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ALHA ITEMS

BRISTOL BRANCH OF THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Welcome back to the **Bristol Branch of The Historical Association**, rejoining ALHA after an absence of some years following the death of Peter Harris. *Rob Pritchard writes:* The Bristol Historical Association was re-launched in 2017 by two retired history teachers, Mary Feerick & Rob Pritchard. We have about 44 local members and about 68 national HA members. Attendance at our events varies from around 30 to 230. We meet once a month from September to May. We are very fortunate to have the support of the University of Bristol history department who provide accommodation. In our first season (2017-18) we met in the Wills Memorial Building. In our second season (2018-19) we met in the lecture rooms at 21 Woodland Road. We are continuing at 21 Woodland Road in our third season (2019-2020).

What do we do? Lectures, tours, pub quizzes and student debates.

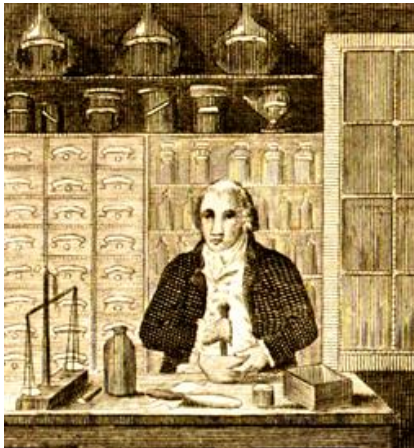
Where? University of Bristol, Woodland Road.

When? Wednesday evenings and weekends

Who? Experts in their field

How much? Bristol HA members £15 a year; adults £3 a meeting; students £1 a meeting.

Topics have included. • The Russian Revolution • Witchcraft • The Slave Trade in Liverpool & Bristol • The Holocaust • The Bristol Blitz • John Cabot • Elizabeth I • Henry VIII • First World War • Martin Luther King • Bristol Zoo • Women as history makers • The 1970s • Battle of Britain • Margaret Thatcher • Stalin's terror • The Welfare State • Second World War • The Cold War



NEW ALHA BOOKLET – APOTHECARIES

ALHA's latest booklet, edited by Dr Jonathan Harlow, is no.31, *Resident hospital apothecaries in Georgian Bristol*, by Michael Whitfield. **An order form accompanies this update, or you can order via ALHA's website.** There is a small discount for orders received before 28 December 2019.

EVENTS AND SOURCES

HISTORY OF SLAVERY PROFESSOR

Bristol University has appointed Olivette Otele as professor of the history of slavery.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/olivette-otele-the-privileged-dont-get-to-tell-us-when-slavery-stops-hurting-xlx9tsxcq> . OO

teaches at Bath Spa University, **Newton Park:**

<https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/our-people/olivette-otele/>.

More about her interests and intentions in the *Guardian* newspaper 30 October 2019 and at

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/oct/30/olivette-otele-uk-first-black-female-history-professor-to-research-bristol-slavery-links>



RADSTOCK MUSEUM EXHIBITION

Radstock Museum's autumn 2019 exhibition records the 75th anniversary of the Double Hills glider crash and the battle of Arnhem. 'As glider RJ113, on its way to help capture the Arnhem Road Bridge, reached **Paulton** it appeared to break up in mid-air and plummeted to the ground, exploding on the field called Double Hill between **Paulton and Farrington Gurney**. All the 21 Royal Engineers and the two pilots on board were killed.' **Until 29 November 2019.** Radstock Museum, Waterloo Road, RADSTOCK, BA3 3EP, info@radstockmuseum.co.uk, 01761 437722.

DIRECTORIES ONLINE

You can search directories online via *Ancestry*, but there are charges. A number of Kelly's and other directories can be searched for free via Leicester University's website.

<https://cdm16445.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16445coll4>. Search by county in the first

instance. **Bristol** directories are under **Gloucestershire**. Included, for example, is the Post Office directory for **Gloucestershire, Bath and Bristol** (1856).

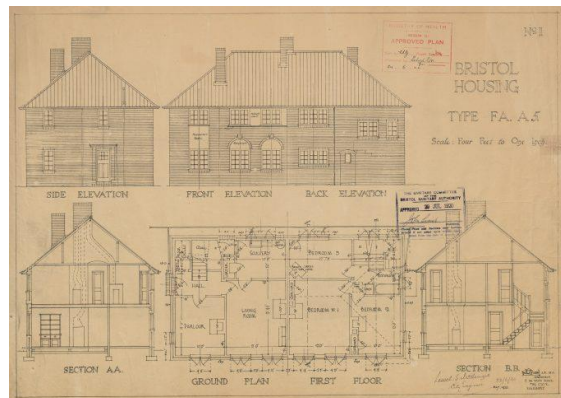
THORBURY MUSEUM EXHIBITION

Exhibition - *Thornbury Camera Club hits 50, until Friday 20 December 2019*. Thornbury & District Museum, 4 Chapel Street, Thornbury BS35 2BJ, 01454 857 774, enquiries@thornburymuseum.org.uk



BRISTOL ARCHIVES EXHIBITION – HILLFIELDS

Excellent small exhibition at **Bristol Archives**, B Bond, Smeaton Road, *Hillfields homes for heroes*. **Hillfields** has the first post-First World War council houses built in Bristol. ‘The design of these houses was the result of an architectural competition and went on to define the homes we see in many areas of Bristol from Southmead to Knowle. Local Learning has been working with schools and residents to uncover and celebrate the history of **Hillfields**. This exhibition displays the project’s research findings, creative responses and some of the archival material that inspired them. *Hillfields Homes for Heroes* is just one of several citywide projects celebrating the centenary of the Housing Act. Part of the Festival of Ideas Homes For Heroes 100 project.’ **Until 18 January 2020**.



MONEY COMPARISONS

In *What's that worth in real money?* in ALHA Newsletter 150, March 2017, Dr Jonathan Harlow outlined the difficulties in converting money values from past years into present ones. In an article in *History Today*, April 2019 69(3), Roderick Floud makes much the same point.

Many historians’ conversions to modern values are misleading. For example, Professor Floud points out that Capability Brown’s pay as a head gardener in a landed estate was £25 a year, which one biographer converts to £2,129 and another to £3,125, both below the present-day minimum wage.

RF examines internet conversion sites: the main ones include:

<http://www.historicalstatistics.org/Currencyconverter.html>
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter>
<https://www.icalculator.info/inflation/historical-inflation-rates.html>
and <https://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/ppoweruk/>

All these give improbably low results, and all differ.

RF reckons that one problem is in the weightings assigned in the calculations to the elements of what is being valued. In the case of bread, for example, the proportion in the average person's diet was much bigger in the past than it is today, so to apply a simple price index produces absurd results. If average earnings are compared, the results are different, with £1 in 1660 equating to £2,000 today, and in 1800 to £1,000 today.

RF concludes that the retail price indexes are good for comparisons in the last 50 years or so but not further; that average earnings indexes are fine for average earnings but not much else; but that for large capital projects and general estimates of wealth it makes better sense to compare the relevant fractions of the gross domestic product. Thus the Crystal Palace cost £85,500 in 1850, equivalent to £8.7m by the prices index; £66.3m by the earnings index; but £319m by comparing fractions of the UK gross domestic product, which makes better sense.

BRISTOL PHOTOGRAPH FAIR

Specialist photograph dealers from the UK and Europe will present a wide range of historic images spanning 150 years from the mid-19th century. Examples of vintage photographic processes such as lantern slides and stereographs will also be on show. The event takes place on **Sunday 1 December 2019 from 10am to 4pm** at The Royal Photographic Society at RPS House, 337 The **Paintworks, Bath Road, Arnos Vale, Bristol BS4 3AR**. **Admission £3.00, but a complimentary ticket** granting free admission to the fair for two people, a Press Release, and an A4 Fair Poster, can be downloaded as pdf documents, for printing at home, from <http://bristolphotofair.uk/>

BOOKS AND OTHER ITEMS NOTICED

The Harptrees History Society, *The Harptreenian* no.20, September 2019. A dozen more articles of the usual high standard.

Jonathan Shorney, *Bristol Hippodrome – a century of shows*, Redcliffe 2019, 248 pp, hb, £20.
<http://redcliffepress.co.uk/product/bristol-hippodrome-a-century-of-shows/>

Cynthia Stiles, *A-Z of Bristol: places – people – history*, Amberley 2019 pb 96pp, £13.49.
<https://www.amberley-books.com/discover-books/local-history/area/somerset-bristol-bath/a-z-of-bristol.html> Similar format to one on **Bath** by Peter Kilby, published earlier this year.

Colin Moody, *The great Bristol high street: glorious Gloucester Road*, The History Press, due out April 2020, <https://www.thehistorypress.co.uk/publication/the-great-bristol-high-street/9780750992497/>. Follows his *Stokes Croft and Montpellier*, published 2018.



Tim Taylor, *Time Team's Dig Village*, hb
£34.95, direct from the *Dig Village* project shop
at
<https://shop.timeteamdigital.com/category/books>

Tony Cherry, *Thornbury castle revisited*,
Thornbury & District Museum 2019, revised
edition. More at
<http://www.thornburymuseum.org.uk/news/>

COMMENTARY AND RESPONSES

Tokens and cryptocurrencies

Ruth Hecht writes: Hi – as you've written something about tokens (ALHA update 30 October 2019), I thought you might be interested in this series of podcasts about a crypto currency and the woman behind it – it's an extraordinary story of greed and deception... nothing to do with local history, but fascinating!!! <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07nkd84>

Archaeology – brought to you by ...

What are we to make of *Tutankhamun: treasurers of the golden pharaoh* (at the Saatchi Gallery in London until 3 May 2020)? If you missed the exhibition at the British Museum in 1972, or the one at the Millennium Dome in 2007, you may want to calculate whether the admission charge (£24.50 lowest) plus the cost and hassle of getting there is worth it. The 150 artefacts, nearly half of which have not been outside Egypt before, might be persuasive, but you won't see the famous gold mask, which came to London in 1972 but is now back in Cairo.

There was a time when if you wanted to see a particular museum or gallery exhibit, you had to go there. Then museums, galleries and their insurers overcame their possessiveness and their distrust of each other and of removal contractors. They started lending items so that a set of one artist's works or a set of related artefacts could be viewed at one visit in a themed, hyped, overcrowded and lucrative exhibition. These blockbusters, like Tutankhamun in 1972, were in, and organised by, public institutions such as the British Museum. The present exhibition is organised by a commercial concern, as was that at the O2 in 2007. That one was a stop on a tour run by Exhibitions International. In 2018 EI was taken over by IMG, a USA entertainments, sports, fashion and marketing company. IMG is a subsidiary of a sports and entertainments conglomerate. Its offerings to the world include *Miss Universe*, which IMG bought from Donald Trump in 2016.

Should we be worried? So long as (1) the museums that supply the items and provide the venues get a fair share of the gate money (1,423,170 paid to see Tutankhamun in Paris; the present tour visits 10 venues; if on average attenders paid €30 each, you can do the arithmetic) and the takings from the shop (ditto), and (2) there is no leakage of artefacts to Russia, Italy, China or Saudi Arabia, there may not be too much to worry about. The entertainments company is likely to be able to afford better design, lighting and display settings - and tighter security - than could be bought by a UK public-funded institution; the museum curators are saved the hassle and anxiety of organisation, insurance, transport, finance, and publicity, none of which feature in the requirements for fellowship of the Museums Association, which in any case is not a qualification by examination. A specialist company ought to bring a high level of expertise, even if the display smacks of the trade fair and the sales 'conference', the explanatory material lacks academic rigour, and the gift shop is as big as the exhibition itself.

Before we grumble about the commercialisation of archaeology, and museums being selectively colonised by the entertainments and sports industries and the media that go with them, we might ponder how the financing of the practice/profession/science of archaeology has changed. Until well into the twentieth century most archaeology, including digs in our area and investigations elsewhere by people from hereabouts, was a leisure activity pursued by time- and cash-rich amateurs who paid for their interests out of their own pockets. **Westbury on Trym's** Amelia Edwards was not sponsored by Fry's or Wills. Not all archaeologists were total abstainers when it came to money. Howard Carter, who excavated king Tut, was a dealer in antiquities and sold the rights to cover 'his' discovery to the *Times*. In the 1960s the Egyptian government sent Tut on tour to raise funds for Abu Simbel, and in the 1970s for the temples at Philae. This present tour will help fund the Grand Egyptian Museum near Giza, after IMG and the insurance companies, Japanese lenders and sundry tenpercenters have taken their profits. Nowadays, with the UK government having deprived local authority museums of the resources to do anything other than watch the dust accumulate or remove it before selling treasures from the collection to the USA, most professionally serious archaeology outside those few universities that still teach the subject is conducted by specialist companies. Most get paid by developers whose planning applications have triggered planning conditions or Agreements under s.106 of the Town & Country Planning Act requiring excavation before development takes place.

It all seems a bit like the private finance initiative: financially questionable and morally



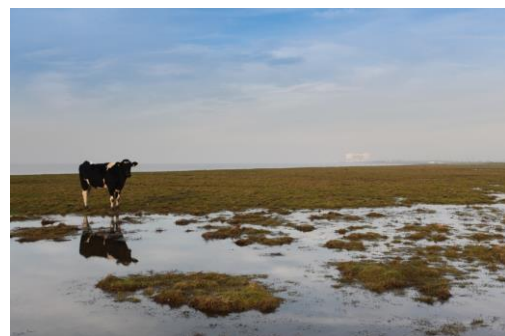
distasteful, but if the alternative is no museum or no archaeology, perhaps we just have to put up with it. Another reason not to be too alarmed is that the likes of IMG will be interested only in famous icons that will draw crowds who will pay high prices to see the exhibits. Our local galleries do not have the Vermeers, Rembrandts or Van Goghs that draw the crowds, nor do our local museums have Sutton Hoo. Neither Rolinda Sharples nor Edward Hodges Baily (left, contemplating modernity) draw capacity crowds, so their works will not be called upon to go on international tour, nor will Bristol City Museum's collection of local mock delft. But if your local authority owned the *Mona Lisa* or Michelangelo's *David*, why not take the opportunity to raise some cash for purposes which our elected representatives decline to fund?

Who drained the Saltmarsh, and when?

A piece in *Newsletter* 159 (30 June 2019) drew attention to aerial photographs of the **Crooks Marsh** area, and asked when the open field system disclosed by the photographs could have been created. Answers to that depend on when the **Saltmarsh** was drained so as to make it worthwhile for open fields to replace rough pasture (image below from *A forgotten Landscape*).

The draining of the **Saltmarsh** must have been a large and expensive operation, for two reasons: (1) It would not have been sensible for only a small area to be drained, because floodwater, salt or fresh, would have flowed in from adjoining and neighbouring areas of the marsh. (2) To stop the Bristol channel from flooding the drained land, some sea defences in the form of earth banks of considerable length must have been raised.

Works of that sort and on that scale could not have been carried out on the initiative of local small tenants and peasants alone, but only by someone with (1) the necessary financial



resources; (2) the power and authority to do the works even if they interfered with occupants of the marshland; (3) engineering know-how; and (4) a motive for making the investment.

Before modern times, who could have satisfied those requirements? There are only three conceivable candidates: a king, the seignorial lord of the area, and the ancient Romans.

1. A king would have had the money and the authority, and could have commissioned the expertise as well as the hard labour. Charles I commissioned extensive drainage works in the Somerset levels, such as King's Sedgmoor drain. But there are no records, local or national, of any king having drained the **Saltmarsh**. And it is difficult to see what motive any monarch could have had for doing so.
2. *Rose Hewlett*, whose forthcoming edition of the records of the Gloucestershire court of sewers was trailed in the ALHA update of 30 October 2019, draws attention to the fact that in the medieval period and perhaps in Saxon times the marsh was held by the bishops of Worcester as part of the endowment of their diocese. RH refers to Christopher Dyer, *Lords and peasants in a changing society: the estates of the bishopric of Worcester 680-1540* (Cambridge UP 1980), a study of how the bishops managed and exploited their estates. As holders of the seignory the bishops would have had the power, resources and continuity to devise, plan and implement large-scale works. The surviving records of the diocese, however, do not refer to any of the bishops having commissioned or paid for such works.
3. More recent research into the **Saltmarsh**, including archaeological investigation, is tending to a conclusion that much of the drainage and sea defences of the area date from Roman times. The present state of knowledge is summarised by Neil Holbrook in Cotswold Archaeology's *Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Report* no.3 (2013). Professor John Allen of Reading University has investigated drainage in several parts of the marsh, eg in the Slimbridge area. Some of the arguments are flimsy, one relating to **Crooks Marsh** being based on a small number of Roman artefacts being found as reported in *BARG Review* 2 (1981). Isolated finds need context to enable them to be assigned any significance, and it is not known how, why or when the artefacts came to be where they were found. But there is enough evidence of Roman activity elsewhere in the **Saltmarsh** to suggest that at certain periods the Roman occupying forces were involved in land drainage and sea defence works. It is difficult to attribute a motive: perhaps with road construction, and with an important military settlement at Gloucester and a supply chain settlement **Sea Mills**, the military saw a need to supply food in quantities beyond the capacity of the existing populace, and decided to render a convenient area of reclaimable land grazable or arable. Hence drainage schemes, and sea defences to protect the reclaimed land from flooding. If the Romans had already drained **Crooks Marsh**, that would be consistent with there being no references to drainage works in the bishops' accounts or other manorial documents during the Saxon and medieval periods.

Worth exploring further.

Spirit of independence?

In a restaurant review in the *Observer* newspaper 27 October 2019 Jay Rayner wrote: 'The people of **Bristol** support their independents. There are theories. One draws romantically on the radical traditions of the city, which fosters a culture of the independent against the corporate, but I'm not quite up to the task of finding the correct historical references to back this up.'

Before local history people queue to give JR information and advice, it might be helpful to unpick what exactly the reviewer wrote. 'Independent' takes on different meanings

depending on context. An independent state is one not under the control or empire of another. An independent congregation was contrasted with those of the established church or others organised nationwide. 'Independent' is a label used by private fee-charging schools to dissociate themselves from schools under state or local authority control. An independent estate agent or bookshop is one not part of a chain.

This last sense seems to be the one in which JR used the word, but a little further on he contrasts the independent with the corporate, so perhaps he is thinking of independents as sole traders or families running a small business not funded by external share capital or an external company. That would exclude small businesses operating branded franchises, of which there are many in the catering trades.

There are not many examples of people in our area rallying to support small traders against big business. If something costs £1 on the internet, £2 in the co-op or Aldi, £3 in Sainsbury's, £4 in Waitrose and a fiver from your local independent shop, Bristolians, like others elsewhere, will vote with their purses, leather or electronic. Preferring small traders cannot go back a long way. Until the nineteenth century virtually every business in **Bristol**, even in manufacturing, was small or smallish. At the turn of the century Fry's employed only about 50. Until the late nineteenth century there were fewer 'corporates' against which 'independents' could be contrasted. Until the company law reforms of the 1850s few businesses were incorporated with share capital. Most businesses, including banks, were owned by individuals who were personally liable for the business's debts, and if they could not pay them they went bust. Bristol could not have had a tradition of preferring small businesses against the big ones, because until the late nineteenth century most local businesses were small, so there was no choice.

JR also refers to the 'radical traditions of the city.' That phrase also warrants unpicking. Three sorts of radicalism can be distinguished: religious, political and economic.

The Lollards challenged the beliefs and practices of the catholic church, and found support in our area. The reformation was a radical change, but it can hardly be counted as local radicalism: people switched to the established church because a powerful king and his agents told them to. The growth of nonconformist groups in our area is a better example of local independence: first quakers, Baptists and other independents, then Methodists and, later, Unitarians – until the last became part of the local establishment. In the civil war – which some historians see as a religious conflict as well as a political one – Bristol sided with parliament against the crown. But Bristol did not join the Monmouth rebellion.

As to political radicalism, when Matilda challenged Stephen for the crown of England, she was not being radical. She considered her claim better than his. When Robert earl of Gloucester supported her, he did so not out of any radical ambition for change, but out of feudal loyalty or a calculation that it would be in his interest to do so. When in 1373 Bristol bought borough status, it was not an act of radical opposition but a matter of convenience, to save merchants traipsing to Gloucester or Ilchester, and to make the town a unit if taxation separate from the depredations of the sheriffs of the two existing counties. As Steve Poole demonstrated (in the sense of illustrated) at ALHA's 2017 local history day, the French revolution did not trigger similar movements here. Political radicalism was part of the Bristol riots of 1831, but Bristol slept through Chartism, and did not get out of bed for free trade.

Civil disturbances in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not so much assertions of radical independence as struggles for survival. The turnpike riots were not motivated by political activism but by a reluctance to starve to death: not the only time that coal workers have regarded coal owners as threatening their livelihoods. Nineteenth century food riots were not about radical aspirations: they were about workers and their families not

being able to afford to buy enough food to survive. The 1793 toll riots were similarly economically motivated, and much of the employment unrest in the 1890s.

It makes more sense to see Bristolians' present patronage of small independent businesses as an example of counter-culture. Every age has them. Counter-cultures have appeared in politics, literature, music, visual arts, entertainments, and in social practices such as clothing and the recreational use of drugs. Counter-cultures react against prevailing or mainstream habits. They can be motivated by dissatisfaction, frustration, moral disapproval, economic or social resentment, dissonance between generations, or attention-seeking. They tend to occur in discrete places: Stroud in the early twentieth century; Totnes more recently. In affluent societies some counter-cultures deliberately embrace poverty, as did Francis of Assisi. Apart from his friars who invented chugging, Bristol does not seem to have produced any similar individuals. Georg Müller pleaded poverty but exploited and manipulated some wealthy people. Rather, poor people have developed their own subcultures using what little resources have been available to them. Others have used money to develop counter-cultures of a sort, and some counter-cultures require money for their exercise: drug use is an example. We can all deplore the monotony, poor quality and unpleasant aesthetics of mass-market food products, but only customers with disposable cash can afford to indulge in the better quality, more varied and more interesting offerings of small family-run restaurants, the independents of whom JR approves. In present-day Bristol, supporting independents is more likely to be a sign, not of radical opposition to the mass market, but the result of some people being able to afford something different.

QUOTE

History doesn't need to come back to haunt us. It never went away.
Christina Riggs, *Boy-king bling* (2019)