

AVON LOCAL HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

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ALHA ITEMS

FROM THE COMMITTEE

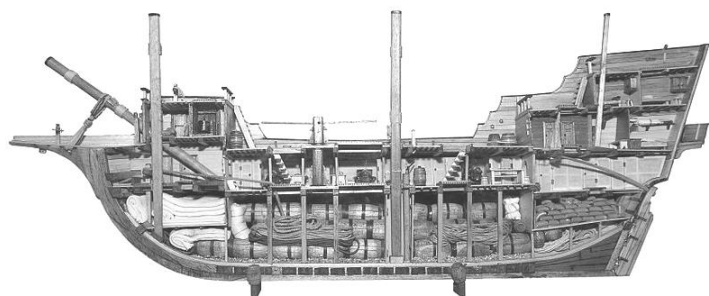
ALHA's committee has declined an offer of an individual's local history notes. ALHA does not have storage facilities, and cannot afford to hire them commercially. It would not be right to expect a trustee to accommodate deposits and to give public access on demand. People who have accumulated notes that could be of use or interest to other local history people are right to deposit them for others to use, but are encouraged to offer to deposit them with a relevant local record office or, in the case of printed material, a relevant local public library.

SANDY TEBBUTT

A memorial service for Sandy Tebbutt, late ALHA trustee and editor of ALHA's *Walks, talks and visits* list, is arranged for **2pm on Friday 17 September 2021** at St Peter's Church, **Portishead**, with refreshments after at Court Farm, **Portishead**. Attenders are asked to email Sandy's family at cathy@salisburyfamily.com.

NEW ALHA BOOKLET

ALHA is about to publish a new booklet, *The trade of Bristol in the 17th century*, by ALHA reviews editor and former secretary



Dr Jonathan Harlow. JH spoke on the subject at ALHA's 2019 local history day at Thornbury, and the book also draws on JH's research into and transcription of the ledger of **Bristol** merchant Thomas Speed, published by Bristol Record Society (BRS no.63, 2011). A flyer for the new booklet, including a reduced

price offer for orders before 15 October 2021, accompanies this e-update. The booklet can also be ordered via ALHA's website, under Publications.

EVENTS AND SOURCES

BRISTOL CENTRAL LIBRARY LOCAL STUDIES

Dawn Dyer reports that **Bristol central Reference Library and Local Studies** are now open, usual hours. 'We still have screens around the desk, hand sanitiser, and we do request people entering the building to wear a mask. Staff are wearing masks. A new Heritage Development Librarian (to replace Jane Bradley) will be starting in mid August.'

BATH ROYAL MINERAL WATER HOSPITAL

Bath & NE Somerset Council is reported to have granted planning permission (reversing an earlier refusal) for the former Royal Mineral Water Hospital buildings in Upper Borough Walls, **Bath**, to be converted into a 160-bed hotel and spa:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-58042622> .

Details of the planning application are on the B&NES website under 21/01752/FUL:

<https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/webforms/planning/search.html> . More under COMMENTARY, below.



LOCAL HISTORY PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

The **British Association for Local History**, of which ALHA and some member groups and societies are members (if only for the bargain public liability insurance that goes with membership) is organising a local history photography competition. Links on the ALHA website and facebook pages, and at <https://www.balh.org.uk/news-could-you-be-the-balh-local-history-photographer-of-the-year-2021-08-18>

SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE HERITAGE PARTNERSHIP

*Jane Marley writes that the next **South Gloucestershire Heritage Partnership** meeting will be on **Wednesday 6 October 2021 10.00 – 12.15**. It will be held again online using Microsoft *Teams*. ‘Many councils, like South Gloucestershire, have declared a Climate Emergency and Lucy Rees will provide us with a talk about what the council is doing and how we are working with others. After the break Jane Marley will introduce the new *This is Your Heritage: Stories from the South Gloucestershire Indian Community* project. This will be followed by a discussion reflecting on the significance of slavery in relation to the wealth underpinning the area and how we address this. There will then be an opportunity to update the group regarding your project.’ Register at https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/south-gloucestershire-heritage-partnership-meeting-tickets-167609858599?utm_campaign=post_publish&utm_medium=email&utm_source=eventbrite&utm_content=shortLinkNewEmail*

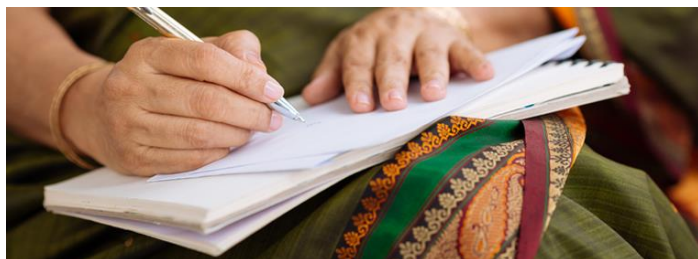
ANCESTRY ACCESS AT SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE LIBRARIES

*Jane Marley writes that **South Gloucestershire Libraries** have extended home access to the Ancestry.co.uk family history site which provides users access to 1 billion searchable UK family history records including censuses, the fully indexed birth, marriage and death records, passenger lists, the British phone books, military and parish records. Details of how to access the site are at <https://www.southglos.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/libraries/library-e-resources/>*

To help you get the most from the site and answer any other questions about tracing your family history, Mike Slucutt from ALHA member **Bristol & Avon Family History Society** will be hosting an online Q&A on **Tuesday 7 September 7.00 – 8.00**. He will be talking about the joys (and frustrations) of tracing your family history, how to use Ancestry and highlight some other sites that you might find helpful and answering any questions. To book for the session please email libraries@southglos.gov.uk



THIS IS YOUR HERITAGE – STORIES FROM THE SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE INDIAN COMMUNITY



Jane Marley draws attention to the web page for the new project *This is Your Heritage: Stories from the South Gloucestershire Indian Community* at: www.southglos.gov.uk/Indian-heritage-stories

BOOKS AND OTHER ITEMS NOTICED

Jane Duffus, *Elegantly understated: 175 years of the Fears watch company*, Bristol Books 2021. Hb £60. Fears started in Redcliff Street in **Bristol** in 1846.

<https://www.bristolbooks.org/shop/fears> and more at

<https://www.fearswatches.com/products/elegantly-understated-book>

GUIDE TO BRISTOL ARCHAEOLOGY SOURCES

Bristol Archives website now carries *The archaeology of Bristol: a source guide*. ‘You don’t need to pick up a trowel to find out about **Bristol**’s amazing archaeology,’ says the introduction. ‘Information held at **Bristol Archives, Bristol Museums, Bristol Reference Library** and in the **Historic Environment Record** can help you explore the archaeology of the city without getting covered in mud. Online resources such as the *Know Your Place* website and the Portable Antiquities Scheme database also mean that often, you don’t even need to leave your armchair.’ [Not that Bristol City Council would wish to stereotype, would it? Ed.] Text in portable document format but accessible using various assistive technologies at <https://archives.bristol.gov.uk/guides/Bristol%20Museums%20-%20Archaeology%20of%20Bristol%20source%20guide.pdf>

COMMENTARY AND RESPONSES

Whose heritage?

Having put Liverpool waterfront in 2012 on its list of world heritage in danger, a precursor to revoking its designation as a world heritage site, UNESCO has now revoked the designation: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2314/>. And UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee has recommended that unless the designs for the A303 road tunnel are extended and changed, Stonehenge be put next year on UNESCO’s: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/jul/23/stonehenge-could-be-stripped-of-world-heritage-site-status>.

Behind these site-specific decisions and threats are general presuppositions: that new buildings should not be built so as to interfere with views of architecturally or culturally important or aesthetically pleasing old buildings, and that the sites of ancient monuments of cultural importance ought not to be disturbed. The UNESCO decisions also derive from beliefs that people at large throughout the world have, or ought to have, an interest in the heritage in a particular place; that they have a right to express disapproval of how that heritage is treated; and that that right includes the imposition of sanctions to encourage compliance with the wider view. As UNESCO puts it, ‘These sites belong to everyone, and it is everyone’s duty to protect them for future generations.’

Whilst what is done in Liverpool or Wiltshire may be considered a local issue, or an international question rather than a local history or archaeology one, it is relevant to us because our area contains **Bath**, which UNESCO designated a world heritage site in 1987. The designation, one of 32 in the UK, covers the whole city. [Getty images]



UNESCO's Liverpool decision raises a number of questions. Some of them are political. What right have people in other countries to tell a sovereign nation state how to conduct its internal affairs? If people abroad want a heritage asset in another country preserved, should they be required to contribute to its conservation and upkeep? If they do not, do they have any right to dictate how it should be managed?

Historians will wonder how the idea of designating places as world heritage sites came about. One view might be that imperial powers have long claimed that conquest gives a right to dictate how people in other countries should behave; that western nation states, Britain in particular, have considered themselves superior to others (and each other) and know best when it comes to deciding what is in the best interests of others; that the UK has often claimed that other states cannot be trusted to look after their heritage properly – a presumption behind some of the arguments for the British Museum retaining the Parthenon frieze sculptures; organisations such as the Venice in Peril fund; and claims every time a building in Pompeii collapses through neglect, that if Italians and their elected representatives cannot or will not look after their internationally valued patrimony, other nations should be entitled to step in and do so.

Another view might be that unlike laws, which are confined to jurisdictions within boundaries, moral judgments apply worldwide: so that just as we are entitled to say that the inquisition, slavery, piracy, the holocaust, apartheid, genocide, the curtailment of individual and political liberties, the damaging of the natural environment, and the destruction in the name of religion of cultural artefacts are wrong, similarly we are entitled to express

disapproval of how a nation deals with aspects of its heritage that are valued or appreciated outside the country in which they are situated.

Another view is that nation states are a comparatively recent invention, and that the conventions that have emerged around them ought not to override our shared humanity, or our economic, social and cultural interdependence; and that the past of one nation is the past of us all.

Bath Royal Mineral Water Hospital

The original building was designed in neoclassical style by John Wood the elder ('far below his best form,' according to Bryan Little), and completed by his son. Work started 1738. An attic storey was added by John Palmer in 1795, and an extension to the west end 1859-1861 (Manners & Gill). That was bombed in 1942. It was rebuilt in modified design with a new attic storey by Garrard, Taylor 1962-1965. It was listed grade II in 1972. A detailed architectural description is at <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1395448>.

At first the institution was called the general hospital or infirmary. What started it was not compassion or philanthropy, but a wish to remove from the streets poor patients who came to **Bath** in search of a cure. Local residents were not admitted. Cynics might detect a parallel with modern attitudes to providing housing for homeless people: not social concern or sympathy for their predicament, but to remove a perceived aesthetic impairment of the street scene. The idea was first proposed in 1716. A public subscription was opened in 1723. By 1742 some £8,600 had been raised; Wood the architect did not charge; Ralph Allen gave most of the stone free. Beau Nash is said to have been active in fundraising: cui bono?

The original 70 beds proved not enough, hence the extensions. By the twentieth century the limited efficacy of the waters at curing anything led to the institution diversifying its treatments and being rebranded as the Royal National Mineral Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases: in the 1930s a relation of mine, a south Wales miner, was treated there for what would now be diagnosed as pneumoconiosis, his stay paid for by the miners' federation welfare fund at a time when local knowledge about the effects of coal dust had not become medical orthodoxy.

The planning permission just granted has been among the city's most controversial of recent years. The application provoked over 400 written objections and a petition signed by 500. Grounds of objection ranged from the emotional to the technical; some were to do with aesthetics, architectural style, density of development and so on. Objections to planning applications rarely tell the whole story: often they vent emotions, mostly of fear, with causes perhaps too deep to uncover. Some are motivated by a fear of, or distaste for, any change whatsoever; others by apprehended effects on property values, though only if negative; others by xenophobic prejudice against foreigners (however defined) or other others; or by antipathy towards social housing or its presumed occupants or their forecast behaviour. More rational objections might be expressed as Bath having too many hotels already, but such objections are often about fear of competition, voiced mostly by those who have hitherto advocated free enterprise and free trade. More to the point are fears about a heritage asset being owned by a commercial concern whose primary aim will be profit, with conservation of the heritage given attention only in so far as, and so long as, it contributes to profit. If that view is taken, the historically critical event here will not be the grant of planning permission in 2021 but the sale of the property by the NHS in 2018.

Meanwhile life goes on, and **Bath** regenerates itself behind its facades. One is reminded of the title of Muriel Beadle's book about Oxford (Robert Hale, 1963) observing (warning? pleading?) *These ruins are inhabited*.

Listing altered buildings

The planning application to alter the *Rhubarb* Tavern in **Barton Hill, Bristol**, noted in ALHA e-update 31 July 2021, is an example of a problem that crops up from time to time



throughout our area: should a building be listed, or not listed, or be removed from the list if it has been altered and many of its original architectural features have been removed? That is what had happened at the *Rhubarb*: Historic England refused to list it in 2019 on the ground that, although it was originally a garden house dating from the middle of the seventeenth century (it was built for Thomas Day, a soap maker who later became mayor), it had undergone substantial alterations in the nineteenth

when it was converted to a pub. [Image from <https://whatpub.com/pubs/AVN/270/rhubarb-tavern-bristol>]

For Historic England to list a building as being of special architectural interest, the building must be of importance in its design, decoration or craftsmanship. To be of special historic interest a building must illustrate important aspects of the nation's history and/or have closely substantiated historical associations with nationally important individuals, groups or events, and the building in its current form must afford a strong connection with the valued aspect of history.

At the *Rhubarb* what remain from the seventeenth century are its external elevations, a chimneypiece at ground floor with its decorative carving, a dated (1672) and initialled (TAD) central corbel, a staircase with turned mirror balusters, and two chamfered first-floor ceiling beams. All the original doors and windows have gone, as has the whole of the roof structure, and little of the ground floor remains. HE took the view that the fragmentary survivals and their interest did not outweigh the cumulative impact of the changes to the building and the loss of most of its historic fabric, so listing was refused.

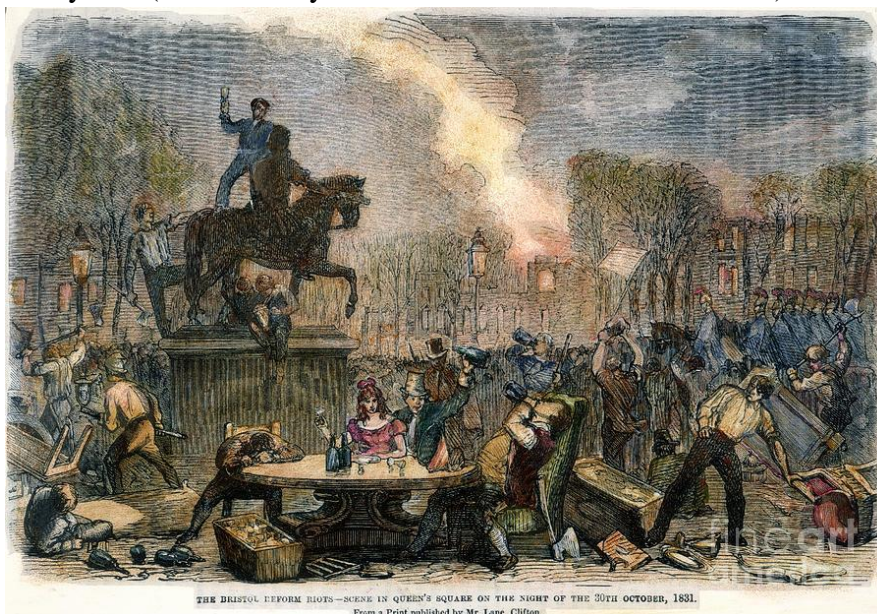
Listing a building does not guarantee its survival. It acts as a reminder, gives pause for thought, and causes a planning application to be required in cases where it would not otherwise have been needed. It is a material consideration that local planning authorities must take into account when determining a planning application.

HE's approach is open to criticism on the ground that it accepts, and could encourage, the destruction or removal of architecturally interesting or important features. A similar risk exists in other aspects of UK planning law: a landowner or developer refused permission to redevelop an old building or vacant land may allow the building to become derelict and uneconomical to repair, or may allow vacant land to remain overgrown and unsightly, and then argue that redevelopment will be an improvement. Planning law thus sometimes encourages antisocial behaviours, to the detriment of our environment and our heritage.

Marxism and Local History

John Stevens writes: If classical Marxism is in retreat, it is a pity, because its central thesis – that history is the history of the class struggle – is important, not least to local historians. (This is not to say that it is obligatory to take one side or the other in the struggle, or to accept the prediction, let alone the hope, that the proletariat will one day dictate to the rest of us.)

The **Bristol** riots of 1831 fit well into the Marxist matrix. The rioters wanted “reform” of some sort, even if no likely Bill (and certainly not the one then before Parliament) was likely to give them the vote. Social and economic grievances no doubt played a large part and even if the primary target was the unpopular **Bristol Corporation** – a view worthy of respect, since it was that of the Home Secretary Lord Melbourne, who at any rate was in office at the time – that does not negate a “class” analysis.



The contemporaneous issue of slavery was complicated by humanitarian feelings on the one hand and then current views about the black man (whether contemptuous or paternal) on the other, but overwhelmingly those favouring slavery were men gaining advantage from it and those opposing were not. The radical Edward Protheroe Jr (1798-1852, MP **Bristol** 1830-32) may be regarded as an exception, but the Protheroe family had significantly diversified away from the West India trade by 1830.

Marxists have more trouble with “culture wars” issues, like Catholic Emancipation, in opposition to which up to 20,000 gathered in **Queen Square** in 1829. They would probably argue that a “false consciousness” was being imposed on the people by their social superiors, and pray in aid the parish processions led by their Anglican clergy and the platform party which included Alderman Daniel and most of the great and good of the city. Those who prefer to emphasise the continuing importance of religion, possibly exacerbated by the growth of a largely ghettoised Irish population, can point to a long tradition of visceral anti-popery in **Bristol**. The Marxist case, however, is at least deserving of an answer.

If Marxism is a religion, the *nouvelle vague*, whose current descendants emphasise issues of race, gender and even disability, may be considered a heresy. Its influence, however, must [may, Ed.] be the subject of a future piece.

1, 50, 500 year histories

In 2016 Max Roser suggested that our view of the significance or importance of a particular event will vary depending on how long a timespan we are looking at. Suppose we write histories of a locality covering one, fifty, and five hundred years respectively. An event that we judge important in our history of one year may not seem so important in our history covering 50 years, and even less in the 500-year history. Take 1918, in which two big events in our area, as elsewhere, were the ending of WW1 and millions worldwide dying in a pandemic. Both events would feature prominently in a history of that year. A writer of a 50-

year history which covered 1918 would probably include the end of WW1 as a major event, but might regard the flu epidemic as a serious blip but not with the vast and far-reaching consequences of the ending of the war. A writer of a 500-year history would probably still regard the end of WW1 as important, but the flu epidemic might not get a mention.

MR was looking at the severity and frequency of economic shocks and upsets, and how people view them. But his idea has lessons — or warnings? — for those of us who rummage about in the local past. From one point of view MR's idea is little more than an application of the common sense general observation that we ought to evaluate the importance of events in their context, and with a sense of proportion; that our views may change with changes in the context in which we view events; and that the historic importance of an event comes not always from its immediate impact but from its longer-term consequences and from the changes that the event led to or made possible. We cannot do that without taking a longish view, which in the case of recent events may not be possible for some years.

MR's warning is relevant to local history, because local history people tend to be interested in detail, and affection for our native or adopted area may lead us to assign to an event more importance than it deserves. When looked at in longer contexts, the event may not be so important after all. When looked at against the background of centuries, it may be insignificant (but interesting all the same, eh?).

QUOTE

Things have lasted for much longer than one thinks.

Michel Foucault, *On the government of the living* (1979)