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Outside our area, but on *Netflix*

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ALHA ITEMS

JACKIE SIMS

ALHA's committee was sorry to hear of the death of Jackie Sims of the former **Filton Community History Group**. *Jane Tozer writes:* As well as being the foremost researcher and publiciser of local **Filton** history from the late 1990s, Jackie was deeply involved in the community development group, *Filton People*. In 1994 Stan and Jackie Sims conceived the idea of a group which would identify the Filton community's social, environmental and recreational needs, and then promote and encourage community solutions. To this end a steering group was set up and a questionnaire was sent out to every household. The subsequent Filton Profile Report was then sent to Filton and South Gloucestershire councillors, and a copy lodged with the local Filton library. With encouragement and funding from Filton Town Council and South Gloucestershire Council the issues of local transport, the needs of older people and of children and young people, and of the environment were

addressed. The name was changed to Filton People and continued until 2008 when the work was taken over by the Southern Brooks Community Development group.

Throughout this period both Stan and Jackie Sims led the research, funding-provision and administration and were the source of many of the innovative ideas.

During this period Jackie Sims was also researching Filton's history. Beginning with the listing of the aviation headquarters, Filton House (now Pegasus House), she worked to promote and record the local history of the community.

In 1999 she obtained a Millenium grant of £23,000 for a project working with three classes of local schoolchildren to discover Filton's rich history. This kicked off a series of oral history interviews, with the result that eventually twelve books of local memories were published, one nationally. Where possible these were illustrated and throughout Jackie's editorial leadership was evident.

The largest oral project was for the BAC Centenary. The stories of workers and ex-employees of both Filton's local aviation industries were recorded, and the resulting book contained about seventy insights on many aspects of aeroplane manufacture including social, training and wartime conditions. Jackie had overall editorial leadership and the resulting published interview texts were praised by the participants themselves.

'Your book edit was very smooth. It is excellent how it's been done'.

Jackie worked on her own projects. Beginning by obtaining the listing of the aviation headquarters, Filton House (now Pegasus House), she researched subjects such as the local Civil Defence, the aviation factory's development of prefabricated housing, the Shield family's laundry and other projects.

During the whole period of **Filton Community History's** work Jackie was tireless in encouraging the committee, directing the progress and continuing her own research projects. All this material has been snapped up by Gloucestershire Archives, who now hold the bulk of the group's work.

GROUPS AND SOCIETIES ONLINE

Many ALHA member groups and societies continue to find ways of communicating online. *Rita Lees writes:* **Marshfield & District Local History Society** continues to offer a monthly talk via Zoom to all its members, and the December 2020 talk concerning the **Marshfield** Mummers was freely available to local residents. Virtual attendance at these meetings remains high; around 48 households on average, with at least 60 people viewing them. We have continued to attract a small number of new members, primarily because such meetings offer a diversion during the winter months and especially because of the lockdown. One issue that needs to be highlighted is the ability of speakers to present their talks by Zoom and for making local history societies aware of them. It is recognised that presenting Zoom talks can be a challenge for speakers if the audience is muted, owing to the lack of audience reaction until the end of their talks. However, in the ongoing uncertainty during the pandemic, it is a very useful tool in the box.

ALHA COMMITTEE

ALHA's committee plans to meet online **8 March 2021**. Member groups and societies are welcome to be represented: please contact the secretary for a link if you or your group's representative would like to listen in or observe. Items to be discussed are likely to include whether to revise the *Avon Local History Handbook* (1979); whether to arrange digitisation of a rare book; whether to publish a revised edition, or defer, the *Walks, Talks & Visits List* if few member groups and societies plan to hold meetings; and to consider a grant application.

EVENTS AND SOURCES

BRISTOL CITY MUSEUMS – SHOPS AND PAST EXHIBITIONS

Ruth Hecht writes: As you mentioned Bristol Museum's shop (or Museums' if you include M Shed!), I thought I'd flag up the fact that they do have an online shop with loads of goodies – from dinosaur toys/books to items specifically about Bristol.

<https://shop.bristolmuseums.org.uk/>

Also, they now have archived many of their past exhibitions online:

<https://exhibitions.bristolmuseums.org.uk/> so, for example on the 'Moved by Conflict' pages about Bristol and the First World War you can watch the silent film 'Temple Meads lined with folk all cheering' – the 12th Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment leaving Bristol, August 1914. *Radical Clay* tells the story of the ceramics collected by Bristol Education Committee's Schools Art Service (and later administered by Avon County Council) which aimed to inspire children's creativity by showing them the very best in new ceramic work – very forward thinking for its time, and it led to some children, such as Kate Malone, going on to be well-known potters.

HISTORY OF MEDICINE – EPIDEMICS OF FEAR

The Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain is planning a series of seminars on 'Spaces of Sickness and Wellbeing: histories of art, architecture and experience'. The series involves the Wellcome Trust collections and the medical history libraries of, among others, Bristol University. More at <https://www.sahgb.org.uk/whatson>

GEORGIAN GROUP JOURNAL ARCHIVE ONLINE

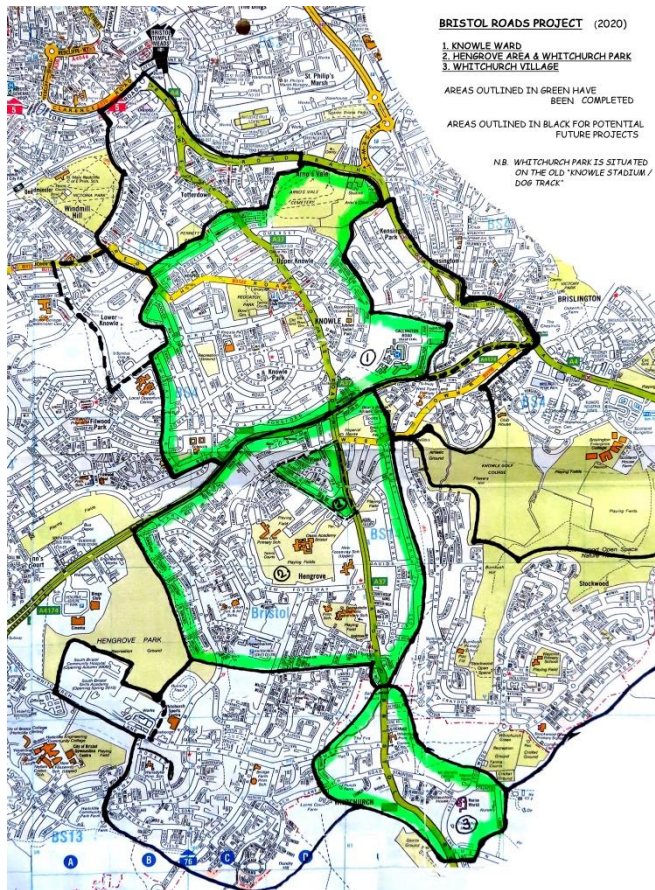
The Georgian Group has put on its website more than 350 articles from its *Journal* on 18th-century architecture and design. The journal, first published in 1986, deals with architecture in Britain between 1660 and 1840. <https://georgiangroup.org.uk/georgian-group-journal/>

MIKE LEIGH PHOTOGRAPHS – AND A CORRECTION

ALHA e-update 31 January 2021, reported on presentations at ALHA's annual general meeting by local groups and societies during lockdown. The AGM was told that Mike Leigh had taken over 800 photographs of **Knowle and Totterdown**, and would be making them into a book. Not correct. *Mike Leigh writes:* 'I think there may have been a "confused communication" here. When doing my Roads Project I actually covered **Knowle, Hengrove and Whitchurch Village**, but not **Totterdown**, and it was those 3 areas that produced the 800 odd images. Also it was never my intention to give talks about the project nor produce a book. In fact I have now completed my piece regarding the project, as you requested, and attach it to this e-mail. I hope it explains all and you think it is OK to print.' Here is Mike's piece:

What did you do in "lockdown"?

Cast your minds back to March 2020. A virus has become a pandemic. The government put the country into lockdown for some considerable time. We had to stay home and could only go out for very specific reasons - to buy food, to go to the pharmacy but, very importantly, to take exercise near our homes. The question now arises 'what will we all do during lockdown?'



I have been a member of **Knowle and Totterdown Local History Society** (KTLHS) since I retired from the Bristol Record Office in 2007, but have been interested in local history for much longer. Fast forward to 2015 and I thought it would be nice to leave some sort of legacy when I go to the great Archive in the sky. Now, my hobby, since I was 12, has been photography. I have accumulated some 70,000 images including 11,000 of Bristol (plus another 7000 of Bristol that I have collected), I don't pretend to be very good at it, I don't specialise in any particular aspect of it, I just take pictures of things that I like, e.g. landscapes and buildings. Oh! By the way I also belong to the National Trust.

In 2015 I decided I would take pictures of all the roads in the area where I live - the site of the **Knowle Stadium / Dog Track** in **Whitchurch Park**. I soon expanded that to all of the roads in the **Knowle Ward** (KTLHS area). I did some of them and then other

things took over, so there was a lull in the proceedings. Then came the pandemic. The obvious thing for me to do was to take up the 'project' again.

I needed to work out a route so that I could visit every road without necessarily walking the whole length of it (there are some very long roads in this area). Then I needed to break down the area in to smaller bite sized chunks - small enough to be able to walk within say an hour or so.

When I started it was exactly as I expected. Very few people and very little traffic about, after all we were in a lockdown. There were no surprises and I didn't really experience any problems except that I did get a few odd looks now and again. But when I explained what I was doing I ended up talking to people about local history - great! There was one occasion when I did feel threatened. Several young people were outside of a shop doing something, I know not what, and watching what I was doing. Fortunately they did not approach me but I was thinking that I had a very expensive camera and wanted to keep it, so I hastened my walking pace!

The equipment I used for the project was a Canon EOS 80D DSLR with a lens giving a 35mm equivalent of 28mm to 320mm. After a while that got a bit 'lumpy' so I reverted to my Canon G5X MK II - a high end compact camera with a 1" sensor and a 35mm equivalent 24mm to 120 mm f1.8 lens. Because of the built-in shake reduction systems I did not need to use a tripod, which with hindsight was a good thing, as that would have attracted even more

attention.

I completed the **Knowle Ward** and moved on to the Hengrove area, where **Whitchurch Park** lies. Same procedure



again but I was well practised at it by now.

Then a long-time good friend who lives in **Whitchurch Village** suggested that I do the same for “the village”. I wasn’t planning that at the time but thought why not?

So there we are. You could say that the pandemic was good for me (though I appreciate not for many others), in the sense of these projects and of course gaining exercise. I visited 244 roads and took 896 images. I put all of the images through Photoshop, just to tidy them up.

What to do with the results. Well, besides adding them to my collection, as the record of a ‘moment in time’, I contacted both KTLHS and **Whitchurch Local History Society** and offered them digital copies of all the images I had taken that related to their areas. They were happy to have them for their respective archives. Since writing this piece it has prompted me to offer digital copies of all of the images I took for this project to Bristol Archives - I will be contacting Allie Dillon very soon. I am hopeful they will accept my offer and who knows some of them might find their way onto *Know Your Place*.



What was the point of the exercise? Besides creating a legacy and a record for myself, and indeed giving me a reason to get some outside exercise, I could share what my part of **Bristol** looked like in a pandemic - nearly empty roads (some of which in normal times are bustling with people and traffic), a very quiet environment, a less polluted environment, a series of images that could be looked back on in the future when people might say “so that’s how a pandemic affected people’s lives” or “so that’s what that area looked like before it was redeveloped”.

Mike Leigh, February 2021

CASTLE PARK, BRISTOL, BY MARY LE PORT

Wessex Archaeology is reported to have been commissioned to undertake investigations before redevelopment on the former Bank of England and Norwich Union site at the Mary-le-port end of Castle Park by **Bristol** bridge: <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/archaeologists-investigate-derelict-buildings-castle-4962376>. Bombing, site clearance and building works will have removed or damaged much of what lies in the ground, but the site is potentially loaded with archaeology.

INSIDE CULTURE

Mary Beard has been hosting *Inside culture* on BBC 2. On 11 February 2021 the discussion was about fact and fiction. It covered truth warnings for *The crown*; actor Jason Watkins on playing real and fictional characters; historian Michael Scott about *The dig*; and the extent to which archaeology and history combine fact and fiction or at least imagination. James Graham, Simon Jenkins and Shahidha Bari discussed the divide between fact and fiction in culture generally, and the popularity (marketability?) of current films based on real events. Available for a year or so at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000s66h/inside-culture-with-mary-beard-series-2-4-fact-v-fiction>

GLOUCESTERSHIRE HERITAGE HUB EVENTS

Jane Marley draws attention to Gloucestershire Archives Zoom events at <https://heritage-hub.gloucestershire.gov.uk/special-edition-february-2021>: The **1st Wednesday of each month**, the *Passport to the past* series is an after (home) school club for young people who are interested in history and the impact that it has today. The **4th Wednesday of each month**, the *Secrets revealed* series is a leisurely lunchtime seminar ideal for those who are new to

learning about the past and for those passionate about history, keen to expand their knowledge on a given subject in a focused session.

BOOKS AND OTHER ITEMS NOTICED

Hubert Pragnell, 'Tunnels in Arcadia: Isambard Kingdom Brunel's portal designs for the Great Western Railway,' *Architectural History* 63 (2020), 143-169, and at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/architectural-history/article/abs/tunnels-in-arcadia-isambard-kingdom-brunels-portal-designs-for-the-great-western-railway/F61B7FE53CB234C0EE336F5E6A684E98>. Draws on designs and pencil and ink drawings in sketchbooks held by University of Bristol Special Collections, watercolour elevations in the Network Rail archive in York, and John Cooke Bourne's lithographs for his *History and description of the Great Western Railway* (1846). Neo-classical at Box, gothic at **Twerton** (short and long) and romanesque for **Brislington**. Includes discussion and reproductions of designs for **Saltford**, **Fox's Wood**, and **St Anne's** tunnel portals.

Roger Leech and Pamela Leech, ed., *The colonial landscape of the British Caribbean*, Boydell for the Society for Post-medieval Archaeology, publication due 21 March 2021. <https://boydellandbrewer.com/9781783275656/the-colonial-landscape-of-the-british-caribbean/> 'This volume brings together new research on the archaeology of the colonial landscape of the Caribbean. It focusses on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and on the British Caribbean: notably Bermuda, Jamaica, Florida, Barbados, Antigua, and especially Nevis [where the Pinneys had plantations and Pero came from: Pinney papers are in University of Bristol special collections: Ed] and St. Kitts. Chapters cover a wide range of landscapes – domestic, military and industrial – and interests, including the archaeology and architecture of African-Caribbean slavery and emancipation, European settlements, sugar production, burial grounds, cartography, fortifications and trade,' it says.

Janice P Nimura, *The doctors Blackwell: how two pioneering sisters brought medicine to women and women to medicine*, WW Norton 2021, hb £21.99. <https://www.wwnorton.co.uk/books/9780393635546-the-doctors-blackwell>. A reminder that Elizabeth B is of international, not just local, historic importance; and that her sister Emily deserves recognition too.

Mike Gates writes: ALHA member **Bitton Parish History Group** is pleased to announce *The Lons and the people who lived there*. This 128-page paperback book is available direct from the publisher, Lulu, at £12 plus delivery. A group from **Bitton Parish History Group** led by Annette Rothwell has delved into census records, newspapers, electoral rolls and military records. The information includes stories from local people who knew some of the more recent inhabitants, the memories of girls who had attended school at The Lons and people who used The Lons Country Club. We were amazed by some of our findings. We certainly hadn't been aware that Turkish baths would have been an 1868 feature of the building, nor did we expect to discover that one of the children brought up there would come to have his portrait in The National Portrait Gallery. Entrepreneurship and sound business acumen enabled some inhabitants to afford the rent or purchase price – including the furniture maker with at least 24 children! Memories of life at The Lons are priceless. They include a story of a child refusing to wear a pig's head, photos of the school's theatrical productions,



and a squash game interrupted when Kingswood School was on fire. Contact: Mike Gates, Secretary 0117 932 8777 email: mgl22@btinternet.com. [More at <http://www.bittonhistory.org.uk/the-lons/>, and more **Bitton** material under **OFFER** below. Ed.]

Hermione Lee, *Tom Stoppard: a life*, Faber 2020, hb 977pp, £30. A full biography of TS, born Tomáš Stráussler, who worked as a journalist and film and drama reviewer in **Bristol**, from 1954 with the *Western Daily Press* and from 1958 with the *Bristol Evening World*. <https://www.faber.co.uk/9780571314430-tom-stoppard.html>

Ingrid de Zwart, *The hunger winter: fighting famine in the occupied Netherlands 1944-1945*, Cambridge UP, 2020, hb £75. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/hunger-winter/047BA5D0B58758940BD15618754830B0>. A piece in ALHA e-update 30 May 2020 noted the listing of the obelisk in the Orange Grove, **Bath**, and the link Historic England made with Victory in Europe day through the Alkmaar garden and the town's gifts of tulip bulbs to the city of **Bath**. Dr de Zwart's book explains the background to the famine. British operations to liberate the Netherlands failed, which cut off food supplies; the railways were not operating; a British blockade aimed against the Germans harmed the Dutch even more; the Germans cut off all road and water transport, and flooded farmland. Dutch families starved, eating livestock fodder, pet cats and tulip bulbs. Hence Elias Prins's and other **Bath** people's relief efforts. So Alkmaar's gifts of tulips were not just an expression of gratitude using what local products Alkmaar had to give, but referred directly and poignantly to the plight of its citizens.

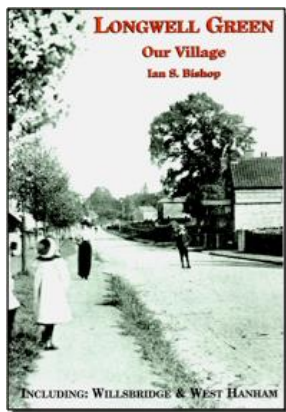
OFFER

IAN BISHOP BOOKS

Geoff Gardner writes: Many people will know of the range of books written and published by local author Ian Bishop, particularly the volumes of old photographs of various Bristol suburbs, some of the villages on the fringes of the City and further out in South Gloucestershire, North Somerset and Bath & North-East Somerset.

Bristol & Avon Family History Society has sold these books for many years and following contact with his family about the remaining stock, are delighted to continue to be the main outlet for his many titles, some of which are now in short supply.

The picture books cover **Pucklechurch; Marshfield; Warmley; Mangotsfield; Bitton; Saltford; Keynsham; Kingswood; Oldland; Staple Hill; Downend; Frenchay; Hambrook; Hanham; Harptree; Pensford; Yate & the Sodburys; Nailsea; Yatton; Winterbourne; Iron Acton; Frampton Cotterell; Timsbury; High Littleton; Hallatrow; Farrington Gurney; Clandown, Radstock & Kilmersdon**; most include nearby settlements as well. There is also a volume on trains, the **Bath to Mangotsfield** line.



His narrative books are more detailed: histories of **Longwell Green** and **Oldland Common** with their surrounding parishes, and *Stories from St Philip's*. Finally there is the story of the Cock Road Gang (Caines family of **Bitton** and **Oldland**).

More details of these and how to buy copies – while limited stocks last – can be found in the shop section at www.bafhs.org.uk

COMMENTARY AND RESPONSES

Dairying

A piece on dairying in e-update 31 January 2021 said that ‘In the nineteenth century, milk was ladled out of a container on the milk cart into the customer’s own container.’ *Rita Lees writes*: In **Marshfield** the supply of milk in this way continued up to the mid twentieth century. The *Marshfield Shops and Businesses* booklet 1920-1940, edited by T & A Chivers & T & W Hope, lists 7 individual milk suppliers in **Marshfield** during that period. Milk could be delivered or collected direct, often using the customer’s own jug. Terry Chivers has since recalled that one supplier was J & R Greenland, which operated in this way into the 1950s. Several long-established residents remembered this practice during our series of oral history interviews, from 2018-2020. The *Marshfield Shops and Businesses* booklet (p.13-14) also refers to the supply of home-made ice-cream, not from a milk supplier but a tobacconist and confectioner, ‘Wobbler’ Jones. Before World War II, Wobbler sold his ice cream, with round wafers, from a pony and governess cart. It was a service provided on Sunday afternoons during the summer. [Image from https://www.1stdibs.com/furniture/tables/bar-carts/20th-century-edwardian-hand-pulled-milk-cart-appointment-to-hm-king/id-f_13094791/ not Marshfield. Ed.]



Hotels

Government measures to limit spread of the virus hit hotels hard. In **Weston super mare** the Grand Atlantic did not survive the first lockdown - <https://www.thewestonmercury.co.uk/news/grand-atlantic-hotel-closes-as-holiday-firm-collapses-4556092> - but appears to be taking bookings. If the purpose of hotels is to give shelter, food and comfortable beds to people away from home, travel restrictions strike at hotels’ very purpose.

That connection with travel hints at why, where and how hotels originated. It also reminds us that not all travel gives rise to hotels: if in a culture the custom (duty?) of giving hospitality to strangers is so ingrained that there is no call for commercial hospitality, as was the case in Greek city states in the ancient world, there will be no hotels. Similarly if travel is prohibited. On a medieval manor, if lower tenants or slaves left, the lord would have lost their services or rents, so movement was prohibited. If the lords and their entourages moved around their scattered holdings, they would use their own accommodation or commandeer it. Only clerics, merchants, other traders, and officials on business might need somewhere to put up for the night. Contrast the roman empire, where inns were many because they were needed to accommodate military and government officials travelling on the business of controlling and communicating within a vast empire and making it work.

Some historians say that some monastic foundations offered accommodation to travellers. At **Abbots Leigh**, for example, there was a hospicium. That is usually translated as ‘guest house’, but it could have been a sort of almshouse or a residence for the chronically or terminally ill, a hospice in the present-day sense. Leigh was not on a pilgrimage route, so passing travellers must have been few. Perhaps the hospicium was to accommodate people such as wool buyers doing business with the abbot?

Commercial hotels, as distinct from premises offering shelter or food out of charitable hospitality, seem to have evolved out of alehouses. The proprietor might offer accommodation in spare rooms, and the alehouse became an inn. Before the Hotel Proprietors

Act 1956 English common law required an innkeeper to offer accommodation to any traveller presenting himself who appeared able and willing to pay a reasonable sum for the services and facilities provided and who was in a fit state to be received. When the first stage coach from London to **Bath** was introduced in 1667, and especially after John Palmer introduced mail coaches between London, **Bath and Bristol** in 1784, coaching inns developed, where horses could be changed. It is easy to see why coach routes should start, call at and end at inns, and why many of those inns should later become hotels.

The connection of hotels with travel is also seen in shipping: hotels were built at **Aust** by the warth and at **New Passage**. Travellers might be delayed by weather or tides, as Daniel Defoe learned. [Aust passage, J Hassell, 1797, British Library <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/kinggeorge/a/003ktop00000013u08300000.html>]



When railways were constructed, hotels were built at their termini. Every London terminus had its hotel. In **Bristol** what later became the Grosvenor was opened by **Temple Meads**, and the Palace (WH Hawtin, 1869) at the junction of Lawford Street and Old Market to serve, it was hoped, passengers from the Midland Railway at **St Phillips**. IKB went a stage further, building a hotel in central Bristol to accommodate his train passengers on the way to America by his boat. Did seaside hotels, eg at **Portishead, Clevedon and Weston super mare**, precede the railway or follow it? The railway reached **Clevedon** in 1847. The York Hotel (later a convent) was designed by George Fowler in 1834. The pier and the Royal Pier Hotel (Hans Price) both date from 1869.

As the number of hotels grew, they diversified to attract different sorts of customer; palaces like the Ritz and the Dorchester in London for the ultra-rich; smaller hotels for commercial travellers. Were the lodging houses that served the spas in **Hotwells, Clifton and Bath** analogous with hotels in that they offered food and domestic service as well as beds, or were they places where visitors brought own servants and saw to their own food and cleaning? Several large businesses, eg Rolls Royce (or one of its predecessors) and John Lewis, ran hotels for their employees. Bristol City Council ran a hotel in **Weston super mare** as part of its social services operations. By the end of the twentieth century budget hotels appeared, offering rooms and basic facilities at prices lower than those charged by conventional hotels. Many hotel chains developed brands, partly to target their markets, which they divided depending on price, social image and so on. Bristol's Society of Merchant Venturers had ambitions to revive the spa at **Clifton**, hence Clifton Rocks Railway. In the nineteenth century bishop Monk went to Baden Baden, and specialist hotels, such as the Peebles Hydro, proliferated. One development in the late twentieth century was the spa hotel, claiming to deliver health and beauty treatments to the moneyed hopeful. Some offer leisure facilities. Plenty to look into.

Rent and groceries

What do you spend more of your income on: housing or food? 'Housing costs were generally the second largest item in household budgets (after food) in Victorian times,' says Peter Malpass in his *The making of victorian Bristol* (Boydell 2019), reviewed by Dr Jonathan Harlow in *ALHA Newsletter* 158, March 2019. Does that surprise you? For most households nowadays the reverse is true, and by a long way.

Many factors influence housing costs. Supply and demand is the main reason for today's house prices and rents. Interest rates mean that the less borrowers have to pay, the more they can afford to borrow, so the more vendors raise the prices. Household sizes affect

demand. So do legal rent controls or their absence. Population changes, including migration in and out, affect demand. Local planning policies (yes, those poor people desperately need more housing, but not on the edge of my village) may affect supply. Credit controls and their absence influence supply, whether those controls are imposed by government as part of economic policy or political dogma or by lenders as part of their business model.

Employment patterns affect demand and people's ability to pay. So does the distance people are willing to travel to work, so transport costs are relevant. Individuals' preferences and expectations of what they will be able to afford may limit what they are prepared to pay.

What housebuilders offer restricts what is available. Housebuilders manipulate the market, eg by stockpiling land to block competitors, by delaying construction so as to limit supply so as to push prices up, by deciding what they will offer the public; and so on. With interest rates being comparatively low at present, house prices and rents are very high. 'Affordable housing' is often either a contradiction in terms or a false trade description.

Local history people who want to test Professor Malpass's proposition might start with published evidence. An example for 1888 from elsewhere is at www.victorianweb.org/economics/wages4.html . What about our area? Was there a difference between the towns and rural areas? Were houses in the country cheaper in the last quarter of the nineteenth century because of the agricultural depression? How much was free accommodation tied to the job actually worth to a farm or mine worker? If towns like **Bath** and **Bristol** were overcrowded, so that working people found it difficult to find somewhere to live, did that drive house prices and rents up? If mine and factory owners had to build houses to accommodate their workforce, as in and around **Radstock**, does that mean that without such housing workers would have had nowhere to live?

The other side of PM's comparison is the cost of food. Since 1945 in the UK we have been used to government policies keeping down the prices of foods, though now that the UK has left the EU we can expect rises in the prices of most foods imported from or through the EU. Was food really so expensive in late Victorian times? Again there is published evidence of that nation-wide, but what about our area? Did rural people have an advantage because the prices of much of what they ate did not have to include transport costs? Did the railways make any difference? North Somerset farmers could get higher prices in London, but did that make any difference to prices locally? Products like grain and cheese were storable, but until refrigeration became affordable and widespread many staples were perishable. Were our local markets confined to local produce? When did the cost of housing overtake the cost of food, and why?

What sources could we use? Household accounts, but most have not survived. Where they have survived, they may be from affluent households and so will not be representative. Most families were more concerned with surviving than bookkeeping. In the case of meats and some other traded commodities, some clues could be gleaned from newspaper reports of livestock sales and market prices. Prices are only part of the puzzle: we have to take into account what money households had to spend, which for most people was not much.

Proxies

The media publish virus statistics: how many new cases have been diagnosed, how many patients have been admitted to hospital, how many people have died, the average number of people a virus-spreader will infect, how many employees have been dismissed, how much the gross national product has shrunk, and so on. As one of the restrictions imposed by the government is on people moving about - apart from the prime minister and his retinue - the media tell us about changes in the number of journeys we have been making. There are graphs, which help us visualise the numbers. As it is not practicable to count all journeys

accurately, the media have used as a proxy for the number of journeys the number of requests for travel directions people have made online, eg to Google, Apple, the AA and the RAC.

Such a proxy is only a crude indicator. Some people may look up directions without intending to go anywhere. Some may intend to travel but do not. Some may travel without the aid of the data-harvesters' applications. But the number of enquiries may indicate roughly the number of journeys made. Proxies can be useful if all we want to do is to detect changes or trends or make comparisons, as distinct from getting accurate numbers.

Proxies are not new. Some rich people paid agents to go on pilgrimage for them, or sent an image of themselves as a proxy. A present-day pilgrimage proxy advertises at <https://www.lemonticole.com/home> ; another charges extra if on his knees: <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=proxies+on+pilgrimage&&view=detail&mid=A22CA52924C0CD949FDDA22CA52924C0CD949FDD&rvsmid=F4B9175A6D35ADCEC76FF4B9175A6D35ADCEC76F&FORM=VDRVRV>. The number of children receiving free school meals has long been used as a proxy for measuring household poverty, and as a substitute means test for other benefits. The number of people receiving unemployment benefits or registering in jobcentres can be a proxy for the number of people actually unemployed, which is not the same thing but is near enough for many purposes. On a large scale, economic historians in some Asian countries where official statistics are corrupt, unreliable, kept secret or do not exist, have used statistics to do with the replacement of rice by wheat, both the extent of land farmed and amounts of grain consumed, as proxies for measuring economic development.

On a smaller scale, proxies could be a useful tool for local history enquirers. They are likely to be helpful where data for a phenomenon do not exist or are sparse or are too difficult or expensive to collect or are suspected to be false, but there are data for related phenomena. One example is medieval and early modern tax collection, which can be a proxy for prosperity because early modern kings tended to tax only those known to be wealthy. (The flat rate poll tax of 1381 led to popular rebellion, a lesson from history that was heeded by English and British monarchs and governments right up until 1990). Some taxation was levied on individuals or the church, but some were extracted from communities. The 1334 lay subsidy was collected from towns and villages. The amount required of each community can be taken as a proxy for the prosperity of a place, or at any rate as an indicator of the presence of people able to pay the tax.

The subsidy rolls for Somerset and Gloucestershire include the following entries:

	quota ££
Bristol	2200
Marshfield	270
Wrighton	150
Yate	143.56
Bath	133.33
Wraxall	118.38
Chewton Mendip	90
West Harptree	90
Portbury	89.47
Backwell	75.47
Thornbury	75
Tormarton	75
Keynsham	52.78
Wickwar	52.5
Almondsbury	46.5
Frampton Cotterell	40

Clevedon	38.47
Langridge	37.75
Pucklechurch	36
Winterbourne	33.25
Tockington	32.5
Tortworth	27.5
Hinton Charterhouse	15
Hawkesbury	13.75

That Bristol was heavily taxed, both in terms of the actual quota and in comparison with other settlements in our area, will be no surprise. What may be unexpected is that **Marshfield, Wrington** and **Yate** were taxed higher than **Bath**, and that **Wraxall** was not far behind. If the tax quota is taken as a proxy for perceived (or suspected?) wealth, then some of our present-day villages may have been more important economically, or more prosperous, or at any rate may have contained more wealthy people, than we may have given credit for. If that is so, the reasons for it might be worth looking into.

CAN YOU HELP?

WARMLEY – WW2 ANTI-AIRCRAFT BATTERY

Robin Short robinshort93@googlemail.com says his grandfather Frederick Hyman was an anti-aircraft gunner at a battery that was stationed in the early WW2 years in **Warmley**, and would be grateful for any information about where the battery was.

QUOTE

...as earth stirs in her winter sleep,
and puts forth grass and flowers
despite the snow,
despite the falling snow.

Robert Graves (1895-1985)