



## AVON LOCAL HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

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

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

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## ALHA ITEMS

### ALHA BOOKLETS

Proceeds of sale of ALHA booklets, edited by Dr Jonathan Harlow, recently passed £15,000.

Titles still in print are listed on the ALHA website, with an order form. [www.alha.org.uk](http://www.alha.org.uk)

## EVENTS AND SOURCES

### WHITEFIELD TABERNACLE, KINGSWOOD

*Jane Marley writes:* The West of England Combined Authority has approved a business case for stabilisation work to the Whitfield Tabernacle in **Kingswood**. The award of £682,000 to repair, re-roof and re-open the building to the public has been identified as a catalyst for the **Kingswood** element of WECA's *Love our High Streets* project. More at

<https://www.insouthglos.co.uk/news/whitfield-tabernacle-stabilisation-funding-approved/> and at <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/property/kingswoods-historic-whitfield-tabernacle-brought-3419748>

### **NATIONAL ARCHIVES DOCUMENT ORDERING RESTRICTED**

The National Archives says that from **Tuesday 31 March 2020** it will limit the number of documents searchers can order. The restriction will last for an experimental 6 months. ‘Readers will be able to order a maximum of 12 documents for the same day, plus up to 12 documents ordered in advance (a maximum of 24 documents per reader per day),’ it says at <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/news/changes-to-document-ordering/>, which lists the times of the ordering and delivery slots. The existing bulk ordering service is not affected, it says.

### **UNEXPECTED SOURCES – BALH CONFERENCE, TAUNTON**

The British Association for Local History is holding a regional conference **Saturday 21 March 2020** at the **Albemarle Centre, Taunton TA1 1BA**. The theme of the conference is “*Unexpected Sources for Local History*” highlighting some unusual sources for local and family history. Speakers include Paul Dryburgh from the National Archives and Esther Hoyle from the South West Heritage Trust. Subjects will include unusual items found in family archives, travel diaries, railway accidents and taxation records. In addition to the talks there will be a small exhibition of Somerset maps and some original travel diaries on display. Please see the BALH website for more details. Lunch is included in the ticket price £25 and bookings can be made on the BALH website <https://www.balh.org.uk/taunton2020>.

### **WESTON, CLEVEDON & PORTISHEAD RAILWAY**

WC&P Railway Group has a small exhibition about the railway **Tuesdays to Sundays 10am - 4.30pm until 31 March**, at **Weston Museum**, Burlington Street, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 1PR. No charge. More at <https://wcpgroup.org.uk/weston-museum.html>.



### **EMMELINE PETHICK-LAWRENCE**

A plaque commemorating EP-L is to be put up in **Bristol Road Lower, Weston-super-Mare**. More about her at <https://www.lucienneboyce.com/.../2019/02/Weston-super-Mare-Final.pdf>. A plaque was put up in 2004 on the house where she was born in **Charlotte Street, Bristol**. Talk in **Weston Museum, Burlington Street, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 1PR** 01934 621028, **3.30pm Friday 6 March 2020**, free.

### **WESTON-SUPER-MARE BUILT HERITAGE EXHIBITION**

*From Village to Town: Weston-super-Mare's Built Heritage.*

‘This exhibition brings together objects, images and film to tell the story of **Weston-super-Mare's** architectural development over the past 250 years. It expands on Historic England's new publication *Weston-super-Mare: The Town and its Seaside Heritage* (noticed below). The exhibition celebrates a complex and remarkable heritage which reflects Weston's transformation from a small village to a busy seaside resort. *From Village to Town* has been created by the South West Heritage Trust in partnership with North Somerset Council and

Historic England.' **Weston Museum, Burlington Street, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 1PR**  
01934 621028, free. **8 February – 9 May 2020, 10.00 to 4.30.**

### **SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE POLICE**

*Jane Marley writes:* December 2019 saw the 180th anniversary of the start of the Gloucestershire Constabulary. Sue Webb, Gloucestershire Constabulary Archives, has



already given several talks and made up a travelling display to go out this year. Where possible she illustrates talks with some link to the area in which she is giving the talk. Contact her at [Sue.Webb@gloucestershire.pnn.police.uk](mailto:Sue.Webb@gloucestershire.pnn.police.uk). Sue works part time so it can take a few days to reply.

The pin-sharp image above is reproduced from

*Thornbury Roots*, <http://www.thornburyroots.co.uk/>, by courtesy of the Thornbury and District Museum, <http://www.thornburymuseum.org.uk/>

### **SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE WOMEN**

*Rebecca Sillence writes:* I'm emailing to ask if any of your members would be interested in attending an international women's day event at **Shire Hall, Gloucester** on **4 March 2020**. Nicky Bree, Unison's Women's Office, is arranging an event at Shire hall to celebrate **Gloucestershire women past and present**. I believe some societies created displays around the theme of inspiring women a year or two ago, so I'm hopeful there may be existing material out there. Options would be:

- 1) To bring a display to the event on 4 March;
- 2) To send any material to are happy for us to use in a slideshow.

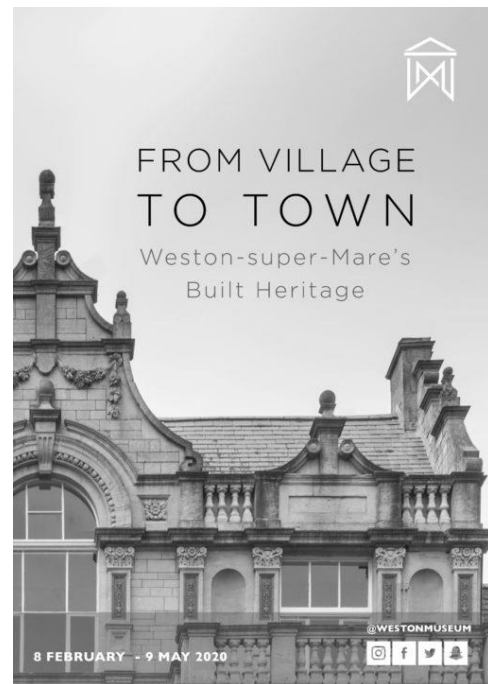
I would be grateful to hear from any parties interested in getting involved. Rebecca Sillence, Customer Advisor (Local Studies), Libraries & Information, Gloucestershire County Council, Cheltenham Local & Family History Library, Chester Walk, Cheltenham, GL50 3JT 01242 532693 [chetlocalstudies@gloucestershire.gov.uk](mailto:chetlocalstudies@gloucestershire.gov.uk)  
<http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/libraries>; Libraries homepage:  
<http://gloucestershire.anywhere.me/>

## BOOKS AND OTHER ITEMS NOTICED

Profile of Olivette Otele (professor of slavery history, Bristol University, ALHA e-update 30 November 2019) in 187 *The Bristol magazine* January 2020, 28-29.

The book on **Weston-super-Mare** architecture referred to above in the notice of the exhibition *From Village to Town* is Allan Brodie, Johanna Roethe, Kate Hudson-McAulay, *Weston-super-Mare: the town and its seaside heritage*, Historic England 2019, 164pp, 120 illustrations, colour and b&w, ISBN: 978-1-84802-479-3, paperback £14.99. An e-book edition is available from e-book retailers: 978-1-84802-532-5, £6.99.

*Bone detectives: Britain's buried secrets* is a TV series transmitted on Channel 4 **Saturdays 8pm from 11 January 2020**. Nothing from our area so far, but 'One of the episodes in the series focuses on the excavation of a 19th century cemetery by Avon Archaeology in the centre of **Bristol**,' writes *Natalie Hunt*, researcher for Tern TV. 'We have yet to be given the transmission date for this episode, but it will likely be in March.'



## OFFERS

*Matt Charlton writes:* I am an archaeologist. I work with heritage groups and societies creating documentaries and interactives. We have recorded filmed oral histories, raised money for exhibitions, created 3d virtual models and undertaken dendro dating. Everything we have created has been supported by a grant application, which we have helped write free of charge.

Our latest film, which is one in a series of several telling the story of rural crafts – you can find this on the 'Latest news' page [www.artefact-it.com](http://www.artefact-it.com). If you'd like to have a chat, then please let me know.

Matthew Charlton, B.A. (Hons) CifA, Eight Bells House, 14 Church Street, Tetbury, Gloucestershire, GL8 8JG, mobile 07974675 834, [www.artefact-it.com](http://www.artefact-it.com).

## COMMENTARY AND RESPONSES

### Mumming

*Chris Freeman writes:* That was an interesting if rather crude summary of views about the possible origins of mumming [Newsletter 161]. You can see why some people think that the shredded paper costumes were originally leaves, but how about feathers? In about 1450 Ibn Battuta of Algiers went on haj to Mecca. Instead of returning straight back home, he travelled around the levant and north Africa (Did he owe money to people back home?) After crossing the Sahara (Sahel?) he came across a people or place called Mande. One of their customs he said he observed involved dramatized recitations, in the presence of the head of the tribe, of poetry celebrating the tribe's past. The performers wore costumes made out of feathers. Any connection? One for the anthropologists?

## Mumming

*JP writes:* I think mumming was disguised begging. Like busking, it dressed up as entertainment a ploy by which poor people extracted money from the rich. Carol singing, with an appeal for cash, was used in the same way: *Good king Wenceslas* ends, 'Wherefore Christian men be sure, Wealth or rank possessing, You who now will bless the poor Shall yourselves find blessing.' *God rest ye merry, gentlemen* is in similar vein. Most mumming performances (at **Marshfield**, the last performance of the day) end at the pub, into which the players go with the takings. Some wassailing songs also beg for money or food. At least, one I heard many years ago in Somerset did, though my recollection of the words, and indeed of the whole event, is hazy.

## Roebuck the 'radical'

*Jude F writes:* Mr Stevens's response in Newsletter 161 points out that several Bristol politicians commonly called radicals also had some non-radical policies. My local example is **John Roebuck, MP for Bath** 1832-1837 and 1841-1847. At school, along with hundreds of other Bath children, I was taught that Roebuck was a radical because he was in favour of non-religious education, supported state grants for elementary schools, thought the ballot in parliamentary elections should be secret, advocated reforming the government of Britain's colonies, opposed the use of force to keep order in Ireland, and wanted to abolish sinecures, especially in the army, which he also wanted to reform. Since then I have read that he opposed reforming the house of lords, was anti trade unions, disparaged working men as wastrels and wife-beaters, supported the slave-owing southern confederacy during the American civil war, and approved of Austria militarily occupying parts of north Italy.



Inconsistencies of this sort, Mr Stevens suggests, require a redefinition of the word 'radical.' I don't think that is so. The meaning of 'radical' is clear: it denotes a wish for thoroughgoing change, from the roots up. There is no need for a redefinition, but for more precision in how the label is applied.

I think the problem has arisen because historians, teachers and journalists have applied the word 'radical' to people instead of to the policies those individual people advocated. As nowadays, different politicians will have supported a range of policies, not all of which are now regarded as radical, nor were they then. In other respects they will have supported conventional, conservative or even reactionary policies, may not have expressed a view, or may not even have thought about it. Look at Hannah More of **Stapleton, Bristol, Wrington, Nailsea and Clifton**, who supported the abolition of slavery and the advancement of elementary education, but in other respects was conservative and in some, reactionary. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, I expect Roebuck's attitudes to religion, the family, the economy, the monarchy, food, dress and so on were conventional or unremarkable.

I suggest we should apply the word 'radical' only to policies, not to people. If a historian, journalist or teacher applies the word with a broad brush to an individual person, they should be challenged to specify what radical policies the victim of their sloppy language advocated.

## Local effects of tax changes

In *Newsletter* 161 John Stevens observed that 'Lord John Russell's whig government of 1847-52 equalised the duties on colonial and foreign sugar, much to the detriment of the **Bristol** sugar interest and those employed thereby.' How far has our area's past been influenced by tax or tax changes?

An early, long-lasting and structural influence was the demarcation of shires, thought to have happened in saxon times, as units of taxation. The shire reeve collected the king's taxes. His successor is the high sheriff, with a role now largely representative, formal and

ceremonial, but the shire survived for centuries as a unit of local government and for some military purposes.

In medieval times wool was profitable, so the king taxed it. At the same time it was vital to the nation's prosperity, so the king wanted to encourage its export. To make both easier the king designated certain markets as staples, the only places where wool could be traded wholesale. One was at the **Temple** in Bristol. Hence the growth of the market there, the attraction of other trades, the processing of cloths, and the expansion of the area and its population.

Once a tax is imposed, the greedy and the unpatriotic will try to evade or avoid it. Hence, in the case of customs and excise, smuggling. As Evan Jones has shown in *Inside the Illicit Economy: Reconstructing the Smugglers' Trade of Sixteenth Century Bristol* (Ashgate 2012), smuggling was then rife along the Bristol channel, and was practised by the affluent out of greed (or because they controlled law and order?), not just by the poor out of desperation. Given Bristol's involvement in the wine and tobacco trades, the fact that it was a customs port, and that competent smuggling is clandestine and unrecorded, the importance of smuggling to this area's economy, not just in the sixteenth century, must have been enormous.

Also of widespread effect has been taxation to fund the provision of public services. Starting with the poor law, taxation has funded what most of us regard as essential to civilised living. From the nineteenth century onwards local rates financed roads, schools, the police, local courts, housing, sewage and waste disposal, libraries, museums and art galleries, parks, concert halls and so on. During the twentieth century most of these services were supported by government grants, which came out of national taxation.

Tax, or the prospect of it, has had political effects. When Francis Dashwood proposed a cider excise in 1763 the reaction from the apple-growing areas of **north Somerset and south Gloucestershire** was violent. At Newport north of **Falfield** villagers burned an effigy of the Gloucestershire MP Norborne Berkeley of **Stoke Gifford**. Bute's government fell, the



Rockingham administration repealed the tax, and south Gloucestershire and north Somerset relapsed into untaxed stupor. In 1990 people protested against the introduction, in place of local domestic rates, of a poll tax, irrespective of ability to pay. The tax was devised by William Waldegrave, MP for **Bristol West** from 1979. The main riots were in London, but there were protests in many towns, including **Bristol**. A revised council tax replaced it in 1992, along with a rise in VAT (similarly regressive, but less obvious, so there were no popular protests). From the eighteenth century church rates became a political issue, at any rate for nonconformists who objected to being taxed to pay for a church they did not belong to and held in contempt.

Removing tax, as well as imposing it, has had local effects. Governments have used tax exemptions or reliefs to encourage chosen trades or manufactures. A tax break has the same effect as a subsidy: the government waives the tax the taxpayer would have paid or tried to avoid. For many years mortgage interest was allowed as a tax deduction, which must have had an enormous effect on housebuilding and owner-occupation, and contributed to the success and local influence of businesses like Bristol & West Building Society in the days of Andrew Breach. It is probably too early to say whether the late twentieth century growth of media businesses in our area, especially in **Bristol and Bath**, has been the result of the creative industry tax reliefs introduced in 2012. Or would Wallace and Gromit and Shaun the Sheep have been successful in any event? Other tax exemptions, such as enterprise zones, were intended to benefit or stimulate specific places. The government website misleadingly

claims they were introduced in 2012, but they were created elsewhere in the 1980s. The big one in our area currently is **Temple Quay in Bristol**. Smaller ones are at **Bath** and **Midsomer Norton**, and there are enterprise areas, offering fewer breaks, at **Filton**, **Sevenside**, **Emerson's Green**, and **St George's** by the M5. The developments will alter the local economy as well as the look of the place, and may contribute culturally and socially to what those places become. One price the community pays is the loss of business rates that would otherwise be paid, at least by those businesses that do not evade them by going into administration with business rates unpaid. No doubt future local history people will have fun working out whether the results were worth it.

More generally, the exemption of charities from corporation tax has helped not only national charities but local ones such as the John James foundation (he came from **Bedminster**), St Peter's Hospice (**Brentry**), Children's Hospice Southwest (**Wraxall**), and so on. Most charities, including ALHA, recover tax under Gift Aid or on receipts from which income tax has been deducted at source.

Lifting of a tax has also had local effects. On one view the riots at **Bristol bridge** in 1793 were a reaction to the bridge trustees' decision not to stop collecting tolls as was expected. What effects the cessation tolls on the Severn bridges will have remain to be nailed. Not all the recent house price rises in south-east Wales and the south-west Forest of Dean will be attributable to electrification of the railway.

We ought not to ignore the effects on our area of changes in taxation abroad. That seems inevitable if an area contains an international port. In the 1760s the Bute administration wanted to make the American colonies pay for their defence. First the government increased duties on sugar, which had serious effects in **Bristol**. When that was dropped, the Stamp Act 1765 imposed duties on newspapers and other materials within the American colonies. They responded with a trade boycott. British merchants were slow to realise the effects. Not until a couple of days before the Act received royal assent did the Society of Merchant Venturers (unaware or just dozy?) petition the Treasury about the effects the Stamp Act would have on its members' colonial trade. **Bristol** merchants urged their London counterparts to take action as well. In early 1766 Bristol was one of 26 towns to petition against the Stamp Act. A London merchant giving evidence to a parliamentary committee claimed that Bristol merchants were owed £800,000 by colonials out of a total owing of £4.45m. The legislation was later repealed, but local damage had been done, both in Bristol and to those who derived their livelihoods from the colonial trades, and also in America, where anti-government sentiment hardened, resulting in revolution, independence and Bristol's adoption of Edmund Burke as parliamentary 'representative.'

There must be other examples.

## **Fatbergs**

Are fatbergs a recent phenomenon? One suspects that in years past more staff inspecting public sewers regularly noted accumulations and removed them before they grew; and that more people have put more fats down the drain as food habits have changed and waste disposal habits have deteriorated. A quick internet search suggests that fatbergs first caught media attention in 2013 when one was reported in (under?) Kingston on Thames. Since then whoppers have made the news in Whitechapel and now Sidmouth.

The Whitechapel fatberg (September 2017) was 250 metres long, weighed 130 tons, and took up space equivalent to 11 double-decker buses. Sidmouth's (January 2019, analysis published October 2019) was 64 metres long, approximating to 6 double-deckers. Fewer condoms and disposable nappies? Could be a demographic explanation?

The media welcome fatbergs as a change from the monotony of domestic politics, international affairs, crime, sport, royalty and entertainment. (The categories overlap). But the

Whitechapel fatberg's archaeological significance was noticed, understood and acted on by the Museum of London, which promptly acquired a piece. Were they offered a choice of samples or specimens? They put it on display, flies and all, to the horror and disgust of adults and the squealing delight of children. Much archaeology has involved analysis of waste, from Oxyrrhinchus to Herculaneum, from **Bath** to **Bristol castle**. Waste deposits supply evidence of human activity. In a sewer stratification presents problems, because the physics of precipitation is different where there is flow, but the principles are the same, as is the human propensity to dispose of waste without thought.

Fatbergs occur as a result of (1) human habits (2) sewers not having enough capacity and (3) not enough inspections by water authorities and their agents. If, like Whitechapel, an area contains many fast food businesses run by irresponsible operators, fats will build up. So in Sidmouth, where fish and chips and other takeaway businesses chose a cheap and anti-social way of disposing of their waste, as did householders putting their non-soluble domestic waste down the lavatory. Where Sidmouth leads, **Weston-super-mare** cannot be far behind. WsM looks a good contender, because it has so many fast food businesses. The land is flat, so sewer gradients are small, so scouring by gravity does not happen. Coupled with public expenditure cuts, that seems a good recipe for our area's very own archaeological specimen.

## QUOTE

And how one can imagine oneself among them  
I do not know;  
It was all so unimaginably different  
And all so long ago.  
Louis MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* Part IX (1938).

## CAN YOU HELP?

The Bristol Festival of Ideas (a brand of Bristol Cultural Development Partnership) is looking to recruit volunteers for this year's festival, which will celebrate the life and work of **Bristol's** boy poet, Thomas Chatterton, *writes Jane Marley*. They specifically need volunteers to facilitate visits to the **Chatterton Room at St Mary Redcliffe Church** - a fascinating room squirrelled away up a spiral staircase above the church's grand North Porch, **early April to late October 2020**. To apply, or if you would like further information, please send an email to [rhys.williams@stmaryredcliffe.co.uk](mailto:rhys.williams@stmaryredcliffe.co.uk), titled 'Chatterton 250 Volunteer.'