



George McGregor Paxton

AVON LOCAL HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

28 February 2019

5 Parrys Grove

Bristol BS9 1TT

Tel, ans and fax 0117 968

4979

wm.evans@btopenworld.com



Website: www.alha.org.uk

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

CONTENTS

ALHA items

Local history day 2019 – getting about; booking

Events and sources

Gloucestershire Archives training

Hillfields, Bristol council house

St Mary Redcliffe & Temple school houses

Bristol University special and theatre collections

Clevedon torc

Livestock markets

Call for papers – women in agriculture and rural life

Aerial photographs

Commentary and responses

Art deco

Public goods

Railways and local history

ALHA ITEMS

ALHA LOCAL HISTORY DAY 2019 – GETTING ABOUT

The theme for ALHA's 2019 local history day will be **transport**, broadly interpreted. **A flyer with booking from accompanies this update.**

EVENTS AND SOURCES

ARCHIVE MANAGEMENT: GLOUCESTERSHIRE ARCHIVES

Kate Maisey writes: Gloucestershire Archives offer training courses at the Heritage Hub on **Tuesday 5 March 2019, 10.00-1.00.**

Introduction to managing your collections:

- Are people offering you their old documents and photos?
- Does your community have an “archive cupboard” known only to a few?
- Do you find yourself responsible for precious archive material?

We will look at how to:

- decide what items to collect

- organise and keep track of what you've got
- share your treasures and involve more people in their local heritage.

Introduction to digital preservation

- Are you responsible for looking after precious archive material, some of which is digital?
- Are key digital records sitting on your laptop?
- Will you need to access digital records in the future?

We will look at how to keep your digital records:

- secure
- accessible
- meaningful

We think these two modules work well together, but if you'd like to attend only one, please get in touch. These modules are aimed at people with little or no previous archive or record keeping knowledge. To book, please visit <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/heritage-hub/heritage-hub-events/managing-your-collections-training/> or email archives@gloucestershire.gov.uk or phone 01452 425295.

HILLFIELDS, BRISTOL COUNCIL HOUSE

A proposal to turn a house in Briar Way, **Hillfields** into a museum piece for a year in its original 1920s condition is reported to have been discontinued:

<https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/bristol-city-council-scraps-plan-2520223>

The reason given was cost: £60k out of the £80k the city council would have spent, to match £80k from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Some might question whether taking a house out of the council's stock in a time of shortage was a good idea in the first place.

St MARY REDCLIFFE & TEMPLE HOUSES

St Mary **Redcliffe & Temple** school, **Bristol**, has re-named its five houses. William Canynges and Edward Colston go. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-47195706>
 In from local history come Alderman Gilbert James (1920s donor; his father was lord mayor and was knighted when Edward VIII came to open the new dock at **Avonmouth** in 1908); Georg Muller (evangelical Christian); and JT Francombe, headteacher 1872-1879 (there is a Francombe House in Commercial Road by the general hospital, and a Francombe Grove in **Bishop Manor**.)

BRISTOL UNIVERSITY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Newspapers have reported plans by Bristol University to replace its Arts & Social Sciences Library building (Twist & Whitley, 1975) in Tyndall Avenue, **Cotham**, with a new building on the site of the Hawthorns just above the grammar school.

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/news/2017/december/new-library.html>

The building is planned to include a cultural collections centre, which will embrace the present Special Collections and the theatre archive, both of which are of importance to local history in this area.

CLEVEDON TORC

What remains of the Clevedon torc, a piece of iron age gold neck-bling, dated to 150-50 BCE, found near **Walton Castle, Clevedon**, some time in the 19th century, has been loaned by the British Museum to Weston Museum for three years. It was given to the British Museum by Augustus Wollaston Franks, a former curator, in 1897. Information about him at https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/term_details.aspx?bioId=148562 The torc will be displayed in the Living Landscape gallery at **Weston**

Museum, Burlington Street, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 1PR, 01934 621028. Entry to both the museum and display is free, 10am to 5pm every Tuesday to Sunday.

LIVESTOCK MARKETS

The markets of Yate and Sodbury is an exhibition at **Yate Heritage Centre**. Photographs of pens and animal traffickers in **Chipping Sodbury** High Street, **Charfield**, **Iron Acton** and so on. Yate & District Heritage Centre, Church Road, Yate BS37 5BG, 10.30 to 4.30 Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays only **until 16 March 2019**. Advisable to enquire before you visit, in case the space is occupied for teaching.

Thornbury & District Museum also shows some photographs of **Thornbury** market. There is another image, undated, of livestock being sold outside the Railway Hotel, **Charfield**, at <https://pubshistory.com/Gloucestershire/Charfield/RailwayHotel.shtml>. Though the image is marked as of a market, in fact no market was ever chartered at **Charfield**, but once the railways arrived (Charfield 1844), livestock were assembled for transport in some places near stations and goods yards, and sales took place.

CALL FOR PAPERS - WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE AND RURAL LIFE

West of England and South Wales Women's History Network holds its annual conference **Saturday 29th June 2019, 10am – 5pm, Bristol**, Venue to be confirmed. Professor Nicola Verdon, author of *Rural Women Workers in 19th century England*, will give an overview of work in this area with special reference to women and agriculture in the First World War. The network invites papers on any aspect of the history of women in agriculture and rural life. Topics could include:

- Farming
- The Women's Land Army
- Industrial employment in rural communities
- Family Life
- Allotments
- Women's Institute
- Protest
- Women farmers and agricultural workers

Paper proposals of not more than 300 words should be sent to Lucienne Boyce, lucboyce@blueyonder.co.uk by **Monday 18 April 2019**.
www.weswwomenshistorynetwork.co.uk

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS

Cambridge University is putting its collection of aerial photographs online. They cover many parts of the UK, and a quick search at <https://www.cambridgeairphotos.com/> returns many for our area. There is a browsable map and a search option.

BUILDINGS AT RISK

Bristol City Council published 4 February 2019 the fourth edition of its local list of buildings considered to be at risk. They include **Knowle's** Jubilee Baths and the Odeon cinema in **Broadmead**. More at <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/238859/The+Bristol+Local+List/a3959184-216e-4ffd-b8f2-d27aef8ce460>

COMMENTARY AND RESPONSES

Art deco

Inclusion of the Odeon cinema in Bristol's **Broadmead** in the city council's local list of buildings considered at risk may remind local history people of the area's art deco heritage. According to architectural historians, when department stores, skyscraper office blocks, motor garages, car showrooms and cinemas came along, architects needed new styles for buildings for which there was no precedent. Hence, it is argued, Art Deco, which got its name from the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes* held in Paris in 1925. Art Deco's characteristics include modernist design, bold lines, fine craftsmanship, rich materials and white or grey surfaces decorated with strong colours.

These new buildings and artefacts were the product of the American post-WWI boom, when the Great Gatsby (1925) affluent splashed their cash on leisure, entertainments, cars, and expensive household goods, for which architects and designers came up with styles that connoted glamour, high fashion and conspicuous consumption with a dash of modernity. (Meanwhile Britain had the Geddes cuts).

In so far as money allowed, we might have expected there to be art deco buildings in **Weston-super-mare**, 'the Margate of the south-west' according to the *Telegraph*, 14 July 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/united-kingdom/england/somerset/articles/weston-super-mare-new-cultural-hotspot/>, then expanding as a place of leisure and pleasure. Surviving examples include the Odeon cinema (Thomas Cecil Howitt, 1935), and some 1930s houses. **Bath** has the interior of the Forum cinema (Watkins & Willmott, 1934), now a church. In **Bristol**, which had 40 cinemas in the 1930s, there was the Carlton, **Westbury on Trym** (1933); the Regent (Watkins, 1928) in **Castle Street**; the green and black glass News Theatre in **Little Peter Street**; the Odeon, **Bedminster Down**; and the Bristol Gas Company offices in **Colston Street** (before 1936), demolished to extend the Colston Hall. Surviving are the Odeon in **Broadmead** (Howitt again, 1938); according to some, the Christian Scientists' society meeting house in **Westbury Park** (or a predecessor of the present brick building?); Northcliffe House on the **Centre** (Ellis & Clarke, 1929), built for the *Evening World* when it was challenging the *Evening Post*; the electricity board offices and showrooms (Giles Gilbert Scott, 1935), now converted into flats; and at least parts of the Whiteladies picture house near **Whiteladies Gate** (La Trobe & Weston, 1921). Also surviving, and recently refurbished, is Pegasus House, **Filton** (Whinney Son & Austen Hall, 1936).



The architectural historians' attribution of art deco to responses to innovations in business does not stand up. Cinemas involved rows of seats facing an entertainment. What was new about that? Theatres in **Bath and Bristol** had been doing that for centuries. Department stores involved a wide range of goods displayed and sold under one roof. That had been happening for years in the market halls of **Bath, Bristol, Radstock, Thornbury, Midsomer Norton and Weston-super-mare**. It makes more sense to see art deco as taking up where art nouveau left off, reacting against death-soaked victorian neo-gothic and prim neo-georgian politeness, and bringing in decoration, colour, liveliness, gaiety, assertive straight lines and bold curves.

Art deco did not last. The roaring twenties were followed by the slump, the depression and another world war, from which this area, like the rest of the UK, took years to recover. We may deplore the materialistic attitudes, extravagant spending and empty values with which art deco is associated, but its surviving examples are worth preserving, if only as a reminder that, given cash and a free hand, architects can design buildings that are fun to look at. That there are now so few in our area is all the more reason to try to conserve what is left.

Public goods

Public goods are things available for everyone to use without payment. Some public goods are natural, such as clean air, unpolluted streams and blackberries in the hedgerow. Other public goods

are made by humans, such as highways, sewerage, piped water, schools, waste collection and disposal, hospitals, fire brigades, signposts, public libraries, museums, parks and art galleries, street lighting and free bus passes.

‘Local communities,’ says Michelle Baddeley in her *Behavioural economics* (OUP 2017), ‘are surprisingly good at ensuring that public goods are provided and maintained.’ She gives as an example lighthouses. That would not be everyone’s choice, because although once a lighthouse is up and shining it warns all seafarers of danger, not all lighthouses were constructed out of altruistic benevolence by local communities but by ship and cargo owners and their insurers out of property- and profit-protecting self-interest. Perhaps lifeboats, at any rate until they came under a nation-wide charity, would have been a better example.

Local history people could test MB’s proposition against how local communities in our area established, developed and maintained public goods. In the case of public roads, one might be forgiven for thinking that our predecessors were more inclined to avoid providing public goods: not until turnpikes were invented did our area get decent rural roads, and then only because coal owners (Bragg, Berkeley, Whittuck and so on in **Kingswood** forest), quarry operators, manufacturers and some landowners got together to organise turnpike trusts. Similarly with caring for the incapable: Bristol Incorporation of the Poor is an example of the community, or part of it, providing a workhouse long before the idea caught on elsewhere, but from 1830 to 1860 **Bristol** delayed and prevaricated before providing a decent mental asylum. As Elizabeth Ralph showed, the early history of street cleansing and sanitation in **Bristol** is less about how it was provided than about how various groups (common council, parishes, people at large) sought to avoid providing a public good or tried to offload the labour and cost of it on to others. Most recently, many people, especially those with respiratory disorders, would hesitate before calling **Bristol**’s record on reducing air pollution ‘surprisingly good.’

Because so many public goods are now provided and maintained by community agencies such as public bodies, we tend to think of them as having been the result in the first place of community action. Most public goods have required action, but when it happened that action came largely from individuals: people like John Carr, John Whitson, Edward Colston, Hannah More, the Herapaths, Georg Muller, William Budd, Bob Woodward and so on. In **Bath** nearly all the almshouses were the result of individuals’ benefactions, not of community effort. Bellott’s almshouses came from an opportunistic use of someone else’s money. In **Bristol** most almshouses – Trinity, Colston, Bengough and so on - were the result of individual benefactions; similarly with charity schools such as Mary Webb’s at **Fishponds**. Georg Muller at **Ashley Down** depended entirely on other people’s gifts.

Many of our public goods were provided by what would now be called special interest groups. Often their members acted, as in the case of lighthouses, out of self-interest. **Bristol’s floating harbour** did not come about because the SMV and the corporation wondered about how they could improve the lot of the citizens as a whole. When it came to schools, Colston’s philanthropy was selective and sectarian.

One thing that can be said in favour of MB’s proposition is that most public goods, especially in education and health, started locally. An exception is the armed forces, but many militias and regiments were raised locally. Only later, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, did the state start to provide such public goods across the nation.

Is that too negative a view, or were our predecessors really into community action?

Railways and local history

A photograph displayed in the **Yate Heritage Centre** exhibition (Events and Sources, above) is of farmers outside the Railway Inn at **Charfield**, apparently forming a market. No market was ever chartered at Charfield: the nearest ones were at **Wickwar**, 2 miles away, and Wotton. If the Charfield assembly was a market and not just the result of chucking-out time, it is an example of an informal one, formed outside railway stations and goods yards where farmers could get their produce and livestock profitably transported elsewhere. Charfield must be but one place where this happened, and but one example of how railways facilitated changes in how people behaved, with consequences for the economies of their local communities.

Most railway histories tell us how and when a line was constructed, who the leading promoters were, how the line was operated and later was undermined and taken over by the GWR, and how it declined, with meticulously described details of the locomotives, rolling stock, liveries and so on down to the last rivet and the last train. These histories, oozing nostalgia, do not always describe the social or economic impacts the line had on the places it passed through. Where there was a station or goods yard, or even just a siding to a mine or quarry or factory, the impact must have been significant. In some instances the traffic tells us the history: coal and agricultural produce in the case of the Bristol & North Somerset Railway which ran through **Brislington, Pensford and Clutton to Radstock**. Similarly with the Strawberry Line from **Yatton through Sandford and Winscombe** to Cheddar and Wells.

Less explored by railway historians are the social effects. Stations and goods yards rearranged the patterns of local transport: stations became the destinations for carriers, and later for bus routes. Some businesses moved to be near the railway. There was an impact on education: as late as the 1950s local lines enabled children in **Portishead and Hallatrow** to go to schools in **Bristol**. Similarly with entertainment: adults in **Sandford and Paulton** could attend events in the cities. Students from **Clevedon** could attend Bristol University from home. The opportunity to commute must have affected housing. The railway must have extended opportunities for work, courtship and sport as well as commerce and entertainment. Worth looking into.

More about transport at ALHA's local history day 2019 on 27 April.