

How to create a blog or website

A Guide for Community History and Heritage Groups

How to create a blog

What is a blog?

The word 'blog' is short for *web log*. Blogs generally have the following features:

- They are updated regularly
- They consist of a collection of **posts**
- Each **post** has a date
- The newest posts appear at the top of the page

A blog can be very much like an online diary. Indeed, one of the most popular blogs on the internet is called *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* (<http://www.pepysdiary.com/>). On this blog, a new entry from Samuel Pepys's diary appears every day. The difference between a blog and a diary is that blogs don't need to be written from a personal perspective.

Blogs typically have the following characteristics:

- They are not written in an excessively formal style
- Blog posts are generally quite short
- Most blogs have a comment feature

Why is it worth blogging?

There are several reasons why you might consider blogging.

- Blogs are free and easy to setup.
- They make it easy to promote your research or community group – anyone with an internet connection can follow what you are doing
- Blogs are usually written in an informal style. It's OK to use them to try out ideas, to write about personal experiences, or to pose questions.
- Updating your blog regularly with interesting content means that readers are more likely to return. This might make your blog more effective than a static website which is seldom updated.

What are the disadvantages of blogging?

There are some potential disadvantages:

- Blogs require continuous effort to maintain. A blog which is never updated can give the appearance that your research project is inactive. A static website might be a better option.
- If you allow comments on your blog, then somebody needs to be given the task of monitoring them. It's important that visitors receive a reply, and that nuisance comments are deleted.

How do I create a blog?

There are many services that you can use to create a blog. One service is called **Blogger** and is run by Google. Another service is **Wordpress.com**. Both services are fairly similar.

The advantage of WordPress is that you can also add multiple pages, creating a fully-fledged website (as described in the following section of this guide). Your blog could be one section of your website.

In both cases, creating a blog is simply a case of visiting one of these websites and registering for an account. Remember to choose a short but memorable name for your blog.

How do I add images, video and audio to my posts?

Blog posts which consist solely of text may appear a little bland. So it's worth considering whether you can spice things up by adding images, video and audio to your posts. Both Blogger and WordPress make it very easy to add pictures to your posts – just click 'Insert image' in the first case, and 'Add media' in the second.

If you want to add audio or video, things become more complicated. Neither service allows you to upload audio or video directly. Instead, you need to use a separate service, and then 'embed' the audio/video in your post.

For audio, the best service to use is SoundCloud. Once you've registered an account, it's simply a matter of uploading your audio files to the website. You then need to enable sharing in your preferences. Beneath each sound recording is a 'Share' option – clicking this should generate some HTML code, which you can drop into your blog post.

For video, the process is similar. Upload your video to YouTube, enable sharing, and click 'Share' beneath the desired video. There is an option called 'Embed' – select it, then copy and paste the HTML code into your blog.

What should I write about?

There is no limit to the range of subjects that you can write about. The best approach is probably just to write about things that interest you, since if you don't enjoy writing posts, there's not much point doing them!

Here are some ideas for things that you might discuss in a blog post:

- Any interesting people, places or events that you have encountered in your research
- Stories in the news, perhaps which have some broad relevance to your research
- Trips you have made to archives or museums
- Any problems or issues that you have encountered
- Interesting sources or images that you have found

Blog posts don't have to be long – sometimes just 2-300 words is enough. This is one of their great strengths, since they allow you to write about smaller topics, such as individual people or sources. Indeed, by keeping your blog posts shortly, your blog can function more like a magazine than a book – readers can easily take in several articles in sitting.

Try to illustrate your posts with pictures if possible. Sometimes a picture will speak for itself and therefore doesn't need much commentary. If you can use your own images, all the better, as this will catch people's interest. Remember that you must not use images found on the internet without permission. However, there are a number of sources from which you can legitimately obtain images to use in your blog. Flickr and Wikimedia Commons are two websites that contain many images released using a Creative Commons license. You will probably still need to credit the photographer, but you won't need to pay a fee. For more information about Creative Commons pictures, see the 'Final steps' guide.

The following links provide some nice examples of blogs produced by local historians.

- The Irish in Leicester – <http://lynda-callaghan.blogspot.co.uk/>
- Charnwood Street, Leicester, remembered – <http://cib2.wordpress.com/>
- Your Histories (history of Clarendon Park, in Leicester) – <http://yourhistories.wordpress.com/>

How to create a website

There are many ways to create a website, and your options are limited only by how much time and money you are willing to invest in the endeavour.

The following guidelines provide some advice on how to create an attractive and functional website at no cost and in a relatively short amount of time. For many community researchers, this will be an ideal approach. For others, a more complex solution may be required. This is particularly likely to be the case if any of the following apply:

- You want to store a large amount of video and audio on the web, and make it available directly on your site
- You want to choose your own domain name (e.g. 'www.mycommunitygroup.org')
- You need to have full control over the design of your site

If you just want a basic but attractive website, then using Wordpress.com to create one is ideal. The site can also be used for blogging, which is discussed in more detail in the previous section of this guide. But WordPress is an ideal tool to create a website, whether you want to blog or not.

There are many guides and tutorials available on the WordPress website which cover the basics of creating a WordPress site. You can find this information at: www.support.wordpress.com.

The following guidance materials show you how to set up a site which is particularly appropriate for community history projects.

Creating your website

The first step is to go to www.wordpress.com. You will need to register for an account, and then sign in. At this stage you will also be prompted to provide a name for your blog, which will form part of the site's web address. This takes the format ***nameofyourblog.wordpress.com***. So think carefully about what name you would like to use.

Once you have logged in, click 'My Blog', and then 'Create a Blog'.

The screenshot shows the WordPress.com registration process. At the top, there is a blue header with the WordPress logo and 'WordPress.com' text, and navigation links for 'Forums', 'Themes', 'Support', and 'News'. The main content area is divided into three sections:

- Blog Address:** A text input field contains 'communityhistory2013' and a dropdown menu shows '.wordpress.com Free'. A green checkmark is visible. To the right, a note says 'Choose an address for your blog. You can change the WordPress.com address later.' Below the input, a message asks 'Did you know, the address communityhistory2013.com is also available?' with two buttons: 'Great! Use this address on my blog for \$18.00 a year' and 'No thanks, I'll use the free address.'
- Name Your Blog:** A text input field contains 'Community History Blog'. To the right, a note says 'Choose a title for your blog. It can be anything you like. Fear not, you can change this any time.'
- Privacy:** A dropdown menu is set to 'viewable by everyone'. Below it, a note explains: 'This means my blog will appear in search engines like Google and Bing, and in public listings around WordPress.com.' To the right, a note says 'The Site Visibility privacy setting controls who can read your blog.'

Understanding your website's layout

When creating your WordPress site, it's worth knowing about the following technical terms:

- **Page** – a page within your website
- **Post** – a section within a page
- **Sidebar** – section at the side, which is the same across all pages. Usually contains basic information such as links to posts or contact details
- **Header** – the area at the top of every page
- **Front page** – the page that visitors will see when they first visit your website
- **Dashboard** – this is the interface through which you control your website. It cannot be seen or accessed by ordinary visitors to your site

It is the ability to create **pages** that makes WordPress a powerful tool. If you were creating a website for a community history group, for instance, you might decide that your website should have the following pages:

- Welcome page
- 'About us'
- News
- History
- Contact information

- Links to other organisations

In WordPress, creating these pages is simply a question of clicking 'Add page', and then giving your new page a title and some content.

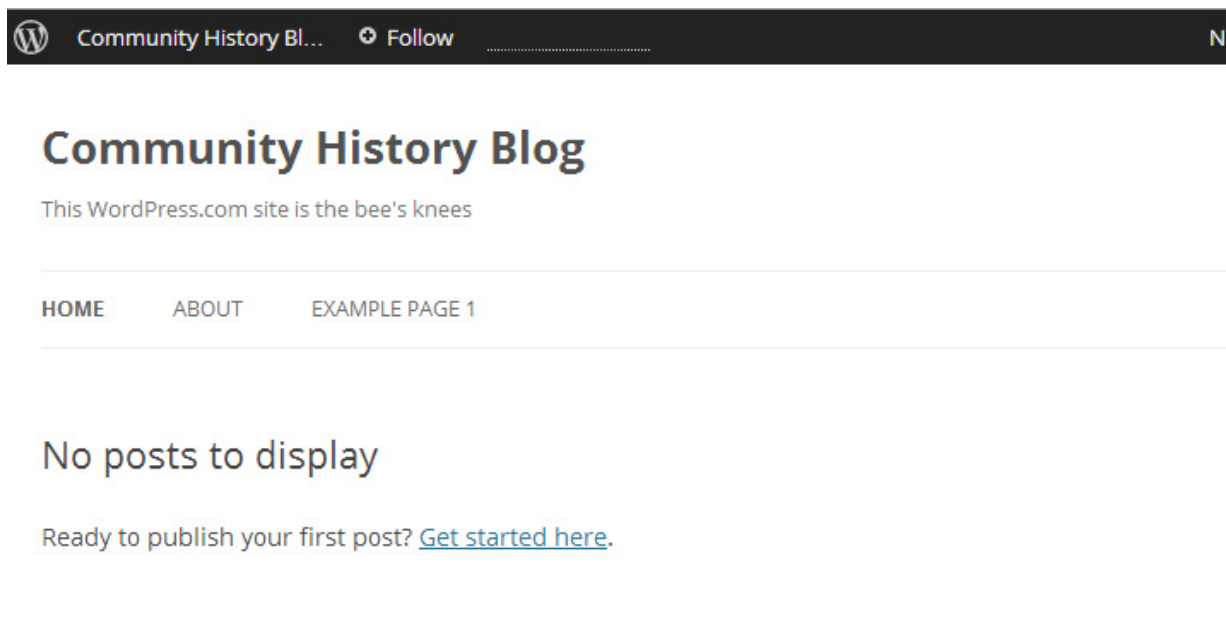
Some pages may contain multiple **posts**. You might create a 'News' page, for instance, which you will update regularly. It's possible to create pages which can display multiple posts. Each post is dated, with the newest post at the top of the page. Doing this is very easy. It's just a case of clicking 'New post' and writing a title with some content.

Your news page will, by default, be the **front page** of your website. However, you may wish to change this.

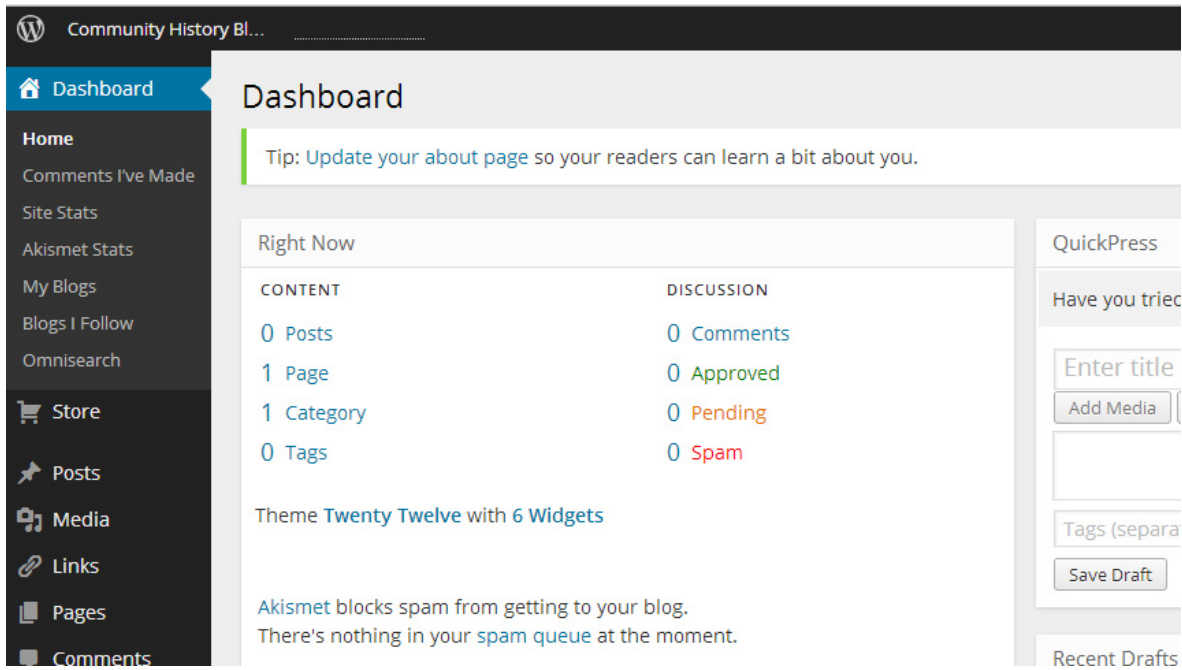
A step-by-step guide

Once you've created your website, there are a few simple things that you can do to improve it.

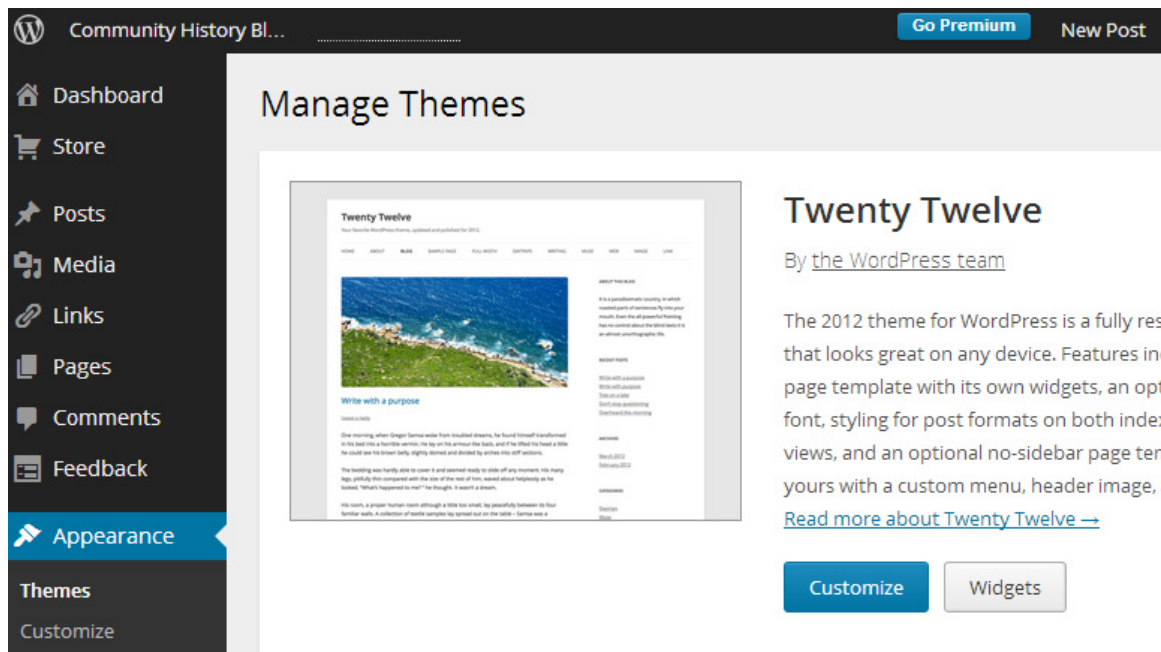
At first, your website will resemble the following image. You might like the plain design, but it's not very eye-catching.



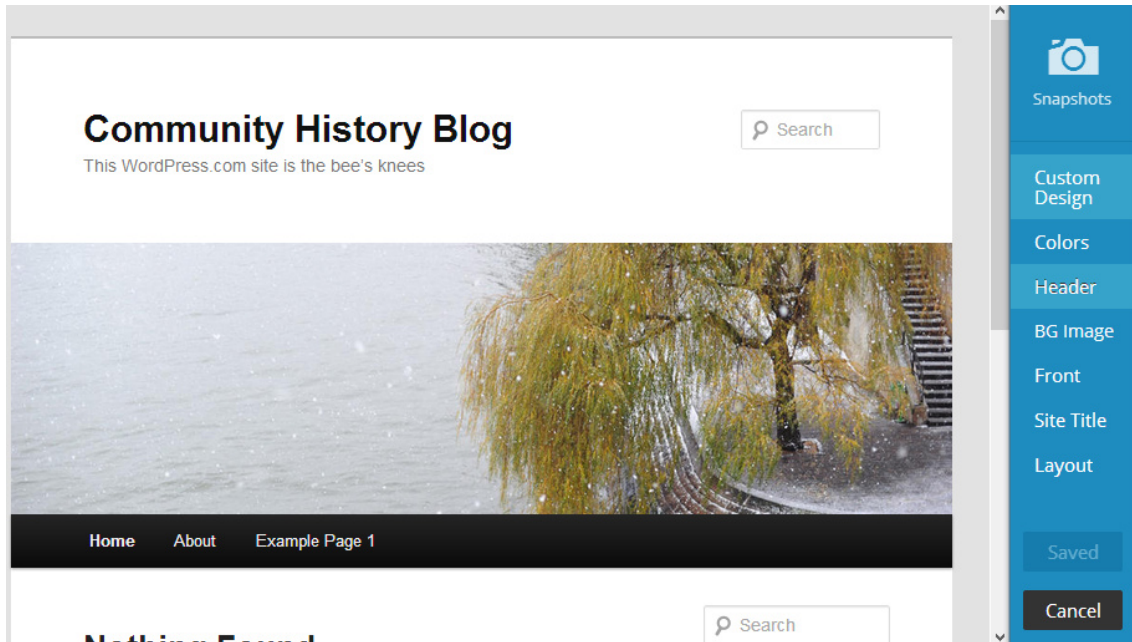
The first thing to do is navigate to your **dashboard**. As you can see from the image below, this serves as a 'control panel' through which you can edit your site and add new content.



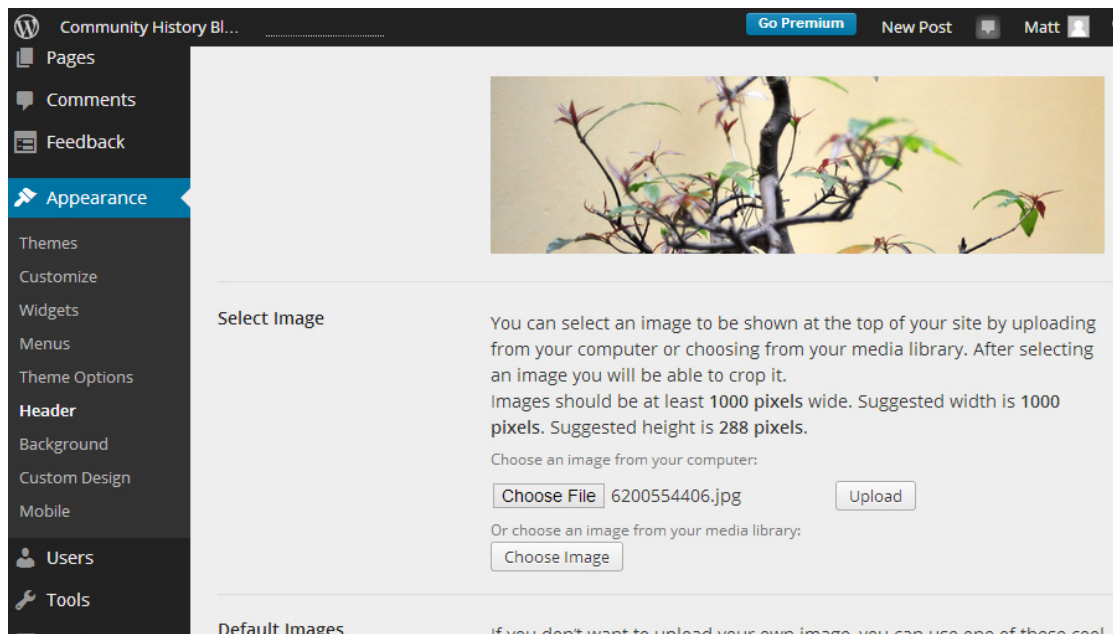
If you select 'Appearance' from the menu on the left, you can start to experiment with the look and feel of your website. You will see that it is possible to apply themes to your website. These themes immediately change the appearance of the site. One good theme to use is called 'Twenty Twelve' – it has a simple, clean layout, but is also customizable.



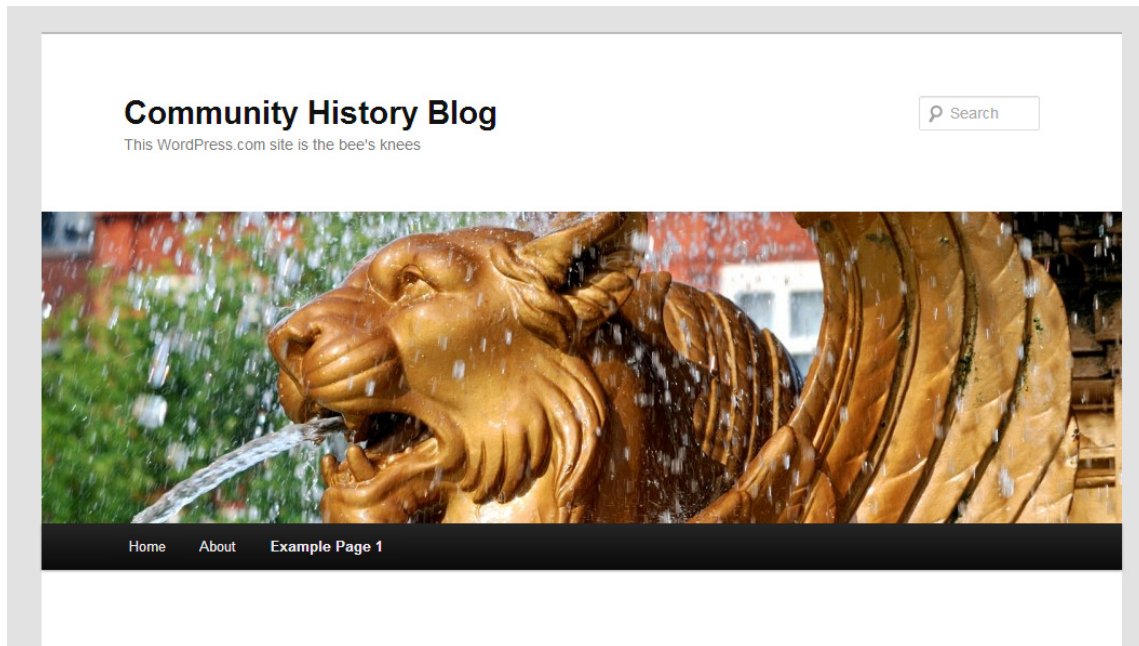
The image below shows what the 'Twenty Twelve' theme looks like when applied to the website that we've just created. Particularly useful is the black menu bar – any **pages** that you create are automatically added here. Further changes to the appearance can be made using the options bar on the right.



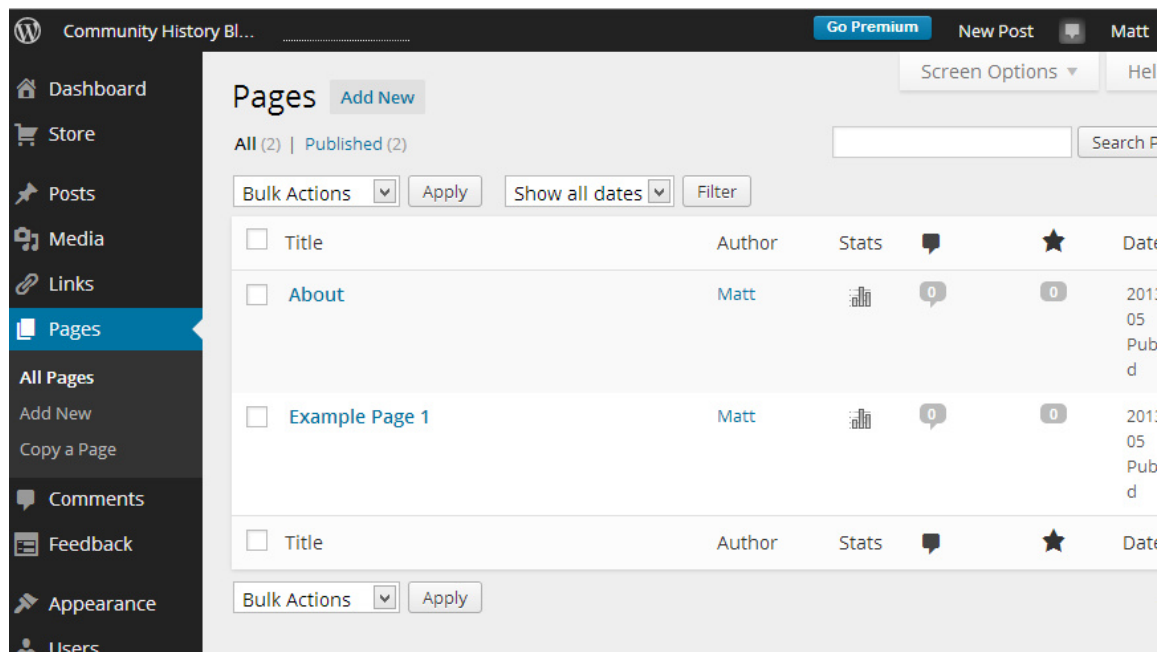
If you go back to the 'Appearances' menu in your **dashboard**, you will see that it's possible to add your own photo to the header of your website. Let's replace the picture of the willow tree, above, with something else...



You will see in the next image that I've added a picture that I took, of a fountain in Leicester, to the website's header.



The next thing you might want to do is add some **pages**. You can do this by selecting 'Add new' from the Pages menu in your **dashboard**.



Now let's add a welcome page. This will be the first page that visitors see when they come to the site. Give the page a title, and type something in the box. Then click publish. If you want this welcome page to be the main page of your site, you can do this in 'Settings > Reading'. You can also change where **posts** appear here – for instance, you might create a page entitled 'News', and set all posts to appear on it.

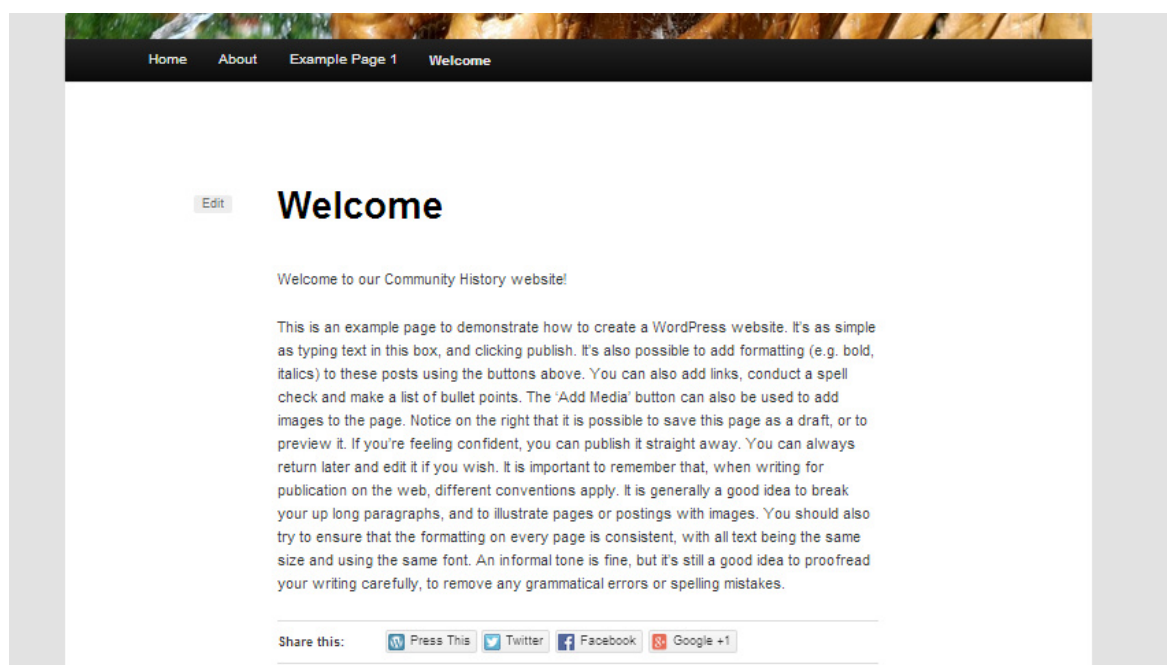
You can also add links, apply formatting and make a list of bullet points. The 'Add Media' button can also be used to add images to the page.

Notice how on the right it is possible to save this page as a draft, or to preview it. If you're feeling confident, you can publish it straight away.

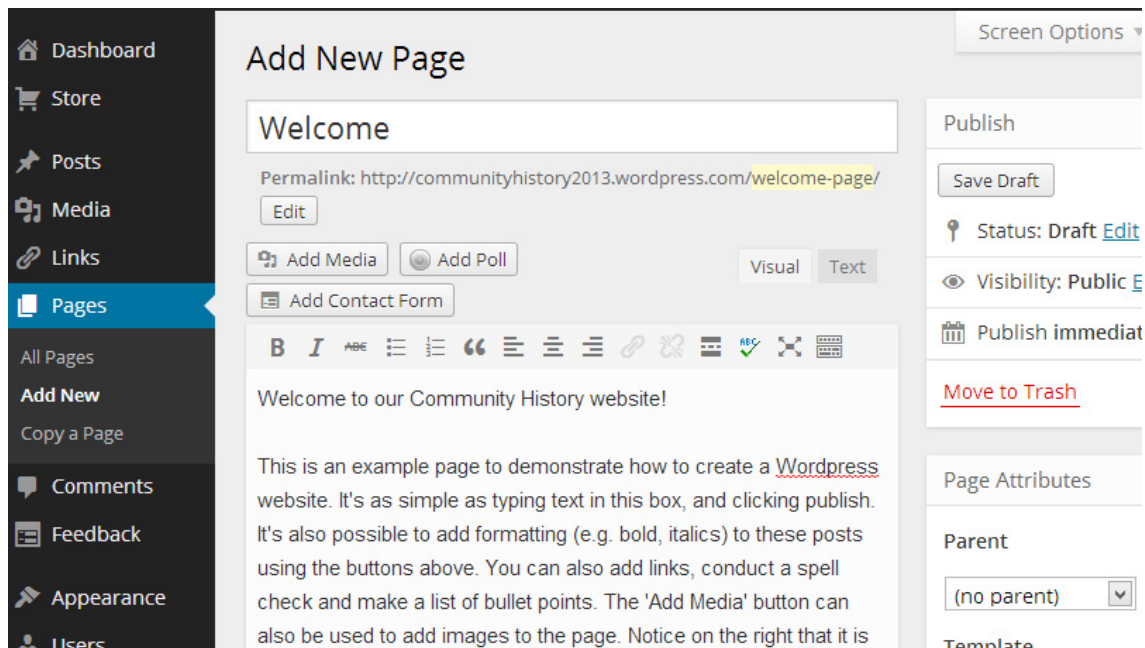
It is important to remember that, when writing for publication on the web, different conventions apply. It is generally a good idea to break up long paragraphs, and to illustrate pages or postings with images. You should also try to ensure that the formatting on every page is consistent, with all text being the same size and using the same font.

If you're feeling confident, you can publish it straight away. You can always return later and edit it if you wish. An informal tone is fine, but it's still a good idea to proofread your writing carefully, to remove any grammatical errors or spelling mistakes.

Here's what our website looks like now:



This is OK, but a page which consists of no more than a big chunk of text is quite boring. The text is also difficult to read. So click 'Edit', and space out the text a little more:



Text by itself still looks a little bland, even if you have spaced it into paragraphs. Fortunately, you can click 'Add Media' and easily add an image to the page.

For this example, I've used a photograph of a church that I took. Try to find an exciting, interesting image that reflects the content of your page in some way. For your 'Welcome' page, for instance, you could have a picture of your community group, or a picture of something associated with your research. The following image shows what this looks like in the editing view:

Posts
Media
Links
Pages
All Pages
Add New
Copy a Page
Comments
Feedback
Appearance
Users
Tools
Settings
Collapse menu

Welcome

Permalink: <http://communityhistory2013.wordpress.com/welcome/> [Edit](#) [View Page](#) [Get Shortlink](#)

[Add Media](#) [Add Poll](#) [Add Contact Form](#)

B *I* ABC

Welcome to our Community History website!

This is an example page to demonstrate how to create a [WordPress](#) website. It's as simple as typing text in this box, and clicking publish. It's also possible to add formatting (e.g. bold, italics) to these posts using the buttons above. You can also add links, conduct a spell check and make a list of bullet points. The 'Add Media' button can also be used to add images to the page.

Path: p

Word count: 215 Last edited by Matt on August

Writing Helper

And here's the website again, as readers will see it:

Home About Example Page 1 Welcome

[Edit](#) **Welcome**

Welcome to our Community History website!

This is an example page to demonstrate how to create a WordPress website. It's as simple as typing text in this box, and clicking publish. It's also possible to add formatting (e.g. bold, italics) to these posts using the buttons above. You can also add links, conduct a spell check and make a list of bullet points. The 'Add Media' button can also be used to add images to the page.

Adding users

WordPress allows you to create websites with multiple contributors. It is also possible to make some contributors 'administrators'. You do this via the 'Users' option on the **Dashboard**.

Tips on good design

Here are some tips to ensure that your website is appealing to users:

- Choose an attractive image for the header of your website.
- Try not to clutter the design. Don't put too many gadgets in your website's sidebar.
- Use short sentences and break long sequences of text into short paragraphs.
- Make sure you use the same style and size of font throughout the content pages of your website

You should include an 'About' page giving details of your community group or research. If possible, provide some contact information so people who are interested in your work can get in touch. If you use social media such as Twitter or Facebook, make sure you include a link to your account.

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