

insights

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Archives and people in the digital age



Archives of the Diocese of Passau | [Herbert Wurster](#)

Digital pioneer

Research | [Georg Vogeler](#)

Digital playground

ICARUS4all | [Johann Hammer](#)

Genealogy business

editorial



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Dear readers,

being a member of ICARUS4all brings us closer to the institutions we are regularly in touch with when we are researching our family history. Excursions organised by ICARUS4all are an excellent opportunity to "take a look behind the scenes" of archives and meet with their employees. The Late Summer Fare 2016, for example, took us to Passau where we visited the modern external depositories and also had the chance to meet the archives' director Herbert Wurster personally. A few months before he is due to retire, the "digital pioneer" is on the cover of this edition of insights. The Archives of the Diocese of Passau are an integral part of Matricula's success story. Today, it is hard to imagine how to do family research without this portal.

Monasterium is yet another indispensable tool. Last year, the portal celebrated its 15th anniversary. In the current edition of insights, Georg Vogeler, Monasterium's Technical Director and Director of the Austrian Center for Digital Humanities in Graz, is talking about the early days, challenges and plans for the future.

On the part of the ICARUS4all community, Johann Hammer is writing about his genealogy business in the United States.

Of course there are many more exciting news from the world of archives.

I hope that you will enjoy reading, and wish you all the best with your research!

Elisabeth Kultscher

Board member of ICARUS4all

3

cover story

The digital pioneer

by Saskia Blatakes

6

community

Adventures at the archives:
learning by filming!

by Birgit Kibal and Tiina Männapsoo

7

projects

Insights into the history of
Upper Austria

by Norbert Kriechbaum

15

research

On the playground of the future

by Dagmar Weidinger

ICARUS4all

10

Genealogy as a business project

by Johann Hammer

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insights provides information about the international archival community today, including archival institutions as well as the related user groups.

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Interview: Herbert W. Wurster | Archive of the Diocese of Passau

The digital pioneer

Up until his retirement in autumn of this year, Herbert Wurster is heading the Archive of the Diocese of Passau. During his entire professional life he has never been afraid of technology. Still, he sometimes had to convince colleagues who were sceptical. An “insights” interview with a man of digital conviction.

by Saskia Blatakes | photos: Dionys Asenkerschbaumer

Herbert Wurster leaves no doubt about what’s really important. In his office at the Archive of the Diocese of Passau, there is a low, small table on which he has already prepared something for this interview. At first glance, the objects seem just as inconspicuous as many other things that are kept at the archive: A few sheets of yellowed paper, imprinted with deeply embossed text written on a typewriter. They give off an odour that is hardly discernible and not at all unpleasant. Stories that want to be told.

While the “insights” visit was meant to be about the archivist Herbert Wurster and his professional life, he knows how to put his objects into the centre of attention right from the beginning. It seems as if he wanted to say: “Look, it’s all about them”.

The stack of loose paper sheets was found quite accidentally by an attentive employee. It had simply slipped into an already indexed collection. Wurster quietly smiles when he says that the document had not been indexed deeply enough back then which is why the document had no clear signature.

The documents are the true stars

The documents are quite something. They are telling the story of a bloody episode of Germany’s history, one that happened not too long ago. Right after the end of World War II, a report of the parish office of Altötting, the place of the national shrine of Germany, describes the murder of ten people: They had been the leaders of a Bavarian resistance movement against Nazism (“Freiheitsaktion Bayern”). At that time, they had already been having enormous problems. The report is using language devoid of any emotion to describe how all of the seven men were summarily executed in 1945, right before the war ended. Whenever a report like this suddenly makes history tangible and alive, Herbert Wurster is all in. His eyes are shining, he is visibly enthusiastic about the unexpected discovery. The pieces of paper also show that archives are always good for a surprise.

Who needs a computer?

This not only applies to the actual

fonds, but also to the state of research in general, which, according to the archivist, is never set in stone. Knowledge is continually being pushed forward. For decades, he has been leaning on the help of new technology. He still remembers the day when his first computer was installed in the year 1987, an “Olymp XT” with a sensational memory of 256 kilobytes. Today he is laughing: “The text processing software was excellent!” Not everyone on his team had been as enthusiastic as he had

already been then. Many of his colleagues had shown a certain degree of scepticism: “What are you going to use this for?” they had asked him. And next: “That won’t be possible. We have too much material to do it!” In the end, he was able to justify the highly modern equipment: “My secretary no longer managed the workload. So I argued that I would need to hire a second secretary unless we got the computer.” Finally, the cost factor won everybody over. Herbert Wurster thinks that Germany, and in particular the

“I argued that I would need to hire a second secretary unless we got a computer.”

Herbert Wurster explains the structure of the newly built external archive building located in the parish of the city of Passau.



Archive director Wurster thoroughly details the history of special archive items for the interview.



archives, have missed out on digitisation. Libraries were the only ones to adopt the new technology early on.

An archive on fire

Wurster belongs to those people who have always been at the technological forefront. The first computer was followed by a database which rapidly filled with data in the years to come. At the turn of the millennium he purchased scanners, and since the year 2005 users from around the world can access the archive online. However, there were times when even the digital pioneer needed to be convinced: When there were early talks about scanners, he didn't really see the point. What's the benefit of having all these pictures, he had been asking himself. A little while later he suddenly understood that automation was not only possible for opening up fonds, but also for making them available.

The future development proved him right: Today, the Archive of the Diocese of Passau has 250,000 data queries per month. "When innovation is turning into tradition, that's really the best part of it."

Meanwhile, Wurster has unfolded a second document on his desk. It is one of the oldest objects of the archive and also tells about an important historical event. In the year 1680, the historical centre of Passau was destroyed by fire, and with it almost all of the archive's fonds. Another fire had already destroyed the Council Registry in the year 1662. The thin book, written in the old German alphabet, describes how routine was by and by resumed in July 1680 following this catastrophe – and how the archive again had to start from scratch.

Definitely not "work-to-rule"

Besides his love for the archive's objects, Herbert Wurster deeply cares about something else: Cooperation

– with museums, universities or other archives in Germany and Austria. The excellent cooperation with the Archive of the Diocese of St. Pölten in Austria's province of Lower Austria, for example, has been going on for a long time. Together with the Oberhaus Museum of Passau, he has organised many successful and well-attended exhibitions over the years. Wurster is not an archivist who is hiding at his archive for "work-to-rule". However, this level of activity and commitment come at a cost. His soft, Lower Bavarian accent and his charming smile take away all severity or bitterness when he goes on to say: "I've really been working an awful lot. But it has been worth it." He feels that it is the right thing to invest a good part of his lifetime, and not to be afraid of work.

His next project: Scanning all council protocols and importing them with the help of the research software READ.

"This project demonstrates the limits of new

technology. So far, our error rate is at 12 percent." Wurster has already been paying his dues. In his work he has also been faced with conflicts between technicians and archivists: "Someone with a technical background is of course a technology freak, with a heart that is beating for technology."

Projecting history into the future

Wurster's heart is beating for history. His dissertation has dealt with the 17th century but he has broadened his view since then: "My interest covers the time span from antiquity to the present. But only in connection with the Diocese of Passau within its historical borders and its connected areas." Recently, his work has shown

portrait

First name, last name:
Herbert W. Wurster

My favourite memories from my professional life:
Public interest in the work of our archives.

When I am alone at the archives, ...
I can work particularly well.

Coffee or tea?
Coffee.

I am impressed with...
young people.

I am good at ...
persevering.

My "favourite object" at the archives:
Autobiography of Bishop Simon Konrad Landersdorfer.

Three things I love about archives:
cooperation, the surprising and abundant richness of the sources, the innovative power of tradition. What I also love about our archive is our electric car – very modern! With it we can easily reach our external archive building as well as one third of our parish, collect archival material etc.

My connection with ICARUS:
I am a founding member of ICARUS and treasurer in the Executive Board.

"Someone with a technical background is of course a technology freak, with a heart that is beating for technology."



that Pope Benedict XVI has always had family roots in Passau. His research on the basis of the parish registers has also brought something else to light: Members of the Ratzinger family have been living into old age for many centuries.

When it comes to dealing with technology, Wurster thinks that a high degree of archival know-how is important: "A machine may think that it can read something else, but this is not possible. It is my job as an archivist to determine the target vocabulary and prevent diverging readings!" Using technology in a sensible way while "keeping our feet on the ground that is formed by archival sciences and sources": For Wurster, this is the task to achieve in the intermediate future.

As far as his personal future is concerned, he will be retiring on September 1. He is relaxed about it, saying that Professor Hannelore Putz will

The illuminated missal after the rite of the cathedral of Passau was obtained in 1470 for the castle chapel of Götterdorf (AT). Especially opulent is the depiction of the crucifixion of Christ: Christ on the cross between the thieves. Below the cross, divided into two groups, the Jews and the Saints.

make an excellent successor. She is already his deputy at the archive.

Archivist for life

Herbert Wurster is not afraid of the spare time that is lying ahead of him. At home, his grandchildren and his farm house are waiting for him. He is also actively involved in many associations in a voluntary capacity. And finally, he is looking forward to having more time for writing and publishing. He cannot let go – he will continue to work.

But before he is going to leave his office in late summer, he primarily wants to pass on his experience. A bookmark is lying coincidentally on his neatly organised desk, with an aphorism by the German-Russian neurologist and author Vladimir Lindenberg: "The best that one person can give to another is a smile". It will be that smile which will accompany Herbert Wurster in his many projects of his quite active retirement. He will always be an archivist, with all his heart and soul. ■

"The best that one person can give to another is a smile."



Name of the institution:

Archive of the Diocese of Passau

Web address:

www.bistum-passau.de/bistum/archiv

Oldest collection:

Documents from the 12th century in the possession of parish archives.

Oddest object / best-known archival item:

A census written on wood, dating back to the year 1562.

Overall volume of digital copies:

More than 1 million.

First digital object:

Church registers, of course.

Most loyal visitors of the reading room:

Enthusiastic researchers of local history.

From the team's point of view

Wolfgang Fronhöfer (Archivamtsrat on paternity leave, Senior Archivist): "Following the centralisation and recording of parish sources, the archives of the diocese, under the leadership of Dr. Wurster, have revolutionised research by digitising the church registers and making them available to the public via online databases. I am proud that I was part of bringing this project to success together with him."

Barbara Hagel (Administration): "I always enjoy coming to the archives because we get on well and trust each other. I also love to work with old sources. Working at the archives gives me new perspectives into the past as well as into the present."

Elena Mühlbauer (Student assistant): "During my studies I came to appreciate Dr. Wurster as an invaluable adviser who not only gave me tips on literature, but also important input for reflection. His main concern is to promote young researchers. He always has time to listen to and encourage us while he is tirelessly trying to supply us with the means we need."

Saskia Blatakes studies Political Science at the University of Vienna (AT) and the Institute for Advanced Studies. She works as a journalist, presenter and editor.



After an introduction into the digital archive system and a guided tour through the archive's storage facilities, the pupils are free to start with their creative tasks.



© Birgit Kibal

Adventures at the archives: learning by filming!

“Adventures at the archives” is the name of the game in Estonia: in other words, students create short movies about historical events based on archival documents. An insight into an unusual success story of a participatory learning process at the archives.

In 2015 the Rahvusarhiiv (National Archives of Estonia) in Tartu (EE) was the first archive to give a new EU-funded activity a go. Within the last two years, hundreds of pupils have participated in this active history learning process called “Adventures at the archives” by creating short movies about the archives, their treasures in the archives and about history in the widest sense.

Setting the playground

At the beginning each group of students participating is given a short introduction by an archive educator, who also sets out some tasks. Topics vary from puzzling over a politically significant historical record, to studying a family history, a court case document or learning about the specific services of the archives such as creating exhibitions or using e-services. At the Rahvusarhiiv one can even engage in a virtual puzzle – a game set in the archive building where QR codes provide the answers to questions displayed on tablets or smart phones. The fastest wins! As a next – or even simultaneous – step, students may either videotape their activity with the given task directly or start the filming process later, making up a film narrative beforehand. These days, it should not come as a surprise anymore that youngsters know very well which programme or app to choose for

quickly capturing their experiences and processing the movies all the way from start to finish – including English subtitles and background music, of course.

Lesson learnt?

Although every encounter between the students and the archives is different, it has turned out that there are some abilities that most of the students taking part acquire. They become aware of the connections between past and present, their perception for essential aspects is sharpened and they pick up storytelling skills. But learning by filming also gives teachers the chance to link such diverse subject matters as history, literature, social sciences, media education, computer training, English language, geography, physics or chemistry. And, of course, a trip to the archives enriches the

otherwise rather theory-oriented school lessons with practical and experimental activities. By delving behind the curtains of the archives students experience a comprehensive understanding of how these institutions function as safe-keepers and mediators of our heritage. Last but not least, it is not only the students who learn something new, but also the archival staff and educators, who attune to younger generations.

Where's the catch?

You might be wondering: It can't all be picture perfect?! Truth be told: Even the Estonian archival staff has noticed some confused or anxious flashes on the students' faces while introducing their tasks at the archives – but when the start signal rings, inspiration starts to flow, and teamwork comes to life bringing about fresh and original ideas. Learning by filming is remembering by playing – dare to taste it! ■

Read up on the pilot project on the blog of the Rahvusarhiiv (in Estonian)

goo.gl/1xeZTW

or in our insights archive:

icar-us.eu/de/insights-archiv

All short movies available here:

goo.gl/UuRq3b

Rahvusarhiiv:

ra.ee

info

Birgit Kibal is an archivist and information manager at the Rahvusarhiiv in Tartu (EE).



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Tiina Männapsoo is an archivist and archive educator at the Rahvusarhiiv in Tallinn (EE).

Insights into the history of Upper Austria

Many family researchers want to discover the places their ancestors lived in. For Upper Austria, the Digital Historical Atlas for Upper Austria lets you explore them from the comfort of your home.

"Who owned my childhood home one hundred years ago?", "What did these ruins look like in earlier days?" Researchers pursuing their hobby have many questions like these. In Upper Austria, the answers can be found on the Internet. In the year 2009, a cooperation between the Upper Austrian State Archives and the Digital Upper Austrian Geographic Information System (DORIS) run by the Department of Geographic Information and Property of the Office of the State Government of Upper Austria together set up the Digital Historical Atlas for Upper Austria (DOGA).

The starting point: Georeferencing

The website DOGA is presenting a wealth of georeferenced information on various topics relating to the history of Upper Austria. Its range includes the originals of the Franziszeische Cadastre, historical views of locations, biographies on Upper Austrian politicians, information on the historical borders of communities and parishes, historical maps, war memorials, concentration camp memorials and election results of Austria's First Republic as well as estate names and house histories of all estates that existed around the year 1830.

The basis for georeferencing is the so-called base map which can be displayed in an overlay mode to-

gether with the "Urmappe", a series of maps from the early 19th century. The system is designed to work in the other direction, too, providing the possibility to find additional information based on current ortho-images. Most topics can be searched either directly via the map or via the integrated search function.

Houses, estates and their owners

One of the most popular items of research is "Hofnamen und Häusergeschichte", which deals with estate names and house histories. A click of the mouse brings up facts such as the estate name, its former owners, specifics on the manor as well as further related information. This level of detail is currently available for the Innviertel and Hausruckviertel regions – a wealth of facts and figures on 45,000 houses and estates that existed more than 200 years

Links

DOGA online:

geschichtsatlas-ooe.at

Upper Austrian State Archives:

landesarchiv-ooe.at

info

Craftsman's house at the Open Air museum Neukirchen an der Vöckla.
Photo collection of the Upper Austrian State Archives, No. 27265



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ago and mainly still exist today. By the end of the year 2018, the project will also include the estates of the Traunviertel, to be followed by those of the Mühlviertel by 2020. In its final stage, the project will be much more than a collection of data for local historians: It will offer unprecedented research opportunities in the areas of social and economic history. However, DOGA will never be a finished project. On the contrary – content will continually be added to include additional information suited for georeferenced application, and existing content will be supplemented and improved. In times like these, when everything is hectic and geared towards the future, searching for personal roots is more important than ever. ■



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Norbert Kriechbaum studied History at the University of Salzburg (AT). With prior career steps at the University Library and the University Archive of the Johannes Kepler University in Linz (AT) since 2006, he is now responsible for the area of modern history at the Upper Austrian State Archives (AT).

On the playground of the future

For more than ten years, the historian Georg Vogeler has been the Technical Director of Monasterium.net. In an interview with “insights” he talks about the early days of the portal, the technical challenges of the future and what a global database of documents could look like. The occasion? The portal’s 15th anniversary.

Mr. Vogeler, how did you and Monasterium get together?

The Monasterium portal was founded in the year 2002 by Thomas Aigner who wanted to provide access to the documents held by Lower Austria’s monasteries for a large group of users by means of a database. In his discussions with the monasteries he argued that the opening hours of the archives could never be long enough to satisfy the needs of the users. Since digital editions are one of my main professional topics I was asked to become the Technical Director of Monasterium in the year 2005. Since then I have been involved in the background in an advisory capacity and have also been responsible for the development of standards and data modeling. I have always been viewing Monasterium as a kind of playground where I can try out new approaches.

What is unique about Monasterium?

There are two points: First, it is the only database that looks beyond “Myself and my archive”. Monasterium is motivated by the desire to unite fonds from various sources. Second, we are talking about an enormous number of documents to be managed. I only know about a single project that is older and equally large, which is Michael Gervers’ DEEDS project in Toronto. But even this project

does not have the same dimensions as Monasterium does.

Monasterium is still growing. How did the portal succeed in surviving for such a long time?

Monasterium’s formula for success – which is probably also the reason why it has become such a sustainable portal – lies in a mix of two aspects: Those who have been responsible decided on the right technology; and soon after it went online, an association was founded that took on responsibility for financing it. ICARUS has succeeded in raising money by submitting project applications and has in that way been ensuring basic maintenance. In addition, the project’s leaders have been using their own personal networks in the world of archives to motivate more and more archives to publish their fonds via Monasterium. In that way, considerable momentum was achieved quite quickly. However, some archives nevertheless prefer to establish their own infrastructure.

Is it possible that this phenomenon, the fact that some archives are setting up their own structures, may one day prevent the creation of a single, cross-border documents database?

We are currently watching a very exciting development that may be-

come very important for an even larger database. Many archives are starting to provide access to their data via an open interface,

a so-called API. The first time this has happened was within the framework of the German Archives Portal, “Archivportal D”. Maybe there will come a time when we will say: “We no longer need a single large database and a single server to store all images. We need an infrastructure that is able to aggregate the data – from various sources.” Monasterium could then for example select the documents in the German Archives Portal and also make them accessible via its own website.

When could this kind of interconnection happen?

This largely depends on the archives’ attitude towards this development. As long as some archives are saying “We have our own software which we can handle, and therefore we are not interested in changing anything”, it will take a long time. If everyone were to say “Our archival material is part of the public cultural heritage which we want to make accessible”, the “only” thing to do is think about the best way to make digital access possible.





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Digital Humanities projects such as Monasterium combine the work of **humanists** and **technicians**. It is not unusual that they speak two different languages. Historian Georg Vogeler knows them both and makes an effort to **build bridges** and reach joint results. He is convinced that good communication is the key.

Monasterium has survived this initial phase. While this is quite remarkable, it is rather unfavourable from the point of view of software development. Let's take an example: A project has been started based on a specific technical solution, but without knowing whether it can handle half a million of documents in a suitable way. Experience has shown that this approach is basically possible but also carries an enormous risk.

The users are not really familiar with the software's background problems, they mainly care about the quality of the data. Monasterium is also criticised for a certain lack of homogeneity...

The lack of homogeneity is already present when data is taken over from the individual archives. We receive very different types of data, and errors may occur in categorising it. I am nevertheless defending it systematically: Each archive is by itself responsible for making its documents available. I think that this problem should be put into perspective because Monasterium is a portal which the users can improve themselves. There will always be people who will complain in terms like "The archive has forgotten an "I", it's Innocent III, not II." Having more information also means that there is more to find.

How do private users work with Monasterium?

I know a historian in Krems who is primarily researching Lower Austria's castles and aristocratic estates and

is also visiting them. In preparing for such a visit to an aristocratic estate he got in touch with today's owner, probably a farmer – that is to say that the current owner was not an aristocrat who knew everything about his family's history. When the researcher arrived, the owner had already assembled a dossier comprising all the documents on the castle that he could find on Monasterium. To me, this is a clear indication that Monasterium is also a portal that is easy to use for non-scientists and allows for broad searches. In addition, we have about 10,000 visits per month. This number could never be reached if Monasterium was only used by researchers! ■

Georg Vogeler was born in 1969 and has been studying Auxiliary Historical Sciences, Social and Economic History, Public Law and Medieval Latin Philology at the Universities of Freiburg and Munich (DE). He is the Director of the Austrian Center for Digital Humanities and has been the holder of the first Austrian professorship in Digital Humanities at the University of Graz (AT) since 2016.

Let's get back to Monasterium: Some critics say that the portal has been growing too quickly and is therefore no longer working as it should. What do you think about that?

Monasterium is a very good example of how Digital Humanities projects usually work. It all starts with a technical solution for experimental and ad-hoc purposes, but then this solution lives on. Many DH projects have a short period of life. Monaste-

Links

Monasterium:
monasterium.net

Austrian Center for Digital Humanities:
informationsmodellierung.uni-graz.at

Dagmar Weidinger is an art historian and works as a freelance journalist and University lecturer in Vienna. (AT).



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Genealogy as a business project

Three years ago, I took my website "Genealogy Austria" online. By taking this step I turned my hobby into a career. Insights into four years of family research as a private business.

It may have been the rumours about a Hungarian princess in my line of ancestors that many years ago encouraged me to start doing some research on my family's history. While I was never able to find the princess, I succeeded in tracing the history of the women and men who were my ancestors back into the 17th century. My personal ancestry project brought me into contact with many Americans who showed an incredible level of enthusiasm for genealogy. Many internet forums and mailing lists are witness to the fact that they want to find out more about their ancestors from the "old" Austria. After all, almost four million inhabitants of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy emigrated between 1875 and 1910, close to three million of them to the United States. This realisation was a turning point in my professional life: I decided to turn my hobby into a career.

Genealogy – An American success story

At the outset of my new endeavour, I carefully prepared my new career by reading specialist literature in English and German, attending proper genealogy seminars such as the one held by Felix Gundacker, and doing "test projects" for friends and acquaintances to get a feeling for the workflows of such research projects. I also benefited

from my knowledge of the German Kurrent script which I had already learned in my youth in the course of my training as a typesetter.

Early in 2014, I was finally ready: I took the English version of my website online. To my great surprise, first requests from the United States started to come in a few days later. They turned into first real projects that gave me the chance to quickly gain a lot of experience. When I took the German version of my website online a few months later I was equally successful.

From probate research to company histories

Since then, four busy years have gone by. In the beginning I mainly dealt with genealogy in its typical form. Meanwhile I have widened my fields of activity. Within the context of probate proceedings, I am for example being asked to carry out research aimed at finding heirs. On another line of business, I am also doing research on the history of companies or the lives of their founders. One of the most important aspects of my work is to analyse and study the available sources since the documents and records required for many of these research projects are not available online.

Once I have located a promising



Johann Hammer doing research for a client. The positive feedback reaffirms his work. Quite frequently he hears that thanks to his work, long-guarded family secrets are finally revealed.

archival collection I like to visit the archive myself. Besides archives run by the churches, municipalities or provinces as well as the State Archives, my visits also take me to archives that are not so well known, for example seigniorial archives, university archives or archives at museums or long-established institutions. They frequently hold real treasures. Besides the "real" work I do in terms of research, the administrative part of my job should not be underestimated. Answering requests, writing reports or doing the paperwork takes up a lot of time. On the other hand, my daily work also has its memorable and "human" moments, for example when I can personally present the results of my research to my clients.

Moments of happiness in day-to-day work

One such example took place some time ago. I had successfully completed research on an American



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family's relatives in Lower Austria, and my clients personally paid me a visit. Together with an elder lady and

her son, we then drove up to a small village in the Weinviertel region which had been the home of their ancestors. In preparation of the trip I had contacted their Austrian relatives and organised for us to meet with them in front of the village church. My American guests were pretty surprised to see the large number of family members who met us there. This trip turned into a very emotional meeting that really touched me. I am of course being paid for my services, but it is moments like these when I can see the happiness and gratitude of my clients that make my job so great for me. ■

Find out more about Johann Hammer's work on his website:
Genealogy Austria:
genealogyaustria.com

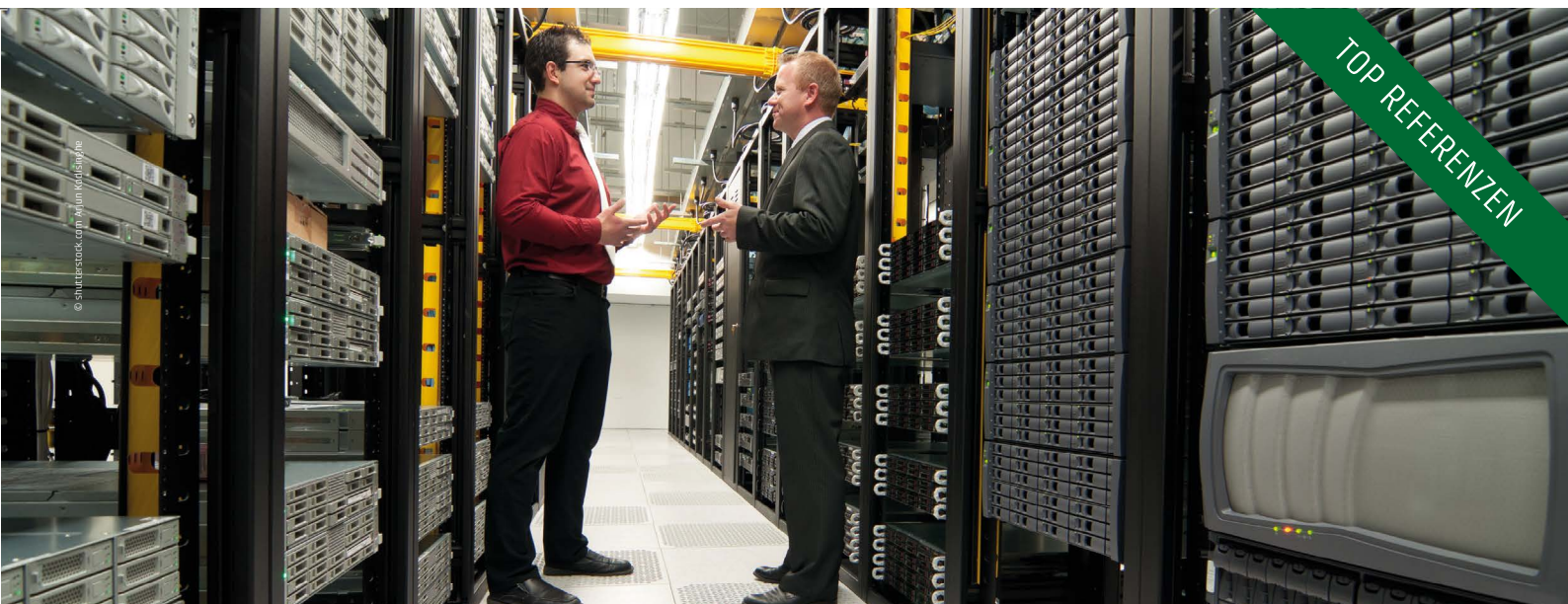
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Johann Hammer born and living in Vienna, is a trained typesetter, graphics designer and IT service provider. He has been working as a professional genealogist since 2014.



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