



AVON LOCAL HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

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Presenting the Newsletter, Baiju
Kunitoshi, 1889

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SUBSCRIPTIONS

Thank you to all members, individuals and groups, who have paid their 2021-2022 subscriptions so promptly. That helps ALHA's cashflow no end. And a double thank you to those who have added something by way of a donation: really appreciated.

NEW MEMBER

Welcome aboard to **Bath Centre National Trust**, which was founded in 1977 and now has over 200 members drawn from **Bath and the surrounding area**. It organises many activities for its members which include day talks and lectures, day outings by coach to National Trust and other properties, and other social events. These enable the centre to fund a variety

of projects in houses, countryside, and coastal regions owned by the National Trust. The donations made by the Bath Centre total £273,660 to date. Donations made in 2019 were



to Dyrham Park - £3800 for an all-terrain vehicle;
to Tynesfield - £1375 to facilitate visits from
children from local schools;

to Avebury Manor - £1000 to improve the
facilities for family visitors.

More about the centre at

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/the-bath-centre>, but the centre also has its own website

separate from that of the National Trust, at

<http://www.bathnt.btck.co.uk/>

EVENTS AND SOURCES

SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE HERITAGE DAYS 2021

Jane Marley writes: This year the theme for **Heritage Open Days 10 to 19 September 2021 is Edible England**. From woodland foraging to factory floor, forgotten recipes to regional delicacies, we're asking our festival community to explore the past, present, and future of our culinary heritage and culture. As ever, other festival favourites will still be taking place, but keep an eye out for specially themed events that chew their way through all things food & drink.

This year the national **Heritage Open Days 2021** is running for ten consecutive days from **11 to 20 September**; you can open your doors for as much or as little of this time as you want; you can pick just one weekend, one day or even one hour. There are lots of different things you can do as long as your event is **free and accessible to all**. You can find out more about what makes a Heritage Open Day [here](#). The starter pack is [here](#). You can organise your event and register it here to start to advertise it through the national scheme [here](#) and then plan your own publicity to maximise the number of people visiting your event.

I will be organising the **South Gloucestershire Heritage Open Days 2021** marketing through a listing on the South Gloucestershire Council web site and through our social media platforms. I will contact you for details of your event at the **start of June**. Do take this opportunity to consider and start planning for the type of event it would be possible to hold while being mindful of government guidance during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Jane Marley, Museums and Heritage Officer, South Gloucestershire Council Tel: 01454 865783; MOB: 07808 364704

SOMERSET ARCHIVES & LOCAL STUDIES

Somerset Archives & Local Studies is open again. You need to book:

<https://swheritage.org.uk/somerset-archives/>

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES READING ROOMS

TNA reading rooms at Kew are open again: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/#!/archives-sector/our-archives-sector-role/coronavirus-update/making-plans-for-re-opening/> . Bookings will be limited to two per person in a rolling 4-week period.

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES – HISTORY BOOK SALE

TNA offers a selection of its history books at reduced prices:

<https://shop.nationalarchives.gov.uk/collections/british-history-books-sale>

BRISTOL LIBRARIES

Kate Murray writes: Seven of Bristol's libraries are now open for browsing and borrowing, and pre-booked computer use. A further ten libraries will be providing Call and Collect services, as well as Book Bundles, returns, and reservations collection.

Open Libraries You will be able to visit **Central, Fishponds, Henbury, Henleaze, Junction 3, Knowle and Stockwood** libraries to return your loans, browse and borrow, and use pre-booked computers. If you want to use a computer, you must phone the library first to book your session. For more details about services available at Central Library, please see www.bristol.gov.uk/libraries-archives/coronavirus-library-information

Open library hours

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Central	10-4	10-4	10-4	10-4	10-4	10-4	1:30-4:30
Fishponds	11-4	11-4	Closed	11-4	11-4	11-4	Closed
Henbury	11-4	Closed	11-4	Closed	11-4	11-4	Closed
Henleaze	11-4	11-4	11-4	11-4	11-4	11-4	Closed
Junction 3	1-4	11-4	11-4	Closed	11-4	11-4	Closed
Knowle	12-4	12-4	Closed	12-4	12-4	12-4	Closed
Stockwood	1-4	1-4	1-4	1-4	1-4	1-4	Closed

Call and Collect Libraries: This service is now available from **Bishopston, Bishopsworth, Clifton, Horfield, Marksby Road, Redland, Sea Mills, Shirehampton, Whitchurch and Wick Road** libraries. You can also return your library items. The reservation service is available (www.librarieswest.org.uk) and reserved items can be collected from any open library or Call and Collect library. In order to provide a safe and Covid-secure service for you and for our staff, services are limited to the following: For Call and Collect:

- Call or email the library you wish to collect your books from (see contact details below) to ask for up to 5 adult items and up to 8 items for under 18s
- If you tell us what type of books you like to read (favourite authors, genres, subject areas), and how many you'd like, we can make selections for you
- 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. However, if you'd like to keep the lovely library bag, please do!

- For specific items, please use the free reservation service at www.librarieswest.org.uk if you can.

Call and Collect Library Hours

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Bishopston	11-3	Closed	11-3	11-3	11-3	11-3	Closed
Bishopsworth	11-4	Closed	11-4	Closed	11-4	11-4	Closed
Clifton	10-1	1-4	Closed	1-4	10-1	1-4	Closed
Horfield	Closed	11-3	Closed	11-3	Closed	11-3	Closed
Marksbury Rd	Closed	11-4	Closed	11-4	Closed	11-4	Closed
Redland	Closed	11-3	11-3	11-3	11-3	11-3	Closed
Sea Mills	10-2	10-2	10-2	10-2	10-2	10-2	Closed
Shirehampton	1-4	Closed	1-4	Closed	1-4	Closed	Closed
Whitchurch	Closed	10-1	10-1	Closed	10-1	10-1	Closed
Wick Road	Closed	Closed	10-1	Closed	10-1	10-1	Closed

Future opening plans We will constantly review the government guidance as we work towards opening more libraries and increasing services in a safe and controlled way. For updates, please check our library webpages and social media.

What to expect when you visit an open library

- We're limiting the number of people allowed in libraries at any one time – it is possible that you will have to queue outside at busy times so, if you can, please limit the number of family members visiting in a group.
- No unaccompanied under 12s please
- Computer sessions will be shorter than usual and must be booked in advance over the phone - contact details below
- We've added signs and floor markings to help maintain social distancing
- You might be unable to browse all our library collections due to current social distancing rules, but our knowledgeable staff will be able to help and advise you if you phone or email ahead
- Toilets will be closed
- Photocopiers will not be available
- It is not possible to collect reserved items from closed libraries, or request them to be moved from a closed to an open library
- Some libraries' children's areas will be closed, but children's books will be available for browsing and borrowing
- All meeting rooms are closed (Clifton, Junction 3, Central, Bishopston) and use of the library as a venue is suspended until guidance changes. We are not accepting any bookings for library space at this time

Protecting you, and our staff: 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. All returned items will be quarantined for at least 72 hours. When visiting the library you should wear a mask or other face covering if you are able to do so.

NHS Test and Trace If you visit an open library, we ask that you check in using the QR code and the NHS COVID-19 app (you will find these displayed at the entrances of the libraries) or use the simple form available to give us your contact details, to support NHS Test and Trace. Any contact information you give us will be kept securely and destroyed after 21 days.

Online services We are continuing to offer extensive online services, including eBooks, eAudio, eComics and online magazines and newspapers (see www.bristol.gov.uk/libraries). We will also be continuing with our online events: children's story times and quizzes; author events; a new virtual book club, a virtual Lego club and the Bristol Libraries podcast. Keep up to date with the latest online goings-on via: Twitter – [@BristolLibrary](https://twitter.com/BristolLibrary); Facebook – [Bristol Libraries](https://www.facebook.com/BristolLibraries); Instagram – [bristollibraries](https://www.instagram.com/bristollibraries)

Contact details Please phone ahead to use a public computer. Please phone ahead if you have a specific query about a service.

Library	Email	Telephone
Bishopston Library	bishopston.library@bristol.gov.uk	0117 3576220
Bishopsworth Library	bishopsworth.library@bristol.gov.uk	0117 9038566
Central Library	lending.library@bristol.gov.uk	0117 9037250
Central Library for computer bookings	Please telephone if possible	0117 9037234
Clifton Library	clifton.library@bristol.gov.uk	0117 9038572
Fishponds Library	fishponds.library@bristol.gov.uk	0117 9038560
Henbury Library	henbury.library@bristol.gov.uk	0117 9038522
Henleaze Library	henleaze.library@bristol.gov.uk	0117 9038541
Horfield Library	horfield.library@bristol.gov.uk	0117 9038538
Junction 3 Library	junction3@bristol.gov.uk	0117 9223001
Knowle Library	knowle.library@bristol.gov.uk	0117 9038585

Marksbury Road Library	marksburyrd.library@bristol.gov.uk	0117 9038574
Redland Library	redland.library@bristol.gov.uk	0117 9038549
Sea Mills Library	seamills.library@bristol.gov.uk	0117 9038555
Shirehampton Library	shirehampton.library@bristol.gov.uk	0117 9038570
Stockwood Library	stockwood.library@bristol.gov.uk	0117 9038546
Whitchurch Library	whitchurch.library@bristol.gov.uk	0117 9031185
Wick Road Library	wickrd.library@bristol.gov.uk	0117 9038557

Further information can be found on our website www.bristol.gov.uk/libraries-archives/coronavirus-library-information.

SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE LIBRARIES

Most SGC libraries are now open again: <https://www.southglos.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/libraries/changes-to-library-services-during-covid19/>. Those remaining closed are: **Hawkesbury Upton, Marshfield and Stoke Gifford Community Libraries**. For **Chipping Sodbury Community Library** [please see their website](#). A Mobile Library (from North Somerset Library Service) visits **Almondsbury, Severn Beach and Pilning**. Opening hours for the libraries that are open are:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<u>Bradley Stoke</u>	10am-5:30pm	10am-5:30pm	—	10am-5:30pm	10am-5:30pm	9:30am-12:30pm
<u>Cadbury Heath</u>	—	10am-5pm	—	10am-5pm	10am-5pm	9:30am-12:30pm
<u>Downend</u>	10am-5pm	—	10am-5pm	—	10am-5pm	9:30am-1pm
<u>Emersons Green</u>	—	10am-5pm	—	10am-5pm	10am-5pm	9:30am-1pm
<u>Filton</u>	10am-5pm	—	10am-5pm	10am-5pm	—	9:30am-1pm
<u>Hanham</u>	10am-5pm	10am-5pm	—	10am-5pm	—	9:30am-12:30pm
<u>Kingswood</u>	10am-5pm	—	10am-5pm	—	10am-5pm	9:30am-12:30pm
<u>Patchway</u>	—	10am-5pm	10am-5pm	—	10am-5pm	9:30am-12:30pm
<u>Staple Hill</u>	10am-5pm	10am-5pm	—	10am-5pm	—	9:30am-1pm
<u>Thornbury</u>	10am-	—	10am-	10am-	10am-	9:30am-

	5:30pm		5:30pm	5:30pm	5:30pm	12:30pm
<u>Winterbourne</u>	—	10am-5pm	10am-5pm	—	10am-5pm	9:30am-12:30pm
<u>Yate</u>	10am-5:30pm	10am-5:30pm	—	10am-5:30pm	10am-5:30pm	9:30am-2pm
<u>Severn Beach</u> Community Library	2pm – 4pm	—	—			

NORTH SOMERSET LIBRARIES

NSC libraries are open. Details at <https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/my-services/libraries-leisure-open-spaces/libraries>

BATH & NE SOMERSET LIBRARIES

Bath Central, Keynsham and Midsomer Norton are open 10am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. You will be able to browse and to collect reservations. Reserve an item on the [LibrariesWest website](#)

BATH ARCHIVES

Bath Archives plans to reopen **Tuesday 4 May**. Booking essential.

<https://www.batharchives.co.uk/> Bath Record Office: Archives and Local Studies, Guildhall, High Street, Bath, BA1 5AW; Email: archives@bathnes.gov.uk; 01225 477421



BRISTOL ARCHIVES

Bristol Archives remains closed, but plans to reopen from **Monday 17 May**. The searchroom will be open on **Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays** and visits must be pre-booked. In the meantime, you can [get in touch](#) to use a remote enquiry service.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE ARCHIVES

GA is open again, but booking is essential. <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives/plan-your-visit/>

SOMERSET ARCHIVES AND LOCAL STUDIES

Somerset Archives and Local Studies is open again, but booking is essential. <https://swheritage.org.uk/somerset-archives/visit/>, which also gives details of the **North Somerset** archivist visits, but no dates for 2021 are on the website yet.

BOOKS AND OTHER ITEMS NOTICED

Maurice Fells, *The little history of Bristol*, The History Press 2021, hb 184 pp, 30 b&w illustrations, ISBN: 9780750993357, £9.49. <https://www.thehistorypress.co.uk/publication/the-little-history-of-bristol/9780750993357/> and available as an e-book. Not clear whether this is a reprint or a revision of the same title by the same author and publisher issued July 2015. Related essay at <https://www.thehistorypress.co.uk/articles/bristol-s-10-historical-places/>

Simon Jenkins, *Britain's 100 best railway stations*, Penguin 2021, pb, 417 pp, colour illustr., ISBN 978 0 241 97900 6, £14.99, but £11.60 from Blackwell's. A new edition of a book published in 2017. Only two stations in our area make the cut: **Bristol Temple Meads** and **Bath Spa**. The latter is included presumably because of its setting, and because of its neo-Jacobean façade, the result of a demand by landowner earl Manvers who wanted a symmetrical architectural stop to Manvers Street. Although the criteria for selection excluded disused stations, the book does mention **Bath Green Park**, 'a miniature palace, with a five-bay piano nobile with ionic columns,' and the author concedes that 'this, rather than Bath Spa, was the station fit for Beau Brummel.'

<https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/300/300165/britain-s-100-best-railway-stations/9780241979006.html>

Andrew Swift, 'Hobbs' houses', *The Bristol Magazine* 197 (April 2021) 64-65. Short article on the **Bristol** sail maker, deal importer, copper smelter and property developer (Queen Square and Redcliffe in **Bristol**; Kingsmead and Avon Street in **Bath**) whose company made the Avon navigable between Bristol and Bath and launched John Wood and Ralph Allen. Hobbs's houses in Prince Street, Bristol and Rosemary House, Bath, were designed by Richard Strachan, architect of **Redland** Court in Bristol.

COMMENTARY AND RESPONSES

Riot

On 21 March 2021 what started as a non-violent demonstration in the centre of **Bristol** against the government's Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing bill moved to an attack on the **Bridewell** police station. Missiles were thrown, police vehicles daubed, damaged or set on fire, windows were broken, and police officers were injured. There were similar disturbances on many days subsequently, several of them violent.

When it comes to riot, **Bristol** has form. In modern times the well-known ones were in 1793 at **Bristol bridge**, following the council's decision to resume collecting tolls; in

1831, ostensibly over the rejection of the parliamentary reform bill; in 1981 after a police raid on a café in **St Paul's**; in 2011 when participants objected to premises in **Stokes Croft** being turned into a Tesco; and in 2021 when the statue of Edward Colston in the **Centre** was forcibly removed.

Less well-known, but well-evidenced, were food riots in 1709, 1753, 1756, and 1795-1796, and in 1801 when rioters attacked market stalls; religious riots in 1714 (against nonconformists) and 1753 (against Jews), and turnpike riots in 1729 and 1749. In 1792 a mob demolished a house for reasons and motives not entirely clear. Whether we count violent disorder at elections is a matter of definition. In many (most?) elections supporters, fuelled by alcohol paid for by their candidate, broke the windows of opponents; political party riots were particularly bad in 1796 and 1810; in 1797 rioting lasted two days; in 1781 rioting by election supporters left two dead and several other people, including children, injured.

No doubt there will be an inquiry into why the latest outbreaks of disorder occurred, what actually happened (the police later altered their account of the police officers injured), and how the disorder was handled by the police. It will all go into the history books. Meanwhile, here are some general thoughts.

1. What sets off civil disorder is often nothing to do with what makes people dissatisfied enough to express themselves violently. The 1793 riots were ostensibly protests against the resumption of bridge tolls, but the context was economic depression resulting from the government's measures to pay for the war with France, which caused unemployment in **Bristol (and Bath)**, especially in the building and allied trades. The underlying cause of the riot was unemployment, poverty and starvation. The participants in the 1831 riots were not people who were going to get the right to vote were the bill to be passed. As elsewhere, eg Nottingham, the riots were as much about dissatisfaction with misgovernment and corruption, national and local. The removal of the Colston statue was at heart a protest about unfair treatment of black people, especially those of African Caribbean descent, in employment and general status, and could also be seen as an offshoot of the *Black Lives Matter* campaigns, which derived from events in America. Recent disorders in Belfast, attributed to dissatisfactions over the economic effects of the UK's withdrawal from the EU, stem, as so often, from years of sectarian antagonism ingrained beyond the reach of reason.

2. Some riots have occurred when an initially lawful demonstration has turned violent. That can happen because some demonstrators, perhaps from outside the area and intent on violence from the outset, turn the event that way, as appears to have happened in Bristol on 21 March. On other occasions the violence has been a response to over-reaction or inept intervention by the police, as in Bristol in 1892 when protest processions were broken up by the police and the military, the tactics of the police being to disrupt the protests, not to protect against violence; and in 1932 when the police hid in a side street and ambushed what until then had been a peaceful procession. Protests do not necessarily turn violent: in 1831 the reform Bill protests in **Bristol** were violent; those in **Bath** and some other places were not.

3. Riots often have more than one underlying cause. In 1793 the underlying causes were economic. There are examples of that from medieval times where during periods of famine villagers broke into manorial granaries in **north Somerset** to release grain being hoarded. Economics rather than politics may have underlain the 1831 riots. The most recent demonstrations were against government measures to restrict freedom to protest; some are understood to have joined in because they oppose restrictions on gatherings the government has imposed to restrict the spread of the coronavirus; the ambiguity (deliberate?) of the slogan KILL THE BILL hints at other motives.

4. Policing of protest has long been a problem. There were no local police forces in 1793 or 1831: the mayor called in the militia from adjoining counties. Police numbers have never been large enough to deal with mass demonstrations. As a consequence the police have

developed tactics such as kettling, cordons, blocking roads and so on, which often exacerbate dissatisfactions, provoke hostile reactions, and seem generally to have been ineffective. Police action in 1892 and 1932 seems to have been intended to disrupt lawful activity, not to protect people or property from criminal acts.



5. Many outbreaks of violence, from domestic abuse to war, result from people not being able, or choosing not, to express their discontent in some other way. That is often to do with the temperaments, mentalities and capabilities of the people involved. The contrasts between **Bath and Bristol** in that respect in 1831 are marked. By contrast, the religious rioting in 1714 and 1753 was not by those who saw themselves as oppressed, but by the oppressors, the anglican ascendancy, or at any rate people who claimed to represent it.

Intangibles

One of the big differences between present and past times in the UK is in the amount of wealth held by people. As individuals and as a nation we are far more affluent, even allowing for inflation, than our predecessors. An obvious comparison is of the amount and value of people's tangible personal possessions. An inventory of the average citizen's belongings nowadays will be longer than that for someone of similar social status living hereabouts in the fifteenth or eighteenth centuries. If you doubt this, look at probate inventories, such as those for **Frampton Cotterell** printed by JS Moore in *The goods and chattels of our forefathers* (Phillimore 1976), or his transcription of the **Clifton and Westbury** probate inventories (ALHA 1981), and then list the objects you have in your house or flat.

A further difference is that nowadays much of an individual's wealth consists, not of physical tangible things, but of intangibles. An example is money: in the form of coin for many centuries, long a means of exchange recorded and transferred on paper or, more often now, electronically. Many forms of wealth are not money but derivatives of it: insurance policies and pensions give rights to money if certain events occur. Whereas most businesses used to be directly owned by their proprietors, nowadays most business owners' property consists of shares or other rights in companies with fictional legal personality.

Another difference is that, as well as owning belongings, individuals now have, as members of a community, assets consisting of rights or expectations created by what the community does or provides for its members. Defence, law and order, education, health services, transport, social security benefits, consumer protection, pensions, emergency services, cultural institutions, bus passes and so on.

It would be interesting to trace how the nature and proportions of those assets have changed in our area over time. Inquisitions post mortem, probate inventories and accounts, and tax records would be possible starting points for such an inquiry. More difficult would be how to calculate the worth of community benefits. Local authority accounts and valuation records will take us only so far. How much is 5 years of primary school education worth? You could value it by inputs: the cost of school premises and their maintenance, teachers' and caretakers' salaries, heat, lighting, cleaning, insurance, books (if any) and so on, and divide the total by the number of pupils. To some people the value of education is in the economic opportunity or potential it gives. To others, the benefits of knowledge, skills and culture are

not capable of valuation. From the mere economic point of view several academic studies have tried to put a value on the boost that a university gives to the local economy of its area; ours has four.

Many of these community assets that we share started locally. Police, fire and ambulance services, all of recent origin, began as local initiatives: only later did they become nation-wide services with expectations of uniformity or similarity across the nation. Education and health services, now a national asset, started locally with individual benefactions or initiatives establishing a school, dispensary or infirmary. Similarly with most public utilities. How they started and how they developed vary from place to place, and should be part of our local histories.

Archaeology dramas

We are used to seeing plays, whether on stage, in cinemas or on television, based on history. Examples of historical subjects range from big events such as Aeschylus's *The Persians*; biographical accounts as in Shakespeare's plays about Romans and English kings; to particular events, as in Terence Rattigan's *The Winslow boy*. But most of us would be hard put to name a drama based on archaeology. Now two have come along in quick succession: *The dig*, a production about the excavation on 1939 of the saxon burials, with ship and treasure, at Sutton Hoo; and *Ammonite*, about the 19th century palaeontologist Mary Anning and her search for fossils.

That many people are interested in archaeology, even if they do not grab a trowel and go scraping, seems obvious from the popularity of the Tutankhamun exhibitions, the local investigations by Mick Aston and his *Time Team* (currently being revived, but without Tony Robinson and with nothing in our area planned: <https://www.timeteamdigital.com/news>), and Alice Roberts's enthusiasms about bones. Most people have at least a little curiosity about the past, one reason being that it involves engaging with the unknown, which frightens some and attracts others. Concern with the unknown is something that archaeology shares with history, geographical exploration, astronomy, space exploration, theoretical physics, royal mail deliveries and mathematical and scientific research, which is one of the reasons why archaeology is worthwhile and sometimes important.

That does not explain why anyone should make dramas out of archaeological digs,



why investors should put money into producing such dramas, and why enough members of the public should pay to see them to make them profitable. In so far as critics and other commentators have asked the question, one answer may be that archaeology activity offers some striking metaphors for aspects of the human condition that drama can explore and develop: boundaries of class, profession and property distinctions; fear of, yet fascination with, the unknown; connections with (worries about?) death; associations with the influential but unknowable unconscious; and, added to the films by screenwriters, directors and producers, repressed or prohibited sexual desire. Added, one presumes, though archaeologists, theologians and conspiracy imaginers remind us that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

Another possibility might be that screenwriters and playwrights want to look at themes that are nothing to do with archaeology, but archaeology happens to offer a story or a set of characters that is a convenient peg on which to hang the drama. A list of the topics that have featured in *The Archers* would be long. *The dig* could just as well have been written about dairy farming or horticulture; *Ammonite* about medical research or gold prospecting. What next? More Freudian fossils in *The Essex serpent*? Or the secret life of George Boon? Or orgies, with underfloor heating, at **Kingsweston** or **Bath**?

ALHA grant to Victoria County History

TF writes: I was surprised to read in ALHA Newsletter 166 that ALHA has made a grant towards *Victoria County History* work on **West Littleton**.

The *VCH* was conceived in the early days of county councils, and later took on an Edwardian flavour. Its ambition was to cover every parish in every county, but in most parts of England it has not done so, either for lack of resources or through lack of interest. The *VCH* has struggled from one crisis to another. That London University's Institute of Historical Research has stopped funding most new work and has left it to local volunteer effort, such as Gloucestershire County History Trust, says a lot. The *VCH* has also been criticised for its template, which straitjackets its editors into producing parish histories in a uniform format, which may be useful for those interested in how the manor or the advowson descended, but does not always catch the wide range of different issues and topics that historians nowadays are interested in and which the different pasts of different communities contain.

I see no sense in adding to *VCH* volumes just for the sake of completeness. That smacks of children collecting cigarette cards or football stickers just to get a full set; or playing Pokemon, egged on by the proprietor's marketing slogan 'Gotta catch 'em all!' Surely it would be better to direct time and effort to work needing to be done, as GCHT has done with Cheltenham and **Yate**.

And if ALHA wants to help promote local history in south Gloucestershire, ought **West Littleton** to be a priority?

ALHA's treasurer replies: ALHA has money that can be used to make small grants to help promote and support any aspect of local history or archaeology that is consistent with ALHA's charitable objects, which are, briefly, to promote local history in our area. It is better for ALHA to make grants out of money that would otherwise just sit in ALHA's bank account, doing nothing for local history and benefitting only the bank.

ALHA does not limit or stipulate what places or topics will be awarded grants, nor does ALHA commission projects, but it responds to applications, each on its merits or lack of them. Unless an application is made, ALHA will make no grant. Work supported by ALHA grants has ranged from the routine and humdrum to the weird and wacky, from the general to the detailed. In the case of **West Littleton** ALHA understands that the village does not have a

local history society or research group. So if the only prospect of high quality work being done is under *VCH* auspices, it seems reasonable for ALHA to encourage and support it.

CAN YOU HELP?

William Carver writes: My charity, the Licoricia of Winchester Appeal, is publishing a book on the Jews of medieval England, based on Licoricia of Winchester. We wonder if you have any images about medieval Jewish **Bristol** that we might be able to use, such as those from Jacob's Well and its possible Bet Tohorah? I understand that there are Jewish tombstones in the wall of a local school? The Licoricia of Winchester Appeal, Charity No. 1174453, Tel: 01962 866255; <http://www.licoricia.org>

QUOTE

There are two basic ways of thinking about the past. Either everything changes, or everything stays the same. Both are but stories we tell, each one containing a grain of truth wrapped in convenient distortions. The first is a tale of technological developments, political revolutions and earth-shattering ideas. Its central faith might be summed up by the oft-quoted opening line of LP Hartley's novel *The go-between* (1953): 'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.' The second approach holds that no matter what vagaries of fate people endure, at their core they remain fundamentally unchanged, moved by the same desires, vices, fears and aspirations from century to century. From this perspective, the testimonies of those who lived long before us can guide us just as steadily in our lives as any modern advice can, if not better.

Irina Dumitrescu, 'Time travelling in comfort', reviewing *Lapham's Quarterly*, in *TLS* 2020.