

JANUARY 16th - "The Digital Society"

Speaker - Nick Jones, former Head of Digital Communications at 10 Downing Street.

Nick explained how he became involved with the Internet and digital communications while at St Andrew's University, working on the student magazine, then he went into journalism. Later, while working as a civil servant, he was asked to help set up a digital communications network at 10 Downing Street under David Cameron. Until then, the government was behind the times technologically. Now it is used daily for distributing masses of information through the Central Office of Communication to, or through, numerous government departments such as the NHS, the Ministry of Defence, or the Environment Agency. Some of the information is precisely that, information, while some is propaganda such as used by RT (Russia Today).

Today over 90% of the UK population is connected through computers, smartphones, ipads or tablets and numerous other gadgets developed either by Apple or Microsoft.

Nick stressed that technology as such is neutral. How it might be used is not. It now provides global interconnectedness in a matter of seconds, providing instant news. How this news is presented is often biased. Nick also stressed three aspects of the digital revolution - Create, Connect, Share. Creative ideas can easily be shared with like-minded friends and colleagues; the world is globally connected; photographs/selfies and personal news can quickly be shared. These are the positives. The negatives, however, include fake news and false information, incitement to terrorism, hatred and violence, cyber-attacks perpetrated by criminals or enemy countries, pornographic images, encouragement to self-harm, and the Dark Web, easily accessed by sexual predators across the world. Unfortunately our security and police forces, let alone the government, are several steps behind and the laws to curb, control or block such activities are often even further behind. While much good has arisen from the digital age, there are still many moral and ethical issues that need to be addressed urgently.