



ALHA

AVON LOCAL HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY

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Details of events to website manager
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Other news, comments, responses to comments,
new work, and changes of contact details to
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Events: <http://www.alha.org.uk/events.html>

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



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Events notified to ALHA's website manager are listed on the ALHA website. If you want your event to be listed, please send details or a copy of your programme to the webmaster, ALHAWebmaster@gmail.com (Please note changed e-mail address). Please notify any changes of regular venue or timing.

ALHA NEWS

ALHA WEBSITE

Bob Lawrence and Jan Packer write: The new ALHA website was launched on Monday 4th April, a few days later than originally planned. It is better designed than the old site, but the address remains the same – www.alha.org.uk. The main feature of the new site is that it gives us much more space, which can be used to provide better information about our member groups and the details of the meetings and other events that they organise. Thank you to everyone who sent messages saying how much they enjoyed our new website.

If you'd like more - or more accurate - information added to the page describing your society / group / museum, please send any text or images you think will make an eye-catching addition to your page to alhawebmaster@gmail.co.uk, and we'll do our best to reflect your group as you'd like to see it.

One small issue has cropped up. One or two people have reported that they cannot see the new site but are redirected elsewhere. This is caused by using a bookmark that has been stored when the old website was still up and running. The site moved physically during our relaunch, so if you bookmarked the old site on your computer, you'll need to remove the old bookmark, find www.alha.org.uk by typing into the browser search bar, and then store a new bookmark. The reason for the problem is that the full address of the new website starts "https" indicating more security than the previous "http".

Although the website has been launched, there are still additions and minor changes to be made. Unfortunately, Tina Lane who was heavily involved in the design of the new site, decided that she did not want to continue in the role of webmaster. We are therefore again looking for a volunteer webmaster to take on the task of managing the website, and if you know of someone who might be interested, please send details to Chairman@ALHA.org.uk. In the meantime, Jan Packer and Bob Lawrence are carrying on working on the site, with help from Veronica Bowerman.

We hope you continue to find the new website interesting. Remember.... if you notice something interesting going on in your area, others might appreciate hearing about it. So let us know and we'll do what we can to publicise to the wider audience of the ex-Avon area.

SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE

Many thanks to all member groups and societies and individual members who have paid their subscriptions. And an additional thank you to those who have added a donation to ALHA. Early receipt of subscriptions helps ALHA's cashflow considerably. Application forms are downloadable from the website.

BANK CHARGES

ALHA member groups and societies that bank with HSBC will have received notice that free banking will cease, and the bank will charge a monthly fee. How will groups react?

Some will accept that the days of free banking are over, even for charities, and will treat the charges as a normal operating expense. Large, and many not so large, organisations can bear that. Easier said than done if a group has, say, 50 members paying a subscription of £10 a year, total

revenue £500. A bank charge of £5 a month, £60 a year, will equal 12 per cent of income, which seems disproportionate.

Another solution is to increase subscriptions to cover the charges. In a group of 50 members paying a £10 sub, the extra £60 spread among 50 people would suggest a sub increase of £1.20 each. That would not be economical to recover if you take into account the cost of printing and posting the notice of increase and of altering application forms and publicity material.

Some groups have tried to shop around, HM government's panacea for every problem short of death, though even then the government will repeat its mantra to next of kin taken aback by funeral quotes. Again, easier said than done. Some banks are now refusing to take on small clubs, whether by transfer of an account from another bank or as new customers. NatWest proclaims free banking for non-profits, but small print elsewhere on its website warns of delays of 8 weeks in transferring an account from another bank. What does a treasurer do with receipts and payments in the mean time?

As always, there is history. Half a century ago banks had a qualified but detectable sense of social responsibility. At risk of oversimplification, the tacit deal was for banks to lend, several times over, what customers deposited, and to give free banking in recognition of the profits the customer was helping the bank to make. Now that banks' sole aim is to make profits, made more difficult by regulation (for which the banks have only themselves to blame: if they behaved properly, there would be no need for them to be regulated), low interest rates (which banks themselves helped to bring about), and government-dictated competition (which the government would not have required if the banks had not formed cartels for many purposes), banks aim to cut costs. One of those costs is paying staff. Hence the closure of branches, the damage to rural and low-income communities, and more automation and online working. Hence the pressures to deter customers from using cheques. CAF Bank, for example, which serves only charities, charges customers a flat fee of £8 per month, plus £1.20 for every cheque they write, and 60p per cheque deposited if more than 20 are deposited in one month.

Even ALHA has adjusted to the pressures. In 2008-2009 ALHA received 167 cheques and wrote 29. It received 7 automated payments and made no payments online. In 2021-2022, a year when there was no local history day, ALHA received only 80 cheques, wrote none, received 130 payments automatically or online, and made 22 payments online. Whilst a majority of individuals now use online banking, many do not. Small groups and societies tend to use cheques for payments and to receive payments by cheque. So small local history groups and societies are among the customers out of whom banks do not make profits and may even make losses.

What is needed is a national giro system, run as a public service, free at the point of use, based on the old financial model. Until that day dawns, small groups and societies will have to manage as best they can. If your existing bank gives 'free' banking, you may decide to stick with it, even though other aspects of its services drive you up the wall. If you can, you may decide to go online, avoid writing cheques, and discourage others from paying by cheque. Some groups will resort to notes and coin – until the banks cotton on and thwart that too.

SUMMER WALKS

It now seems likely that ALHA will not be able to arrange any summer walks this year. The committee has yet to consider future arrangements. In the mean time, member groups and societies that have arranged walks in their area, or would be happy to host a walk, are invited to advertise their events on ALHA's website: alhawebmaster@gmail.co.uk .

EVENTS AND SOURCES

ANTHONY BEESON

ALHA's committee has heard with regret of the sudden and unexpected death of Anthony Beeson, who was the Art Librarian at **Bristol Central Library** for many years. He was also a local author, collector, and a leading light in the field of Roman mosaics. His publications included *Roman Gardens* (Amberley 2019); *Mosaics in Roman Britain* (Amberley 2022); *North Bristol Seamills Stoke Bishop Sneyd Park and Henleaze through time*, (Amberley 2014) and *Central Bristol through time* (Amberley 2012), both using his collection of photographs; *Central Bristol history tour* (Amberley 2018); and *Bristol central library and Charles Holden: a history and guide* (Redcliffe 2006). For more about the building, see BRISTOL CENTRAL REFERENCE LIBRARY, below.

INDIANS IN SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Jane Marley writes: An exhibition and films which capture and celebrate the stories of people from India who now call South Gloucestershire home were launched at a special event at **Aerospace Bristol** on 6 April.

This is your Heritage: Stories from the Indian Community in South Gloucestershire is an exhibition and feature an introduction film that provide a fascinating glimpse into the lives of South Gloucestershire residents with Indian heritage.

The exhibition forms part of a pilot project which encourages people from the Indian Community in South Gloucestershire to share their experiences of migration, and works with local museums to gather and document their oral histories. The introduction film is being shown as part of the exhibition, and three films about three Indian Contributors are now available on the project web page.

South Gloucestershire Council and partners, South Gloucestershire Race Equality Network, Avon Indian Community Association, South Gloucestershire Museums Group, and Yate Heritage Centre (Yate Town Council), secured Arts Council National Lottery Project Grant funding for the project, which runs over the next twelve months, at museums and libraries across the district.

The introduction video can be watched at the exhibition venues and, together with the three videos about three contributors, can be found on the web page:

<https://www.southglos.gov.uk/indian-heritage-stories> . Additional films and materials will be added during the project which ends in May 2023.

BLACK FAMILY HISTORY

Jane Marley draws attention to the resource *Researching Black History in South Gloucestershire*, at <https://www.southglos.gov.uk/documents/Researching-Black-History-in-South-Gloucestershire.pdf> . Much of the guidance is applicable outside South Gloucestershire.

BRISTOL, CAPITAL AND ENSLAVEMENT

Bob Lawrence writes: This research project, run by the University of Bristol, will use research done by members of the public to co-produce a holistic narrative about how slave-derived wealth, through the 1834 compensation awards, has shaped **Bristol's** built environment, business and charity. It will also connect the stories of the enslaved to the sites in Bristol by using the "slave registers" to identify the enslaved people claimed for by Bristol residents. This particular area of research is part of a wider project and is being run by Dr Richard Stone of the Department of History and his research associate Dr Cassandra Goptar.

Participants in the project will be given training and support in the use of online information and archives, and will develop skills transferable to other situations. They will be involved in furthering our understanding of this area of history. Some volunteers may have already done research which can be contributed towards the project, while others will have experience of doing their own historical investigations.

Full details are available at <https://tinyurl.com/5au46a6u>, together with a form to express interest.

SHOPPING IN YATE

Poster from **Yate Heritage Centre**, right.
To **Saturday 18 June 2022**.

AEROSPACE BRISTOL NEW CHIEF

Congratulations and good wishes to Sally Cordwell, appointed chief executive officer of ALHA member **Aerospace Bristol**. SC has previously worked at Bristol Old Vic and the SS Great Britain Trust. [Image on page 1 from Aerospace Bristol].

<https://aerospacebristol.org/news/new-ceo-sally-cordwell>

BRISTOL CENTRAL REFERENCE LIBRARY

The Arts Council has awarded **Bristol** city council's libraries service £117,650 to update the facilities of the reading room on the upper two floor of the central reference library, which is listed Grade I: <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/newsroom/funding-success-for-modernisation-of-bristol-central-library> .

'Among the work to be carried out is the refurbishment of the listed study tables, adding energy efficient lighting and sockets for charging laptops and devices, which will create 96 modern and accessible study spaces. The adjacent marble exhibition corridor will also be upgraded to include secure display units, hanging displays and interactive touch display screens. **Visitors to the**

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library will be able to easily access items from the extensive local history collections on new interactive display screens, bringing Bristol's story to life in a more accessible way than ever before,' it says. [Image from Bristol City Council].



Work is expected to take two years. The city council says use of the reading room will not be interrupted.

KINGSWESTON BRIDGE

Bristol city council is reported to have included in its budget money for the repair of the metal bridge that carries a footpath from **Kingsweston** House over Kingsweston Road into the **Blaise Castle** estate: <https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/news/mayors-revised-budget-includes-funds-to-fix-kingsweston-iron-bridge/> . The bridge, built in 1820 and listed Grade II, was damaged in late 2015 when hit by a lorry. It has been claimed that the accident was caused by the city council having raised the road surface but not altered the height sign. The structure has been swathed in scaffolding, and the route has been closed to pedestrians, ever since. Conservation interests such as **Kingsweston Action Group** have been pressing for the bridge to be repaired. Whether the accumulated cost of the scaffolding now exceeds the cost of repair has not been disclosed. More at <https://www.kwag.org.uk/?s=bridge>

COMMENTARY

WHERE WAS BACKWELL MARKET?

Backwell in north Somerset is one of those settlements whose centre has shifted over the years. Old and not so old maps show that the original nucleus of **Backwell** was around the church, a mile or so south of where the present day action is. **Backwell's** focus seems to have shifted in two stages: first, when the main road from **Bristol** was turnpiked, which caused the existing village to be by-passed by through traffic; and later in the 1950s when the bulk of the modern building in the area gained momentum.

In 1270 Henry III granted a charter for a weekly market on Thursdays at **Backwell** to Ela La Sore, to be held 'at the manor'. Edward II renewed the charter to Richard de Rodney in 1318, but the day of the week was changed to Mondays. Ela la Sore was also granted the right to hold a fair, annually on 21 September, the feast day of the catholic saint Matthew (though the church dedication is to St Andrew, a widespread dedication in Somerset.)

If the market was held 'at the manor,' where was it held? Early houses in **Backwell** include the Grange, near the church, but the earliest parts of that house are believed to date from the fifteenth century. Park Farm towards the **Farleigh** end of the settlement is thought to be of late medieval origin. House names with 'Court' in them can imply that that was where the manor court was held (cf Leigh Court in **Abbots Leigh**, **Brockley Court**, **Nailsea Court** and so on). There are two such houses in **Backwell**: Court Farm in Church Lane, the earliest parts of which are dated to the early seventeenth century; and Sores Court in what is now Hillside Road. That name suggests a connection with Ela La Sore, so was that the original manor house, and is that where the markets and fairs were held?

It is not known how long **Backwell's** market lasted. If Celia Fiennes in 1702 had a bucket list, **Backwell** was not on it. Daniel Defoe, whose *Tour* was published 1724-1726, did not visit. Collinson, published in 1791, says the fair was still held, but the market no longer.

LANDSCAPES

Bristol city council is reported to have changed its attitude to building houses on an area in **south Bristol** between **Knowle West** and **Novers Lane** dubbed the **western slopes**:

<https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/western-slopes-fight-not-yet-6592793>

Notwithstanding the present shortage of housing, the proposal has been contested. Many objectors want to see preserved a tract of landscape they consider visually important. Because a landscape is necessarily local, local history people might be prompted to ponder how and when there have been changes in how we view landscapes, and why.

In *Spirit of place: artists, writers and the British landscape* (Thames & Hudson 2021), Susan Owens traces how writers and visual artists, including creators of landscapes, have portrayed the look of the environment – mostly, the countryside. At times they have seen nature as hostile, threatening and to be feared; as a benign resource to be exploited, especially for food and raw materials; in the eighteenth century poets and writers like Edmund Burke admired the sublime, whether in the grandeur of mountains or the power of a storm; the romantics saw landscape as a

place of and for the imagination; in the twentieth century they shuddered at landscapes as sites of war or other conflicts.

SO's book is concerned with the landscapes of Britain generally, and our area does not feature much in it. The only artist who lived and worked for a significant time in what was later the county of Avon was Thomas Gainsborough (Canaletto painted **Badminton House**, in the sense of painting a picture of it, but only once). TG painted in **Bath** from 1759 to 1774. His fame rests on his portraits, though he was more interested in landscape. Avon has no mountains, natural lakes or spectacular waterfalls. Whilst many parts of our area are pleasant, and there are striking vistas from some viewpoints, only the **Limpley Stoke** valley could be described as beautiful. But landscape interests local history people, because any landscape, unless it is imaginary, must be local and will almost certainly be full of history.

Because the views and viewpoints of artists and writers are necessarily individual and subjective, SO's book does not say much about how the rest of us have viewed landscapes. One suspects that generations have taken landscape for granted, like wallpaper or the weather or background noise. Familiarity breeds not noticing. One question for local history people is how we came to value landscape, and to regard it as something to be protected.

Landscape designers like Lancelot Brown and Humphry Repton created, and sometimes destroyed, landscapes for landowners who wanted views from their principal mansion houses. Examples in our area include Brown at **Prior Park, Bath** in the 1750s and 1760s, **Dodington** 1764 and **Blaise Castle at Henbury** 1796, Repton at **Oldbury Court in Fishponds** 1800, **Royal Fort, Bristol** 1801, **Brentry** 1802, and Leigh Court at **Abbots Leigh** 1814, but largely ignored by Philip John Miles. Nowadays on a smaller scale it is not unusual for a house owner to pay special purchaser prices for fields nearby, not in order to use them but to stop anyone else obstructing their view. In towns, views over playing fields and anywhere over agricultural land are commonly perceived as influencing house prices. It is the money rather than the view that counts.

Landscape also seems to be appreciated when it comes under threat. The formation of the National Trust (for the preservation of places of historic interest or natural beauty) in 1894-1895 was driven substantially by opposition to the construction of roads and railways by Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley, whose first clerical appointment was to the **Clifton** College mission in St Barnabas in **St Paul's**. Concern for landscapes appears to have intensified in the 1930s as a reaction to ribbon development, seen as spoiling the countryside.

A step change was the Town & Country Planning Act 1947, which gave county and county borough councils power to control development, with a legal obligation to take into account 'material considerations', one of which could be amenity. Local historians might like to try to trace when, where and why amenity considerations have influenced planning decisions in our area. One source would be archived planning decisions. It would be a limited source. Local planning authorities have been, and are still, required to give reasons when they refuse planning permission, so that we can read when apprehended damage to or loss of amenity was a reason for refusal. But there has never been a legal obligation to give reasons when a planning permission is granted. So unless the archived file contains amenity objections and comments on them, it will not often be possible to nail whether or how far the effect on landscape has been a factor in a decision. Another problem is that where a local authority is under tight political party control, a

decision may have been whipped, so that individual councillors' thoughts, feelings and reasonings will have been overridden.

Of recent years concern about landscape has shifted somewhat from solely visual considerations to more comprehensive environmental ones, largely as a result of worries about global overheating. Some people may object on amenity grounds to wind turbines or solar panel arrays, but their objections may be outweighed by arguments to do with the consequences of carbon emissions from other sources of energy. For local historians, not only do landscapes change, but so do our attitudes to them, how we see them, and how we value them. Again, local history is being made.

METAL DETECTORS

It is more than 20 years since some users of metal detectors turned up at an ALHA annual general meeting and tried to get members to pass a resolution opposing rumoured legal controls on the use of metal detectors. No resolution was passed: the proposers had not given notice of their motion to the secretary as required by ALHA's constitutional rules. It was commented that observing rules was not a habit of (stereotypical?) metal detector users.

The problem has not gone away. Recent damage to a site just outside our area by a social media-summoned rally has drawn attention to the problem again.

Some archaeologists would ban use of metal detectors altogether. That would not be reasonable. Metal detectors can be put to beneficial use, eg to help locate gas mains, electricity cables and water pipes, especially if there are no records of their installation showing where they are. If use of a metal detector reduces the risk of death, injury, or damage to buildings or public assets or amenities, that must be a good thing. Like knives, computers, money, water, gas, electricity, parliament and chemicals, they are in themselves morally neutral: it is how people use them, not their existence, that can be judged good or bad.

Archaeologists are sometimes grateful to metal detector users for finding out that something of archaeological interest, hitherto unknown, may exist. What archaeologists (and others) object to is (a) the subsequent uninformed, unrecorded and damaging excavation; (b) the extraction of a find from its context without investigation and recording of that context; (c) the removal of finds and their retention in private ownership; and (d) the sale of finds for private gain. Underlying some of these objections is a belief that whatever the UK law of property may say, ancient artefacts ought to be treated as public property because they are part of our common cultural heritage, and their ownership or appropriation by a finder or landowner is accidental and undeserved.

The Portable Antiquities Scheme, summarised at <https://finds.org.uk/about>, tries to address the problem. It is managed (or not) by the British Museum, and relies on staff (if still in post) of local museums (if still open). Finders are asked to report finds to a local officer (if identifiable and available); a local museum assesses the find; an inquest may determine whether the find is treasure trove; valuable or significant finds may be purchased by a museum or other public repository; the finder (or landowner, if aware) is rewarded. The scheme is claimed to give metal detector users an incentive to report finds. Like all compromises, the PAS satisfies nobody. It has resulted in some finds being dealt with responsibly, and the public benefitting accordingly. But

it is a form of self-regulation, owing much to party political ideologies that oppose limitations on perceived private freedoms. Like all self-regulation, it depends on trust and self-discipline where both may be lacking. It is not as effective as legal sanctions, efficiently and incisively applied and enforced by a competent and adequately resourced authority.

REFUGEES

Notwithstanding Home Office procedures, people in our area, as elsewhere, have been moved to offer shelter to people fleeing the consequences of war in Ukraine. Were there similar occasions in our local past?

Huguenots are said by some historians to have come to **Bristol** following the revocation of the edict of Nantes in 1685, but in fact they were under catholic attack from 1680. Did some of them see what was coming? Between 400 and 500 came to Bristol, whose population was then no more than 20,000. Established shipping routes helped, and must have seemed a simple and quick way out. The refugees were welcomed in **Bristol** by dissenters and some anglicans, but not by the mayor, who saw them as claiming poor relief and as competing with existing businesses. Temporary relief measures were limited: 50 refugees camped in **St James's** churchyard, and a small colony formed outside **Lawford's Gate**. Later, the corporation gave the Huguenots St Mark's chapel on **College Green** for their French language religious services. Official hostility continued: in 1693 Bristol's MP John Knight opposed a parliamentary bill to allow naturalisation of foreign protestant refugees. His language differed little from that used today by those opposing immigration.

Because of Bristol's trading links with western France, we might have expected Bristol to be a destination for those fleeing the French revolution in 1789, but as Steve Poole pointed out at ALHA's 2015 local history day, that does not seem to have happened initially. But after the Terror more emigrés followed. When Napoleon invaded Prussia, some Germans fled here, including Conrad Finzel (sugar) and Georg Müller (children's homes at **Ashley Down**, which Finzel substantially financed).

Similarly with the Irish famine. Irish people had formed small communities in various parts of Bristol, but perhaps fewer than might have been expected with long-established shipping links between **Bristol** and Waterford, Cork and Dublin. More came to **Bristol** after the famine in 1847, but many moved on to America, again using established shipping links.

In the twentieth century many people displaced by wars in mainland Europe sought refuge in our area. When in 1914 Germany invaded Belgium – to which Britain had made commitments – over a thousand Belgians, mostly catholic, came to **Bristol**. Led largely by the catholic pro-cathedral, a committee based in Victoria Square, **Clifton**, organised a refugees fund, and accommodation in private houses and other premises such as the Imperial ground sports pavilion on the borders of **Knowle and Brislington**. Some refugees were housed in **Greenbank**; others were supported by churches in **St Pauls, Horfield** and **Alveston**. Catholic schools, perhaps under hierarchical instruction, seem to have absorbed the children without difficulty or fuss. Most returned after the war ended, a special train taking 700 from **Temple Meads** to Tilbury for boat to Antwerp. When nazi Germany moved against Czechoslovakia and Austria, we might have expected many German Jews to have come to **Bristol** in 1939 because of university academic links, but few

seem to have done so, most preferring to move to academic posts elsewhere in the UK and in America.

During WW2 some families welcomed children evacuated from London; others did not. In **Abbots Leigh** the community was divided. Some, including the parish council, objected to them attending the local school – evacuees were taught in the village hall – and complained about the behaviour of incomers in the camp at **Long Ashton**. Others, including the parochial church council and some families, were more compassionate and welcoming.

Of the two thousand or more displaced persons who came to Britain during or after WW2, only some 20 are known to have come to **Bristol**; they included 10 Latvians. Many hundred Poles came to this area, working at **Radstock, Paulton, Avonmouth and Filton**. Arley chapel on the edge of **Cotham**, originally congregationalist, was bought in 1968, when it became a Polish catholic church and community focus.

In 1972 Idi Amin expelled Asians from Uganda. Some 600 came to this area. Some initially were housed temporarily at **Thornbury**, against local opposition, the majority settling before long in various parts of **Bristol** and elsewhere. Some white families objected to 50 Asian families being settled in **Totterdown**, where the city council owned vacant houses purchased for the planned Outer Circuit Road.

Civil war in Somalia in 1991 led to Somalis fleeing to Britain. Those in **Bristol** grew from about 2,000 initially, to 10,000 by 2001, and 20,000 by 2007, making them the largest ethnic minority in the city.

QUOTE

The unsettling thing about history is that we know what was going to happen to people next, and they did not. Our past was still their future.

Paul Ferris, *Gower in history: myth, people, landscape*, Armanaleg Books 2009.

EVENTS DIARY

Events notified to ALHA's website manager are listed on the ALHA website. If you want your event to be listed, please send details or a copy of your programme to the webmaster, contact details on page 1 top right (Please note changed e-mail address). Please notify any changes of regular venue or timing.

Because of the coronavirus, events may be cancelled at short notice. Some venues are continuing to impose restrictions or requirements. Links or directions to online events open to the public appear on ALHA's website.