issues, they will implicitly place their recollections within their prior assumptions about history – and assumptions about what historians are interested in!

The memories usually encountered in oral history interviews typically fall into three categories. There is 'global' information – actually usually national, and often ultimately derived from the mass media such as newspapers, radio and television. For example, recollections of what the Blitz was like in London during the Second World War from someone who was not living in London at the time fall into this category.

More interesting is 'local' information – such as what the Blitz was like from someone who was there at the time. Individual people are usually named, although there may only be fragments of a story (often triggered by mention of a specific building or person) rather than a more developed narrative. Some 'local' information can be recollections of purely personal events – for example, how the person felt on their wedding day.

In between the 'global' and 'local' information is another interesting category of information. This has been termed 'popular memory' and usually comprises short (and often seemingly 'rehearsed') narratives. These include supernatural legends – ghost stories and the like – and tales which have a 'moral' aspect, such as indicating how to behave at, say, weddings or funerals (usually because the tale clearly shows how things should *not* be done!). Such tales are clearly shared between people living in the same village, or those who worked or socialised together.

Too many local historians are so obsessed with getting at the facts that they tend to dismiss local legends and folklore whereas such lore may be a distinctive aspect of what bonds a group or community together. By their very nature these key aspects of collective identity are usually known only to those who 'belong' to a specific group. Such unique and easily-lost aspects of local history should never be ignored when encountered.

One variant of 'popular memory' is recollections from interviewees about what they recall older members of their families (such as parents) saying about significant events before the person being interviewed was born. For example in the 1940s the Irish government conducted a major oral history interview programme to find out what people 'remembered' about the famines of the 1840s. Such passed down recollections of more personal events can be thought of as 'family folklore' (see page 15).

More information about oral history

See the Oral History Society Web site (http://ohs.org.uk/) for extensive advice on all aspects of collecting, transcribing and publishing oral history.

The East Midlands Oral History Archive (EMOHA) has built up a useful collection of advisory leaflets, all of which can be downloaded from their Web site (www.le.ac.uk/emoha).

An academic journal, *Oral History Review*, is available online at www.historycooperative.org/ohindex.html; in the first issue the article by Rebecca Jones '*Blended Voices*: crafting a narrative from oral history interviews' (www.historycooperative.org/journals/ohr/31.1/jones.html) is especially relevant for anyone preparing interviews for publication.

Sounding Boards: Oral testimony and the local historian by David Marcombe (Department of Adult Education, University of Nottingham 1995) provides extensive practical suggestions and background advice.

For those who want to delve a bit deeper into the subject see the list of further reading on page 48.

How to record oral history

The origin of oral history in the 1970s coincides with the availability of affordable tape recorders. Such reel-to-reel tape recorders have been superseded by cassette tapes and more recently by mini-discs (although mini-disc recordings are tricky to transfer to computers for editing). Now recording direct to the hard drive of a laptop computer is the best option, using a suitable external microphone.

Another good way of recording is to use a video camera, probably with external microphones to get the best sound quality from both interviewee and interviewer. The aim is not to produce a sophisticated film, so putting the video camera on a tripod, pointing it at the interviewee (preferably from the side so they tend to forget about its presence) and then to all intents and purposes ignoring it is quite sufficient. By having a video, facial expressions and body language can add to the impact of the verbal reminiscences. With digital video cameras the image and sound can be readily imported into a computer for editing – for this reason alone consider this option rather than, say, mini-disc or cassette recordings.

When done properly oral history is much more than casually jotting down reminiscences. By interviewing a number of people with a common background a cumulative account of their experiences can be built up. Often this involves quite ordinary aspects of their lives – such as schooling, clothing, shopping, domestic chores – that are often too 'unremarkable' to form part of conventional records. Yet what was commonplace merely 40 or 50 years ago now seems increasingly distant from modern assumptions and expectations.

The person being interviewed needs to feel relaxed. This may mean that preliminary meetings and 'chats' are necessary to build up the required level of trust. Frustratingly not everyone who has an 'interesting story to tell' will want to be interviewed. And a great many will either refuse to be taped or videoed, or unexpectedly become tongue-tied in the presence of a microphone. As good shorthand is not a skill acquired by most local historians, this can cause significant problems.

The person interviewing needs to have a number of skills. They must be able to operate the tape recorder or video camera confidently. They must be able to listen and encourage the interviewee, without unnecessary interruptions. Questions must be open-ended (i.e. cannot be answered simply with a 'yes' or 'no') and not impose a bias (i.e. should take the form of ''What were your holidays like?' rather than 'You must have enjoyed your holidays'). Interviews usually benefit from being guided by pre-planned topics, but the interviewer must be alert enough to ask for more information about specific remarks. So ask for clarification on statements such as 'She used to live in Brown's old house' which leave anyone who does not know where Mrs Brown used to live (and she may have died or moved 30 or more years ago…) none the wiser.

Wherever possible make sure that there is only the interviewee and the interviewer (perhaps with a 'technical assistant') in the room. There is nothing worse than trying to interview someone while someone else is continually interjecting and telling them what they should be saying! The exception to this is organised 'reminiscence sessions' at elderly people's homes or monthly meetings for the elderly. Such sessions tend to stimulate reminiscences that might otherwise have not been recalled, but they can be dominated by a minority of contributors. They are usually a nightmare to record as often more than one person is speaking at one time, and it is difficult to place a microphone in a place where everyone is clearly recorded.

One very successful way of collecting reminiscences is to ask people to look out their old photographs. Even typical family photographs may be taken in front of significant buildings or show locations that have since changed substantially. If the owners of the photographs are agreeable then scan in these photographs (a portable scanner and a laptop computer means that the photographs never leave their owner's house). Now for the interesting stage. If Mrs A has talked about her photographs and allowed you to take copies, go along to see Mrs B down the road. Let Mrs B talk about her photographs, but then show her any of Mrs A's photographs that may contain people, buildings or locations that Mrs B would also know. You may find that Mrs B has recollections that add to those of Mrs A (or, indeed, may contradict what Mrs A said!).

If appropriate permission has been granted then the more interesting of such photographs can be put on a Web site, together with the ability for anyone to email their recollections about the photographs. Not quite oral history as it was envisaged in the 1970s, but a way of potentially making contact with a wide range of previously-unknown 'informants'.

Oral history recordings may provide a rich resource for dialect studies. If you suspect that 'informants' have a distinctive dialect then be sure to ask where they grew up, and how long they have lived in their present village or suburb. Dialect researchers are especially interested in people who have lived most or all their lives in one locality. However a recording loses much of its value to dialect researchers if it is not known how long the speaker has lived in a location, or where they grew up.

The legalities of oral history

An oral history recording is usually only of real value if it can be placed in an archive, or the transcript published in some form. And this means that the person being interviewed must allow you to do this. In the absence of such consent it is unethical to publish such interviews and quite probably contravenes copyright (and there are separate rights in (a) the words spoken; (b) the recording; (c) any transcription of the recording). Bear in mind that copyright can only be assigned in writing, never just be 'word of mouth' (see pages 56 to 61).

Without such consent you will have to wait until 70 years after the death of the interviewee before being able to:

- copy the recording (even to make back ups or donate to a Record Office or other archive);
- play the recording in public or include on a Web site or CD-ROM;
- include a transcript in paper publications, exhibitions or Web sites;
- adapt in any way.

So even the most informative interview is to all intents and purposes a waste of time unless a suitable consent form is signed. Trying to get consent retrospectively is usually fraught and, if the interviewee has moved away or died, it may be difficult to contact anyone in the family who is authorised to give such consent.

Furthermore appropriate consent forms mean that a collection of oral history recordings will probably not need to be registered under the terms of the Data Protection Act (1988).

However the assignment of copyright is distinct from the 'moral rights' of the interviewee (see page 67). Moral rights cannot be assigned and so remain with the interviewee. This gives them the right to be named as the 'authors' of their words (although technically this right needs to be 'asserted') and, in any event, publishers are required not to adapt anyone's words in a way that might be deemed derogatory

(such as by making alterations that give a false impression of what was said or meant).

One further legal issue should always be borne in mind – when publishing interviews make sure nothing is defamatory, otherwise an expensive legal action directed at the publisher may ensue.

Transcribing oral history interviews

After the interviews have taken place then transcriptions need to be made. This is very time-consuming – every hour of recording will take several hours of careful transcription. Transcription is more of an art than a science. Think of your role more as a translator than an editor and bear in mind the following guidelines:

- Never correct the interviewee's words, grammar or speech patterns (such idiosyncrasies are an important aspect of oral history)
- Never add words or otherwise change the content or intent (although parenthetical comments may be added if necessary to clarify ambiguities).
- Use em-dashes separated by a space (' — ') for brief pauses and for unfinished sentences.
- Use square brackets for relevant non-verbal events, such as [pause], [giggles] or [doorbell rings].
- Avoid including every pause, 'um' and 'ahh' (and 'uh' after words) but do include them they are significant to the specific part of the interview e.g. if the interviewee is finding it difficult to discuss say the death of a close friend or relative, or it is clear that the interviewee is choosing their words carefully to keep a skeleton in the closet!
- Likewise usually avoid the interviewer's noises of encouragement ('Ah yes', 'Oh really!', 'Hmmm') but do include them when they cause the interviewee to change tack or explicitly respond to them.
- If necessary adopt consistent spelling for dialect words.
- Adopt a 'house style' for quote marks etc (see page 51) and standardise font style and other typographical details (see page 141)
- Ask for help with any unintelligible sections of the recording. If necessary use square brackets such as [unintelligible because of traffic noise] to indicate words or passages that are not transcribed.

Opposite: *A form devised for the Memories of Nottinghamshire project which collects scans of old photographs and recordings of reminiscences about the photographs.*

MEMORIES OF NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

COPYRIGHT ASSIGNMENT AND CONSENT FORM

FOR ORAL HISTORY RECORDINGS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

The purpose of this assignment and consent is to enable the Memories of Nottinghamshire project to permanently retain and use the photographs and recorded recollections of individuals.

As present owner of the copyright in the contributor content (i.e. the words recorded by and/or the photographs copied today by the Memories of Nottinghamshire project), I hereby assign copyright to the Memories of Nottinghamshire project on the understanding that the content will not be used in a derogatory manner.

I understand that no payment is due to me for this assignment and consent.

I understand that I am giving the Memories of Nottinghamshire project the right to make available the content of the recorded interview in the following ways:

- use in publications, including print, audio or video cassettes or CD-ROMs
- publication worldwide on the Internet
- public performance, lectures or talks
- public reference purposes in libraries, museums & record offices
- use on radio or television
- use in schools, universities, colleges and other educational establishments, including use in a thesis, dissertation or similar research

Do you want your name to be disclosed? YES/NO

Signed:

Print name:

Date:

Address (including postcode):

Name of interviewer(s)/recordist(s):

Brief details of deposited material (continued on a separate sheet if necessary):

Note that person(s) transcribing the interview own the copyright to the transcript. This is in addition to the interviewee's rights to the words themselves (which should have been assigned using a consent form) and to the rights in the recording (owned, unless otherwise assigned, by the person who made the recording *or* the person or organisation who paid for the tapes etc on which the recording was made). Preferably transcriber(s) should assign copyright or, at the very least, make provision for copyright to be clearly assigned in the event of their death.

Family 'lore'

As already noted, oral history interviews can include passed down recollections of more personal events that can be thought of as 'family folklore'. However there is more to family 'lore' than such narratives. Indeed, often such tales are rarely told in their entirety but alluded to with a 'catch phrase' that means little to anyone else. Like nicknames and 'in' jokes, these sort of remarks simultaneously define who is part of the family (i.e. 'in the know') and bond the members of the family together. They are among the most interesting – and easily lost – aspects of any family's history.

For example, my mother and her mother-in-law could be reduced to fits of giggles by someone interrupting an appropriate conversation with 'You know where the Electricity Showrooms is… '. Anyone in that part of my family would also know exactly what was meant by 'Don't do an Aunt Beth…'.. Other examples of family lore include remarks such as 'Oh, remember the time at Andrew's wedding… ' which are never expanded on because everyone in the family recalls all too well what happened then.

Good examples of family lore and 'customary practices' can usually be found whenever the family gets together for fairly ritual events such as birthdays, Christmas, weddings, christenings and funerals. Most families do something a 'bit different' at such events. As an example of family customary practice, my mother's family (from rural Leicestershire) always had pork pie and toast for breakfast on Christmas Day. This was considered very odd by my father, who had grown up in the city of Leicester. The 'ritual' was adapted in later years by incorporating my mother's liking for Bucks Fizz. I suspect that few other families would even consider enjoying Bucks Fizz, pork pie and toast while opening their presents!

Weddings are especially interesting because here two families need to exchange the distinctive 'lore' that bonds each of the families together so that there is a sense of shared identity between the two sets of in-laws. So at a family wedding reception look out for the aunts from one family getting together with the aunts of the other family (and, all too often it is the aunts that spontaneously feel the need to share such family lore) and, after a few small sherries, explaining how a person acquired their rather scurrilous nickname, or exactly what did happen at Andrew's wedding (although you will be need to be part of the family for much longer before you are likely to know what Aunt Beth got up to…).

Nicknames

Nicknames used within the family or village are a valuable insight into the human nature of communities. In some families, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, baptismal names were rarely used and people known to their family and friends by entirely different names.

For example my maternal grandmother, born in 1904, has 'Sarah' as her first name on her birth certificate. However her father had just helped give birth to a calf while she was being born and both calf and daughter were always referred to as 'Dot'. In adult life she introduced herself as 'Dorothy'. Only in her 80s, when she had outlived most of her family and friends and went to live about twenty miles away did she decide to introduce herself as 'Sarah'.

While nicknames do not always get written down, they are an important aspect of family and local life and should be recorded whenever encountered. If the reference to the person is only a passing one, nicknames can be included as either 'Sarah "Dorothy or Dot" Dallaston' or 'Sarah ("Dorothy" or "Dot") Dallaston'.

From ancestor worship to 'real lives'

Such family lore and customs reveal that there is much more to a family than 'Biblical' lists of who begat who. While family trees are the backbone of family history research, unless fleshed out they are little more than ancestor worship, and only the start of the research needed for worthwhile writing and publication. Most certainly a family tree is not the end result of research – the lives of the people need to be developed into a story-like narrative which is easily digested by the readers and, so far is possible, makes entertaining reading.

Despite all the effort needed to track down the necessary information, families are not simply about names, births, marriages and deaths. These are landmarks in lives that are lived in communities, by people who have occupations or businesses, and who – if successful – will own and transfer property. Any one family interacts with any number of other families. Some people will have led lives that had a notable influence – for good or otherwise – on other peoples' lives.

Just as local history research needs to be developed so that it tells the story of the people rather than simply the place, so too the bare facts of family history research need to developed into brief accounts of families and their communities who are living – typically or otherwise – in the social milieu of their time. The emphasis should not be on individuals but on the *interactions* between individuals.

Look for contrasts within families. In *Glad for God* by John Hamilton (Heart of Albion 2003) the author compares the branch of the Bousfield family that stayed put in Nottinghamshire with the branch that moved down to Bedfordshire. The Nottinghamshire Bousfields remained with the Church of England and several of them ran local pubs. The Bedfordshire branch converted to Methodism and, in sharp contrast, became leading pioneers of the nineteenth century temperance movement.

By putting these developments into the social and political context, locally and nationally, the contrasts in this one family became a microcosm of changing attitudes in England at that time.

Follow up anyone who is notable – or achieves notoriety! The Bedfordshire Bousfields included an important inventor of agricultural equipment. By tracing patents and the reviews of his new equipment in the trade press of the time, the author was able to write the first account of this man's previously overlooked achievements. Although starting out as fairly straightforward, albeit very thorough, family history research, the author achieved an account of much wider relevance and interest.

Gazetteers and guide books

Some types of local history books read – in whole or in part – as gazetteers, for example guide books which list villages in alphabetical order. The following remarks also apply to information about places which can be visited in the course of a walk, cycle ride or car tour. The main way such gazetteers and guides are used means they are read 'piecemeal' rather than from cover to cover. Aim for a standardised sequence of information rather than any attempt at 'literary variation'. Information which is needed most quickly – such as directions – should be at the start or end of the section, and perhaps typeset with a distinctive font or layout.

For example, a guide book to prehistoric monuments could have the following sequence (although not all categories of information may be available for every monument described):

- Name
- Parish
- OS 1: 50,000 sheet number and 6 or 8 figure grid reference
- Directions from nearest road
- Advice on access (e.g. permission must be obtained from nearby farm; footpath exceptionally muddy in wet weather)
- Type of archaeological monument (e.g. stone circle; hill fort; burial chamber; burial mound) and approximate date
- What can be seen (perhaps augmented by a sketch map, photograph or drawing)
- Any important lost or buried archaeological information
- Nearby archaeological sites relevant to the appreciation of this monument
- Summary of earliest archaeological investigations

- Any folklore or popular interpretations (or misunderstandings!) of the monument
- Current archaeological interpretation
- Whether or not any finds are in local museums (if important artefacts from the site are in museums then photographs or drawings are especially helpful)
- Bibliography of published archaeological information about this monument (unless clearly listed in an appendix)
- Any additional information helpful to the visitor (e.g. nearest refreshments or toilets)

This is probably a greater variety of information than encountered in most other types of guidebooks but hopefully provides a few clues for other subjects.

Old photographs

Be careful about planning books based mostly on old photographs. Considerable skill and some experience is essential to avoid poor-looking reproduction (see Chapter 4). Above all, the limited space devoted to text – usually just captions and a short introduction – means that the writing has to be exceptionally 'crisp' to avoid being merely pedestrian.

The skill is to write a caption that goes beyond stating the 'who, what, where and when' necessary to appreciate the photograph. The aim is to subtly and concisely 'tell a story' about the event or people depicted, and to make this part of a wider understanding of the locality – although some photographs will lend themselves to such narrative captions more easily than others. (See page 98 for more on writing captions.)

Transcribing documents

A different type of primary research may involve the preparation of transcriptions or translations of old documents. R.F. Hunnisett has provided detailed help in *Editing Records for Publication, Archives and the User* No.4 (1977).

There are some key issues which apply even when short extracts are being transcribed:

- Reproduce the text as accurately as possible.
- Do not add or omit without clear editorial marks.
- The heading should state where the document is stored and the repository's document reference.

- Abbreviations which are unambiguous should be expanded in square brackets.
- Abbreviations which are doubtful should be left unexpanded and with an apostrophe ' to shown the abbreviation.
- Alternatively, expand the abbreviation in a square bracket but end the expansion with a question mark '?'
- *Either* retain *all* original spelling, punctuation, paragraphing and capital letters, however inconsistent, *or* modernise all spelling, punctuation and capitals.
- Figures and numerals should be as the original i.e. Roman, Arabic or mixed.
- Rubrics and other headings should be underlined.
- If there have been alterations and the original version is legible, provide this in a footnote.
- Gaps, tears and illegible sections should be indicated thus: […]
- Recurring phrases may be contracted (e.g. TRE for *Tempore Regis Edwardi* [i.e. early 1066] in Domesday surveys)
- To denote mistakes in the original thus: [sic]

Where and what to write about

The tendency of local history to be based on a specific parish dates back to the origins of local history research, when it was typically the local clergyman who took an interest in the parish records and recorded the recollections of his parishioners.

In some ways the parish may be too big a unit for a local history study as even a small village will yield endless sources of material for local history. The researcher may need to focus on specific aspects of the history rather than attempt to find out 'everything'.

Too many 'village history' publications are excessively parochial, as if the events described are entirely self-contained. However, no community exists in isolation so local events should be linked to relevant regional and national events. For instance, churchwardens do not remove screens and altars in the sixteenth century entirely of their own accord – the Reformation led to various mandatory laws. Workhouses do not appear in the early eighteenth century through local whim – they are a result of national legislation. Likewise if the church was rebuilt in the mid-nineteenth century it was almost certainly conforming to the Gothic Revival fashion which had started in the 1840s. Events at the local level fall into two broad classes – they either conform

to regional or national trends, or they are in some way deviant. The writer should indicate where local events are normal in a wider context – or draw attention to the untypical local situation.

Local history is normally seen as the history of a place – probably a village, perhaps a town, or specific aspects of a larger settlement. However, one unusual research project involved the history of a road *between* towns, drawing upon old photographs, the history of inns, important houses and factories along the way. This particular project also revealed a surprising amount of folklore – especially previously unrecorded ghost stories.

Other approaches may involve the study of a specific subject (such as holy wells, church monuments, wind or water mills, framework knitting, etc.) on a regional basis. There may be practical reasons for limiting a project to a specific county. However sometimes there is much similarity between adjoining counties, especially when the county boundary is a river valley. In such instances a topographically-defined scope may be more suitable than one defined by the more arbitrary administrative boundaries – so the 'water mills of the Avon' may make more sense than a study restricted to one of counties through which the Avon flows, especially when the river forms a county boundary.

In a few instances a county boundary defines a significant contrast, as where the Roman Watling Street forms the county boundary between Leicestershire (originally part of the Danelaw and considered part of the East Midlands) and Warwickshire (not part of the Danelaw and regarded as part of the West Midlands). The accent changes markedly within a few parishes and comparative studies have revealed that inter-marriage between adjoining Leicestershire parishes was higher than between adjoining parishes that straddle Watling Street. Look out for similarly significant contrasts elsewhere.

Sometimes the survival of documents enables aspects of one place's history to be described in unusual detail. This may lend itself to regional comparisons between places with a common link. Academic historians are rather fond of such comparative studies but this does not mean that such studies need to be dry and dusty.

Despite the tendency for local history to be about geographically-defined areas, always bear in mind history is about *people,* not just places. Make sure the convenience of limiting a study to a specific village, town or county does not diminish the opportunities for bringing the topic to life.

Non-documentary sources

The conventional distinction between historians and archaeologists is that the latter are 'prehistorians', dealing with preliterate societies. But this distinction is now bunkum – much archaeological investigation has been directed at Roman and medieval remains, where documentary evidence may be available to help interpret the artefacts. And with the increasing interest in post-medieval and industrial archaeology, copious records may survive. For example, most episodes of *Time Team*

confirm that at least some documentary evidence is available to help the interpretation of remains that are up to 1,000 years old.

Apart from archaeology there are other important aspects of local history that are best thought of as non-documentary. Among these are buildings (which might be thought of as 'standing archaeology'), natural landmarks, and every aspect of the 'countryside'. In my more flippant moments I refer to these as 'historical sources you can go out and kick'. Collectively they can be referred to as 'landscape archaeology', a term invented in the 1950s by its pioneer W.G. Hoskins.

In an attempt to understand the historical records about 'lost' medieval field villages, Hoskins did something decidedly heretical for an historian in the 1950s – he put down his old documents, put on a pair of comfortable boots, and went out to look at the present day fields and lanes in Leicestershire which overlaid the abandoned medieval villages he was reading about. And the results were far more exciting than he had expected. To his expert eye the modern landscape preserved evidence of not just the immediately previous field systems but, at least in some places, evidence for a whole sequence of changes. Ancient boundaries, field systems, and the 'humps and bumps' of long-since abandoned medieval houses could all be discerned if you knew where to look.

The publication of Maurice Beresford's book *The Lost Villages of England* in 1954 and Hoskins' book *The Making of the English Landscape* in 1955 alerted both specialists and the public to this exciting new concept of 'landscape archaeology'. Map-like aerial photographs of much of England taken by the RAF in the late 1940s, plus others taken specially, provided a novel and seductive way of experiencing these new approaches to past landscapes.

Hoskins famously observed that in the English landscape everything is much older than we think it is, as (apart from the field boundaries created during eighteenth century enclosures) much else dates back to the medieval era, in most cases to the formation of nucleated settlements and their associated 'great field' systems in the ninth or tenth centuries. About twenty years later further research revealed that in some places aspects of the landscape were much older than even Hoskins thought, as Iron Age and even Bronze Age boundaries and field systems seem to have persisted for over 2,000 years.

By the mid-1980s landscape archaeology had moved on and become concerned with physical evidence for changes in population, climate, land use, the technology of farming, settlement patterns, and the organisation of space. This approach was given the text book treatment by Michael Aston (later to don stripey jumpers and become the kingpin of *Time Team*) in his book *Interpreting the Landscape* (Batsford 1985). However such sophisticated analysis was achieved at the expense of effectively depopulating the landscape – there was no attempt to see the land through the eyes of the people who once lived there, still less about how social practices and customs influenced the use of the land or brought about changes. Local historians attempting to build on the insights of specialist landscape archaeologists need to address this academic weakness.

There are several useful books on landscape archaeology. Christopher Taylor brought Hoskins' *The Making of the English Landscape* up to date with a heavily annotated edition (Hodder and Stoughton 1988). The recent *Historic Landscape Analysis: Deciphering the countryside* by Stephen Rippon (Council for British Archaeology 2004) offers practical advice. For villages in the East Midlands and East Anglia Tom Williamson's *Shaping Medieval Landscapes: Settlement, society, environment* (Windgather Press 2003) offers a novel and persuasive argument for the formation of nucleated villages in the Anglo-Saxon era.

Must time dictate?

Conventional local history tells its tale through chronological ordering. The starting points vary but usually there is a superficial account of any archaeological finds, probably a translation of the entry in Domesday (although all-too-rarely is there any discussion of how this fits in with regional trends), a brief mention of the origin of the place-name (but rarely any suggestion of what broader significance this may have), transcriptions (often of dubious accuracy) of medieval and early modern documents, followed by a fits-and-starts coverage of the eighteenth century onwards depending on the availability of well-researched documentary sources, and perhaps concluding with recollections from people born about seventy years ago, together with a selection of old photographs. Non-documentary sources of information, such as topography and landscape archaeology, may sometimes be fitted into their respective time slots, together with detailed descriptions of historic buildings.

But is this really presenting the history of the place as above all a settlement of human families? The availability of detailed information for one period might mean that a thorough analysis and synthesis of just that part of the overall sequence would be far more worthwhile. This is especially true of, say, the nineteenth century, where even the most humdrum community will be documented in numerous ways.

In *Writing Local History* David Dymond (Phillimore, 2nd edn 1988) quotes a local historian in a commonly-encountered situation: 'It seemed such a pity to have all these bits and pieces lying about, so I decided to put them in chronological order.' Such an uncreative approach is surely the least satisfying solution to the circumstances! Each local history project will require its own approach. Convention is not necessarily the best guide.

The 'inevitable' march of progress

Far too often the chronological account builds up into a remorseless march of progress – the transport gets better, the schools get better, the population gets larger, local administration is reformed, piped water arrives, and so on and so on. Such 'triumphalist' accounts should ring loud alarm bells. 'Progress' is something which is only seen in retrospect, and usually only by ignoring a great many 'inconvenient' inconsistencies. Rather than fall for this propaganda – and it is propaganda – the local historian should assess the evidence as impartially as possible. For example, just how easily was Victorian prosperity achieved? Were there setbacks? How homogenous

was nineteenth century society – was prosperity really shared by all, or just enjoyed most by those who left the records?

Everyone has heard the expression 'History is written by the victors'. It is equally true for local history. Records and historical accounts are usually written from the 'top down'. This means the attitudes of major landowners take precedence over the 'common people' – who usually left less in the way of written records, and whose names more often than not enter historical accounts only when they transgress the norms of the period and appear before the judiciary. Likewise the supremacist stance of the Church of England subtly or otherwise colours perceptions of the 'dissenting' denominations – note for a start the ideologically biased terminology of 'dissent'.

Such 'top down' bias is especially noticeable with the eighteenth and nineteenth century Enclosure Awards. The typical historical accounts of this era are written from the perspective of the larger landowners who usually benefited from these awards. But what happened to the people who lost commoners' rights and had to adapt to a new economic regime based on wage labour? Census data shows that most villages grew after parliamentary enclosure awards, suggesting that the requirements for wage labour were greater. But Poor Law records may offer conflicting evidence about the prosperity of these labourers. Some villages were more open than others to growth, usually when the land was mostly held by tenant farmers rather than by a resident landowner. Yet other villages also developed at this time in other ways – for example, becoming centres for framework knitting or lace-making. How does the settlement or region you are studying fit into these general trends? Was 'progress' that easily recognised at the time, or by all people?

Key players in the heritage industry, such as The National Trust, have long beguiled us with the illusion of stately homes and country houses that magically sustained themselves without human intervention. The reality – the luxury of a few was often sustained by near-slavery for a great many servants – has been conveniently excluded from the ideologically-loaded heritage myth that presents the past as a romantic idyll. While this is an extreme example, local historians should remain wary about accepting other deeply-rooted myths about British history that have been developed over the last hundred-or-so years.

When to start writing?

The simple answer is: sooner rather than later. Too many local historians enjoy researching ever-deeper into their subject but then fail to write up their efforts for the benefit of others. Claiming that one has not finished the research is no excuse – no subject can be fully researched, and no research remains complete or definitive for long. Frankly, if you are not willing to rise to the challenges of writing up your research for the benefit of other people, all the time spent researching might as well have been spent watching TV or talking down at the pub.

After a time sufficient information will have been obtained on a specific aspect which enables the basic interpretation to be made confidently. Further details may well emerge but these will not cause a fundamental revision. This is the time to begin

writing up that aspect. Leave it longer and the quantity of 'secondary detail' will make it more difficult to get to grips with the main analysis.

Any item of local history writing longer than an essay can be broken into fairly self-contained sections. The writing of one section can proceed while another section still awaits further research.

With family history research writing drafts as you go is fairly essential. Tracing of names, dates and other 'primary' information usually concentrates on a specific branch of the family. The nitty gritty detail and the unresolved ambiguities may be forgotten after you have moved onto another chunk of research. Rather than leaving a rather messy set of notes and putting off the challenges of linking it all together, put together a reasonable draft *before* you move on to the excitement of generating yet more notes. Writing such a draft inevitably shows where more research might be needed. At this stage you may not know where to look for the necessary information or you may be unable to visit geographically-remote archives. Just leave suitable notes in the text while putting together a narrative that links together what you have discovered.

There is a maxim that says that all stories have a beginning, a middle and an end. However this is especially unhelpful for family history, where the beginning is lost in the mists of time, and the end has yet to come. The narrative aspect of family history needs to be less about the family 'as a whole' than the lives of the people – and these tales most certainly have apparent beginnings, middles and ends, even if they span several generations.

If all else fails begin by dealing with topics of regional or national importance, and introduce your ancestors into the 'bigger story'. So if you are having difficulty finding out details of your seventeenth century predecessors, summarise any previously-published historical accounts of the Civil War and Commonwealth era for the areas where they lived, and put your relatives' lives into this context.

Put concisely, if the foreground is rather devoid of detail, make the background more interesting. So, even if you have not traced all the individuals in the early seventeenth century, the geographical occurrence of a surname is probably easier to establish and this can be part of the story.

If you have a parallel interest in other aspects of history – say costume or traditional farming practices – then include appropriate details as background to your predecessors' lives.

Sometimes the sheer difficulties – and, less rarely, the satisfactions – of a particular episode of family history research will itself be a tale worth telling. This is an approach that needs to be handled carefully – concentrate only on the main aspects and avoid mentioning every minor detail. Still less keep harping on about how difficult it was – 'show don't tell' the reader the problems and allow them to infer your feelings at the time. Keep the reader wondering what happens next. If one particular anecdote starts rambling on then intervene a 'sub plot' before coming back to the original previous aspect. If appropriate make one story the 'framing story' inside

which other narratives are interwoven. The 'How I did it' approach is difficult to pull off but can work well if there is a strong sense of suspense and plenty of verbal illustrations.

'I've not finished the research' is never an excuse

Putting off starting to write up because you think the research is not yet finished is never an excuse. No research is ever finished and with both local and family history the more information you collect then the more questions arise. Family history research is especially prone to being open-ended. However there is always a point at which enough is known about a topic to make a reasonable interpretation. This is the time to put the notes into a suitable order and begin to draw together your overview. Often the act of writing everything out will reveal critical gaps or at the very least sources that need to be checked or rechecked. This may also reveal problems with keeping track of the exact details of your sources – something that will be easier to correct earlier than later.

Always start to write up one project, even it means leaving a few gaps, before you move on to another project. If you find working through one folder of notes to prepare an article rather intimidating then how are you going to feel when you have a whole pile of folders of notes? Inexperience and lack of confidence with writing is certainly not helped by also having to deal with too much material. And, unless you have found a way of reversing the effects of human ageing, then the longer you put off writing up the less likely you are to start. Local and family historians can all make long lists of people those work was never written up and therefore to all intents and purposes lost when they became infirm or died.

By starting to write up sooner rather than later you are also gaining practice at the skills of putting information into order. This is not a skill that any of us are born with and, like any other skill, it only 'comes naturally' (if it ever does!) after considerable practice. However, the more you practice the easier it becomes.

There are plenty of opportunities to publish short articles. Local history magazines will be keen to include quite specialist and specific topics if they are written in an appropriate style. Aim to contribute one such article each year. With family history write up recent research as a 'newsletter' to be circulated to family members with their Christmas cards. Keep to a consistent design and layout so these accumulate into an attractive set of documents.

If all else fails

If you really cannot psyche yourself up for writing up an article – and we have all been there, for whatever reasons – then there is something else that you should do. Simply put all your notes into a 'time line'. This is especially helpful for family history where the commonest source of information is a list of names, dates of birth, marriage and death, etc.

By putting everyone's dates onto chronological sequence the bare bones of a story are already showing through:

1743 John Brown (II) baptised St Mary's church, Littlethorp

1745 Elizabeth Golightly born Littletown

1758 or 1759 John Brown (probable father of John Brown (II)) buried Littlethorp

1767 John Brown (II) marries Eliz. Golightly Littletown Baptist chapel

1789 John Brown (III) born Littletown

1792 Jane Brown born Littletown

1793 John Brown (III) buried Littletown Baptist chapel

1819 Thomas Hodgkinson named as licensee of The Three Crowns, High Street, Bigtown.

1821 Jane Brown marries Thomas Hodgkinson, SS Peter and Paul church, Bigtown

1821 John Hodgkinson baptised, SS Peter and Paul church, Bigtown

In practice you will probably have more exact dates for marriages, baptisms and deaths. You should also keep details of the sources for information with each entry. You may also want to add key regional and national events. Perhaps a spate of deaths coincides with an especially harsh winter, or poor harvests. Clearly if you know that any of the men have been killed or injured in a battle then you need to add pertinent details of the war to your time line.

It sounds rather tedious but this is an excellent way of structuring your information and offers benefits out of proportion to the effort needed to prepare the timeline.

This timeline may be sufficient to inspire you to write up *parts* of the family history as a specific story about certain people and events. Bear in mind that compiling details is not the same as writing – the latter needs a narrative, a 'story line', which provides a structure for all the 'facts'. And do not be tempted to include somewhat irrelevant information just because you happened to have tracked it down (even if considerable blood, sweat and tears were expended tracking it down – save that for another story!)

Beware that timelines are deceptive because what people do *not* do is also significant. Are there any reasons why Edna never married and remained a spinster? Why did George stay on the farm when both his brothers went off to the trenches in 1915? Likewise why did Mary stay in Dublin when her mother and sisters went to Liverpool? If one person never appears before the magistrates for being drunk and disorderly whereas known associates or relatives of his do, then this is interesting. Is there any suggestion that he had joined the Methodists?

If you have, or plan to create, a Web site for your family history (see Chapter 8) then such a timeline would be an excellent 'work in progress' to share with other

researchers. The advantages of Web pages is that any references to a specific individual in the timeline could 'hyperlink' to a page specifically about that person, and vice versa; the same applies to places. You could also provide links to other peoples' Web sites; for example if one of your ancestors was killed in the Battle of Waterloo then rather than provide details of Wellington's campaign on your site you could link to appropriate military history sites.

Invent nicknames

With family histories first names may not be sufficiently unique, as with dynasties whose oldest sons are all called Thomas or John. The answer here is to nickname them. At an early stage of research this may have to be done as Thomas (1815–49), Thomas (1845–93), and so forth. At a later stage (but only when you have identified all the possible 'Thomases' etc) you might want to refer to them as Thomas (I), Thomas (II), etc. However this is rather dehumanising. Much better to call them 'Thomas the alehouse keeper', 'Thomas the orphan' (making it clear that he is the same as 'Thomas the cobbler' later in the narrative…) and so on.

People and places

If your ancestors grew up in a fairly small community then the more you find out about the people, the more you will be finding out about the places where they lived. If possible share notes with relevant local historians, or deliberately find out as much about the places' history as you sensibly can. This may well lead to an article which is as much about local history as it is about family history, especially if your ancestors were key members of the community, or inter-married in such a way that many of the inhabitants were relatives of your ancestors.

Articles for local history periodicals

Most of this book assumes that you will be both writing and publishing your research. However many researchers begin by writing articles to be published in relevant local history publications. You will probably be familiar with these publications as resources for your own researches. They broadly fall into four categories:

- 'heavyweight' transactions which normally record the history and archaeology of a county;
- lighter weight annual (or, exceptionally, more frequent) periodicals relating to a county or major city; these usually have the title along the lines of *Anyshire Historian*;
- quarterly or monthly newsletters, with short 'newsy' information;
- annual village-based or interest-based periodicals, again often called something like the *Newton Historian*.

The editors of transactions usually publish articles that are 'heavy' in both their content and style of writing. The other types of publication are usually edited by

people who realise that a more lively style of writing is required, and are often happy to consider articles on quite narrow topics if they are well-researched and competently written. Such articles usually need to be under 3,000 words (and rarely over 5,000). This means they are an excellent way of sharing 'interim results' of larger projects, with the benefit that publication may draw other people's attention to your (perhaps rather specialist) interests, enabling them to share any relevant research with you.

Be sure to include key references to sources but, except for academic-style journals, aim to keep bibliographical details 'light'. Often a list of sources at the end is quite sufficient for articles, without many or any details in the text. Only with direct quotations do you need to provide clear details of the source.

When writing for a popular readership any technical terms (such as 'toft and croft', 'hearth tax', 'bastardy bond', etc) will usually need to be explained when first used; this is known as 'glossing' (from which the word 'glossary' derives).

So a sentence which originally read 'Thomas Hodgkinson's name appears on a bastardy bond of 1832, although this does not mean he is the father of Mary's child' could usefully be expanded to 'Thomas Hodgkinson's name appears on a bastardy bond of 1832. However as at least two bondsmen signed these documents (which ensured that a sum of money of between £40 to £50 was available to support the child until it reached about nine years of age) he is not necessarily the father of Mary's child.'

Never assume that all readers will be sufficiently familiar with all the terms you have learnt to bandy about comfortably. If someone already knows what the term means then they can happily skip on, the rest of the readers will be grateful for a reminder.

As a matter of interest, could you fairly exactly define 'toft and croft' or 'hearth tax' or have written the gloss about bastardy bonds? If, as I suspect, most readers will have only a vague idea of what these terms refer to and when they applied then the need for them to be glossed is self-apparent. There are many other terms that need glossing but I have picked on these three simply because I recently consulted several standard reference books on British history, local history handbooks and the like and none of these offered definitions of these terms. If I, with some background interest in such topics and well-stocked bookshelves, have difficulty pinning these terms down then I am sure most readers of popular articles will have greater difficulty. If, as I did with 'bastardy bond', you end up using a Web search engine to find a definition then you have to make an assessment of the source – not everything on the Web is necessarily well-researched! With luck you will find several definitions that say more or less the same thing.

All editors are happy to discuss ideas for articles and offer advice. Indeed most would much prefer to discuss an idea at the early stages rather than have to deal with something sent in out of the blue. Editors may have to take into consideration details which you will not be aware of, and normally have more experience of writing than most novice writers, so do not be surprised – still less offended – if there are requests

for changes. All editors will fine tune references and typographical details to conform to the 'house style' of the publication.

Writing articles will build up your confidence sufficiently to tackle more substantial accounts of your research. Understandably, the very thought of writing a book of 30,000 to 60,000 words seems intimidating to anyone who has never written a book before (and, from personal experience, it only seems a little less challenging after writing several such books!). As the old Chinese maxim says, 'Every journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step', so breaking a major writing project down into article-sized 'steps' is an excellent way to avoid being intimidated by the overall aim.

The same is true not just for the written part but for building up experience with dealing with illustrations – photographs, maps, charts, etc. – and, where necessary, obtaining permissions for reproduction (see pages 56 to 61).

Writing articles has another advantage as it means that research is put down on paper before you with too much material to easily deal with (a well-known problem already mentioned in the previous section).

And, while this might seem a rather negative way of thinking, by working on articles you will learn from mistakes – such as not keeping sufficient details of sources – before the damage becomes too great.

There is another reason for writing articles and that is to promote books; this is discussed further on page 237.

The three elements of history

There is no such thing as ‘truth’ which can be discovered by ever-more exacting research. All historians evaluate their sources, reject those considered dubious or irrelevant, emphasise those which enhance their interpretation, and (subtly or otherwise) cajole the reader into sharing their views. Put another way, not all facts are equal. No two writers, no matter how esteemed, will interpret the same topic in exactly the same way.

Although no historian can ever reveal the 'truth' about the past, there is most certainly a correct approach to writing about the past. Three main elements should always be present:

> **Narrative** – the progression of circumstances with the emphasis on ‘what happens next’ and on ‘what changed’.
>
> **Description –** ‘what happened at a particular time’.
>
> **Analysis** – ‘why this happened or that changed’ and how events are connected with other local, regional or national activities. At times ‘comparison’ may be more relevant than ‘analysis’.

Unfortunately local history publications all-too-often give copious descriptions, a little narrative, and maybe some analysis tacked on as an after-thought. This is neither competent writing nor rewarding reading. All three elements must be woven together. Description and explanation should be almost simultaneous. Details and broader viewpoints should be frequently interspersed. Description and opinions should be balanced.

Remember also that while dates are important to many aspects of history they are most certainly not the only aspect of history that is important. Dates tell us *when* something happened but do not, of themselves, say *why* they happened, still less why *you* think events happened as they did.

Writing history is essentially a way of creating narratives that put 'what happened at a particular time' into a wider context. At the same time, try to not simply 'tell' your readers, but 'show' them.

In recent years academic historians have realised that 'story telling' is an appealing way to present even the most intellectual ideas. Perhaps this 'historical storytelling' should not be a surprise as the main sources for academic historians have always been literary sources (such as letters and journalism) and judicial records (such as witness's statements), all of which are strongly narrative.

Only with much practice will the three elements of good local history writing come together naturally. Fortunately word processors readily allow ideas to be elaborated, cut about and frequently redrafted. There is no excuse for not taking full advantage of this benefit of computers!

Preparing for a first draft

When commencing work on a specific section or topic the first stage is to compile all relevant facts and data into some semblance of order. This may involve information being exported from databases, various sections of text being cut-and-pasted from word processor files, all interspersed with brief notes, perhaps citing sources or queries.

At this stage *actively* keep track of the *sources* of every item of information (see also page 44). Setting up a new database or document for this specific purpose may help keep bibliographical data safe and secure. While copying-and-pasting changes the details of sources can be lost or confused all too easily. And if you think you're going to remember exactly what came from where in a few months' time then you need to take a serious reality check, or at least be willing to put in vast amounts of effort later to re-establish and check the sources.

The importance of a synopsis

With all this fresh in your mind establish a synopsis listing the most important topics. More experienced writers may prefer this synopsis to be quite concise, but others will want to break topics down further, perhaps as far as paragraph themes. In attempting to set out this linear progression gaps or contradictions may emerge. This is quite

normal. At worst considerably more research may be needed, at best it will bring into focus the inherent ambiguity of the situation.

While this book is about self-publishing, bear in mind one of the reasons why commissioning editors at 'real' publishers insist on seeing a detailed synopsis – it shows the author has thought in sufficient detail about the scope of the book to have avoided or resolved any problems with the progression of ideas. As most people reading this book will probably have less experience of writing than authors submitting to 'real' publishers they will benefit even more from the time needed to think through ideas in sufficient detail to prepare a synopsis. This is a lesson that I have learnt the hard way – believe me, major restructuring of a book halfway through the first draft is seriously dispiriting!

So, don't say I didn't warn you – adopt the stance of 'synopses are too much trouble' or 'I'm not the sort of writer who needs a synopsis' only if you are willing to risk all the time and trouble it will take to dig yourself out of whatever unexpected pitfalls arise while writing the book.

The first draft

When you have enough information on a specific aspect to make a confident interpretation there is nothing to do now except 'get stuck in'. No more procrastination or putting it off until tomorrow!

Nowadays writing skills cover a broad spectrum. Sadly, even those who have been through higher education rarely have the ability to write clearly and grammatically. The lucid style of historians such as W.G. Hoskins seems to belong to a lost era. However, this is no reason not to start writing, even if you consider your writing skills to be in need of considerable polish – there will be plenty of opportunities to put a shine on things later.

Local history is about ordinary people and everyday life, and therefore many readers will also be 'ordinary people' rather than history specialists. Those who write local history should be particularly concerned that their writing is both clear and stimulating.

The key thing to remember is that you are trying to inform and entertain the reader. Keep the ideas moving forward. Write as if some typical readers are sitting reading your work, or they are across the desk from you and you are reading it aloud to them. Your style will become warmer and more conversational. Above all, get quickly to the point – and keep to the point!

At this stage resist all temptations to get bogged down with niceties of style or fine detail. Leave notes to yourself to check out minor facts or make specific additions (use the 'highlighter' tool in your word processor to make these notes stand out). Unless you need to check continuity of an argument, do not keep stopping to read what you have just typed.

After a while a particular theme will have been concluded so take a break. However, come back as soon as possible (certainly the next day) otherwise continuity will be lost. 'Little but often' is far preferable to intensive but isolated episodes of writing.

Keep asking some basic questions:

- Who and what is this information for?
- Where and when do the readers need to know it?
- Are you informing, persuading, or both?

Keep your readers in mind. Are they likely to be young or old (or both)? What might they already know about the subject?

All local history writing needs to inform and engage the reader's imagination. Most local history writing – anything that will be read for pleasure rather than simply as part of wider research – needs to be entertaining. Unfortunately these simple and obvious objectives are rarely achieved by local history writers.

Writing for on-screen reading

How you write depends to a large extent on the expected readers and to some extent on the way it will be published. There are number of key differences between writing for paper publications and for electronic publications such as Web sites. Paper publications must be structured in a 'linear' way, where different ideas follow successively in different chapters, and ideas are explored successively.

In contrast Web sites allow (indeed require) ideas to cross-refer using hyperlinks, which means that readers will not have the same 'linear' experience of the information as with a book and can explore the information in many different ways.

Also Web sites need to use more illustrations, and can incorporate moving images, animations and sound in a way not possible with printed publications.

Quite often electronic publications will contain more information than even a large book, and can be 'open ended', as revisions and updates can easily be made, and Web sites may even encourage feedback from visitors.

When writing for Web sites remember that on-screen reading is different to using books. Most people 'skim' through text and only stop to read fairly short sections that grab their attention. Be sure to use much shorter paragraphs than are typical for books. Also provide plenty of subheadings and other clues as to what the text is about. Making sure the opening sentence of a paragraph gives a good idea of what the rest of the paragraph is about is also beneficial.

Style

Unless you are an experienced writer then the first draft or two should be concerned with getting the 'flow' of ideas into a sequence which works. Unfortunately,

INTRODUCTORY

ELEMENTARY RULES OF USAGE

- Form the possessive singular of nouns with 's
- In a series of three or more terms with a single conjunction, use a comma after each term except the last
- Enclose parenthetic expressions between commas
- Place a comma before 'and' or 'but' introducing an independent clause
- Do not join independent clauses by a comma
- Do not break sentences in two
- A participial phrase at the beginning of a sentence must refer to the grammatical subject
- Divide words at line-ends, in accordance with their formation and pronunciation

ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

- Make the paragraph the unit of composition: one paragraph to each topic
- As a rule, begin each paragraph with a topic sentence; end it in conformity with the beginning
- Use the active voice
- Put statements in positive form
- Omit needless words
- Avoid a succession of loose sentences
- Express co-ordinate ideas in similar form
- Keep related words together
- In summaries, keep to one tense
- Place the emphatic words of a sentence at the end

A FEW MATTERS OF FORM

WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS COMMONLY MISUSED

WORDS COMMONLY MISSPELLED

Above: *The contents list for William Strunk's book* Elements of Style.
The full text is available as free downloads from various Web sites.

inexperienced writers rarely realise that this is a long way from a final draft. Somewhere between the first and final drafts the details of 'style' need to be tackled. Do not be surprised if this requires substantial rewriting! None of us are born with the ability to write clearly. It is a skill that needs to be developed.

After you have completed the draft of a section come back to it some days – preferably weeks – later. Now is the time to start polishing up the writing style.

Writing style is as individual as dress sense. The trick is to avoid *inappropriate* style or looking daft. One of the long-standing writing style gurus is William Strunk. Entering his name into a Web search engine will lead to numerous online versions of his book *Elements of Style*. Overleaf is the contents list for Strunk's guide.

Two other Web sites are especially relevant. One is called the 'Perdue OWL' (http://owl.english.purdue.edu/writers/introduction.html) which has masses of on-line and off-line writing related resources, including a long list of further helpful links. The other is called 'Writing argumentative essays' (www.eslplanet.com/teachertools/argueweb/frntpage.htm). (These Web addresses are correct at the time of publication; if the sites move then try entering the name of the sites into a search engine.)

If you prefer the printed page to Web sites then track down the following books:

English for Journalists, Wynford Hicks (Routledge 1998)

Writing for Journalists, Winford Hicks, Sally Adams and Harriett Gilbert (Routledge 1999)

Building Arguments, Drew Hinderer (Wadsworth 1992)

Critical Thinking, William Hughes (Broadview 1992)

Critical Reasoning, Anne Thomson (Routledge 2nd edn 2002)

The next few sections make some specific suggestions for a 'makeover' of the first draft.

Involving the reader

Reduced to the most simple wording, a key piece of advice is simple: **Don't tell but show**. This means using 'action' verbs and nouns rather than 'impersonal' sentences. So *always* avoid such impersonal constructions along the lines of:

- It is said that…
- It was believed that…
- There is reason to suppose…
- There were thought to be…
- It seems that…
- It is possible that…

Where appropriate, use action verbs and nouns to put sight, smell and sound into the writing.

And, to provide an example of the maxim 'Don't tell but show', the next section is written in just such a manner. And, at the risk of being far too self-referential, this paragraph is an example of what the next section is trying to tell you…

Keeping the reader curious

The way journalists subtly keep readers' interest is to raise expectations for information about a specific topic. So, when a tabloid newspaper offers some attention-grabbing headline such as 'Newly wed wife has nookie with vicar', you can be sure that the first part of the article will contain more-or-less relevant facts, but the really interesting bit (for those who regard such revelations as interesting) will be at least half-way through, if not right at the end.

While local historians will rarely be dealing with extra-marital sex, the same sense of suspense and deferred satisfaction of curiosity can be used. Indeed it can be usefully combined with an opening paragraph that outlines the following section or chapter. So a section on the origins of a village could begin:

> The village of Longdale is first mentioned in the Domesday book of 1086. But it must have existed before this. Indeed the name itself probably predates the village as we think of it now.

This could be followed by a series of paragraphs discussing, firstly the Domesday evidence, then a summary of evidence (probably regional rather than specific to 'Longdale') for the nucleation of villages, leading on to a discussion of dating evidence for place-names in the region, and what types of land unit (and associated settlement patterns) would have been associated with such early place-names. Only then would the curiosity raised by the third sentence of the introduction have been satisfied – yet, all through what may be quite an involved discussion, the reader may have retained (if only subliminally) a sense of where it was all heading.

There are more direct ways of raising curiosity. These opening sentences could be reworded as one or more rhetorical questions:

> When was Longdale first mentioned in records? Did it exist before this? Could the name itself predate the village as we now think of it?

This still serves to outline the topics to be covered in the subsequent discussion and most certainly raises curiosity. However repeated use of such rhetorical questions ceases to work as an 'attention getter' and simply becomes an annoying mannerism. Far better to make a habit of raising curiosity with 'incomplete' statements that are 'completed' later, and save explicit questions for the 'big occasions' when you need to make sure the reader really is paying attention.

At the end of a chapter the summing up could provide a bridge to the next chapter by 'anticipating' some of the key points that will be explored next. So, for example:

> From all this evidence William Hastings was clearly thriving in the 1460s. He now needed to show off this increased status by fortifying his houses in Leicestershire, using what in the fifteenth century was the very latest in 'one-upmanship' materials. Unusually, detailed records for the construction of one of these have survived; the next chapter is devoted to this insight into one of the last medieval castles built in Britain.

Note all the uses of 'curiosity raisers', for example, the new high status building material is not named (it is brick) and the location of the building for which records have survived is not disclosed (it is Kirby Muxloe). Note also how information is subtly put into some sort of wider context – the houses were status symbols, the records are 'unusual', the castle was 'one of the last'. In just 70 words the reader has a sufficiently clear idea of why the next chapter is going to delve deeply into the minutiae of medieval building accounts and is curious to read on.

Structuring paragraphs

Each paragraph must deal with a single clearly-identifiable theme. If not, break into two or more shorter paragraphs, even if the result is a very short paragraph (as this one is!).

Make sure that there is a logical link to the paragraphs before and after. If not, think whether a linking sentence or paragraph is needed, or whether a subheading would work better. (Reread this section of this book and consciously think about how the paragraphs have been broken up, and where subheadings have been used.)

Bear in mind that the reader's attention is limited, and that people who spend a lot of time 'surfing' Web sites tend to skip read. The first and last sentences of a paragraph should contain the main or strongest ideas, just as the opening of each sentence should be well-founded. On the same basis the first and last paragraphs of each section and chapter should provide a clear basis for what is to come or analysis of what has been presented.

Eschew sesquipedalianism*

Each sentence *must* be as clear and concise as possible. Some authors use four words when one would do. Others use an exotic term when an everyday one would be clearer. They may think this displays erudition. Far from it. Instead, they are taunting their readers and revealing their incompetence in basic communication.

Some academics love to use – or, worse still, invent – long words. Amateur writers are often fooled into thinking that these give their writing more authority. Most certainly not! Unusual words and jargon are obstacles to effective communication and betray muddled thinking. Always eliminate them.

* If you really want to know, 'sesquipedalianism' is Latin for 'using words a foot-and-a-half long'.

However do not confuse jargon with technical terms such as ‘cost of living index’ or ‘mean household size’. These expressions (provided they are explained fully when first used) are acceptable where no other word or phrase will convey the specific concept.

Also watch out for innocent words being corrupted – ‘function’ and ‘situation’ are especially susceptible to being violated. 'Absolutely', 'accountability', 'committed to', 'embed', 'enhance', 'global', 'hopefully ' and 'robust' are among many other victims of repeated abuse.

Some words and phrases have meanings which are only loosely-defined, or where the meaning depends on the context. Examples include ‘the people’, ‘progress’, ‘the middle ages’ and ‘capitalism’, but there are plenty of other examples to watch out for. Either replace such phases with more exact terms, or include a 'tighter' definition when you first use them.

Keep things concise

Why 'commence' when you could simply 'start'? 'Accordingly' is far more cumbersome than 'so'. Words with Anglo-Saxon origins are easier than ones from French, while words derived from Latin are least easy for the reader. So 'turn' rather than 'revolve' and 'set up' instead of 'establish'.

Always eliminate any unnecessary clauses such as ‘It can be argued that… ’ or ‘It should go without saying that… ’ or 'It is true to say that… ' (to which my mental response is 'Which parts of what you have written are *not* true then?'). I've even come across writers who think they should tell us that 'It may or may not be true that… '. If you have a tendency to draft such out-and-out 'padding' and nonsense then make sure it gets eliminated at the first opportunity.

Sometimes you may feel the need to tell the reader 'It is important to understand that… ' or 'It is probably significant that… '. Such remarks can be completely eliminated on the basis of 'Why are you telling this if it is not important?'. If emphasis is needed it should be added not with a passive phrase but with just one 'active' word, such as 'Importantly… ', 'Significantly…', or 'Probably…'.

Avoid clichés like the plague

> At the end of the day they have all been done a million times before, and are getting a little tired. To be sure, I'll be as happy as a lark if they were few and far between. The bottom line is you can't see the forest for the trees when you're between a rock and a hard place – it's a can of worms, just one more bone of contention. Go back to the drawing board to get the best of both possible worlds and face the challenge to make continuous improvements a blessing in disguise. Mind boggling as this maybe, when it comes to a head such core values are a defining moment of the cutting edge. Even if you draw a blank with each and every example, the fact of the matter is that it is

> easier said than done in the foreseeable future to expect these to be few and far between. Whether or not this is food for thought or simply flogging a dead horse, forward looking people will fully diversify and give 110 percent to get the message across. Have I made myself perfectly clear?
>
> Hard on the heels on this head count of the holy grails at the heart of the matter there is a heated argument that, even if it grinds to a halt, hopefully – if you get my drift – it goes without saying that in terms of the final analysis the real issues that are the key to the problem need to be put in place. Last but not least, in the nick of time – and make no mistake about it – meaningful dialogue is the only way of meeting the challenge.
>
> To be sure, this means taking it to the next level. Walk the talk and welcome to the world of mumbo-jumbo. When all is said and done, seriously consider whether this serves a role or whether to start the ball rolling by taking on board viable alternatives.

I make that 69 clichés in three paragraphs, not forgetting the heading. (Whoops, there goes another one – make that two; which then makes a hat trick. Who's counting anyway? I can't keep up...).

None of these clichés help clear communication. They are corporate-speak 'fog' that betrays the muddled thinking of their perpetrators. If you are tempted by such fossilised phases then twist them round – remember, you heard it here worst: he who burns the candle at neither end will wait in pain for the light at the end of the puzzle.

Readability

What makes some writing easier to read than others? Paying attention to four related issues makes all writing easier to read:

- Avoid unnecessary long words (i.e. those with 3 or more syllables).
- Avoid sentences with several long words.
- Keep most sentences to 24 words or less (the *average* sentence length should not exceed 20 words).
- Vary sentence length.

Some word processing software (such as Word) includes options for 'readability index' tests. One of the best-known is called the 'Flesch Reading Ease', which is based on the average number of syllables per word and average number of words per sentence. The scores range from 0 to 100 and the higher the score the easier the document is to read. Aim for a score of at least 60 (*Reader's Digest* editors are said to aim for a score of 75 on this test) and make changes if you score under 40.

Other reading index tests present scores as equivalent to the reading ability in American school grades. The Gunning Fog Index is widely used in the publishing industry – make changes if you score over 6th grade.

Break up sentences when possible

Two types of sentence should usually be broken up:

- Where 'which' or 'who' are not followed by a restrictive clause then break into two sentences and substitute with 'this', 'these' or the appropriate personal pronoun.
- Where a conjunction ('and', 'but', 'or') is followed by a 'parenthetical expression' enclosed by commas. If splitting into two sentences will not work, then consider replacing the conjunction with a semi-colon.

Sentences beginning 'While', 'Whereas', 'Although', 'Where' are often long and complex. Two simpler sentences can usually be created, although the second may need to start with 'Therefore', 'Thus', or 'However'.

Constructions using 'both . . . and', 'neither . . . nor' are always clumsy and should be reworded.

Cut out all superfluous statements such as 'I do not know whether or not they are related'. Worst of all are phrases that read to the effect that 'This statement is either true or not.'

First person and objectivity

Avoid using 'I' too often. Never use 'we' to refer to the author (except where the work is really the result of a team effort).

Never use impersonal constructions ('It is said that . . .', 'It is believed . . .', etc. – see page 35) to give a false objectivity to the author's beliefs or opinions.

Passive sentences

Involving the reader also means minimising the use of so-called 'passive sentences'. These are sentences that make an object or idea into the improbable instigator of some action. We use them all the time in conversation – 'The table's been booked for 8 p.m.' rather than 'I have booked a table for 8 p.m.' but they create an unnecessary distance between the writer and reader if used frequently.

Such passive sentences are regarded as necessary for 'academic' writing, but you should minimise their use when writing for a more general readership. So rather than 'This topic has been explored already ... ' try 'I have explored already ... ' or, involving the reader even more explicitly, 'We have already explored... '.

Tips on tense

Use the simple past ('went', 'announced') when the sentence includes some reference, possibly indirect, to the time or date when the event took place.

Use the present perfect ('have gone', 'have announced') when there is no reference to date – but avoid repeated use of the present perfect. Use the past tense when reporting what people said at a particular time.

Use the present tense when making a generalisation or drawing a wider conclusion from the evidence that is relevant to the present. In summary sections be sure to stick to one tense.

How to do it not

- Don't use no double negatives.
- Make each pronoun agree with their antecedent.
- Join clauses good, like a conjunction should.
- About them sentence fragments.
- When dangling, watch your participles.
- Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
- Just between you and i, case is important too.
- Don't write run-on sentences they are too hard to read.
- Don't use commas, which aren't necessary.
- Try to not ever split infinitives.
- Its important to use your apostrophe's correctly.
- Proofread your writing to see if you any words left out.
- Correct spelling is absoluteley essential.
- Don't abbr.
- You've heard it a million times: avoid hyperbole.

(Source unknown)

Tips on conjunctions

Two mistakes commonly made when speaking need to be eliminated in writing.

So:

- never use 'dates to' but always 'dates from'
- never use 'comprises of' but either 'comprises' or 'consists of'

Revisions to the draft

Once the first draft is well-advanced then go back and remove jargon and repeated words, tighten sentence structure, fill in minor gaps and maybe refine the basic structure and flow of ideas. Word processors – especially the built-in thesaurus – simplify all these tasks.

On a practical level, revisions may result in changes (such as deletions of substantial sections of text) which later you may want to 'undo'. My recommendation (based on problems resulting from *not* doing it this way!) is to keep the first draft (and also any subsequent completed drafts) 'tucked away' on the computer, and to revise a duplicate set of files. This way, going back to an earlier draft is always possible without delving into back up discs.

Referring to people

At a fairly late stage in the revision process read through checking specifically for references to people.

Firstly check that when a person is first mentioned you state their first name or, if this is not known, their initial(s). If all else fails then they should be 'Mr Smith' or 'Mrs Brown'.

Subsequent references to this person should usually be by surname only. However this clearly does not work with family histories – and even here first names may not be sufficiently unique, as with families whose oldest sons are all called Thomas or John. The answer here is to 'nickname' them (see page 27) – but do so consistently!

Except when a person's first name or initials are unknown avoid the use of conventional titles such as 'Mr' and 'Mrs', unless it is important to distinguish a 'Mrs' from a 'Miss'. What must be avoided is referring to some people as Mr John Brown or Mrs Beth Smith and others simply as Thomas Brown or Ann Smith, without there being any obvious reason why some get labelled 'Mr' or 'Mrs' and some do not.

However titles such as 'Sir', 'Lord', 'Dr' and 'Professor' should be included, at least the first time the person is mentioned. If the local GP was always referred to as 'Dr Black' or a squire was always addressed as 'Sir John' then this is the way they should be referred to throughout the book.

The final draft

So, now you think you are nearly there! Go through the draft again several times. Check just one of the following points each time (and try not to get distracted by the other things to be checked until it is their turn):

- Is the tense, voice and mood of the verbs consistent?
- Is each sentence expressed as clearly and concisely as possible?
- Ask 'What is the point of this paragraph?'
- Is each paragraph free from unnecessary duplications of words and phrases?
- Is the logical progression of ideas quite clear? Put yourself in the mind of someone who is approaching this 'cold' – would they still find the ideas linked easily together?
- Do facts get in the way of the flow?
- Would subheadings help?
- Is all the information under a subheading related to that heading?
- Are there too many short sentences made up of short words? Even worse, are there too many sentences which contain more than about 20 words, or with several polysyllabic words in close proximity? Not all sentences need to be short, but there must be a *good* reason for not breaking up a long sentence. Seek variety of word and sentence length.
- Are there any impersonal constructions (such as 'It is believed that... '; see page 35). Hint: use the 'Find' function of your word processor to find every 'It' and 'There'; some of course will be valid uses as pronouns. Above all eliminate any unnecessary clauses such as 'It can be argued that... ' or 'It should go without saying that... '.
- Are there any passive sentences (see page 40) and, if so, can they be eliminated?
- Have you used any jargon terminology (see page 37)? Are any terms vague?
- Double-check that each section deals only with the topic described in the words of the heading. Either change the wording of the heading or, more probably, add more headings.

- In some instances the clearest way of presenting information is by using 'bullets' (there are plenty of examples in this book, including this list). However, such lists should be checked to ensure that every item fits the wording of the introductory remark.

Essential feedback

Now put the text away for at least a fortnight and come back to it quite fresh. Go through everything once more. Then show it to at least three different people – preferably one who has detailed knowledge of similar topics and another who is a non-specialist but who is not shy about pointing out complex or ambiguous passages.

Chose people who are knowledgeable and likely to be frank. Friends and relatives may say it is great when it is anything but.

Schoolteachers are no longer reliable on grammar and have always been poor bets as critics of writing style. Editors of local papers may be able to help or recommend a colleague. Alternatively contact the Chartered Institute of Editing and Proofreading

Do not be tempted to argue with any feedback. You may have a clear idea of what you *intended* a remark to mean – but that does mean it cannot be read another way. Take note of all comments and then, in the cold light of another day, assess what changes are needed.

Under no circumstances be tempted to proceed to publication without either an experienced editor seeing the final draft, or having taken on board the suggestions of several well-informed people.

References

References are essential to any published history. Even the most popular of village history pamphlets should leave sufficient footprints to enable subsequent researchers to easily follow back to original sources.

However, my experience of editing local history books for publication is that few writers keep adequate notes on their sources. Initials of authors get 'lost', titles of frequently-cited works abbreviated or corrupted, names of publisher and dates of publication are erratically recorded and dates (for instance of newspapers) abbreviated inconsistently. All this will mean that extra time – all too often a lot of extra time – has to be found later to sort out the confusion. Much better to get it right in the first place!

For all published sources there are some basic 'essentials':

- The author (with first name or initials)
- The full *and correct* title of the work.

- The publisher (although this is less important for works over, say, 100 years old). Old fashioned practices of substituting place of publication for the publisher are most unhelpful.

- The year of publication. Where revised editions or facsimile reprints are involved then both the original and later publication details need stating.

- For articles in periodicals then the full and correct name of the article is needed, the title of the periodical, any issue and volume number, page numbers, plus of course the name of the author(s) – as ever, with first name or initials.

Non-published sources should be treated in the same manner but with a clear statement about the location of the document (with any reference number, if applicable e.g. county record offices assign accession numbers to their collections) or the date when 'personal communications' (usually abbreviated to 'pers. comm.') were received.

Ideally, each reference should cite a page number in the original source. Where articles in periodicals are cited, pagination should *always* be included. Unfortunately many researchers are not this thorough about keeping details such as page numbers, at least in the early stages of their work. With time it becomes exceptionally difficult to re-establish such details later. While keeping tabs on page numbers and the other minutiae of bibliographical details may initially seem like an unduly time-consuming chore, at a later stage you will realise that any time spent recording these details in the first place is usually much less than the time needed to re-establish such information later. There is a very simple moral to this paragraph – either start off with good habits or learn the hard way.

Footnotes and endnotes

Footnotes appear at the foot of the page, and endnotes appear either at the end of the chapter or at the end of the book. For convenience in this section I will refer to both as 'footnotes'.

You may have got used to reading books with copious footnotes, and may want to use them in your own writing to refer to sources or supplementary information. However most readers find footnotes unduly 'intimidating'. Unless you are writing *only* for an academic readership then avoid any form of footnoting. Brief remarks that are 'secondary' to the main text can appear in parentheses rather than being moved off into a footnote.

However the elimination of footnotes creates difficulties including bibliographical information. The Harvard system (see next section) provides a reasonably concise yet unambiguous solution. Most importantly, editing and redrafting text is much easier with the Harvard system than with traditional numbered footnotes.

Unfortunately some 'old school' humanities writers have a knee-jerk emotional reaction against the Harvard system, which they associate with scientific and technical writing. Frankly, take such emotional nonsense seriously only if you want to make life hard for yourself and your readers.

Worse still are writers who think that adding footnotes adds 'credibility' to their writing, even though they are writing for a popular readership. Far from adding credibility they are simply displaying all too clearly their unwillingness to write in an appropriate manner. No 'ifs'' 'buts', or 'maybes' – still less the arrogance of 'that remark doesn't apply to me' – in the final published version *never* use footnotes unless you writing only for academic readers.

Under no circumstances use Word's special footnote tool, except for initial drafts. It looks wonderful – but Microsoft have provided no way for this to be exported out to typesetting software. This means all such footnotes will have to be copy-and-pasted, and all the numbering will have to be manually reinstated – twice (once in the main text and again in the list of footnotes, without making any mistakes either time as these are very difficult to spot, and even more difficult to sort out). Unravelling Word's footnote function is a nightmare you will only want to experience once and, believe me, it's best never to go near there in the first place.

Harvard referencing system

With the Harvard system this book would be referred to in the main text as (Trubshaw 2005) – yes, including the round brackets. At the end of the book is a list of the full bibliographical details (see the next section for details of the format used).

Page references would be shown as (Trubshaw 2005: 16) or (Trubshaw 2005: 11–16) or (Trubshaw 2005: 3, 11–16, 55) – note *exactly* how the colon and comma are used. Multiple sources are separated by a semicolon thus: (Trubshaw 2005: 3; Smith 2001: 55)

Where the author is prolific it may be necessary to distinguish between (Trubshaw 2005a) and (Trubshaw 2005b). Multiple authors are cited as (Smith and Jones 2000) or (Smith *et al* 2002). It may also be necessary to distinguish between (A. Smith 2001) and (B. Smith 2001).

Preparing references for publication

Be warned. When editing it has taken as long for me to sort out the author's references as to edit the whole of the main text. Writers who are otherwise good at preparing their text may be sloppy about citing their sources or standardising abbreviations.

In general, minimise the use of full stops after abbreviations (e.g. 'PRO' rather than 'P.R.O.') and capital letters in subtitles (e.g. *A History of Anywhere: Some recent research* rather than *A History of Anywhere: Some Recent Research*).

When numbers are contracted (e.g. 1550–5) use an en-dash (' – ') not a hyphen (' - '). The quickest way to create an en-dash in Word is to type space, hyphen, space, any letter, space. Word will auto-correct the hyphen to an en-dash. Copy the en-dash (without the spaces) and paste where needed. Even better, learn how to set up Word's auto-correct function – it has lots of other good uses too! – and set this up to replace two consecutive hyphens with an en-dash (you'll need to create an en-dash then copy-and-paste it into the 'replace with' box). Once this is set up you can create an en-dash between numbers by simply typing two hyphens and the job's done!

Books should be cited thus:

> Smith, Alan, 1999, *A History of Anywhere: The Victorian era*, Littletown Publishing Co.

Note that the author's surname comes first, followed by the first name (or initials if the first name is not known), then the year of publication (in the case of revised editions, this is the year of the publication of the edition you are citing), the title and subtitle in italics, then the publisher. Pay particular attention to the use of commas, spaces and other punctuation. Ensure that there is *complete* consistency throughout the bibliography.

There are advantages in emphasising the authors' surnames in all capitals or in bold, e.g.:

> SMITH, Alan, 1999, *A History of Anywhere: The Victorian era*, Littletown Publishing Co.

or

> **Smith**, Alan, 1999, *A History of Anywhere: The Victorian era*, Littletown Publishing Co.

Multiple authors appear thus:

> Smith, A., and C.D. Jones, 1997, *How the Railways Changed Anywhere*, Littletown Publishing Co.

Note that only the first author's surname comes before their initials or surname. If you are using all capitals or bold then this reference would appear thus:

> SMITH, A., and C.D. JONES, 1997, *How the Railways Changed Anywhere*, Littletown Publishing Co.

> **Smith**, A., and C.D. **Jones**, 1997, *How the Railways Changed Anywhere*, Littletown Publishing Co.

Papers in anthologies should be shown with the title of the chapter or article in quotes and the volume title in italics:

> Smith, A.B., 1998, 'Anywhere in the sixteenth century', in C.D. Brown (ed.), *Everywhere and Anywhere*, Bigcity Press.

Papers or articles in periodicals should be shown similarly but with relevant information on volume and issue numbers and page references:

> Smith, A.B., 1999, 'Anywhere in 1550–55', in *Journal of Sixteenth Century Studies*, Vol.16, No.2, pp15–25.

Common practice in academic publications is to further abbreviate periodical references thus:

> Smith, A.B., 1999, 'Anywhere in 1550–55', in *J. of Sixteenth Century Studies*, 16, 2, 15–25.

However if writing for a non-academic readership this may not be sufficiently self-explanatory so the previous format is preferable.

Newspaper citations can normally be simplified to title and date (ensure consistency of abbreviation of dates):

> *Littletown Herald*, 2 Sept 1925.

For unpublished documents state where a copy is located:

> Smith, A.B., 1997, 'Mid-sixteenth century social transitions in Anywhere and environs', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, (University of Bigcity Library).

Unpublished historical documents are very similar but clear details of any document reference numbers should be given:

> Anywhere churchwardens' accounts for the mid-sixteenth century. Bigcity Record Office. Ref. 18/A/234/iii

Citing Web pages

References to information published on the Internet and World Wide Web begin with as much as possible of the information that would appear for a printed source e.g. author, title, name of Web site. Then state 'Retrieved on' and the date the information was downloaded as Web pages may change in content, move, or be removed from a site altogether. (For example, stories on newspaper Web sites are usually only temporary). Then comes the URL (i.e. Web site address). If at all possible copy-and-paste from the Web browser while this page is online to minimise the chance of typing errors. Do not put spaces or other punctuation in to create line breaks.

For example:

> Smith, Gavin, 1996, 'Recovering the lost religious place-names of England', *At the Edge* No.3, pp12–19. Retrieved 10 Jan 2005 from www.indigogroup.co.uk/edge/religpns.htm.

Citing emails

Emails direct from individuals should be cited as personal communication. Emails sent to email lists should be cited as:

> Email from Jim Johnson, posted to ANSAX-L list on 2 Feb 2004.

Unfortunately someone can send an email disguised as someone else. Authors should *always* verify the source of emails before citing them as personal communications. Furthermore, many people regard their contributions to email lists as 'off the cuff' and may change their opinions later. If you intend quoting someone's email message then always check with the sender that they are happy for their opinion to be put into print (this will also confirm that they are, indeed, the authors of the message).

Abbreviations commonly used in references

Old fashioned references frequently use terms such as 'ibid.', 'op. cit.' and '*passim*'. Thankfully all but the most antiquated academic publishers have realised that these are impractical. One huge advantage of the Harvard system is that you no longer have to waste time going through pages and pages of footnotes trying to hunt down the details for an 'op. cit.'.

However, if for some reason you are not using the Harvard system (for example when writing articles which must conform to the house style of an academic-style journal) then they may be necessary. If you must use them, do so correctly:

ibid.

This is from the Latin *ibidem* meaning 'at the same place'. It is used only when a reference refers to the same work as the previous reference (although the page number may be different). Ibid. cannot be used after a different work has been cited – in this case you need to use op. cit. (see below). Ibid. is printed with a full stop after the 'd' to denote the abbreviation. It should *not* be italicised and the 'i' is capitalised only at the beginning of a sentence.

op. cit.

This is also Latin, from *opere citato*, meaning 'in the work quoted' and refers to a work which has been previously cited (but not immediately before). The author's name is given as well, and page-number (if applicable): Smith, op. cit. p155. Op. cit. is printed with a full stop after 'p' and 't' to denote the abbreviations; there is a space before 'c'. Op. cit. should *not* be italicised and the 'o' is capitalised only at the beginning of a sentence.

Be warned – using op. cit. may mean that the reader has to look back through hundreds of references to find the first citation. Many editors avoid the use of op. cit. entirely, perhaps by adopting an abbreviation for frequently-cited works. So James Wright *The History and Antiquities of the County of Rutland* could subsequently be cited as 'Wright *Rutland'*; or 'Wright *HACR'*; although if someone wants to know the publisher or dates of publication they will still have to laboriously track down the first citation.

passim

This is from the Latin meaning 'in every part'. It is used only where other references cite page numbers and appears instead of a page number when the majority of the work (book or article) cited is relevant to the reference.

Just to catch the unwary, there is no full stop after *passim* and it should be italicised; the 'p' is capitalised only at the beginning of a sentence.

Preparing for typesetting

Only when you (and as many other people who can be persuaded to comment on the final draft) feel that the words are as clear and concise as possible should you embark on the next editing step, which is to ensure consistency of 'presentation'.

Hierarchical headings

Books usually have chapters, probably sub-divided into sections. These sections may themselves be divided into sub-sections. All these *must* be ordered 'hierarchically'. Conventional type mark up is to code each of these types of headings as 'A' for chapter headings, 'B' for subheadings, 'C' for sub-subheadings and perhaps 'D' if a further sub-category is necessary. Under no circumstances can, say, a 'C' category heading follow directly under an 'A' heading – the hierarchy must be adhered to strictly.

Sometimes it will not be immediately obvious if, say, a 'B' or 'C' heading is required. These need to be thought through carefully and, if necessary, additional subheadings added elsewhere.

Traditionally such mark up was placed between the '<' and '>' characters. So this page would be marked up:

<A>PREPARING FOR TYPESETTING

Only when . . .

<B>Hierarchical headings

Books usually have chapters . . .

Unfortunately some typesetting software automatically converts mark up between '<' and '>' into formatting commands. And <B> or <b> usually converts all the following text into **bold** (and <I> or <i> converts the following text to *italic* which means using Roman numbering does not help either!). To avoid this try labelling the different level of headings <AA>, <BB> etc instead of simply <A>, <B> etc.

House style

There are a number of details of presentation which can be done either one way or another. What is important is that a book is consistent.

Publishers create what is called a 'house style' which determines usage.

The following points are based on house styles used by many UK publishers (American publishers have quite different house styles).

- Use single quotation marks; with doubles for quotes within quotes. No quotation marks around displayed extracts (i.e. quotations shown as a complete paragraph with bigger margins than the main text).
- Punctuation should be inside quotation marks if it belongs in the original, although final punctuation will be outside quotation marks if the quotation forms part of a sentence.
- Dates should be written consistently (e.g. 23 August 1998 *or* 23 Aug 1998; avoid 23rd, 25th etc). Decades should be the nineties *or* 1990s (without an apostrophe between the '0' and 's').
- With Old Style dates before 1752, when the year began on 25 March, then for dates between 1 January and 25 March use the form '1691/2' (N.B. *not* '1691–2' which denotes something quite different!).
- Centuries should be written in full i.e. nineteenth not 19th
- Contractions of numbers should be thus: 1–3; 1–20; 10–15; 1914–18 (*not* 1914–8); 10–31; 21–29; 101–9; 1974–78 (*not* 1974–8); 111–15 (*not* 111–5); 121–25; 128–45.
- Contractions of numbers use an en-dash (' – '), not a hyphen (' - '). (see page 46)
- Numbers higher than 10 should normally appear in figures except when used in general terms – e.g. about a hundred people – or for centuries – e.g. ninth century; nineteenth century.
- Four digit numbers and larger should have a comma (e.g. 1,000).
- Decimal points should appear at mid-figure level (e.g. 3·4 *not* 3.4)

- Percent should be spelt out in the text and the number preceding appear in figures. However the symbol (%) may be used in tables.

- 'Dashes' used for punctuation – like these – should be an en-dash (' – '), not a hyphen (' - ') and separated by spaces.

- Abbreviations consisting of capital letters should normally be expressed without full stops – PRO, MOD, GNP, CIA, IBM.

- Contractions ending with the same letter as the original word do not take a full stop – edn Mr Dr St – but where the last letter is not included do take a full stop – ed., ch. (although abbreviated units of measurement – mm kg lb – are correct and do not take a final 's' in the plural).

- Initial capitals are to be avoided, except to distinguish the specific from the general e.g. the Church (institution) and the church (building). Exceptions include Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Middle Ages (but normally 'medieval'), Gothic, Reformation, Renaissance, Enlightenment, etc.

- Hyphenation should be minimal but above all consistent.

- Spelling must be standardised to British rather than American forms. '-ise' rather than '-ize' is to be generally preferred although consistency is essential (except for quotations).

- Archaisms such as 'whilst' and 'amongst' should be replaced with 'while' and 'among'.

- Full stops should normally be omitted after headings and subheadings.

- Commas should be omitted before the final 'and' or 'or' in lists unless essential for clarity. Commas should normally be omitted after adverbial phrases or conjunctions especially when they begin a sentence – 'At last… '; 'During the summer… '.

- Square brackets are used only for editorial notes or interpolations in quotations. Round brackets (parentheses) should be used in all other instances.

- Ellipsis – use […] (including the square brackets) for the omission of long passages in quoted text. Use '**...** ' (N.B. no space before and a single space after) for shorter omissions. For example, 'The end of this sentence and the whole of the next sentence have been omitted […] However this sentence has just been shortened… '

- Chapters should be numbered in Arabic and referred to in the text as Chapter 1 (note upper case 'C').

- Figures and illustrations should normally be unnumbered.

Correct use of abbreviations and hyphenation can be found in *The Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors*. This is an essential reference book for any 'sub editor'.

Note: Direct quotations should *not* be changed to conform to 'house style'.

Proof reading

Some people spot errors in printed text as if they were flashing neon signs. Other people (myself included) seem to miss most of them.

Although spell checking software helps there are still plenty of errors which can be missed:

- Literals (a correctly-spelt word but not the correct word).
- Incorrect punctuation.
- Grammatical errors.
- Proper names incorrectly or inconsistently spelt.
- Inconsistent use of abbreviations or date formats.
- Inconsistent citing of bibliographical information and other references.
- Inconsistent typography

So far as I can tell, proof reading is something you are either 'born good at' or start out badly and never get to be really good. Unless you are excellent at spotting errors, or know somebody who is, then use a professional proof reader. Suitable contacts can be provided by the The Chartered Institute of Editing and Proofreading

If you are excellent at spotting mistakes but new to proof reading then the best advice is to read through the proofs several times, each time looking for just one type of mistake or inconsistency. If you are proof reading your own work (exceedingly risky!) then try to put the proofs aside for a week in between proof reading sessions, so you come back to them with 'fresh eyes'.

Professional proof readers use a standard system of symbols to mark up errors which are described in British Standard BS 5261.

Keep doing it

There are two parts to writing – what you are writing about and how you write about it. The first is down to research and inspiration, and the latter owes more to craftsmanship and experience. Assuming you have something to write about – even if the inspiration about the best way of approaching the subject is a bit elusive – then the best way of getting better at writing is simply to do more of it.

No matter how modest the scope of your writing projects, always aim to get a balance of narrative, description and analysis (see page 30) and keep asking:

- Who and what is this information for?
- Where and when do the readers need to know it?
- Are you informing, persuading, or both?

As you come back to drafts to revise them then pay increasing attention to the other aspects of writing 'craftsmanship' outlined in this chapter. But such details are secondary to setting your ideas out in a suitable style and with appropriate analysis. No one is born with ability to write well any more than any one could set off and win a marathon race without plenty of training – but keep practising and what once seemed impossibly difficult will begin to seem just a part of your normal routine.

Further reading

Historical research

History: What and why, Beverley Southgate, Routledge, 1996
Computing for Historians, Evan Mawdsley and Thomas Munck, Manchester University Press, 1993
Ordnance Survey Maps: A Concise Guide for Historians, Richard Oliver, Charles Close Society, 1993

Oral history

Sounding Boards: Oral Testimony and the Local Historian, David Marcombe, University of Nottingham, 1995
Interviewing Elderly Relatives, Eve McLaughlin, Federation of Family History Societies, 1985 (2nd edn)
The Myths We Live By, Paul Thompson and Raphael Samuel, Routledge, 1990
Oral Tradition as History, Jan Vansina, University of Wisconsin Press, 1985
The Oral History Reader, edited by Rob Perks and Alistair Thomson, Routledge 1998
Storied Lives: The cultural politics of self-understanding, G.E. Rosenwald and R.L. Ochberg, Yale University Press, 1992

Landscape history

Interpreting the Landscape, Michael Aston, Batsford 1985
The Making of the English Landscape, W.G. Hoskins and Christopher Taylor, Hodder and Stoughton, revised edition 1988
Historic Landscape Analysis: Deciphering the countryside, Stephen Rippon, Council for British Archaeology, 2004

Shaping Medieval Landscapes: Settlement, society, environment, Tom Williamson, Windgather Press, 2003

Writing style

Writing Local History, David Dymond, Phillimore, 1988 (2nd edn)
The Complete Plain Words, Ernest Gowers, HMSO, 1994 (revised edn)
The Oxford Guide to English Usage, Oxford UP, 1994
Cassell English Usage, Tim Storries and James Matson, Cassell, 1991
Fowler's Modern English Usage, H.W. Fowler, Oxford Univeristy Press, revised edition 2004
A Concise Dictionary of Correct English, B.A. Phythian, Guild Publishing, 1993
Troublesome Words, Bill Bryson, Penguin, 3rd edition 2002
Penguin Guide to Punctuation, R.L. Trask, Penguin, 2004
BBC News Style Guide. Download from www.bbctraining.com/pdfs/newsstyleguide.pdf

Editing

Editing Records for Publication, R.F. Hunnisett, British Records Association 1977
Basic Editing (2 vols), Nicola Harris, The Publishing Training Centre 1991
The Chicago Manual of Style, University of Chicago, 2004.
Copy-Editing, Judith Butcher, Cambridge University Press, 1992 (3rd edn)
Hart's Rules for Compositors and Readers, Oxford University Press, 1983 (39th edn)
The Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors, Oxford University Press, revised edition 2002
The Oxford Guide to Style, Oxford UP 2002
[*The Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors* and *The Oxford Guide to Style* are available as a combined volume titled the *Oxford Style Manual*, Oxford University Press, 2003.]