

# AVON LOCAL HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY

## *Newsletter 150 March – July 2017*

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

Events: <http://www.alha.org.uk/events.html>

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

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#### DIARY

Material for **Newsletter 150** by **24 June 2017** please

Magazines and books to reviews editor, Hardings Cottage,  
Swan Lane, Winterbourne BS36 1RJ

[jonathan.harlow@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:jonathan.harlow@uwe.ac.uk)

Details of events to website manager,

Flat 1 Chartley, 22 The Avenue, Bristol BS9 1PE

[lawrence@hazels.u-net.com](mailto:lawrence@hazels.u-net.com)

Other news, comments, and changes of contact details to  
membership secretary,

5 Parrys Grove, Bristol BS9 1TT

[wm.evans@btopenworld.com](mailto:wm.evans@btopenworld.com)

### **ALHA LOCAL HISTORY DAY 2017**

ALHA's local history day 2017 will be held at UWE Frenchay on **Saturday 22 April**. The topic will be **The Street**, broadly interpreted. Streets are so much an everyday feature of ordinary life that we tend to take them for granted. Streets go back a long way. They differ in their origins, in how they have changed over the years, in how we and our predecessors have used them, what part they have played in people's lives, how they have looked (to artists as well as users) and how the look of them has changed. Streets have had their ups and downs, not just physically but also in how people have regarded them socially. Our speakers, from different parts of our area, will look at various aspects of streets at different dates in different places and over different periods of time, and will outline their changes, visually, environmentally and socially. Presenters include Pat Hase on **Weston-super-mare High Street**; John Chandler on **Chipping Sodbury**; Mike Manson on **Old Market, Bristol**; Peter Malpass on **Corn Street**; Jenny Gaschke on the **Braikenridge** street views; and **Steve Poole** on policing street disorder. In case you have not booked already (96 people already have), a **booking form accompanies this newsletter**.

## ALHA SUMMER WALKS 2017



ALHA's summer walks for 2017 begin with a walk round old **Brislington**, starting at St Luke's church, **7pm Monday 8 May**. Leader will be John Rowe of ALHA member **Brislington Conservation and History Society** leading. **A flyer for the two walks arranged so far accompanies this newsletter** and details of others will appear on the ALHA website.

If you would like to help with organising ALHA's summer walks, could you please contact Mike Hooper or any other member of the ALHA committee.

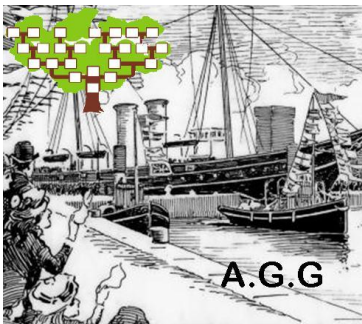
## ALHA SUBSCRIPTIONS

ALHA's financial year starts 1 April, and subscriptions are now due. **A membership renewal form accompanies this Newsletter**. Subscriptions remain the same: for an individual, £3 if you receive by e-mail, £5 if you receive by post; for a group or society, £5 if you receive by e-mail, £7 if you receive by post. The ALHA committee does not expect to alter subscription rates in the foreseeable future, so if you would like to pay by bank standing order (saves time, saves memory, saves postage), please ask the treasurer for a bank mandate form.

Many thanks to all who have already paid their subs, or do so promptly: early receipt helps ALHA's cashflow no end.

## ALHA FACEBOOK

*Veronica Bowerman writes:* Events information from ALHA member societies continues to attract more visitors to ALHA Facebook page and should, long term, heighten the profile for many. The initial information is taken from the ALHA webpage showing forthcoming Events but, where possible, ALHA Facebook team aims also to include a picture, logo and/or website address. We have had some success with societies who do not have a website or Facebook page. Several have now designed a logo, poster or non-copyright photo to epitomise their society. This is now reflecting in the number of visitors to their event information on ALHA Facebook. Here are three examples:



**Avonmouth Genealogy Group's** recent event posting, left, showing their newly designed logo, achieved 559 visitors to the facebook item.

**Hartrees History Group's** photo, right, showing one of their recent events, resulted in 430 visits to the facebook item.



**Gordano Civic Society** is the only one of this group of three member societies that has a website. We included their website link as well as a poster they had submitted for one of their events, and the posting attracted 553 visitors to the facebook item.

Many member societies seem to appreciate the Facebook facility showing forthcoming events. We would like more, including others with their own website, to e-mail information to ALHA Facebook page to encourage more to attend forthcoming meetings such as the examples shown above.

ALHA FACEBOOK - RECENT HIGHEST NUMBER OF VISITS			
	Source	Further information	Reached
1	ALHA – LHD – April	Talk/Photo - Peter Malpass - Corn St	8k
2	Knowle & Totterdown LHS	Forthcoming Event – Peter Fleming	4k
3	Architecture Centre	Event – Bristol Through Maps	3.7k
4	UWE Regional History Centre	Event – Maltreated and Malcontents	2k
5	Angela Thompson Smith	Photo - Street where she lived (To heighten interest in ALHA Local History Day.)	1.8k

Some of the above initial information has been extracted from ALHA Newsletters and posted to ALHA Facebook. This has resulted in a high number of visitors, particularly when photos were included as well. Postings from other Facebook pages, particularly *Bristol - Then & Now* are also proving very popular.

We have stimulated more interaction and discussion through our postings. Two in particular in February, 2017 related to the former **Children's Hospital, St Michael's Hill** and to **Bristol Museum** archaeology courses.

We have also posted a QR code on Facebook – with a link to Eventbrite - to encourage more visitors to Facebook using mobiles to book tickets for ALHA Local History Day – 2017 and/or to share the information with others. We have also asked each speaker for a photo to highlight their subject, to introduce themselves and/or their presentation. Overviews are being scheduled into the ALHA Facebook page to appear at regular intervals now in the run up to the April event. The Eventbrite direct link for tickets and further information can also be obtained from: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/alpha-local-history-day-2017-tickets-30044464803> Alternatively, a ticket order form can be printed off from the ALHA website <http://www.alpha.org.uk/>

ALHA's Facebook team seeks to increase the number of visitors to the page. They welcome suggestions e.g. text and non-copyright photos. Please submit the latter as jpegs to the dedicated ALHA Facebook email [avonandbristolarchaeology@gmail.com](mailto:avonandbristolarchaeology@gmail.com)

## **COPYING UPDATES**

*Past ALHA secretary Jan Packer suggests* that circulation of ALHA's monthly updates could be increased if in each group that receives a copy by e-mail, one or more members were to make a paper copy for those who do not receive by e-mail and thus may not see updates and the information they contain. Could be particularly useful for short notice of events.

## **ACCESS TO NEWSLETTERS AND UPDATES VIA THE ALHA WEBSITE**

Rather than send *Newsletters* and monthly updates as attachments to e-mails, ALHA would like to send recipients an e-mail with a link to the ALHA website where the document can be viewed and downloaded. Bob Lawrence has put a link on the website for this: [www.alpha.org.uk/Latest.pdf](http://www.alpha.org.uk/Latest.pdf). We think it works, as does **Frenchay Village Museum**. If you have any problems, do let us know.

## **ALHA LOCAL HISTORY COLOURING BOOK 2017**

This year's edition is now out. Many tasteful drawings to colour in, including *Bristol's Puritan Streak*. 99p, usual outlets, until stocks last, 1 April only.

## **EVENTS AND SOURCES**

### **BRISTOL LOCAL DEMOCRACY**

*City Hall: home of democracy in Bristol* is an exhibition of photos, films and other documents relating the history of Bristol's town hall and its predecessors. **City Hall (Council House)**, admission free, **until 26 May 2017**.

### **A FORGOTTEN LANDSCAPE PROJECT**

**Sevenside** latest at <http://us11.campaign-archive1.com/?u=5a1c4370a35827939f3c8d02b&id=80ffa1fa2d> , including volunteering opportunities.

## GAS GIRLS

In 1918, **Avonmouth** was a centre of Britain's chemical warfare industry, with two factories making and filling shells with deadly Mustard Gas, employing hundreds of local women and girls. There were hundreds of accidents, nearly three thousand casualties, and several deaths.

*Gas Girls* tells the story of these women, the beliefs that drove them, the hardships they lived with and the friendship and humour that bound them together.

Touring around Bristol April - June 2017: **actacentre, Bedminster 27 - 29 April** (BSL performance **28 April**); **Rondo Theatre, Bath 5 May; Trinity Centre, Bristol 19 May; Blakehay Theatre, Weston 3 June; Stoke Park School, Bristol 6 June**. Tickets £4 from [www.acta-bristol.com](http://www.acta-bristol.com) or 0117 9532448



BRITISH GAS CASUALTIES, 1918

## CBA WORKSHOP ON ADVOCACY

The Local Heritage Engagement Network, run by the Council for British Archaeology and funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, aims to support local advocacy for archaeology and the historic environment. It wishes particularly to respond to current threats to archaeology and conservation services in local authorities, local museums, wider heritage services and opportunities for public engagement as a result of budget cuts. Details of the project and supporting resources at: <http://new.archaeologyuk.org/local-heritage-engagement-network>.

LHEN offers a free to attend workshop and training day at the **Library, Paul Street, Taunton 29 April 2017**. *Advocacy, and supporting your heritage* will focus on how local groups can engage in advocacy, what networks of support are available, and how this type of work can help in the difficult process of protecting the position of archaeology and heritage in local government's affairs and in local communities. Speakers include local authority archaeologists about their role and challenges and threats facing archaeology and heritage services, and people from community groups who are engaging in advocacy and seeing positive results. This event is particularly useful for groups and societies who are considering getting involved with advocacy in the area but also for those who are already involved and may want to share their ideas with others. To book your place please use the link <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/advocacy-and-supporting-your-heritage-tickets-32585156079>. This is a free event but booking essential.

## REVIEWS

By *Dr Jonathan Harlow* unless otherwise said: *The Local Historian* **47.1** (January 2017) contains nothing of direct Avon, or even South West, interest. No books of Avon interest are reviewed.

*Bristol & Avon Archaeology* **26 (2014-15)** has Bruce Williams' usual and valuable review of all the archaeological work and watching briefs in the Avon area over these two years; though I did not find anything that looked sensational to my inexperienced eye. Otherwise it is **Bedminster's** day with two full articles on work there in 2005-8. The point that emerged for me from both these was that until this millennium Bedminster was a marginal or overflow area, active for some Iron Age time, some Roman time, some Dark Age time; but with no evidence of continuity in between. There is also a short article on the **WW1 Remount Depot** by Peter Insole and Nick Nourse, which supplies a fair bit of material for a rather neglected facility.

*Journal of the Bristol & Avon FHS* **167** (March 2017) contains much the usual good mix, though not Bob Lawrence's guide to internet sources. This quarter's 'My Parish' is **Dyrham**: a list of sources but as too usual no references. This severely limits the value of any such piece as historians do not care to use sources which are themselves unreferenced. The useful article on the **Yate Heritage Centre** notes that its history starts with the Anglo-Saxons. Time to catch up on Roman remains noted in the B&A Archaeology round up for 2015? **Dr Harlow would welcome reviews of recently published books or articles relevant to ALHA's area and objects**

## BOOK SOUGHT

ALHA individual member Richard Coates seeks a copy of JS Moore's *Clifton and Westbury Probate Inventories 1609 - 1761*, published in 1981 when ALHA was Avon Local History Association. [Richard.Coates@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:Richard.Coates@uwe.ac.uk).

## BOOKS NOTICED

Sheila Rowbotham, *Rebel crossings: new women, free lovers and radicals in Britain and the United States*, Verso 2016, £25. In *Newsletter* 143 Dr Jonathan Harlow reviewed *Strikers, Hobblers, Conchies & Reds: a radical history of Bristol 1880-1939* by Dave Beckwith, Roger Ball, Stephen Hunt & Mike Richardson (Breviary Stuff Publications, £18.50), which included a paper by Mike Richardson on the activities in Bristol of radicals **Helena Born** and **Miriam Daniell**. SR's book recounts what happened to them, and others, after they went to America. Also vignettes of supporting characters including Bristol quaker **Emily Sturge** – ODNB entry at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/templates/image-pop.jsp?id=51774&orientation=p> but her photograph is not downloadable - who campaigned for women's education and much else, and was the first woman governor of **Redland High School**.



Helen Dunmore, *Birdcage Walk*, Hutchinson 2017, £18.99. Fiction, not local history, but the heroine is a radical girl who marries a property developer who builds in **Clifton** (hence the title) and is ruined in the 1793 financial collapse. Sounds like an antidote to Ethel Winfred Baker's *Miss Ann Green of Clifton*. Local talent. Enthusiastic reviews in national broadsheet newspapers.

Mike Richardson, *The enigma of Hugh Holmes Gore: Bristol's nineteenth century christain socialist solicitor*, Bristol Radical History Group 2017. Brought up in **Clifton**, councillor for **St Philip's**. Outing long overdue. On sale at Bristol Archives.

Laurent Chatel, *William Beckford: the elusive orientalist*, Voltaire Foundation 2017, £65. <http://xserve.volt.ox.ac.uk/VFcatalogue/details.php?recid=6648> Relevant to aspects of the architecture of Beckford's tower at **Lansdown** and his landscaping.

## RESPONSES

### **Bristol & N Somerset railway and Olveston church**

*Jan Packer writes:* I was interested in the piece in the February 2017 Update which mentioned the **Bristol & N Somerset railway**, because my GGGrandfather (**William Brock, of Brock & Bruce** in 1873) was involved in some ways. He is credited with building many stations, **Brislington** being one. There is also anecdotal evidence of his being involved in the building of **Pensford** viaduct but I have never found any proof. I would love to establish fact or fiction around such a beautiful structure. I wonder if any readers have more information that could link Brock to any of the works on this line that I might learn from.

Coincidentally, the next piece, about the effects of the outlawing of resale price maintenance, mentioned **Olveston**, where Brock carried out extensive renovation of the church, St Mary the Virgin. I recently visited and was shown around by local history enthusiast Eric Garrett who had lots of great info on the work and costs involved. Photo attached.



### **Member of Parliament: Representative or Delegate?**

*John Stevens writes:* Your editorial in the February update comments on this perennial question. It should be remembered that the position of a "rebel" MP (whether rebelling against his parliamentary leaders or his

constituents) has changed considerably between the age of Burke and the present.

In the first place, a member rejected by a "popular" constituency such as **Bristol**, if a man of ability and/or good connections, could easily

find a safe billet in one of the numerous “pocket” borough seats - as **Burke** did, through Lord Rockingham, at Malton in Yorkshire. Secondly, Party was in its infancy, parliamentary discipline being maintained largely by connection and patronage. Thirdly, to the extent that parties *did* exist, they did not go to the country at general elections with detailed programmes for the next Parliament. The functions of government were confined to balancing the books, maintaining public order and defending the Realm.

Things began to change with the Reform Act of 1832. In the general election which followed, the radical Whig MP for Bristol, **Edward Protheroe**, pledged himself at the behest of the Bristol Political Union to vote for shorter Parliaments, secret balloting and a further extension of the franchise. In the Bristol election of 1835, on the other hand, Colonel **James Evan Baillie**, a far more conservative Whig, disdained pledges, wishing (in true Burkean fashion) “to maintain the independence which becomes the representative of a great community”. Protheroe’s outlook looks to the future, Baillie’s to the past.

## **COMMENTARY**

### **BRISTOL CATHEDRAL, THE COLSTON WINDOW AND EDWARD COLSTON**

*Dr Madge Dresser writes:* A visitor to Bristol would have to be unobservant not to notice that the name of **Colston** features prominently in the urban landscape. There are Colston streets, skyscrapers, statues, schools, civic ceremonies and even a concert hall bearing his name. Yet Edward Colston, for so long uncritically revered as Bristol’s philanthropist and benefactor, is now the centre of an increasingly fierce public row. At its heart is the revelation (first documented in print in the 1920s but made more widely known by the late 1990s) that he played a role in promoting the trafficking of enslaved Africans and the trade in slave-produced goods. Is he still to be publicly honoured on the grounds that he was a product of a time when slavery was largely accepted (save for a few visionaries and those unfortunate enough to be enslaved)? Or is commemorating him akin to celebrating Jimmy Saville or Hitler on the grounds of their contributions to charity and public works? Though local, this controversy is part of a wider

Whilst according to the party Whips, there were numerous “doubtful” MPs in the decades following 1832, they became notably fewer with the vast extension of the electorate brought about by Disraeli’s Reform Act of 1867 (“household suffrage”) and the subsequent growth of mass parties.

Essentially the position today rests on two assumptions: that electors by and large vote for a national party rather than a local candidate, and that in casting their votes they are mainly influenced by the parties’ manifesto pledges. An elected member can therefore be reasonably expected to vote along the party line in Parliament.

Many criticisms may be made of the above but this is not the place to do it. Viewed cynically, the present arrangement at least allows ambitious MPs to square the circle between virtue and prudence and enables the Whips to sleep easily in their beds. Well publicised revolts over Brexit notwithstanding, things are unlikely to change any time soon.

global movement reconsidering public commemoration in a post-colonial age. Much public debate around Colston first focused on his statue in the city centre which proclaims him as Bristol’s ‘wise and virtuous son,’ and then on the refurbished Colston Hall, at which Bristol’s *Massive Attack* refused to perform on the grounds it honoured a slaver. The discourse around this has become polarised in a way which echoes the culture wars around Brexit and Trump. Some Bristolians (including those descended from enslaved Africans) see his commemoration as an insult which implicitly excludes them from feeling part of the city. Others see the denigration of Colston as a Stalinesque denial of Bristol’s historical traditions by the politically correct. The debate has recently taken on a new cogency as the **Colston Hall** is about to undergo a further multi-million pound refurbishment and the pressure group *Countering Colston* then stepped up its campaign to challenge the propriety of publicly honouring Colston.

Thus it came to the media’s attention that Bristol Cathedral has a large stained glass

window dedicated to the man himself. The Cathedral was already under pressure from activists for hosting a service on Colston's birthday, especially after the bishop had at one such service said that Colston's complicity in slavery was still a matter of debate. Though the *Countering Colston* campaign never actually demanded the window's removal, the media knew a good story when it saw one and asked the dean what he thought the Cathedral should do about it. The dean, mindful of the explosive atmosphere, was too cautious or canny to make give a definitive answer and said he'd consider the proposal, which prevarication further fuelled fervid media speculation. In fact no one (including *Countering Colston*) seriously demanded its destruction.

But what do we know about the Colston window itself? More research needs to be done but it seems the window was installed in 1890 when the Cathedral's north transept was rebuilt. The glass was supplied by Powell & Sons, of Whitefriars and tellingly, it was financed by the **Dolphin Society**, one of the charities set up by Bristol's elite to honour Colston. Shattered during an air raid in 1941, much of the original window was lost and its remaining fragments were reconstructed into the present Colston window. Some original glass remains in the roundel at the top portraying Christ and the centurion, and the most Colston-oriented remnants are the dolphins in the tracery, which were associated with his name. (The legend of the dolphin 'saving' one of Colston's ships also features in the plinth of **John Cassidy's** 1895 statue of Colston in the city centre).

**Edward Woore** (1880-1960) is credited with the restoration of the bombed-out window. Woore trained in London under **Edward Whall** of the Arts and Crafts movement alongside a fellow student called **Arnold Robinson** who by 1923 had purchased the Bristol glass firm of **Joseph Bell and Son**. It was with Robinson's firm that Woore was commissioned to do the window.

Though the window does not seem presently to be under the direct threat of a Cromwellian purge, emotions are running high. The recent case of an African-American employee who, after 8 years working under a window portraying 'Happy slaves' at Yale University's

Calhoun College, thrust his broom handle through it, is a case in point. Though more heat than light has characterised the recent furore in Bristol, it is an appropriate moment for the Cathedral and the city to own up to its historical slaving associations and to reconsider how it might honestly represent itself to an increasingly diverse and polarised public.

*Wendy Matthews, Bristol cathedral Chapter Clerk, writes:* **Bristol** has a difficult legacy with slavery and an issue that has received increasing attention in recent years is the personal legacy of **Edward Colston** (1636-1721). He was a wealthy merchant and Deputy Governor of the Royal African Company and was involved in the slave trade. He is remembered both through his name (e.g. **Colston Hall**) and in various forms of art, including windows at **Bristol Cathedral, St Mary Redcliffe and All Saints**. The 'Countering Colston' group has been campaigning to have Colston's name removed from buildings and it has been suggested that the window in the Cathedral could be replaced. The Dean and Chapter of Bristol Cathedral are clear that slavery is wicked and evil, and has some sympathy with the aim of the group, but we also acknowledge the difficulty of eradicating Colston's memory from the city, and the complexity of trying to judge a society and a time so far removed from our own, and to present history in an appropriate manner. The Dean has said:

'What is important, when it comes to the physical legacy of the past, is how we tell the stories about those objects and what they mean. The Cathedral and the city have a long term relationship, and part of our role is to act as a mirror, reflecting the city back to itself, and *vice versa*. At time with issues like slavery that can be a difficult conversation, but it is one that must be had. On occasions, like the annual Sunday service, when we remember the abolition of the slave trade, we tell the story of our mistakes through objects like the stained glass window which was given by Colston, and reflect on those issues, which are still so alive and prevalent in the city of Bristol today. These objects can remind us of what went wrong, and encourage us to not repeat the same mistakes. We know, from our engagement with Unseen that slavery is still alive in our city. It is this modern injustice that the Dean and Chapter, the

local community, and all of us individually need to recognise and act against.’

There are no immediate plans to replace the window, but the Dean and Chapter are considering how the story of slavery should be told in the Cathedral, as part of our wider work.

The window itself is located in the north transept. It was commissioned during the rebuilding of the nave, which began in the 1860s, and was installed in 1890. However, in 1941 the nave and transept windows were blown out by a bomb during an air raid and so much of the original window was lost. Some original glass remains in the roundel at the top with the Centurion and Christ, and the dolphins in the tracery, which were a personal mascot of Colston. They commemorate a famous story: ‘One of his ships, returning from the West

Indies richly laden, sprung a leak which the crew was unable to stop. The water was rapidly rising in the vessel when a dolphin was sucked into the aperture and thereby the vessel and crew were saved.’ The figures of Cornelius and the Centurion in the middle were translated from different windows in the Cathedral, and the six episodes of the Good Samaritan were put in place below with an accompanying inscription. The original window was created by **Edward Woore**, who was a leading figure in the arts and crafts movement and was an apprentice of **Arnold Robinson**, who took over **Joseph Bell and Sons**, the famous Bristol glass firm of the period. Robinson designed the home front windows in the nave, and helped complete the restoration of the Colston window after the war.

## CHARLES DARWIN AND LOCAL HISTORY

English Heritage is arranging for a cutting from a mulberry tree in Charles Darwin’s garden to be planted in Bristol University’s botanic garden in **Stoke Bishop**: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/botanic-garden/news/2017/darwins-plants.html>. CD does not feature much in local histories of our area, except in **Westbury on Trym** in histories of the ‘Queen Elizabeth slept here’ subspecies. CD’s mother was a Wedgwood. In 1795 John Wedgwood, later founding treasurer of the Royal Horticultural Society, bought **Cote House** in WoT. In 1816 **Ellen Sharples** drew a



pastel portrait of the 7-year-old, holding a pot of plants, from which it is inferred that CD visited Cote House when he was a child. CD later married a Wedgwood cousin. (They shared grandmothers, a thoughtful saving). Cote House was demolished

1919 by **George Oatley** for **Henry Overton Wills** to make way for **St Monica**.

**Ethel Winifred Baker** wrote CD into her didactic local-history-based romance *Miss Ann Green of Clifton* (Arrowsmith 1936). EWB’s heroine attends a party at Cote House, where she meets the 8-year-old CD, who takes her to one side, asks her to bend over, and exposes his pet mouse. CD’s theory of evolution came later. Bristol Polytechnic named a science block at **Frenchay** after him, but UWE seems to have forgotten that.

Darwinism is not free of controversy. It is denied by fundamentalists who take literally an ancient Hebrew creation myth. Although most biologists accept some form of CD’s natural selection theory, some scientists think evolution happens when species survive by adapting to changes in their environment, whereas others think mutations are random, and that the species that survive are those whose mutations just happen to let them cope with environmental change. Whichever is right, the basic idea of evolution, of survival through coping with changes in the external environment, offers a way of looking at historical change: in the case of changes within local communities, by looking at how they responded to changes outside. If there is no change, there is nothing much, apart from that fact, worth writing about. So a lot of history is about change. The concept of evolution gives a method of approach, a viewpoint, a framework, a window, a prism, for looking at local change. What changes in our community’s environment happened, and how did the community react and change as a result? In our area, as elsewhere, the Romans came, the Romans went; Saxons, Angles, Jutes and Vikings arrived; and then the Vikings v.2 rebranded as the Normans. Struggles for control between warlords; changes of ruler; plague; the erosion of feudalism; the renaissance; religious unrest; the reformation; civil wars; the agrarian, industrial, scientific and technological revolutions; the rise of parliament; events in the rest of Europe – all impacted, like the Luftwaffe and America, on our area. Worth a look.



## DATA PROTECTION AND LOCAL AND FAMILY HISTORY

How far privacy has existed or has been valued has varied over the ages. Was there any privacy at all on a **Gloucestershire or Somerset medieval manor**, or on an 18th century **Bristol ship**? Until recently there was not much law about privacy. English law has tended to associate secrecy with sedition. Business people have always guarded their trade secrets, perhaps because other business people were inclined to poach them. Prying and snooping at most times have been considered unneighbourly. In the 20th century people tended to guard certain sorts of information, eg about income, age, health. For some the secrecy of voting is a constitutional right that had to be fought for; others voice their political opinions, also a constitutional right in most western liberal democracies. Nowadays there are concerns about media intrusion into the private affairs of individuals, and about the way organisations like Google and facebook harvest personal information about those who use their services, without their knowledge or consent, and exploit that information commercially. UK data protection law dates only from 1984, and did not deal with individual privacy until 1998.

Two data protection principles may be of concern to local history and family history people. One principle is that personal data about individuals should not be kept longer than is necessary. This results in the destroying of many records, whether held by government departments, local authorities, other public bodies or private sector organisations. One of the universities in our area routinely destroys all staff and student records a couple of years after the student or employee has left. As a result, large swathes of information that would be of interest to local and family historians (and who knows what students may become historically significant?) is lost

for ever. It used to be the rule that government papers were not released at the Public Record Office until 30 years had elapsed. For most categories of document the period at The National Archives is now 20 years. The rule's purpose was to protect national security and political interests, and the privacy of politicians, not that of the data subjects. Similar rules have evolved in other contexts.

Another data protection principle is that personal data about individuals should be handled fairly. That has led managers of some record offices and archive repositories to bar public access to whole categories of records that may contain personal information about people who may still be living. An archivists' umbrella organisation has issued a code of practice for its members' guidance:

[http://www.archives.org.uk/images/documents/DP\\_codeofpractice\\_Oct\\_2007.pdf](http://www.archives.org.uk/images/documents/DP_codeofpractice_Oct_2007.pdf)

One example is school log books (required to be kept since 1862) and pupil records, which are closed for periods that can be as long as a hundred years, irrespective of content and notwithstanding any conditions stipulated by the depositor. In 2011 the UK Information Commissioner upheld a Welsh county council's refusal, under the UK Freedom of Information Act, to allow access to school admission registers for 100 years: [https://ico.org.uk/media/action-weve-taken/decision-notices/2011/607040/fs\\_50314844.pdf](https://ico.org.uk/media/action-weve-taken/decision-notices/2011/607040/fs_50314844.pdf) The decision appears to have been based on the possibility that school records might show that a pupil was in care or had been fostered or adopted, and a surmise that people at the time the data were recorded will have expected them to be confidential. Again, the result is to deprive local and family historians of access to valuable information.

## WHAT'S THAT WORTH IN REAL MONEY?

*Dr Jonathan Harlow writes:* All too often one finds in some historical piece some phrase like "£82 (or £60,000 in today's money) . . ." Such equivalences are usually themselves worthless. For though the past is another country, there is no exchange rate for C15 pounds sterling against today's GBP. Indeed even such exchange rates as obtain between countries today reflect the overall demand for the respective currencies, not

equivalent purchasing power - as the bargain-pouncing traveller soon finds.

To make the point another way, consider two different ways to calculate relative purchasing power now and in say the fifteenth century. On the one hand, I can look at a person today and the standard of living enjoyed on say £25,000 a year. What would it cost a C15 person to enjoy the same then? Don't forget to include a trip to an African game park, and ready access to all the

books ever printed. But now, go the other way. What would it cost you today to live like a C15 merchant? Start with up to half a dozen full time servants. Whatever answers you come up with, there is no way that you will find the same multiple between the C15 pound and £1 today going backwards as going forwards. Many of the goods and services from one time are not available at the other; and even for those in both lists, relative scarcity and costs are quite different. Labour for example is now very dear in terms of manufactures, but used to be very cheap.

So what to do? Well for many items, people are familiar with today's prices, but not with the old ones. So if a medieval merchant was fined £10, you might instance what that would buy in wine or gowns. But be relevant. If a labourer was fined 10s, reckon his loss in bread and beer. A

man leaves his wife £40 a year: what life-style would that support? And where would such a widow rank? Incomes may be treated by contemporary comparisons and by *relevant* modern ones. So the provincial merchant, clearing perhaps £600 a year. How would that rate for a landowner at that time? or a rector? And how does it compare with trading incomes earned outside London today? Other sorts of income may best be compared on the basis of items of service: what was the standard charge for drawing up a will then compared with today, or for conducting a wedding? In the last resort, if you can find no data to show what a sum of money meant then or a relevant comparison with today, then better say nothing at all than offer a meaningless 'equivalent'.

## **CAN YOU HELP?**

### **VICTORIA COUNTY HISTORY – CHIPPING SODBURY**

*James Hodsdon writes:* You may have seen the new history of **Yate** by Rose Wallis, which came out in 2015 [Reviewed by Dr Jonathan Harlow *ALHA Newsletter* 145]. The research for it was carried out by Gloucestershire County History Trust – supported by a South Gloucestershire Council grant [*and a smaller one from ALHA: Ed.*]. It was the first step in a new project to investigate and write up all the nearby parishes, to the national standards set by the *Victoria County History* (VCH). The Trust has now begun work on **Chipping Sodbury**. Draft sections written by main researcher, Phil Baker, are starting to appear online, at <https://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/counties/gloucestershire/work-in-progress/sodburys> . Another researcher, Beth Hartland, is working on the medieval sources for **all three Sodbury parishes**.

Although most of the specialised investigation is done by paid professionals, there's a lot that volunteers can do, especially with more recent sources. This was true at **Yate**, and we'd like to create a similar set-up at **Chipping Sodbury**, where we already know there are willing hands. However, what the Trust lacks is someone on the spot, to provide a personal bridge between local volunteers (and their local knowledge) and the rest of the 'VCH Glos' effort, whose centre of gravity tends to be Gloucester itself, where many of the relevant archives are.

Ideally, we'd like someone with an active heritage/history interest, who is local to the Sodburys and perhaps also knows the scene in the neighbouring parishes we'll be tackling in due course. In the first instance, the task is to organise, guide and encourage volunteers, and generally promote the project locally – adding up to a few hours per week. Depending on inclination and aptitude, there are also openings for new trustees. If this sounds like you, or someone you know, then James Hodsdon, chair of the Trust, would be delighted to hear from you: [jj49@btinternet.com](mailto:jj49@btinternet.com) or 01242-233045. The **Yate** book is available from the **Yate Heritage Centre** and **Chipping Sodbury Tourist Information**, as well as public libraries.

### **CUMBERLAND BASIN, BRISTOL**

Bristol tour guide Rob Collin, [rob.collin1@btinternet.com](mailto:rob.collin1@btinternet.com), seeks information on the derivation of **Cumberland Basin** (and Cumberland Road) in **Hotwells**. Perhaps named after one of the royal dukes of that title, but which one? And what about Cumberland Street in **St Paul's**?

### **BRISTOL & NORTH SOMERSET RAILWAY – WILLIAM BROCK**

Please see also above under RESPONSES.

### **JS MOORE CLIFTON AND WESTBURY PROBATE INVENTORIES 1609 – 1761**

Please see also above under BOOK SOUGHT.

### **CATTYBROOK BRICKWORKS, SHORTWOOD**

I have an enquiry about the former Cattybrook Brick Works at **Shortwood** (between **Mangotsfield and Pucklechurch**), in particular the old kilns. Do you know of any group which could provide information on this site. Thanks. Cllr Michael Bell Mob.07875631817.

### **DIARY**

*Events notified to ALHA's website manager to end of July 2017 and beyond appear on ALHA's website, under events. If you want your event to be listed, please make sure that you send details or a copy of your programme to Bob Lawrence, contact details on page 1 top right.*