

SELF-PUBLISHING YOUR LOCAL HISTORY RESEARCH: SOME HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS

These notes have been prepared to accompany the BALH webinar presented on 12 May 2021. They aim to describe the steps needed to turn a local history text into a self-published or society-published book.

PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS

§ Although I have attempted to cover the stages of publishing a book in their logical order please read right through these notes before you make a start, as you need to be aware from the outset of some of the actions you will have to do later (such as obtaining ISBNs, and leaving time for indexing), and make decisions accordingly.

§ If you want your book to look like a ‘proper’ book from a ‘proper’ publisher, take a good look at books on your shelves which strike you as well designed and pleasing to use. Learn from them how the parts of a book are arranged, and borrow good ideas about typography and page design.

THE RAW MATERIALS OF A BOOK

§ In planning a book from scratch it is useful to look at it in architectural terms – the overall structure and proportions; the elements (chapters or sections) from which it will be constructed; the supporting images, maps and figures; the smaller components, such as a consistent hierarchy of headings and sub-headings; and the finishing details – the extra material that will be needed front and back. You can then draw up a plan and a synopsis. If you are contributing a volume to a series, of course, some of these decisions will already have been made.

§ The title of your book may be catchy and clever, but it must also indicate what, who, and when the book is about. The cover, too, must be attractively designed and relevant to the subject matter.

§ If your book is to be the work of multiple authors it is essential (to avoid a great deal of editing later) to give precise instructions to everyone involved about matters such as headings, referencing (including citation) and the use of quotations. You might consider browsing the results of a Google search on ‘style sheets for authors’ and impose a standard set of basic rules from one of these.

§ How to write well is beyond the scope of these notes (read the sage advice in David Dymond’s *Researching and Writing History*), but it is worth pointing out some common failings. Poor punctuation and spelling; over-long sentences (the writer is getting carried away) or very short paragraphs (the narrative turns into a list); excessive use of exclamations (better not to use them at all) and underlining (don’t); long quotations of copyright material (beyond the permissible fair dealing of a sentence or two); misuse of the space bar to position text (use only tabs to indent, and align text left, right or centre from the paragraph section of the ribbon). Ask one or more literate friends to read your work and suggest improvements.

§ Decide whether to reference by footnotes, chapter endnotes, book endnotes, Harvard referencing, or simply by listing works used at the end, chapter by chapter. Link text and notes (in Word, use ‘Insert footnote’ in the ‘References’ section of the ribbon), so that you can add or delete notes without manually renumbering. Superscript note numbers should follow punctuation, not intervene between the last letter of a word and the comma or stop. Be consistent. Observe the bibliographical referencing used in books by reputable publishers, as regards italicising book and journal titles, and settle on a style and be consistent.

§ Illustrations will need to be prepared using editing software (such as Photoshop) to create JPEG, PNG or TIFF files, and should be of high enough resolution to be between 300 and 600 dpi when enlarged or reduced to the size at which they will be reproduced. If photographing old images to use in a publication you should take at the highest resolution – they can easily be reduced later if necessary. If you are not

confident with editing digital photography enlist help – plenty of people are adept at it – and surprising improvements to images can be achieved by cropping, adjusting levels and using various editing tools.

§ Decisions around illustrations in a book include whether all are to be colour, or black & white, or a mixture. Print-on-demand printing will probably not allow a mixture – black & white can be included, of course, but will be regarded as colour. If all are to be black & white, any that happen to be colour should be converted to grayscale. A second decision is whether illustrations are to be grouped together or integrated into the text (which is more tricky). Illustrations must be captioned, of course, and it is important at this stage to have a numbering system (whether or not included in the published book) to identify which caption goes with which illustration.

§ There may be other graphic material – maps, tables, charts, pedigrees, for instance – to be considered. Many publications are let down by amateur-looking maps, so you should consider finding someone who can use Photoshop and typesetting software to give maps and tables a professional look.

§ All books will have preliminaries and endmatter, and looking at existing well-designed books will be instructive. A common arrangement of preliminary pages is this: half-title page | frontispiece | title page | publication details | contents | acknowledgements and credits | preface or foreword (note that foreword is not ‘forward’, the opposite of backward, as a surprising number of people seem to think). It may be useful to give the prelims a separate page-numbering, generally in roman numerals (romans) so that the text of the book itself begins on page 1 – this will avoid a potential indexing nightmare if the prelims have to change. The endmatter typically will include notes, bibliography, index, and possibly information about the author(s) and/or society, including details of other publications. Some of this, that I suggest putting at the front, can go at the back, and vice versa.

FROM TYPESCRIPT TO PDF

§ Once all the elements of the book are ready and all the text has been edited (and, please, not before) the book must be typeset. Here the options are these: discuss with and hand over all materials to a professional typesetter/ designer (and pay them); do the typesetting oneself using dedicated software (Adobe Indesign, or at a pinch MS Publisher) – this will involve an interesting but fairly steep learning curve; or stick with what you know, Word probably, but explore all the refinements it offers, around spacing for instance, and manipulating graphics, to make it look as professional as possible.

§ A decision must be taken about the binding of the book, whether paperback (sometimes known as perfect bound); casebound (hardback) with printed case; or jacketed casebound, with or without printed case. A booklet of under about 60pp may be stapled instead of bound (this is known as wire-stitched). If you decide to have separate paperback and hardback editions, they will need different ISBNs. Other decisions relate to the page size, use of colour, and – if printing by conventional means – the print run. To some extent cost will be a factor in making these decisions, so it is important to explore a range of quotations from printers. The financial aspects are discussed further below.

§ The design of your book (assuming that you are embarking on this yourself, rather than handing over to a professional) is to some extent a matter of personal taste, but it will be useful to pick up ideas from good quality books which you find attractive. So, speaking personally, I would avoid a page size as large as A4, unless the book requires large illustrations, and no smaller than A5. There is a range of traditional sizes in between, which are commonly used by book printers. Nor would I normally set a book in a Times typeface, nor a sans serif face. This handout is using Minion, but you will find a range of other bookfaces to choose from that come with your program; others may be downloaded free, or can be purchased. Avoid the temptation to plaster a book with a range of exotic typefaces – stick to one, or at most two, for text work, and perhaps a complementary display face for headings. If the book is to be printed in colour, consider using colour not only for illustrations, but also for headings and as a tint behind specific blocks of text. The font size and, crucially, the leading (space between lines) is very important to the look and feel of the page, and the readability of the text, so play around until you feel you’ve got it right. Leave generous margins on all four sides, but especially the gutter (the side nearest the binding). Experiment too with embellishments – running heads, page numbers (folios), rules and boxes, and in text with drop capitals to begin the first paragraph of a section (all can be achieved in Word). Note that extended quotations are usually indicated, not by putting them in inverted commas, but by indenting and dropping the point size of the text. Quotations should not be distinguished from other text by printing them in italics.

§ I find, when setting a book that will have images integrated in the text, that it is best to produce first what used to be called a galley proof, that is, just the text, set continuously without regard to page-breaks. This should be carefully proof-read and corrected, because such corrections (even single-letter typos) made later, after the images have been placed, will sometimes make the page design go haywire. This galley proof may be printed out, in which case it is useful for marking-up the target position of the images, or sent to the author as a pdf, who can use the comment or sticky-note facilities to make corrections and save changes. It helps to have two computers when implementing these changes.

§ The corrected galley proof can now be made up into pages, by placing images and their captions, and adjusting text to avoid awkward page breaks. The latter can usually be resolved by slightly enlarging or reducing the size of an image, or by subtly increasing or reducing slightly the tracking (the space between letters) in a paragraph to bring over or take back a line (also possible in Word, if you search it out). It can be quite fiddly, but one quickly learns unobtrusive tricks.

§ Once the text is all set in pages the index(es) can be made, and all the other preliminary and endmatter brought together. An important feature of the prelims is the reverse of the title page, which should contain publisher and copyright details, date of publication, ISBN, and perhaps the typefaces used and the names of the typesetter and printer. Do allow plenty of time in your schedule for indexing – there are free programs available that will help, but good indexing is an art. It is usual to set much of the endmatter text, including index, in a smaller font, and the index in two or three columns. Endnotes are sometimes set in two columns also. What appears a very long index when first typed out boils down quite significantly when set small in three columns.

§ One other form of publication should be mentioned at this point. Sometimes it is desirable to reprint a title more or less unchanged, and this can be done by scanning each page of an existing copy and creating a new pdf. You can of course add new material front and back, and with skill perform a little ‘invisible mending’ on the scanned pages.

FROM PDF TO PRINTED BOOKS

§ Published books are identified by their International Standard Book Number (ISBN), so you will have to purchase a block of these, 10 or 100 at a time, depending how ambitious you are, from Nielsen Book UK, who run the ISBN Agency. This is a 13-digit code unique to your book, which looks something like this: 978-0-948140-04-4; and means 978 (it is a book)-0 (or 1, published in UK or US)-948140 (the publisher, BALH in this case)-04 (the book, one of 100 numbers allocated, 00-99)-4 (a check digit, an algorithm calculated from the 12 other digits). The ISBN should be printed on the back cover along with a barcode (easily downloaded as a png file free from various websites), and also inside the book, with the other printing information.

§ Printing can be done in two ways: by conventional means, whereby plates are made from pdf files, and a predetermined number of copies are printed and bound; or by print-on-demand, whereby pdf files are stored, and used to produce single or multiple copies in response to demand. The pros and cons of both are outlined below. It is also possible to convert to print-on-demand after the initial print run by conventional means has been exhausted, in order to keep the title in print.

§ Conventional printing by a local printer (BALH has used such a printer, Salisbury Printing, for *The Local Historian* and *Local History News* very happily for many years) has the advantage for the author or society that you can call on their expertise and advice, and employ them (for an additional cost) to do as many of the preliminary design and origination stages as you do not feel confident to undertake yourself. You will need to get quotes for the work (and can of course shop around for competitive quotes) specifying print run, paper quality, page size, extent (number of pages) and binding. Quite commonly one specifies a number of copies (e.g. 500) plus the cost of a run-on (e.g. 100, 250), so from that you can weigh up the cost of producing fewer or more copies. But these will be the figures for printing 500, 600, 750 all at once – not for printing 500 and then coming back later for another 100 or 250 (a common misapprehension). If you are doing the origination yourself you should certainly involve your chosen printer at an early stage in the various decisions you have to make. Conventional printing is generally cheaper per copy for a large (500+) print run, and offers more flexibility over format and paper, etc. But you have to guess in advance how many you will sell, pay the full amount when they are printed, store them until they are sold, and

handle all distribution. A common (and prudent) way to deal with these difficulties is to build up a list of subscribers pre-publication and only publish when you have enough takers to cover the cost.

§ Print-on-demand printing (which BALH has adopted for its series of handbooks, using one of the principal players in this field, Lightning Source) has developed over the last decade and is rapidly becoming the chosen route for the kind of small-scale publishing that in local history we tend to focus on. My experience has all been with Lightning Source, which has printed more than 100 of my titles since 2010, but I am well aware that there are many other p-o-d printers in the field, easily found on search engines, and there are comparison websites. So do some research and shop around for the best fit for you – but be aware that, as with any developing technology, there are plenty of sharks exploiting the novelty. Typically, I think (but this is from my Lightning Source experience) one opens an account and is assigned a customer rep, the website has online manuals, a cover template generator, and a price and shipping calculator. When your book is in its completed state you upload to the company's website pdf files of the interior and cover, with accompanying metadata (i.e. you fill in all the details on an online form); your submission is checked and an online proof is generated after about 48 hours which you inspect and, if all is well, you approve. All this will cost you a one-off charge currently of about £60, but there is also a small annual charge for storing the files to keep them available and the book in print. You can then order copies, as many and as often as you need, to be sent anywhere in the world within a few days. Details are added to Nielsen Bookdata (the bookselling industry's database) so your book will appear on Amazon and be available through conventional booksellers worldwide. This will generate one-off sales, quite independently of your efforts, and you will receive a monthly payment (which is very unlikely to be a large sum). If you find that your book, despite your efforts, has the occasional mistake, or a phone number, for instance, needs changing, you can resubmit the corrected pdf and subsequent copies reflect your changes. The advantages of this form of printing are fairly obvious (copies available within a few days of submission; no large up-front bill; no storage problem; no need to estimate sales and so no danger of selling out or, conversely, being left with unsold copies; remote distribution handled for you). But there are disadvantages: you do not have the advice of a friendly local printer; the quality may not be quite as good (though I have achieved excellent results); there is less flexibility as to paper quality and page size; and a higher unit cost on substantial print runs.

SELLING YOUR BOOK

§ If you are hoping to persuade booksellers to stock your book you should expect them to take 40% of the cover price, so that for a book selling at £10 you will supply them copies for £6, and you should price the book accordingly. There are exceptions to this 40%, in fact some retailers will try for 50% or even more. Conversely, you may be planning to sell all copies yourself or within your society, or to subscribers, without offering them to the trade. Or you may have a friendly local village shop, pub, museum or similar, which is prepared to sell copies at a much lower discount. Bookshops, too, as a one-off may accept a discount lower than 40%, but probably not much. You should expect caution on their part initially, until the book proves itself a good seller, and they will probably ask for sale or return terms and perhaps delayed payment. Chain booksellers (you know who I mean), as opposed to the independents, find it difficult to accommodate one-off publishers within their centralised buying and accounting systems, so don't be too optimistic of product placement there.

§ If you have fixed the price to allow for the booksellers' discount you will be able to sell copies yourself at events or to members at a 'special' reduced rate (a good strategy, psychologically) and still make a better return than through the trade. But if you are printing by conventional means don't be tempted to order far more than you are likely to sell, in order to bring down the unit cost – you will probably be left with a heap of boxes for a long time and a consequent storage problem.

§ It is a legal requirement for publishers to send a copy (free) to the British Library Legal Deposit Office (Boston Spa, Wetherby LS23 7BY). Sometime later you will probably receive a request (actually a demand) from the Agency for the Legal Deposit Libraries (ALDL) for five more free copies to be sent to them in Edinburgh, and these will be passed to the national libraries of Scotland and Wales, the Bodleian Library in Oxford, Cambridge University Library and the library of Trinity College, Dublin. This request may take many months to arrive, so don't sell out before you honour this legal duty.

§ As well as factoring these copies into your finances, you will probably want to give away a few copies for review or complimentarys to repay debts incurred while writing your book. Reviews offer good (or occasionally bad) publicity, and fall into two categories. Local newspapers, magazines, radio, social media and websites will make your book known at the time of publication, by reviews, features and interviews. It is easier if you have a named contact to approach, and even better if you write them a press release in ‘journalese’, which if they are busy they can simply print unaltered. If you can turn your book into a news item, which may get picked up beyond the local media, all the better. Rather than scatter review copies willy-nilly it is preferable to send out fliers and press releases, offering to send review copies on request. The second category of review is those published in relevant academic and professional journals, such as *The Local Historian*. These will not appear for months, sometimes years, after publication, so they do not help your immediate publicity drive, but will ensure interest in your work and a permanent record of your achievement.

§ There are other well-tried and fairly obvious ways of selling your book, ranging from a launch, celebration or reception to mark its publication; then taking copies along to sell after lectures and at other events; and running stalls at fairs, Christmas markets and similar.

§ If you have produced a handsome and worthwhile book, managed the finances fairly accurately, and been prepared to go out and sell it, in every sense, you should find yourself with funds in hand to begin with confidence to produce the next one, and so to start the process all over again, and again . . .

John Chandler

(jh.chandler@hotmail.com www.hobnobpress.co.uk)

After the Webinar I wrote this blog to clarify and expand on some of the points raised as questions and discussion:

I think that we were all amazed at the take-up for our self-publishing webinar, over 230 attendees, and I was astonished that almost everyone stuck with us to the end. Sitting talking to oneself in front of a computer it really doesn't make any difference whether 6 or 600 people are listening – but of course it does. If one can be said to receive empathy back from a remote audience the feeling was of a community of kindred spirits. So thank you for your attention and participation (and thank you, Paul and the BALH digital team, for making it happen).

As well as offering you our thanks, this blog pursues some of the points raised in questions which we failed to address. I was conscious that, because I have no experience of the printers other than those I regularly use, I was unable to advise on the range of print-on-demand suppliers out there; and because I do my own typesetting and design I have no idea how much to expect to pay for professional help. It was gratifying therefore to discover that a BALH member, Andrew Chapman, who attended the webinar, runs a company which specialises in helping people to self-publish, Prepare to Publish (<https://preparetopublish.com/>), and he is well able to advise on such matters. Heather mentioned a printer that she has used and several people asked for details: it is Print 2 Demand (<https://print2demand.co.uk/>). Because we were speaking on behalf of BALH I was trying not to recommend particular companies, nor to push my own little outfit, nor for that matter to slag off a well-known chain bookseller. So please don't take any of this as official BALH policy.

Several questions concerned ISBNs, how much they cost and whether you need them. To buy just one currently costs £89, ten cost £164, 100 cost £369, and (if you are really ambitious) 1,000 cost £949. You do not have to have an ISBN but there are advantages. I suggest you look at the Nielsen website (<https://nielsenbook.co.uk/isbn-agency/>) and perhaps this site too (<https://ukbookpublishing.com/do-i-need-an-isbn-for-my-book/>). Incidentally, journals and magazines should carry an ISSN (International Standard Serial Number) – these are free and issued through the British Library. Each issue of the serial

carries the same number. The British Library is also the recipient of legal deposit copies of monographs (standalone books) and serials, as explained here: <https://www.bl.uk/legal-deposit>.

Copyright is always a worry and a confusion. The BL's website has a useful summary (<https://www.bl.uk/business-and-ip-centre/articles/what-is-copyright>). See as well the Government's site (<https://www.gov.uk/topic/intellectual-property/copyright>) – this also explains about 'fair dealing' (short quotation for criticism or review). For most of our purposes copyright continues for 70 years after the creator's death, or 70 years after first publication if that is later. So the specific example raised of a postcard published c.1925 will only be copyright if whoever took it was still alive in 1950. On a different copyright issue, the question of publishing a revised version of one's own university thesis should not be a problem, though out of courtesy (as with most such matters) it does no harm to clear it with whoever may have an interest. Frequently small publishers face demands for large copyright or reproduction fees, out of all proportion to the financial scale of the publication. The National Trust recently refused me permission to publish the author's own photograph taken of one of its properties, claiming copyright because she was standing in their grounds. (I resist using an exclamation mark.) If negotiation is not successful (try offering a few free copies of the book) the only recourse is to walk away and find a different, copyright-free, alternative. When you publish a book you should include a copyright statement (usually vesting copyright in the author) and perhaps some kind of disclaimer or prohibition – copy the wording from a mainstream publisher's book.

Adobe Creative Cloud, as it is now called (<https://www.adobe.com/uk/creativecloud.html>), which includes Indesign for typesetting, Photoshop for image manipulation, and many other tools (most of which you probably won't need) is in widespread use – like Microsoft Office you pay for it now by a monthly subscription, though I still use an old version that I purchased outright. There are freeware and shareware programs out there which you might consider as alternatives, such as Faststone Image Viewer (<https://www.faststone.org/>), Scribus (<https://www.scribus.net/>) and – for indexing – Index Generator (<https://www.openviewdesign.com/>). There are comparison websites describing similar programs, so search Google. As before, do not take these as BALH recommendations – you must check them out for yourself. But, as I suggested in my talk, you may consider, if you use Word all the time, just exploring the additional tools and tweaks available in it that can improve the appearance of your text.

Several questions raised specific stylistic issues. These may have been the tip concealing the iceberg beneath, so it's probably best to refer you to the two books which sit on most editors' shelves, *Copy-Editing* by Judith Butcher (the Cambridge handbook) and the *Oxford Manual of Style* (full references to these and others at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_style_guides#United_Kingdom). A Google search on 'Style Guides' throws up plenty of free downloads. I expressed my prejudice against using Times as the typeface of choice. Personal favourites are Garamond, Baskerville, Bembo, Minion, and Caslon, as well as the more obscure Scala and Chaparral. I sometimes use Doves Type, partly for the story behind it (check it out). Of course, most of these are not free, although there is a multitude of quite acceptable typefaces (referred to – wrongly – as fonts) free to download. Typography can become an enthusiasm (aka obsession) – to indulge it get hold of Simon Garfield's *Just my Type* (Profile, 2010).

Finally, two deeper considerations about what we do and why. Someone asked about the potential crossover between writing for a local history audience and a much wider readership. One of the missions of the local historian, it seems to me, is to enthuse people in general about their neighbourhood so that they will become interested in it and care for it. Writing engaging books of local history for the 'general' reader which are attractive and produced to professional standards is therefore a laudable aim, in fact it is our duty. We all know about 'creative writing', but there is also its opposite, 'destructive writing' – the ability by one's ineptitude and incompetence to dampen any enthusiasm the reader thought they had for our subject. The second consideration about local publishing is that it is part of a continuum – knowledge about the past is stored in archives and libraries – historians mine these resources to undertake their

research – they write up and publish their research – they deposit copies in archives and libraries – they have added to the resource for the next researcher. Just a thought.

Thank you, on behalf of the BALH, for taking part in what I hope you feel can become a constructive dialogue.

John Chandler