

# AVON LOCAL HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY

Registered charity 270930

## Newsletter 164 30 September 2020

Website: [www.alha.org.uk](http://www.alha.org.uk)

Events: <http://www.alha.org.uk/events.html>

facebook <https://www.facebook.com/AvonLocalHistoryandArchaeology>

Material for Newsletter 165 by 15 December 2020  
please

Magazines and books to reviews editor, Hardings Cottage,  
Swan Lane, Winterbourne BS36 1RJ  
[jonathan.harlow@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:jonathan.harlow@uwe.ac.uk)

Details of events to website manager,  
Flat 1 Chartley, 22 The Avenue, Bristol BS9 1PE  
[roblawr1944@googlemail.com](mailto:roblawr1944@googlemail.com)

Other news, comments, and changes of contact details to  
newsletter editor and membership secretary,  
5 Parrys Grove, Bristol BS9 1TT  
[wm.evans@btopenworld.com](mailto:wm.evans@btopenworld.com)

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### ALHA NEWS

#### WALKS TALKS AND VISITS LIST – CORRECTION

Garry Atterton's telephone number is 0793 422 8161, not as stated in his entry in the Spring 2020 *Walks, Talks & Visits* list.

#### OFFER

The secretary has received from an anonymous donor an original copy of the *Bristol Victory Evening Post* dated 8 May 1945. A note said, 'Hoping this might be of interest to one of your local history societies. Not

rare, I am sure, so please recycle if not wanted. Just looking for a good home for it. Thanks.' Enquiries please to Catherine Dixon, [blackrockefd@hotmail.com](mailto:blackrockefd@hotmail.com), 01275 849200.

### **COMMITTEE ON ZOOM**

The ALHA committee held its September meeting via *Zoom*. Two members were not able to use the facility, and there were some glitches in joining the meeting and with sound. The last two difficulties were overcome during the meeting, which was able to transact business and discuss. The committee hopes to arrange another meeting, still experimental, in November. The committee is tentatively thinking of running in 2021 the local history day that was planned for 2020, if the speakers are up for it and a venue can be found.

### **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2020 ON ZOOM**

With no prospect at present of ALHA being able to hold its annual general meeting in the usual way, the committee is exploring the possibility of holding it via *Zoom* for those who can use it. (Gloucestershire Local History Association managed its AGM successfully in this way). The committee proposes to issue to all members notice of the meeting, its agenda, and the papers (the annual report and the 2019-2020 accounts) on paper or e-mail, and to invite those who cannot or do not wish to participate via *Zoom* to write or e-mail the secretary with any comments or suggestions, and to indicate approval (or otherwise) of the motions proposed.

### **ALHA WEBSITE**

Bob Lawrence, who has managed ALHA's website since its inception, would like to stand down. The committee invite expressions of interest from anyone who would consider taking over the role. If you are interested, could you please contact Bob, Flat 1 Chartley, 22 The Avenue, Bristol BS9 1PE, [roblawr1944@googlemail.com](mailto:roblawr1944@googlemail.com).

## **EVENTS AND SOURCES**

### **MUSEUM AND RECORD OFFICE REOPENINGS**

**Radstock & District Museum team write:** The Museum is reopening on **Sunday and Wednesday afternoons only from 2pm - 5pm**. Please see our website for further details and what changes have been put in place due to allow a safe reopening. For mail orders from our shop (our shop will not be open to Museum visitors) please email [shop@radstockmuseum.co.uk](mailto:shop@radstockmuseum.co.uk). For finance related matters please email [treasurer@radstockmuseum.co.uk](mailto:treasurer@radstockmuseum.co.uk). For governance matters please email [chairman@radstockmuseum.co.uk](mailto:chairman@radstockmuseum.co.uk). If you have an item you wish to donate to the museum collection please email [catalogue@radstockmuseum.co.uk](mailto:catalogue@radstockmuseum.co.uk). If you have a research enquiry please email [research@radstockmuseum.co.uk](mailto:research@radstockmuseum.co.uk). For publicity matters please email [publicity@radstockmuseum.co.uk](mailto:publicity@radstockmuseum.co.uk).

For general enquiries please call the Museum on 01761 437722 during our opening hours.

**The National Archives** at Kew is now open Tuesdays to Fridays 10am to 2.50pm only. Booking is required, and there are conditions. 'We are currently able to provide access to our first floor document reading room and second floor map and large document reading room only – our other facilities will remain closed, including our reference library, our exhibition spaces, our shop, and our cafés. We will also be unable to provide many of our other usual reading room services, including, access to microfilm and microfiche, research advice, record copying and access to our computers. We will continue to provide free downloads of digital records on our website for the time being, as we are initially only able to re-open for a very limited number of researchers. We will keep this, and all of our opening arrangements, under constant review.' More at <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/news/coronavirus-update/>

**The British Library is open Tuesdays to Saturdays only, 10am to 3pm. Booking is required, and there are conditions. More at** <https://www.bl.uk/visit/opening-hours> and <https://www.bl.uk/visit/keeping-everyone-safe>

**Bristol City Council** library services reopening is complicated. [https://www.bristol.gov.uk/libraries-archives/library-finder/-/journal\\_content/56/20195/LIBRARY-UPRN-000000199356/LIBRARY-DISPLAY](https://www.bristol.gov.uk/libraries-archives/library-finder/-/journal_content/56/20195/LIBRARY-UPRN-000000199356/LIBRARY-DISPLAY)

gives two different sets of opening hours. Enquirers are best advised to look at the city council's website or telephone; what follows tries to summarise the information for those readers who are not online.

The **central library** is reopening in stages. The central reference library (including the local studies area, microfilm, newspapers and periodicals) is being used to quarantine returned books, so is not open to the public. The lending area is understood to be open now **Mondays to Saturdays 11am to 4pm**, but numbers are limited; no children under 12 will be admitted; computer sessions will be shorter than usual and must be booked in advance by phone. Call 0117 903 7250 to make a booking; **lavatories will be closed**; photocopiers will not be available; browsing is not permitted, but staff will be able to help and advise you if you phone or email ahead; no WiFi; no café; floor markings and signs show distancing.

### **If you visit**

'Please do not visit the library if:

- you've had coronavirus symptoms in the past 10 days
- a member of your household has had coronavirus symptoms in the past 14 days
- you've been in contact with someone who's had coronavirus symptoms in the past 14 days

There will be safety measures in place, including Perspex screens at staff desks to minimise contact between staff and our customers. We have supplied staff with masks, gloves, face guards and hand sanitiser, and hand sanitiser units will also be available for you to use in key locations around each library.

All computers will be wiped clean with alcohol wipes between each session. Unfortunately, we will not yet be able to offer an enquiry or reference service or any assistance with computer use.

When visiting the library please wear a mask or other face covering.'

### **NHS Test and Trace**

Library staff will take visitors' names and contact numbers, though you can let us know if you do not your details passed to the NHS Test and Trace programme.

### **Call and Collect service**

This service is currently only available at **Central Library**. You can email or call or the Central Library on 0117 903 7250 to ask for up to 5 adult items and up to 8 items for under 18s.

'We will issue the items to your library account and put them in a washable and reusable bag ; We will telephone or email you to let you know when your items are ready to collect; You can leave any items you don't want to take home; You can then bring your books back in the same bag when you are finished, and it will be placed into quarantine.'

### **Returned items and library procedures**

All returned items will be quarantined for 72 hours. DVDs and Fastback books can be borrowed for 3 weeks instead of the usual 1 week. Events, room booking and enquiry services remain suspended, but the library continues to offer online services, social media children's events and virtual book clubs. Loan periods will be for 3 weeks. Overdue charges will apply for items borrowed from open libraries (**Central, Fishponds, Henbury and Stockwood**). Hire charges for DVDs now apply.

### **Reservation service**

You can once again use the [LibrariesWest website](#) to make reservations for items from the catalogue. The Bristol libraries you can collect your reservation from will be limited to those sites that are currently open – **Central, Fishponds, Henbury and Stockwood** libraries. It is possible to select other libraries in other library services as your collection point, but you may be charged a reservation fee by that library service. There is no reservation charge if you collect from a Bristol Library. Reservations may take longer to arrive than usual. There is a temporary limit of 10 reservations per library member at any one time.

There is limited opening at **Henbury, Fishponds and Stockwood** libraries.

<https://www.bristol.gov.uk/libraries-archives/coronavirus-library-information>

### Contact details

Please call ahead to use a public computer. Please call ahead if you have a specific query.

**Central Library** - Email: [lending.library@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:lending.library@bristol.gov.uk), 0117 903 7250

**Fishponds Library** - Email: [fishponds.library@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:fishponds.library@bristol.gov.uk), 0117 903 8560

**Henbury Library** - Email: [henbury.library@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:henbury.library@bristol.gov.uk), 0117 903 8522

**Stockwood Library** - Email: [stockwood.library@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:stockwood.library@bristol.gov.uk), 0117 903 8546.

**South Gloucestershire libraries:** 11 are now open again. **Filton** library is closed (not for the virus but for building works). Opening hours of individual libraries are listed simply and clearly at <https://www.southglos.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/libraries/changes-to-library-services-during-covid19/>, which also gives details of the special arrangements, some of which are similar to those at Bristol noted above. Services available include self-service borrowing, 1 hour computer use, and 1 hour's use of Wi-Fi. Black and white copying is available at **Cadbury Heath, Emersons Green, Hanham, Kingswood, Patchway, and Staple Hill**; colour and black and white at **Bradley Stoke and Yate**; but no photocopying available at **Downend, Thornbury, or Winterbourne**.

**Bath Central, Keynsham and Midsomer Norton Libraries** are open again **10am to 4pm, Monday to Friday**. Main library areas will not be available for browsing. Face coverings are required, unless you have a special exemption, in line with the [latest government guidance on face coverings](#). The number of people entering the library at any one time will be limited. Public computers and self-study areas are still closed. Books can be returned through designated drop-boxes on the ground floor of **Bath Central Library**, and at the entrances of **Keynsham** and **Midsomer Norton** Libraries. There will be a limited range of pre-selected books to 'grab and go' (you will need your library card for this). We must follow social distancing protocols, and use hand sanitisers provided. All other library services remain suspended. <https://beta.bathnes.gov.uk/library-and-information-services>.

**Bristol Archives** <https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/bristol-archives/plan-your-visit/> (Beware: if you go to <https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/bristol-archives/> and click on View Opening Times under Bristol Archives, that will take you to the hours for MShed, which are not those for Bristol Archives.) All visitors need to book their visit in advance. The searchroom is open on **Tuesdays and Fridays 9.30 to 12.30 and 1 to 4pm**. You can choose either a morning or afternoon slot, each of three hours. Visits are rationed to one per week. Appointments can be booked two weeks in advance. New time slots are released every Monday. Documents must be ordered when you book. You will need to provide document references for up to six individual items. Catalogue references can be found on BA's [online catalogue](#).

**Bristol & Avon Family History Society's** research room at B Bond is closed until further notice: <https://bafhs.org.uk/research-room/>

So is **Bath Archives**: <https://www.batharchives.co.uk/opening-hours> 'We will continue to answer remote enquiries by email, telephone and post to the best of our abilities.'

**Somerset Heritage Centre** at Norton Fitzwarren has limited opening. Booking is required and there are conditions. The centre is open for research visits **Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday**. There are two bookable sessions each day. These are from **10.00 am to 1.00 pm and 2.00 pm to 4.30 pm**. There is a limit of 6 people per session: <https://swheritage.org.uk/archives-reopening-information/>

**Gloucestershire Archives** is open Tuesdays to Fridays 9am to 4.30 pm. Booking is required, and there are conditions. <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives/plan-your-visit/covid-recovery/>

**National Trust Tyntesfield and Dyrham Park** houses, cafes and shops are open, but booking is required. <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/place-pages/2362/pages/opening-times-calendar>

**Kingswood Heritage Museum** is open **Tuesdays and Saturdays 11am to 5pm**; face covering required: <http://www.kingswoodmuseum.org.uk/visiting/>

**Aerospace Bristol**, is closed <https://aerospacebristol.org/covid-19>

**Thornbury & District Museum** is closed until further notice: more detail at <http://www.thornburymuseum.org.uk/visiting/opening-times/>

**Weston Museum** is open **Thursdays to Saturdays 12 noon to 4pm:** <https://westonmuseum.org/your-museum/welcome-back/>

Weston Museum, Burlington Street, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 1PR 01934 621028, free

## **PLANNING AND ARCHAEOLOGY**

The government has published proposals on reforming planning law: *Planning for the Future*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future>.

The white paper does not mention archaeology. It mentions known historic sites, but much archaeology these days is done because the local planning authority has power to require archaeological investigation to take place before development or redevelopment starts. The legal mechanism for such requirements is either a s.116 Agreement or a condition on a grant of planning permission. If existing planning law is to be replaced, archaeologists might prefer to see legislation imposing an explicit duty on local planning authorities to consider at both the stage of drawing up local plans and at the stage of determining a specific planning application whether the power to require archaeological investigation should be exercised, and perhaps to consult relevant interests (such as local history and archaeological societies) before coming to a decision. A risk is that the present powers could be swept away by new legislation were it to impose a new regime which did not give local planning authorities such a power. Such a side-effect would be consistent with one of the government's aims, viz to speed up the planning process. Does the government see archaeology as one of the causes of developments being delayed?

One way the government proposes to speed the process is to fast-track planning applications consistent with a previously approved local plan (of which three different sorts are proposed). If such a regime comes in, there is a risk that applications considered consistent with a local plan will be automatically permitted (or, more dangerously for archaeology, given deemed permission by a general development order), so that the local planning authority no longer need take into account considerations such as the desirability of archaeological investigation, which would otherwise delay the development. If the proposed regime does that, one effect will be to make it all the more important that any need for archaeological investigation is considered at the local plan making stage, otherwise the archaeological pass will already have been sold by the time the developer wants to start work. So one representation people concerned about archaeology might consider making might be that a requirement to consider the need for archaeological investigation should be explicitly written in to the local plan-making procedure as well as the procedure for considering planning applications. Another might be that if large categories of development are to be permitted by general development order (ie no need for express planning permission), conditions requiring, or permitting the local planning authority to insist on, archaeological investigation should be written into the general development order.

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists and Council for British Archaeology initial briefing on the white paper is at: <https://www.archaeologists.net/news/cba-cifa-joint-initial-response-'planning-future'-white-paper-1596816757>

The British Archaeological Trust's initial statement is at: <https://rescue-archaeology.org.uk/2020/08/rescue-says-a-government-fixated-on-simplification-of-planning-law-is-not-good-for-our-future-environment>

If you would like to respond to the government consultation, you can do so until **29 October 2020** via <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future>, or by email to: [planningforthefuture@communities.gov.uk](mailto:planningforthefuture@communities.gov.uk)

## **JAMES HENRY ARROWSMITH-BROWN**

*Dr Jonathan Harlow draws attention* to the death in January 2020 of Mr JH Arrowsmith-Brown at the age of 99. He and his daughter Victoria were the last of the family which ran the firm of Arrowsmiths, with a century's record in printing and local history publishing. This included the first fifty-seven volumes of the Bristol Record Society.

## **SOMERET & DORSET NOTES & QUERIES**

As mentioned under REVIEWS below, an on-line index to *Somerset & Dorset Notes & Queries* is now at <https://www.sdnq.org.uk>.

**REVIEWS** by Dr Jonathan Harlow unless otherwise said

*The Gloucestershire Court of Sewers 1583-1642*, Rose Hewlett ed., Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society 2020, Gloucestershire Record series vol. 35; pp. lxxxii + 365; b&w and colour illustr, ISBN 978 1 913735 00 5, hb £30, but £22.50 plus postage for a limited period. *Reviewed by William Evans*

ALHA's 31 August 2020 e-update noticed this book, with a summary by its editor, so a description is not repeated here. More on the history of land drainage in our area appeared in 'Land drainage and sea defences' in e-update July 2017; 'Crooks Marsh' in *Newsletter* 159 (30 June 2019); and 'Who drained the Saltmarsh, and when?' in e-update 30 November 2019.

Apart from the painstaking meticulousness of the editing, this book is valuable because (1) it contains a transcription of records of a type of which few survive; (2) it deals with an aspect of local government and land management important to large tracts of this area both north and south of the Avon; (3) it covers a period in our area's past for which comparatively few records have survived; and (4) the wealth of local place and individual names will commend the book to family history researchers. The excellent introduction, indexes, referencing, maps and glossary of technical local land drainage terms (itches, gouts etc) make navigating the text much easier than it would otherwise have been.

Although the editor's introduction deals with the great flood of 1607 and its successor in 1636 (both of which devastated part of north Somerset as well as south Gloucestershire), the commissioners' records themselves refer only obliquely to what must have been frightening and traumatic events, with people (identified and named by the author) and animals drowning and much property damaged or destroyed. They record, for example, channels cut to get water away, and sea banks and walls needing repair. It is almost as if the commissioners took disaster in their stride, which may say something for the tough-mindedness of the times, or unconcern for the plight of those who actually worked the land. One suspects their attitude to a virus pandemic would have been stoical and practical.

The editor discusses the 1607 inundation and quotes contemporary accounts of it word for word. She appears to accept the received explanation of the event, a combination of exceptional spring tide, wind and low atmospheric pressure. She notes the recent proposal – readers may have seen a television programme – that the cause was a tsunami, generated by movement of a large chunk of the continental shelf off south west Ireland, and evidenced by analysis of organisms found in the sea bed and in sedimentation both sides of the Severn, but she does not enter the argument. Not unreasonably: it is no concern of the text transcribed. A valuable and worthwhile book, thoroughly recommended.

*Bristol's Photo Pioneer: HA Postlethwaite* by Veronica Bowerman, Henleaze Heritage 2020, 44 pages, many illustrations, £2.99 e-book via Amazon.

HA Postlethwaite, HAP or Possy, (1888-1970) was a dedicated photographer, skilled and 'amateur' only in the sense that he worked as a full-time civil servant. He was proficient with black & white, colour and cine. (He also wrote short stories.) Though not a native, most of his later life was spent in **Bristol**.

In this booklet Veronica Bowerman outlines his life, both family and photographic. It is a full account and doubtless reliable, but regrettably there are no references. But the real glory of the book is in the photographs. There are several lively and affectionate portraits. But best of all are the images of pre-WW2 Bristol and area. Some, dating around 1939, are in colour – and in very delicate colour, watercolour rather than poster-paint. If the post-publication price – check Amazon or **Henleaze Local History** or [henleazebook@gmail.com](mailto:henleazebook@gmail.com) – is anything like the e-book one, buyers will get a bargain and a book to linger over more than once.

**'Rulers of the county: the magistracy and the challenge of local government c. 1790-1834'** by Rose Wallis, *The Local Historian* 50.2 (April 2020) pp 92-107.

This is an interesting account of a period in which the challenges to local authority were growing. Rose Wallis shows that though this was to some extent recognised in the increasing numbers who were 'qualified to act', they were still drawn from the same ranks of squire and parson – the 'natural leaders' of society. And they were untutored and unpaid. So were the leaders of municipal governments but their place perhaps gave them more perks and side benefits than the most active JP could expect from his voluntary service.

The article appears to deal almost exclusively with law and order; and while this was clearly the main concern of the magistracy, one might look also for an examination of road maintenance in this era of tolls; and of the magistrates work in adjudicating questions of poor rate maintenance and setting corn prices.

Three of our ALHA booklets are reviewed in *The Local Historian* 50.3 (July 2020): Nos 28 *Surgeons & Artists* ‘nicely illustrated’; 29 *The Butlers* ‘well researched’; and 30 *The Temperance Movement* ‘fascinating study’.

***Writing the History of Somerset: Family, Community & Religion (Essays in honour of Robert Dunning)*** ed Adrian Webb & Andrew Butcher (Halsgrove 2018, £16.99) had escaped my notice but should certainly be brought to yours. It is reviewed favourably and in detail in *The Local Historian* 50.2 April 2020). [This book was noticed, also belatedly, in ALHA e-update 31 August 2019. As there noted, it contains an essay by Dr Joe Bettey, ‘A Somerset gentleman and landowner: Thomas Smyth of Ashton Court, **Long Ashton** 1609-1642;’ and one by Adrian Webb, ‘New light on William Day of **Blagdon**, land surveyor, cartographer, and linen draper.’ Includes a bibliography of RD’s writings, many of which touch on the Somerset part of our area. Ed.]

Local historians may be glad to learn that there is now an on-line index to *Somerset & Dorset Notes & Queries*: <https://www.sdnq.org.uk>. Read about it in *Local History News* 136 (Summer 2020). This same issue has a lovely cover picture: A German woman self-shielding from cholera in the 18th century.

***Hotwells: spa to pantomime***, Sue Stops (Bristol Books 2020, ISBN 978 190 944 6229; 80pp, colour illustr, pb £10.) *reviewed by William Evans*

This is three booklets in one. First, a summary of **Hotwells** past: the spa, the Victorian period (in 1879 Hotwells Road had 194 shops and 32 pubs), and the destruction of the community in 1963-1965 by the intrusion of the Cumberland basin road system. For more detail, there is *On the waterfront: the Hotwells story*, by the author and Helen Reid (Redcliffe 2002). The second part tells how in the late 1970s the local community restored Hope chapel, which was named not out of theological or social aspiration but after its evangelical donor Henrietta Hope (1750-1761), and ran it as a community arts centre for 20 years. The third part celebrates the annual pantomime which started at the Hope centre in 1980 and still livens up the end of winter.

As much personal memoir as history, the book is written in a light, informal style and is profusely illustrated. The author’s enthusiasm and the energy of the participants come across vividly. The author and her editor have done well to organise a welter of unruly source material so as to produce a lively, interesting and informative read. If lockdown is getting you down, this book will lift your spirits.

Some points stand out. First, how the character of the **Hotwells** area has changed several times. Those changes were set off by fashion, external economic pressures and local authority decisions, but also by local people’s determination and hard work. Some of that was done individually or in co-operation with each other; sometimes they took advantage of help from outside, and sometimes they opposed and overcame pressures from outside. Second, the devastation wrought by the 1960s road scheme – image left from flickr. A photograph shows minister of transport



Ernest Marples opening it, admired by Gervas Walker, leader of the city council. The parallels with the outer circuit road scheme and its destruction of **Totterdown** are striking, the main differences being that the Cumberland flyover actually got built and used, and the **Hotwells** community achieved something of a recovery. Third, the precariousness of much of the area’s social and community infrastructure, and the huge contribution made by voluntary effort. Renovation of some buildings was down to the initiative of newcomers, which some might disparage as opportunistic gentrification of a run-down area. Underneath the positive exuberance of this book, there are some serious issues, which must be known to many communities in the older parts of large towns, in our area and elsewhere.

## COMMENTARY AND RESPONSES

### The past obscured

A piece in the e-update of 31 August 2020 suggested that you cannot tell just from the look of a place what happened there. Several readers have pointed out that the choice of Jane Austen in **Bath** was a poor example. *David Evans* (no relation) writes: 'I am surprised that you included **Bath** and Jane Austen in your list of 'hidden' history; **Bath** must make a fair proportion of its tourist income from the association, even though she hated the place (they do keep that quiet) and started a thinly disguised satire called "Sanditon"!'. Point taken.

### Bristol's Poet Laureate

*John Stevens* writes:

*Bob Southey! You're a poet, poet laureate,  
And representative of all the race.  
Although 'tis true you've turned a Tory at  
Last, yours has lately been a common case.*

To many *literati*, Poet Laureate Robert Southey is best known from the viciously ironic dedication to Lord Byron's *Don Juan*, the opening of which is given above, castigating his alleged apostasy from the radicalism of his youth in search of preferment and place.

Educated at Westminster and spending his later life in the Lake District, Southey (1774-1843; Laureate from 1813) was a Bristolian by birth and upbringing. He was christened at Old Christ Church in the city, a plaque outside the current church commemorating the event, and married at St Mary **Redcliffe**.

The justice of Byron's attack may be questioned. A trajectory from Left to Right is not uncommon in a man's life, particularly in a time like the early nineteenth century when, to many, the very foundations of society were under threat. Nor is it clear what political course Byron (1788-1824) might have followed, had he lived to outgrow his abnormally prolonged adolescence. In any case, Southey's views, even in his Tory phase, were eclectic, staunch conservatism in opposition to catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform existing alongside a social radicalism which deplored the effects of industrialism in Birmingham and Manchester and an advocacy of public works to combat unemployment.



Poetically, Southey's *oeuvre* is slim in volume and perhaps lacking in profundity beside that of his fellow "lake" poets Coleridge (his brother-in-law) and Wordsworth. Nonetheless, there are many and varied gems. A few examples follow.

*After Blenheim* is one of the finest anti-war poems in the language, highlighting the effects of conflict on civilians caught up in it, exemplified by the greybeard telling his grandchildren how his own grandfather's cottage was razed to the ground during Marlborough's triumph. The refrain, '*twas a famous victory*, is ironic.

Not that Southey was an unthinking pacifist. His respect for valour in a righteous cause, such as the struggle with Napoleon, is demonstrated in his *Life of Nelson*, which long remained a standard biography of our greatest naval hero and formed the basis for a film as late as 1926.

Other poems worthy of mention are the dramatic and sombre ballad of *The Inchcape Rock*, and *The Pig*, which despite one or two lapses into a regrettable anti-semitism, is a notable paean of praise to one of the more (to many) unlikeable beasts. And who can read the mock-heroic *Gooseberry Pie* without the mouth watering?

This is not to mention *The Old Man's Comforts*, a poem perhaps famous for the wrong reasons, namely the splendid parody in *Alice in Wonderland*. Unlike Carroll's nonsense, however, Southey's original is a poem with a moral, ending:

*I am cheerful, young man, Father William replied,  
Let the cause thy attention engage -  
In the days of my youth I remembered my God  
And He hath not forgotten my age.*

It is too late for many of us to follow the old man's injunction; but the advice, it is suggested, is sound.

## **The End of Local History?**

*Dr Jonathan Harlow writes:* In the April edition of *The Local Historian* (vol 50.2) Bill Evans argues that local history is over. [*No, he didn't, but never mind. Ed.*] His case is based on the premise that 'local history depends on local diversity and on distinctiveness from the nation as a whole'; and so is under threat from increasing homogenisation nationally and even globally.

I disagree, and in the first place by rejecting his premise. The interest and importance of local history do not depend on its difference (though of course until the local history is done, nobody knows whether this locality *was* the same as that or not.) The strength of local history is that it is grass-roots history. National or international history is generalised history. This is especially true of social and economic changes, but it is also true of political history unless one thinks that political history is confined to the locality of Westminster.

So to take one of Bill's examples: the takeover or supersession of small local businesses by national ones. One can see the results as statistics; but where better to see the process than in a local study? Well, only in several local studies. And one of the great boosts to local history today is the internet. Local historians are no longer relegated to the amateur resurrection of amusing or shocking incidents for the delectation of a few local readers. They can be professional historians equal to others in the value of their results as well as their methods. Local History is a full and proper sort of history like Political History or Military History.

So gird yourselves to the task, fellow Local Historians! Here in the same issue is Rose Wallis on the relation of the magistrates to local government in Somerset 1790-1834. Its value goes up as it is matched by similar studies for Suffolk and Surrey and Sussex; whether they tell the same or a different story.

We are hardly short of national studies of history of any kind or age. Not one of them but will benefit immeasurably from more studies of how this or that worked out on the ground. Forget about the 'last local historian' turning the lights out! Rather let us all switch on more and more lights among the grass-roots!

## **Working backwards**

Some inventions appear out of nowhere; others come from putting different technologies together; others from applying techniques used in one practice to another. Local history would benefit from applying methods used in other activities. Statistics, philosophy and law are obvious examples. Another is family history, one of whose techniques is to work backwards.

Family history people point out that your current family is a good place from which to start your family history enquiries. You can get information from your parents and grandparents if they are alive and from other relations if they are still speaking to you. They may tell you about their parents and grandparents, and about people and events you did not know about. Birth, marriage and death certificates give information about the subject's parents, as do parish registers. Each one gives information about the previous generation, and so on. There will be gaps and dead ends, but working back is easier than trying to work forwards.

Because most local history narratives are chronological, we tend to investigate the past in date order. We tend to look for an event, a change or an origin, and then work forward. That is understandable, because many sources tend to record things consecutively: chronicles, newspapers, diaries, collections of letters, accounts, minutes, registers – all tend to record things consecutively.

I'd like to suggest that for local history investigations working backwards can also be helpful. You could start with a present-day activity, family, building, business or institution and then work back. Has the house or business always been in the same ownership or control? Who owned it previously? When did those premises become a shop? What was it before? When did the chapel close and why? How and when did the farm, school, or business change? Having established what was there before, you can go on to enquire what was there before that, and so on. In the case of land or a building the ownership can be traced through abstracts of title in the property's pre-registration deeds, which can take you back a long way.

## **Minds and mentalities**

RG Collingwood's early work was on roman Britain, and included contributions on our area in the britanno-roman period. Collingwood later moved into other aspects of history.

One of his themes was that it is not enough for historians to find out and narrate what happened: they ought to try to explain why from the point of view of the people involved at the time. As most change, natural disasters apart, results from deliberate actions by people, Collingwood contended that historians should explore why people acted as they did, and what motives, beliefs and values drove them to do so; in popular parlance, historians should try to find out what made people in the past tick, and should try to get inside the mindsets of the people being studied. We must not assume, argued Collingwood, that people in

other ages thought and felt the same as we do. Not only, as LP Hartley put it, is the past a foreign country because people do things differently there: their thoughts, their beliefs, what they know and do not know, and what they take for granted, are also different. Collingwood's observation is borne out by study of ancient civilisations such as those of Greece, Rome, China, India and Africa, and of their literatures. His observation also applies to the UK, and to our area.

As with any form of historical generalising, one problem with Collingwood's approach is that it can lead to stereotyping. We read Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou*, and jump to the conclusion that all cathars and catholics in the early fourteenth century were like that. We read Eamon Duffy's *Voices of Morebath*, and infer that all pre-reformation English parishes were similar. We read Thomas Cox's account of eighteenth century Bristolians with cloudy looks, and assume that all were similarly preoccupied with getting and spending.

The remedy is to look at individuals as well as groups, and not to assume that the behaviours, beliefs and thoughts of one individual were necessarily shared by everybody. That is one reason why local history is important and useful: it forces us to look at the detail. The detail may help us take a wider view of the larger picture, but it will also point out the exceptions and the complexities, individual and local.

### **Did Voltaire visit our area?**

The Voltaire Foundation for Enlightenment Studies has published a new edition of Voltaire's *Lettres sur les anglais*, first translated under the title *Letters concerning the English nation* (OUP 2020, 3 vols, hb, £ don't ask; cheaper in OUP *World's Classics*, 1994).

Jean Arouet visited England in the 1720s, and wrote about his experiences in the *Lettres*. It is not known for sure whether he ventured out of London during his stay (Oxford and Stratford on Avon were not then on the tourist itinerary, but **Bath** and **Hotwells** in the season might have been). But it is clear that V had contact with, or at any rate knew of, at least one person who lived in our area. In one of his *Lettres* he mentions a Thomas Gordon, who in 1719 was employed as secretary by John Trenchard, who had inherited the Leigh Court estate in **Abbots Leigh** in 1715. Gordon was a classical scholar who had translated the Roman imperial historian Sallust (praised for the purity of his Latin style, and read for his smut) and made one of the earliest translations of the historian Tacitus. In one of his *Lettres* V commended Gordon's translation, commenting that the English had histories of the reigns of individual monarchs, but lacked a history of the nation as a whole, though Gordon was capable of writing it.

Gordon and Trenchard authored the *Independent whig*, published in 1720 and 1721, and the weekly letters signed 'Cato' published in the *London Journal* and the *British Journal* from 1720 to 1723. MP for Taunton, Trenchard attacked the high church tory party, so may have shared many of V's opinions about power, religion and the church; hence, one surmises, V's plug for Thomas Gordon.

It is not unreasonable to guess from the above that V had met Trenchard or Gordon or both, most likely in London. There is no evidence that V ever came to Leigh Court or **Bristol**. Could V have been taken to the **Hotwell** in the season? The Society of Merchant Venturers had leased the Hotwell to Callowhill and Jones in 1695, and its assembly room was built about 1723, which suggests that the spa had become popular enough to finance such a venture by the time V was in England. Pure speculation, of course, but just a possibility? One would pay good money to have heard V bringing the Enlightenment, if not enlightenment, to **Bristol's** moneygrubbers – not that many of them would have understood a word.

### **Rule of law**

In early September 2020 the UK government proposed legislation contradicting and overriding some of the terms on which the UK agreed to leave the European Union. Such an Act, it was claimed, would break the UK's international treaty obligations and be contrary to the rule of law. One criticism of the government's action, voiced by former prime ministers Major and May, was that no-one would ever trust the UK again to keep its word and to abide by law. By the time you are reading this, there may have been developments.

Most people, at any rate in the UK, take the rule of law for granted. Some historians trumpet it as a great and longstanding English tradition, but the idea is fairly recent. It evolved in modern times from Thomas Hobbes, who argued in his *Leviathan* that the natural state of human beings was selfish and lawless anarchy, and that only if people gave up their freedom to do what they liked and ceded to a sovereign power to impose order and law was it possible for civilised life to occur. Hobbes's book was published in 1651, so he will have been thinking and writing during and in the aftermath of the English civil war. One of his concerns was

to justify restoration of the monarchy. Hobbes's idea of a social contract forms the basis of much subsequent political thought (Locke, Rousseau, Rawls etc) and of some ethical ideas.

Hobbes's requirement of the rule of law was about power and government on a national scale, but the idea applies also within states to people's relations with and dealings with each other. In order to survive and go about their normal activities people rely on general acceptance of the constitutional, criminal and civil law. We assume that property rights will be respected and if necessary enforced; that the criminal law will be observed and policed; that people will perform their contracts and that the courts will apply sanctions on those who break them. Even anarchists expect tap water, the NHS and buses to be there when they need them, and law-breaking demonstrators expect the police to observe British law, not American practices.

The rule of law has been fundamental to the survival, growth and well-being of our area. As elsewhere, agriculture has relied on the security of property rights and the performance and enforceability of contracts of employment and for the sale of produce. If farmers did not perform their land drainage obligations (see Rose Hewlett's book reviewed above), large tracts of our area from **Aust** to **Shirehampton** and from **Gordano** to **Locking** and way inland would be under water for parts of the year. Manufacturing and commerce rely on contracts being performed and promises kept, and on intellectual and other property rights being respected and upheld. A city like **Bristol**, for many years an international trading port with a variety of manufacturing and commercial activities, would not otherwise have survived, let alone prospered, nor would **Bath** or **Weston super mare**, with their different but rule-of-law-dependent economies.

There have been occasions, some recent, when governments did not observe the rule of law, or manipulated it improperly. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries the crown licensed privateering. It exempted from the criminal law of piracy those who paid the crown money for a licence (or, as lawyers would say nowadays, an immunity) to prey on foreign ships and their cargoes. **Bristol's** Woodes Rogers (1679-1732) was a privateer. One Thomas Goldney (1664-1731) was a **Clifton** example. The quakers not unreasonably considered his privateering (and his slave trading) inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and the ethical beliefs of their Society, and kicked him out. Peaceably, of course, and in accordance with the rules.

## QUOTE

'You must have seen great changes since you were a young man,' said Winston tentatively. The old man's pale blue eyes moved from the darts board to the bar, and from the bar to the door of the Gents ... 'The beer was better,' he said finally. George Orwell, 1984

## CAN YOU HELP?

### ALHA WEBSITE

As mentioned above under ALHA matters, Bob Lawrence, who has managed ALHA's website since its inception, would like to stand down. The committee invite expressions of interest from anyone who would consider taking over the role. If you are interested, could you please contact Bob, [roblawr1944@googlemail.com](mailto:roblawr1944@googlemail.com).

### BRISTOL RECORD SOCIETY DIGITISATION

*Dr Evan Jones writes:* Since 2015, BRS has been working on a programme of digitisation, in line with its core mission to make available materials needed for studying the history of our extraordinary city. While the Society began this initiative with the electronic publication of its [own volumes](#), it has now moved on to other primary sources and scholarly works.

In association with the [Bristol Branch of the Historical Association](#), the BRS digitised and e-published the [120 pamphlets](#) produced by the BHA (1960-2007). These were the direct precursors to the [ALHA book series](#).

In the last year, the Society has also e-published electronic copies of a dozen out-of-print scholarly books that relate to the history of Bristol. These include:

- [Joseph H. Bettey, \*Bristol Observed: visitors' impressions of the City from Domesday to The Blitz\* \(Redcliffe, Bristol, 1986\)](#)

- [Evan T. Jones & Margaret M. Condon, \*Cabot and Bristol's Age of Discovery\* \(University of Bristol, 2016\)](#)
- [C. M. MacInnes & W. F. Whittard \(eds.\), \*Bristol And Its Adjoining Counties\* \(University of Bristol, 1955\)](#)
- [Patrick McGrath, \*The Merchant Venturers of Bristol: A History of the Society of Merchant Venturers of the City of Bristol from its origin to the present day\* \(Society of Merchant Venturers, Bristol, 1975\)](#)

In the last month, the Society has undertaken the digitisation of some of the [topographical prints of 17th-18th century Bristol](#), owned by the Society of Merchant Venturers. These have been photographed in the Special Collections Department of the University of Bristol and are now being made available under a Creative Commons license. So any one in the world can now view, download and use high resolution images of these important artworks for free.

Scanning and e-publication of scholarly works is often cheap. The cost of professionally scanning a book can be as little as £20. However, if the work is rare, large or valuable it can cost much more. If you would like to support the BRS's digitisation initiative and are interested in sponsoring a particular book, pamphlet or image, please contact its Digitisation Officer, [Dr Evan Jones](#). For more information, including a downloadable donation form, visit the [Bristol Record Society website](#). [Dr Evan Jones](#), Senior Lecturer in Economic and Social History, Department of History, School of Humanities, University of Bristol, 0117 928 8971, [evan.jones@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:evan.jones@bristol.ac.uk)

## **EVENTS DIARY**

*Events notified to ALHA's website manager are listed on the ALHA website. If you want your event to be listed, please send details or a copy of your programme to Bob Lawrence, contact details on page 1 top right (Please note his changed e-mail address). Please tell him of any changes of regular venue or timing. The list is not attached to this newsletter because most events have been cancelled or postponed, and not all changes may have been notified to Bob, so ALHA may not have full information.*