

AVON LOCAL HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY

Newsletter 155 *30 June 2018*

Website: www.alha.org.uk

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

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

CONTENTS

ALHA NEWS

What the committee has been up to
Local history day 2018
Summer walks: Portishead for Langford
New ALHA booklet
And another one sold out
ALHA Facebook
Examining ALHA accounts
Local history day 2019 - transport

SOURCES AND EVENTS

Tales from the Vale
Bristol Archives
Exhibitions
Prisons – new database
Aerospace archive

REVIEWS

Edited by Dr Jonathan Harlow

BOOKS NOTICED

Music in the SW region
Denis Read: portrait of an artist
All Saints Clifton

COMMENTARY

Judging the past
Knowable communities
Evidence

CAN YOU HELP?

ALHA examination of accounts
ALHA grants team

OFFER – storage boxes and files

DIARY

Material for **Newsletter 156** by **20 September 2018**
please

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

jonathan.harlow@uwe.ac.uk

Details of events to website manager,
Flat 1 Chartley, 22 The Avenue, Bristol BS9 1PE

lawrence.chartley@btinternet.com

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

5 Parrys Grove, Bristol BS9 1TT

wm.evans@btopenworld.com

ALHA NEWS

NEWS FROM THE COMMITTEE

The committee reviewed the 2018 local history day, thought generally successful, with thanks to those who made the visual technology work. The event only just broke even financially, so the events team will be considering whether charges for the 2019 event ought to be raised a little to provide a margin of safety. Negotiations are in hand for the 2018 annual general meeting and Joe Bettey lecture, which Stella Man of **Glenside Museum** has agreed to deliver. Sandy Tebbutt has completed the 2018 revision of ALHA's *Walks, Talks and Visits* booklet, a copy of which is sent to each member group and society once it has paid its subscription. The committee agreed to pledge a further £100 to **Keynsham & Saltford LHS**'s appeal for the installation of the proposed memorial to the 1968 flood victims.

ALHA LOCAL HISTORY DAY 2018 – Texts of the talks delivered at ALHA's 2018 local history day have been posted on ALHA's website. ALHA expresses gratitude to all the speakers.

ALHA SUMMER WALKS 2018

Since the programme, organised by Mike Hooper, was published, the walk at **Langford** intended for **12 August 2018** has been **replaced** by one around **old Portishead**. The remaining programme for 2018 is:

SUNDAY 8 JULY – UNDERFALL YARD, BRISTOL DOCKS

Leader Steve Hallam – Long-time volunteer for the works at the yard

Walk An in depth look at recent renovation to this up-and-coming & important part of Bristol docks, including newly restored and working machinery

Meet at
1:45pm for
2pm start At the Underfall Yard visitors centre at the Cumberland Basin end of the docks behind Avon Crescent. There are restaurant facilities here if you wish to make the visit part of a day out.



SUNDAY 12 AUGUST – OLD PORTISHEAD

Leader Sandy Tebbutt – local historian and ALHA Executive Member

Walk A walk around Old Portishead

Meet at 1.45 pm At St Peter's Church, just off the High Street. Postcode for your satnav - BS20 6PS
for 2 pm start

ALHA BOOKLETS

ALHA's next booklet will be *Schools, readers and writers in medieval Bristol* by *Nicholas Orme*.
A flyer for ordering in advance at a small discount accompanies this newsletter.

John Stevens's *Bristol politics in the age of Peel* is now sold out.

ALHA SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE

Many thanks to all who have paid their 2018-2019 subscriptions. If you would like a bank standing order form, please ask the treasurer.

ALHA FACEBOOK

Isla-Kouassi-kan, a second year history student at UWE, has joined ALHA's facebook team. She aims to increase ALHA's membership, and says, 'My main role is to provide engaging stimulus for people my age and younger but also to promote exciting events, facts and information for everyone to partake in. I am learning on the job as I can delve into Bristol and the surrounding areas' history which for me, is an exciting prospect as a budding historian. I am looking forward to meeting and getting to know all of our members. I am only a Facebook message away for those who want to pass on interesting facts, advice, wisdom and suggestions relating to history and archaeology.' Veronica Bowerman writes that since Isla joined the team she has produced, among other items, four blogs which have been well received:

- 1 - The Violet Ray device, used during the early 20th century medically and domestically on a day to day basis.
- 2 - Stokeleigh camp – an early hill fort
- 3 - Highwaymen in the local area
- 4 - Fact or Fiction – The Lady and the Horse.

ALHA ACCOUNTS EXAMINATION

Katherine Martin, who has kindly examined ALHA's accounts for several years, wishes to stand down. ALHA's turnover is below the amount which makes audit or independent examination of the accounts legally compulsory, but ALHA's constitution requires the accounts to be checked as the committee think appropriate. A volunteer who is not an ALHA trustee is requested to cast an eye over the accounts, which are kept in a spreadsheet on computer but can be printed off if need be. The work is not onerous, and involves checking opening and closing bank and investment account balances against statements, and payments against invoices or vouchers. If you would like to undertake this role, please contact the secretary or the treasurer.

ALHA GRANTS

Applications for ALHA grants are considered by a small subcommittee consisting of Bob Lawrence, Dr Jonathan Harlow and the treasurer. They rarely meet, but communicate by e-mail and telephone, before making recommendations to ALHA's executive committee. They would like to co-opt another member. The work is not heavy: ALHA rarely receives more than a couple of applications a year. If you are interested in helping, please contact the treasurer, 0117 968 4979.

ALHA LOCAL HISTORY DAY 2019 – GETTING ABOUT



The theme for ALHA's 2019 local history day will be **transport**, broadly interpreted.

Our area, past and present, has been shaped by transport. By boats, because we have a coastline and navigable rivers that facilitated trade and communication: along the coast, up the Severn and its tributaries, to Ireland, Iceland, France, Spain, Portugal, America, the Caribbean, the Baltic. That led to seafaring, ships, including the SSGB, shipbuilding and its financing, and the wealth of many commercial families. Roads started with ridgeways and tracks, then roman roads, carriers' routes, turnpikes, town streets, by-passes, motorways and their engineering. Canals carried stone, coal, agricultural produce, manufactured goods. Railways made links to London, Exeter, Gloucester, south Wales, the midlands and beyond. For centuries transport depended on the horse and all sorts of things connected with it, not least the agriculture that produced its fodder, and those who cleaned up behind it. It also depended on people, thousands of them, not just the likes of Macadam, Charles Dundas, IKB, William Taylor, Holman Fred Stephens,

George White. There were builders of vehicles, carts, wagons, private and stage coaches (and their coaching inns), cars, lorries, aircraft, trams, buses, ambulances, fire engines, bikes (both sorts), balloons, many made locally. Transport generated architecture. People travelled for trade and business, to see relations, to get to and from work and school, for leisure and for tourism. Transport dominated some areas: **Filton, Patchway, Brislington, Temple Meads, St Philip's, Lulsgate**. In WW1 **Shirehampton** specialised. Who paid for it all? Who initiated the ideas? What did people think of the new forms of transport? What work did the employees do? How come trade unions and the domination of the T&GWU? There was a colour bar on the buses. What about modern developments? Buchanan's **Bath**? Bristol's inner and outer circuit roads? A Bristol metro? Guided transport? The Portishead branch? The Avon ring road? Anton Bantock Way?

ALHA's events subcommittee invites proposals for talks or presentations on or connected with any aspect of the theme: maximum 500 words, please, to Peter Fleming, Peter.Fleming@uwe.ac.uk; Bob Lawrence, lawrence.chartley@btinternet.com ; or Bill Evans, wm.evans@btopenworld.com.

EVENTS AND SOURCES

A **Forgotten Landscape's** *Tales of the Vale* touring exhibition showcases the work of the project's [Tales of the Vales](#) volunteers. This exhibition and its accompanying book is a collection of the work the volunteers have done over the last two and a half years. Their work spans more than two millennia. If you visit the exhibition, you can pick up your free copy of the publication and CD, or the project will send you a free copy. The publication and audio will also be available as a download on the project's website.

The tour began 16 June 2018 and has been to **Oldbury, Littleton and Avonmouth**; next dates:

2-7 July **Shirehampton Library**, Station Rd, Bristol BS11 9TU.

9-12 July **Thornbury Library**, St Mary St, Thornbury, BS35 2AA.

13-14 July **Severn Beach Village Hall**, Ableton Lane, Severn Beach, BS35 4QE.

16 July-27 Aug **Bristol Archives**, 'B' Bond Warehouse, Smeaton Road, Bristol BS1 6XN

September **Gloucester Archives**, Clarence Row, Gloucester GL1 3DW

Katie Scaife, Project Officer, A Forgotten Landscape, 01454 863043,

Katie.Scaife@southglos.gov.uk; www.aforgottenlandscape.org.uk

Tales of the Vale talks include - **Friday 13 July, 7pm, Severn Beach Village Hall, Ableton Lane, Severn Beach, BS35 4QE**. Adam Mead will talk on the *Bristol and South Wales Union Railway* was built to connect Bristol with South Wales; AM has researched the construction of the railway and the Severn Tunnel which replaced the ferry crossing in 1886. Then Sarah Hands will share her work on the amazing and little known history of *Over Court*, a prestigious manor house built in **Over** near **Almondsbury** that had its origins in medieval times. To book, go to <https://tovsevernbeach.eventbrite.co.uk>

OTHER EXHIBITIONS include **Bristol's WW1 conscientious objectors, to 14 July, Bristol Archives**.

BRISTOL ARCHIVES

Congratulations to Allie Dillon on appointment as Bristol City Archivist; and to Bristol Archives on becoming accredited by the Archives Services Accreditation Panel, for meeting national standards on maintenance and access. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/archive-service-accreditation/management-of-archive-service-accreditation/>

PRISON HISTORIES

Rosalind Crone, a lecturer in history at The Open University, writes:

Prison History (www.prisonhistory.org) is a database of information on nearly 850 penal institutions in 19th century England, including around 420 local prisons and 380 lock ups. For each institution, there is information about its operational dates, jurisdiction, location, population statistics, the primary and secondary sources which mention it, and a list of all the relevant and surviving archival documents which we have been able to find in repositories in England. Users can either search for specific prisons or various types of prisons, or browse the lists of archival materials that we recovered.

One aim of *Prison History* is to emphasise the importance of the local prison (and lock ups) in nineteenth-century society. It is an institution that has been largely neglected in the major studies of nineteenth-century imprisonment and I think it is time to redress the imbalance. To do that, I need help from local historians. My hope is that *Prison History* will be a useful resource for local historians, and also that local historians will want to get involved with this project, to help make the database an even better tool for local history, and, through emphasising the importance of prisons within nineteenth-century communities, to demonstrate the importance of local history research.

Prison History will be launched **6 July 2018** at the National Justice Museum in Nottingham. It is



free to attend. We have put a survey for local historians on the website to collect feedback – thoughts about the design of the site, and opinions on how develop the resource in the near future. There is a ‘submit feedback’ button on the website, or the survey can be accessed via this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/HR3CNLH> . **Dr Rosalind Crone**, Senior Lecturer, History, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, 0190 865 2472.

AEROSPACE BRISTOL ARCHIVES

Linda Coode writes: ALHA member **Bristol Aero Collection Trust** houses a substantial company archive which dates from 1910. The companies represented in the archives include the British and Colonial Aeroplane Company, Bristol Aeroplane Company and British Aircraft Corporation. The archive includes minute books, account books, sales ledgers, annual reports, photographs, glass plate negatives, drawings, film and ephemera. There are also books and journals supporting the collection. Please contact us archives@aerospacebristol.org for more details of the material we hold. Many of our catalogue descriptions are available to search on [The National Archives Discovery catalogue](#) and more will be added as cataloguing progresses. The archives at Bristol Aero Collection Trust, Hayes Way, **Patchway**, BS34 5BZ are now open to all for research purposes, by appointment only. Please contact archives@aerospacebristol.org to book. Please note that we don’t have staff records, but you are still welcome to contact us as we may be able to look in other sources to see if we have anything for your relative. The engine side of the story of the Bristol family of companies is with [The Rolls-Royce Heritage Trust Bristol Branch](#) and is available by appointment. The Sir George White papers are held by [Bristol Archives](#).

REVIEWS by Dr Jonathan Harlow unless otherwise said:

The cradle of Methodism 1739-2017, GM Best, New Room Publications (Tangent) 2017; ISBN 978-1-910089-60-6; 755pp incl index; illustr b&w and colour; hb £25, *reviewed by Bill Evans*

There is no shortage of histories of Methodism, or of biographies of the Wesleys. Samples vary from the naïve to the scholarly, from the narrative to the theological, from the factual to the doctrinal, from the objective to the sentimental and from the hagiolatrous to the defamatory. GB’s book presents an account of Methodism through a close examination of what happened in Bristol and Kingswood, particularly the construction of the **New Room** (of which the author is warden) and **Kingswood school** (of which was headmaster) and the later lives of both establishments.

The narrative starts with what the Wesleys did in **Bristol and Kingswood** in 1739, and how the New Room originated (GB suspects it was funded by Selina Huntingdon); the differences between JW’s arminianism and Calvinism and the Wesleys’ dealings with Huntingdon; the recruiting, training and appraisal of local preachers; the founding of the school at Kingswood and its regime; the New Room as publisher; its dispensary; the Wesleys’ attitude to American independence (CW was anti-republican); the way the collapse of the established church in America led to the formation of Methodism there as a church, which increased the pressure for British Methodists to ordain their own preachers, which CW opposed strongly; JW’s efforts to keep Methodism within the C of E and events after JW’s death; (Jabez Bunting is mentioned and his portrait printed, but the separation of Methodism from the established church is treated only as background to the New Room’s history); the New Room’s dwindling congregation and its use by the welsh Calvinists; their decline; the restoration of the New Room in the 1920s with funding from Edward Sykes Lamplough (but not J Arthur Rank) and the architectural services of the sympathetic congregationalist George Oatley; the statues of JW and CW; the transformation of Kingswood school and its removal to **Bath**; the interplay between the New Room and Kingswood school; and the modern revival of the former and the modernisation of the latter.

Particularly impressive are the accounts of how JW and CW juggled their time between Bristol, Kingswood and London and, in JW’s case, elsewhere; the harsh regime at Kingswood school (no games, amusements or visits home), aspects of which would nowadays be regarded as child abuse; the details of individuals who are not often referred to elsewhere (the book is an Aladdin’s cave for family historians);

JW's character (dictatorial, brooking no opposition or disagreement, devious and manipulative: CW comes across as considerate, tolerant and likeable).

One striking aspect of the book, apart from its sheer detail and wealth of illustrations, many from Bristol central reference library, is the author's use of original archival material, mostly from methodist church archives. Apart from a couple of references to the church in the abolition campaign and some general 'some historians say that ...' formulae, few secondary sources are cited, and there is no bibliography, possibly for the reasons mentioned at the start of this review. GB's book is the result of meticulous and assiduous hard work on original sources.

Some surprises: for example, we might have expected JW to have liaised with Hannah More over the abolition campaign, but they never met. In 1790 JW declined to meet her on the pretext that he disapproved of her family's social pretensions. Did JW see her as a threat, or as a competitor in the morality and salvation markets?

This valuable work is warmly recommended.

Your City's Place-Names: Bristol by Richard Coates (English Place-Name Society 2017, 220 pp, illustrated, £14).

This is it: the Bible, the Law and the Prophets. Professor Coates is an expert and now a resident, and we get the benefit. (But it is good to see an acknowledgement of the continued work of Jenny Scherr, once ALHA Editor, who also reviews the book, favourably but not uncritically, in the BGAS *Transactions*.) The only caveat is that the book mostly includes areas, and only a few roads or streets: Christmas Steps makes the cut, but not Coldharbour or Pitch-and-Pay Lane. On the other hand it goes well outside Bristol proper into most of the county that used to be Avon. (CUBA is not listed, but Bristol gets full treatment.) For all this region this is THE reference book. Fail to buy it only if you actually prefer your post-prandial disputations to remain ill-informed.

Bristol museum and art gallery: guide to the collection by Julia Carver, pb, 88pp incl index, illustr full colour, Bristol Books 2017, ISBN 978 – 1-9094-46120, £7.50, reviewed by Bill Evans

Every art gallery, private or public, national or municipal, needs a guide to its collection. The guide may be a list giving the title of each work, its artist, its medium, the date it was created, and perhaps the date it was acquired and its provenance. It could take the form of a full detailed catalogue stating everything that is known or, in the art world, claimed or peddled, about every item. It may include critical commentary, context, history, explanation or assessment. It may or may not be comprehensible or accessible, whether to specialists or to the public.

Over the years Bristol's art gallery has not always been well served by its catalogues. Apart from references in council minutes, which not everyone reads, we might have expected lists of works held to have been published, eg for the Bristol Institution in 1823; when the collection was rehoused in 1872 and 1905; and when it was extended in 1928, 1936 and in 1946, the year the city council first appropriated money from the rates for the gallery: until then it had been financed by a fund set up by Herbert Henry Wills, by donations, and by nationally administered grants. In 1930 the gallery published a catalogue of its oil paintings, which it updated in 1957. In 1970 the city council published *Catalogue of oil paintings city art gallery Bristol*, with a few reproductions, some in colour, with text and cover title in typefaces that at the time must have seemed the height of arty chic, like long hair and flares. Since then the idea of a comprehensive and publicly accessible catalogue seems to have gone out of fashion. Searching the BM&AG website is not recommended for the short-tempered or those with high blood pressure: only the Travelwest website is more impenetrable.

JC's guide, however, does justice to the collection, and does so handsomely. Unlike the 1970 catalogue, this is not a full list, but a guide to the main schools and movements represented in the collection. Bristol's gallery may not have the big names or the famous pictures that wealthier galleries like Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester have acquired: its strength is in its representativeness, and in the qualities of individual works. A brief history of the collection is followed by chapters on the old masters, the renaissance and the reformation; the grand tour and the enlightenment; the Bristol school; British art from 1790 to 1920; French art from 1831 to 1910; British modern art; and contemporary art. At the end a timeline from 1808 provides useful scaffolding for those who want to explore the local history of fine art culture hereabouts. JC's book reproduces in colour samples of key works, with historical, cultural and technical comment and

explanation. The style is lucid. The quality of the images is superb, the design excellent. It is a pleasure to look at and handle such a beautifully produced book, quite apart from the excellence of the content. Congratulations and thanks to all concerned.

Somerset's Military Heritage by Andrew Powell-Thomas (Amberley 2018, 96 pp illustrated, £14.99)

This is a book in the familiar Amberley format: 96 pages and very fully illustrated, mostly in colour. It includes military sites from the Iron Age to WWII and each site has a short piece about it. It is a little oddly organised: the sites are arranged in chapters by named district and there is a map to show the district boundaries - but the map does not in fact tell the reader which district is which. (The publisher's press release states that each chapter should have a map, but this has not been done.) And does it really make sense to file the biggest battle of them all, the battle of Sedgmoor, under Westonzoyland? **Lansdown Hill**, with its fine memorial, is surely worth more than a sentence under **Bath**. And no mention of the confrontation at Chewton Hill in August 1642. Nevertheless it should prove very useful to any tourist with an interest in military sites. Even they, however, are likely to have preferences, and the book would be better for an index listing sites by period. The historian of course will regret the complete absence of references. So very much a familiar Amberley publication: strong on enthusiasm and illustrations, weaker on structure, indexing and follow-up help.

Weston-super-Mare history tour by Stephen Butt (Amberley 2018, c 100 pages fully illustrated.) This is a genuinely pocket-sized guide (12.5 x 17 cm) to 53 historic sites in **W-s-M**. There is keyed map at the beginning and each site is given a picture – some in colour – and a text. It is a pity that the photos themselves are seldom dated, but otherwise this booklet fulfils its purpose admirably for a very reasonable price.

Black tudors: the untold story, Miranda Kaufmann Oneworld 2017, 273pp + 103pp bibliography, references and index; 20 b&w illustr + 8pp colour plates. ISBN 978-1-78607-184-2. HB £18.99. *Reviewed by Bill Evans*

This book examines traces of 10 black people in England from 1500 to about 1640. Its local history interest for this area is the last chapter, which deals with **Cattalena of Almondsbury**. The only trace of Cattalena is a probate inventory in Bristol Archives (FCI/1620-1632/19, 1-2), drawn up after she died in 1625. That document says C was 'a negra deceased of Almondsbury in the county of Gloucester single woman,' and lists her possessions ('One cow, one bed ... four little pots ... one tablecloth, all her wearing apparel, one coffer and two little boxes'), and their valuation (£6 9s.6d.).

Upon and around that one meagre trace the author constructs 16 pages of background, comment and speculation. A Hispanic-sounding name, so did C come from Spain or Portugal? Then a discussion of the use of the word 'negra'; a description of **Almondsbury** and Mary Willcocks' invention of Princess Caraboo (nearly 200 years later); references to Africans locally eg at Dyrham; traces in Bristol of at least 16 Africans (John Young appointed one c.1560 to look after his garden); speculation that C may have been a runaway, or been employed as a servant at Knole or **Over Court** (where James Laroche, Bristol's busiest slave-trader, had 2 black servants in the 18th century) or **Gaunts Earthcott**; a description of Knole's Thomas Chester's trading with Guinea and Spain; an account of the inventory; comment on the absence of furniture; speculation that C may have been a prostitute; discussion of the bedding and household goods, cow keeping, butter-making and pasturing; speculation about how C might have become financially independent; speculation about her burial (surviving parish registers only from 1653) and her administrator, Helen Ford, a married woman.

I did not know what to make of all this. Should we thank the author for drawing attention to someone who might otherwise be forgotten? Or for paying attention to people who must have been exceptional in their day but otherwise ignored as invisible? Or for providing background, context and some explanation to help us understand a local life? Or should we deplore the spinning out of one short trace into a chapter full of speculation, misconceived references, and irrelevance? The author acknowledges Pip Jones and Rita Youseph's *The black population of Bristol in the 18th century* (BBHA 1994); but what happened in the 18th century is hardly relevant to 1625, any more than the fact that a servant ran away from Berkeley castle makes it possible, let alone likely, that C was a runaway. There is reference to Madge Dresser's *Slavery obscured* (Redcliffe 2007) but not to Peter Fleming and Madge Dresser's *Bristol: Ethnic Minorities and the City, 1000-2001* (Phillimore 2007). The approach is typified by the author's speculation that C could have been a

prostitute (how else could a single woman have acquired possessions?) followed by acknowledgement that there is no evidence that C was a prostitute. Speculation can be useful in local history, but there are limits.

Bristol: unique images from the archives of Historic England, Simon McNeill-Ritchie, ed., pb, 96pp, 160 b&w and colour illustrations, Amberley 2018, ISBN 978-1-4456-8037-8, £14.99. *Reviewed by Bill Evans*

This book reproduces a selection of images, mostly of prominent buildings, from HE's huge archive, plus one photograph taken by the editor. Each image has an explanatory caption. A 2-page introduction summarises **Bristol's** past. A page describes the HE archive in Swindon.

The images are grouped by area: Clifton, Waterfront (ie Harbourside), Broadmead, Temple Meads, Redcliffe and Further Afield. The central area is labelled Brandon: did the editor misread a map that marked Brandon Hill in large lettering? The last group, headed 'Diversity' and all in colour, includes images of some religious buildings and street art.

The images are mostly fine (surely HE has a sharper image of the Victoria Rooms?), but the selection is predictable and unexceptionable, so the result is rather bland. Only three images, of the Horfield prison chapel and administrative block, of the pre-bombing interior of St Nicholas church, and of St James's square, made me sit up and take notice. The overall impression is worthy but dull, perhaps because, as with the Braikenridge collections in the city museum and library, the images are mostly of buildings or streetscapes with few people. Whilst most of the city's prominent buildings are covered, there is little housing, which is what constitutes most of the city's built environment and gives it its visual impact.

Apart from publicising the existence of the HE archive, it is difficult to see who would want to study this book. The publishers' blurb puffs it as 'the perfect souvenir for tourists and residents alike,' but do the latter need to be reminded that that is the suspension bridge, or that that is the front of **Temple Meads** station? It is not a book for local history people, because the images are not referenced, and though the captions date many of the buildings, they do not date the images themselves. Apart from one or two mis-spellings, the captions are accurate, but some lack a sense of proportion: does posterity really need to know that the King's Arms at **Brislington** reopened after a major refurbishment by Enterprise Inns in 2005? Other captions miss opportunities: yes, it's the sikh temple in **Fishponds** Road, but from what was it adapted?

If HE wants to publicise the magnificent and valuable contents of its treasure-house, there must be better ways of doing it.

Bristol Industrial Archaeology Society Journal 50 (2017) has a fine varied set of articles. Martin Bodman surveys some three centuries of **flour roller mills in Bristol**, a good study in the interplay of technology, trade, transport and industrial structure. It seems rather vague on power in the 20th century, but it is at any rate a pleasure to note the important role played by the Baker family. Then a study of Pinney and his Caribbean estate managers over nearly 60 years. The most striking feature was the ravages of rum, not merely in its own right but as scouring the lead from pewter pots and into the consumer. Maggie Shapland (for whose excellent account of the **Clifton** Rocks Railway see *Newsletter* 154) shows how the internet can be used to promote historic sites like that railway and the Brunel Swivel Bridge. Anyone concerned with a local history website will learn something to their advantage here. Lastly Steve Grudgings with a very full discussion with Jack Shaw as he approached his 90th. Mr Shaw had a wide variety of experience, including transport for Mulberry. Not so very long ago, but how much of the work, from railways to mining, was hard manual work, skilled sure, but tough!

As usual, this issue is copiously and well illustrated. I have found the reproduction a bit murky in the past, but these are very clear and sharp. Just £4 plus £1 p&p from Stuart Burroughs, Museum of Bath at Work, Julian Road, Bath BA1 2RH. Where will you get better value?

Transactions of the Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society 135 (2017)

Last year's edition, just published in June 2018, has two articles on the ALHA area. One is an account of a Romano-British agricultural enclosure near **Yate**, which suggests fair continuity of practice from the Iron Age, but notable access to foreign consumer imports in Roman times. And there is an account of Henry Thomas Ellacombe, vicar of **Bitton**, an active incumbent whose Oxford Movement convictions probably militated against great success there, and a keen horticulturalist. He was, like so many parsons in earlier

days, a good local historian. We can also claim Professor Coates on the origins of the Cotswold name – still open to speculation, but an erudite and interesting coverage of the ground.

The reviews do us better. Favourable notices are given to Madge Dresser's *Women & the City*; Jeff Bishop's *Bristol through Maps*; and R Miller's biography of Dr John Ashley, founder of the Bristol Channel Mission.

The *Transactions* are very good value for a subscription of still only £10 a year, but would surely be more so if a little more timely.

Bristol Omnibus Company: the twilight years by Stephen Dowle (Amberley 2018 96 pages fully illustrated, £14.99)

The twilight years are 1975 to 1980 and this is a typical Amberley collection of nearly 200 photographs of the various models and modifications employed in those years. The text identifies the model, and the year, and often the location and the service. What more can any aficionado of buses require?

Dr Harlow welcomes reviews of recently published books or articles relevant to ALHA's area and objects.

BOOKS NOTICED

Stephen Banfield, *Music in the West Country: social and cultural history across an English region*, Boydell & Brewer 2018, hb £30, e-book £20, <https://boydellandbrewer.com/music-in-the-west-country.html>

Moirá Gavin, *Denis Read: portrait of an artist*, Glenside Hospital Museum 2018, pb colour illustrated. A biography of the Bristol artist 1917-1979, fully referenced and professionally written and printed.

John Hudson, *All Saints for all people: 150 years of All Saints, Clifton*, Redcliffe 2018, £12.50.
<http://redcliffepress.co.uk/products-page/forthcoming/>

COMMENTARY

Evidence

History depends on facts. Facts depend on evidence: if there is no evidence that anything happened, there is nothing to write about. For most local history, evidence is in documents: official records, legal and financial papers, letters, diaries, council minutes, shopping lists, newspapers and so on. In the 20th century tape recorders made it possible to record people's oral recounting of their recollections of past events. These are considered valuable, not only because they often deal with matters that do not normally get recorded in documents, but because they are often personal direct eye-witness accounts.

Courts in the UK put a high value on eye-witness evidence. In civil cases hearsay evidence is only sometimes admissible, and in criminal trials hardly at all. Historians similarly value eye-witness accounts. Some have become famous, such as the younger Pliny's account of the eruption of Vesuvius in 79. (His uncle got a closer look, but for understandable reasons did not get round to writing about it.) Other eye-witness classics include Samuel Pepys's diary entries about the great fire of London; and Alistair Cooke's *Letter from America* after the assassination of Robert Kennedy, anniversary rebroadcast on BBC Radio 4.

But just as historians have come to mistrust the reliability and accuracy of documentary evidence (bias, prejudice, malice, ignorance, a limited or incomplete viewpoint and so on), so during the 20th century the presupposition that eye-witness accounts are reliable was called into question. Insurance companies, jurors and lawyers are familiar with the witness who claims to have seen the collision, but turns out to have looked towards the accident only after hearing the noise, so that what the witness actually saw was not the events leading up to the bang or the impact itself, but the state of affairs immediately after the event. A more unsettling doubt was raised by experimenting psychologists who showed an event or short film to a number of people, who gave differing accounts of what they had seen. As a result of these and other investigations, it is now generally accepted that human observation and memory are fallible, and can be vitiated by much the same

shortcomings as documentary evidence. The nadir of the eyewitness account came when a spokeswoman for the president of the United States presented obvious falsehoods as 'alternative facts.' As with liberty, the price of good history is eternal vigilance.

Knowable communities

In *The country and the city* (Chatto & Windus 1973) the literary critic Raymond Williams made the point that novelists set their characters in a 'knowable community'. Those communities or networks will vary depending on what the author wants to say. Thus in Jane Austen neighbours are not those who live close by, but those, perhaps at some distance, who can be socially visited, a network of propertied families among whom the agricultural workers, craftspeople and dealers who create the characters' wealth do not appear. Contrast the novels of George Eliot, Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy, whose characters' communities are socially wider and more diverse, especially if the setting is urban.

A similar point could be made about history writing. The author chooses a subject, a theme, an approach, an angle. Anything not relevant is excluded. Diplomatic history is about the diplomats and their toings and froings: it does not concern itself with the populations the diplomats purport to represent. Political history tends to focus on the major players, their policies and their achievements, if any, and ignores the voters.

Local histories are different. Those that explicitly concentrate on a theme will understandably omit what is not relevant to that theme, but if a history of a small community such as a village, small town, suburb or institution is to present a fair picture, it ought to cover as much of the community and its constituents as the sources permit. Tracing the descent of the manor and the advowson is all very well, but explaining what happened and why, and how things came to be as they are, involves examining as many as possible of those who have been part of the community, not just those who had the wealth and the power.

Judging the past

Most modern historians take the view that it is anachronistic to make moral judgments about what people did in the past by reference to present-day expectations about how people ought to behave. **Bristol** merchants' involvement in slavery and the slave trade, for example, should not be condemned, it is argued, merely on the ground that we nowadays consider slavery to be wrong. The view is one application of a wider principle, that it is inappropriate to evaluate, by any standards, conduct that occurred before the standard existed. Thus it would be unfair to criticise William I or Henry VIII for not being democratic, centuries before the concept of democracy became current in Britain, or WD and HO Wills for manufacturing and selling tobacco years before scientists reported a statistical correlation between smoking and lung cancers. Nowadays local attention focusses on Edward Colston and his slavery connections, but there are many other examples, including corrupt practices at elections, the diversion of charity assets into private ownership, the employment of children, and the treatment of women.

Is the non-judgmental principle too wide? One exception might be based on what some jurists and catholic theologians call natural law: the idea that some acts or behaviours are inherently wrong, and have been treated as wrong in most societies in most ages. Obvious examples include murder and other offences against the person, various forms of fraud or deception and, at least in societies that recognise private property, theft. If, judged by those pretty universal standards, Henry VIII, the Borgia popes and Adolf Hitler stand condemned, the defence that that is the way people behaved in those days or 'It's a cultural thing' do not seem cogent excuses.

Another exception could be argued for in relation to societies that had adopted or professed religious beliefs that included moral precepts or values. Examples include mainstream Judaism, Christianity, Sikhism and some versions of Islam. If people claiming to be Christians have performed, in whatever age and circumstances, acts which contravene the basic tenets of their faith, let alone the teachings of the founder, are we not entitled to point out the inconsistency?

Third, whilst it may be argued that behaviour ought not to be criticised if it was in accordance with accepted practice or custom at the time, what about when someone has challenged the morality of the custom or practice? **Bristol** merchants were trading in slaves, British plantation owners were

owning them, and **Clifton and Bath** annuitants were drawing income from them long after people like Hannah More and William Wilberforce were campaigning against those practices. John Wesley was challenging slavery as early as 1736, and in **Bristol and Kingswood** from 1739 or shortly after. Quakers had long been speaking out against slavery years earlier, and for reasons not all of which were based on religious beliefs. Once the morality of an act or practice has been challenged, judgment can be made, because the people involved could make a choice, and so can we.

CAN YOU HELP?

EXAMINING ALHA ACCOUNTS: if you would like to cast an eye over ALHA's annual accounts, please see above under **ALHA matters**.

ALHA GRANTS: if you would like to join the team that considers grant applications, please see above under **ALHA matters**.

OFFER

ALHA member **Bristol & Avon Family History Society** offers a number of the following available for recycling, all in very good condition:

'Proper' acid-free Archive boxes 18" by 14.5" by 13" high

A4 lever-arch files 3" wide

These are being offered to 'good homes' on basis of 'you collect' and 'first come etc'. Anyone interested please contact publicity@bafhs.org.uk or phone Geoff Gardiner on 01275 830869

DIARY

Events notified to ALHA's website manager are on the ALHA website. 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.