



ALHA

AVON LOCAL HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY

Newsletter e-update
31 July 2022

Registered charity 270930

**Material for printed Newsletter 172 by 12
noon 24 September 2022 please:**

Magazines and books to reviews editor
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jonathan.harlow@uwe.ac.uk

Details of events to website manager

ALHAWebmaster@gmail.com

Other news, comments, responses to
comments, new work, and changes of contact
details to newsletter editor and membership
secretary, 5 Parrys Grove, Bristol BS9 1TT

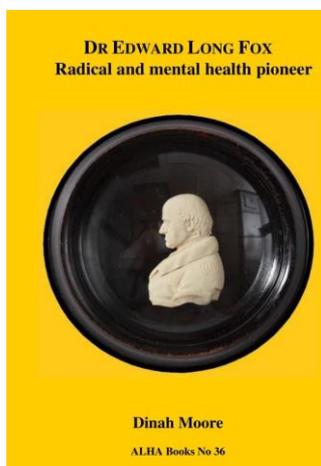
wm.evans@btopenworld.com

Website: <http://www.alha.org.uk>

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

Facebook:

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



ALHA NEWS

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is on the ALHA website

ALHA NEWS

WIDCOMBE HISTORY GROUP

Welcome to **Widcombe Local History Group**, a part of The Widcombe Association, which has 400 members and is **Bath's** largest local residents' association. **Widcombe & Lyncombe** Local History Group used to be a member of ALHA, but ceased to meet some years ago. The Society's chairman is Dan Lyons, danlyons1966@icloud.com .

NEW ALHA BOOKLET: EDWARD LONG FOX

ALHA's newest booklet, no.36, edited by Dr Jonathan Harlow, is ready. The title is *Dr Edward Long Fox: Radical and mental health pioneer* and the author is Dinah Moore. ELF was a physician who was active in **Bristol** politics, pioneered humane treatment for the insane at **Brislington** House, and founded a therapeutic spa on **Knightstone** island off **Weston super mare**. An order form, with a small discount for early purchases, accompanies this e-update.

This is Dinah Moore's first ALHA booklet. She offers talks on Edward Long Fox and related subjects – there are connections with William Cookworthy and delFTWARE and much else – but it will be some months before the next edition of ALHA's directory of presenters is issued. DM can be contacted at mooredinah@me.com .

NEWSLETTER REVIEWS

Dr Jonathan Harlow, who edits the reviews in ALHA's quarterly newsletters, writes: I am planning to include reviews of the old histories of **Bristol**, probably one at a time, in the Reviews section of the Newsletter. Of course I shall include Barrett, Seyer, Nicholls & Taylor, and Latimer's volumes. I welcome suggestions for inclusion: jonathan.harlow@uwe.ac.uk

EVENTS AND SOURCES

SLAVE VOYAGES

SlaveVoyages website is a collaborative digital database that compiles and makes publicly accessible records of the largest slave trades. Search these records for the broad origins and forced relocations of more than 12 million African people who were sent across the Atlantic in slave ships, and hundreds of thousands more who were trafficked within the Americas. Data include where they were taken, rebellions, loss of life during voyages, identities and nationalities of perpetrators, and so on. <https://www.slavevoyages.org/>

THORNBURY MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS

Thornbury Picture House 1919-1959 is an exhibition at **Thornbury & District Museum**: <https://www.thornburymuseum.org.uk/2022/04/18/having-fun-at-the-picture-house/> until **Saturday 23 August 2023**. Longer exhibitions include one on *Railways in Thornbury*: https://www.thornburymuseum.org.uk/am_event/thornbury-railway/ to mark 150 years

since the railway arrived; and one on *Thornbury treasures*:

https://www.thornburymuseum.org.uk/am_event/thornbury-treasures/

CAPPER PASS, BEDMINSTER

Wessex Archaeology has uncovered the remains of Capper Pass's smelting works at Dalby Avenue, **Bedminster**, Bristol: <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/excavation-reveals-history-bristols-most-7305430> . [Image from *Know Your Place*].



More, including images, on the Wessex Archaeology website at <https://www.wessexarch.co.uk/news/archaeology-finds-constant-innovation-and-regeneration-heart-bedminsters-history> . Copies of Brian Vincent's ALHA booklet no.35, *The Pass family and the smelting industry in Bristol* can be ordered from the treasurer or via the ALHA website, <https://www.alha.org.uk/publications/booklets/booklet-order-form>

WESTON MUSEUM

Weston's High Street is an exhibition at **Weston Museum** until **5 November 2022**:

<https://westonmuseum.org/event/westons-high-street-community-exhibition/>

Burlington Street, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 1PR, 01934 621028.

WEST OF ENGLAND AND SOUTH WALES WOMEN'S HISTORY NETWORK CONFERENCE

Jane Askew gives advance notice of the Women's History Network conference to be held on **Saturday 15 October 2022** at **Bristol Central Friends' meeting house, Champion Square, St**

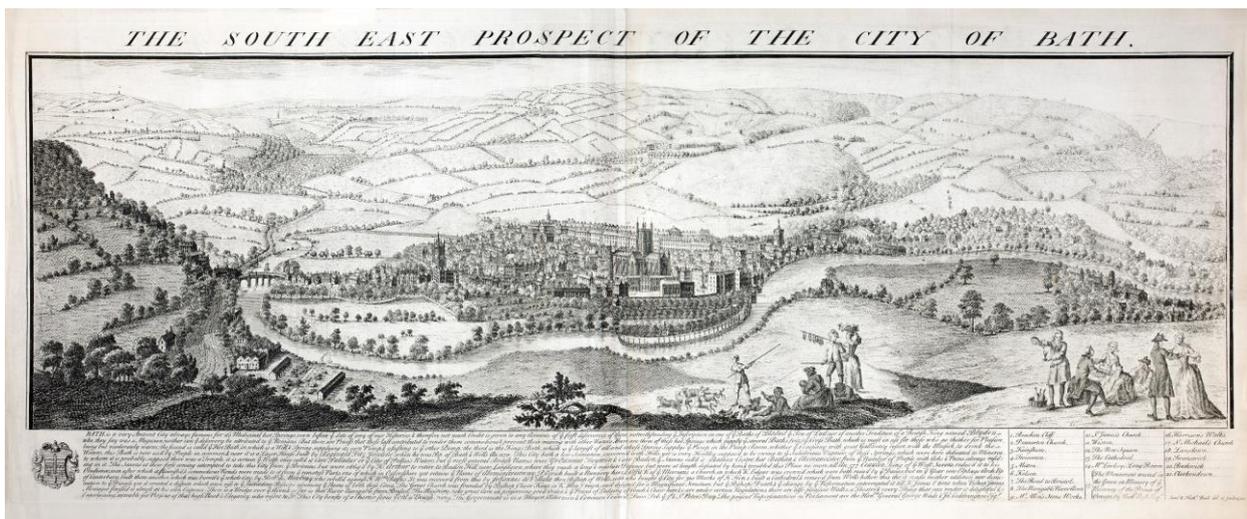
Judes, Bristol BS2 9DB. The general theme is *Women and money: a historical perspective*. Papers include one on a Bristol stockbroker and his women clients in the late 19th century, and one by ALHA individual member Sarah Villiers on women as heads of households. More at <https://womenshistorynetwork.org/category/conferences/> or from Jane.Askew@uwe.ac.uk .

ST PETER'S CHURCH AND CASTLE PARK, BRISTOL

Wessex Archaeology has been working at **St Peter's church** and **Castle Park, Bristol**. Full details and images at <https://www.wessexarch.co.uk/our-work/st-peters-church-castle-park-bristol>

BATH AND COLONIALISM ARCHIVE PROJECT: NEW COLONIALISM ARCHIVE DATABASE

Jane Marley draws attention to a new website www.bathandcolonialism.org , which contains information on **Bath's** links to the transatlantic slave trade. Funded by the National Archives Testbed Fund, Bath Abbey, **Bath Record Office** and Bath Preservation Trust have worked together to research **Bath's** links to the transatlantic slave trade. Digitised copies of the *Bath Chronicle* from 1760 to 1780 were searched for keywords relating to activity, products and profits.



A collaboration with historian Lisa Kennedy has resulted in the website and 'Finding the Words', guidance for archives seeking to record racist language and distressing content in a sensitive way. A pdf of 'Finding the Words' is downloadable from the website.

A talk on the subject is planned for November 2022.

SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE RECORDS

Recent acquisitions at **Gloucestershire Archives** include material relating to South Gloucestershire Council's response to Covid-19, and hundreds of Magistrates' Court registers. A full list is at

<https://gloucestershirearchives.wordpress.com/2022/07/01/gloucestershire-archives->

[accessions-april-june-2022/](#) . As there may be data protection restrictions on disclosure and processing of personal data, it may be advisable to enquire before searching.

AUDIO COLLECTIONS

Katie Scaife draws attention to a new regional project to preserve the south-west's audio collections. The project follows the *Unlocking Our Sound Heritage* project and will seek to digitise, and so preserve, more of the south-west's rare, unique, and irreplaceable audio heritage.

The project aims to map who in the region has audio collections. If you have audio recordings on any format in your collections, getting involved in the project planning now will make you eligible for:

1. getting your audio collection(s) digitised for free and
2. receiving free training and support in working with and sharing audio collections with your communities should the project be successfully funded.

If you have any archival audio recordings in your collection(s), please notify Katie Scaife, Archives South West's South West Sounds project developer, **Bristol Archives**, katie.scaife@bristol.gov.uk , 07704 358 691.

BOOKS ETC NOTICED

Alan Freke, *The bells of Frenchay church: the story of the first new ring of bells in the diocese of Bristol in the 1930s*, £5 plus £1.50 p&p from Frenchaybellringers@gmail.com or **Frenchay Village Museum**.

The late CR Elrington ed., and Prof R Coates series ed., *The forced loan and men fit to serve as soldiers, 1523*. **Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society**, Gloucestershire record series vol.26, 2021, HB 207pp, £30. This is an edited transcript of a record of Henry VIII's forced loan of 1523, a 10% charge on assets between £5 and £20 or land worth 20s a year or more. The tax was raised to pay for war in France. The record also lists by name men fit for military service, the amount assessed, and whether they had armour or harness. The record is divided by hundreds. Those in **south Gloucestershire and Bristol** include Grumbald's Ash hundred, which stretched from **Olveston to Acton Turville**; **Pucklechurch** hundred; Barton Regis hundred, which included **Clifton**; **Thornbury** hundred, which stretched as far as **Marshfield**; and **Henbury** hundred, which then went all the way up to **Aust**. There is a 35-page index, and an editorial note of the differences between the record and the military survey of 1522. This will be a valuable source for social, family, property and military historians.

Julian Bacharach, 'Are events things of the past?', *Mind*, Volume 130, Issue 518, April 2021, 381–412, <https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/fzaa065> .

COMMENTARY

No mayor

On 5 May 2022 **Bristol** voters elected to abolish the office of directly elected executive mayor from 2024. The voting was 56,113 (59%) to 38,439, but only 29% of those entitled to vote did so. Liverpool has made a similar decision, but after public consultation, not a vote, which was considered too expensive. Is the **Bristol** decision historically significant? One answer is that it is impossible to tell at present: only at some time in the future, not yet calculable or guessable, will historians be able to compare events so as to be able to judge whether the change in 2024 will have made a difference. What local history people can do is assess, from today's viewpoint, whether constitutional changes in the government of our area in the past made much difference. A similar exercise could be tried for other places.

Some would say that the first constitutional change was when a town became a borough, with the rudiments of self-government, but in the case of **Bristol** it is not easy to pinpoint when that happened, because some of the early charters appear to relate to the guild merchant as distinct from a civic body.

There is more general agreement that a big change happened in 1373, when the town bought a charter that made it a county separate from Gloucestershire and Somerset. That gave the town its own sheriff responsible for collecting royal taxes. At the time it was argued that separate county status would save merchants going to Gloucester or Ilminster on official business – a change that no doubt saved those individuals time and expense, but hardly likely to have influenced the course of events.

For centuries the town then continued constitutionally unchanged. Its government was in the hands of a common council composed of a self-perpetuating and self-serving mercantile clique and the Society of Merchant Venturers, with many individuals being members of both. In 1620 the corporation granted control of the town's port, its most important piece of infrastructure, to the SMV. Much administrative work was done by quarter sessions, whose members were the aldermen.

In 1836 the Municipal Corporations Act of the previous year replaced the common council with a council elected by ratepayers. There was a similar change in **Bath**. As many of the old council members were elected to the new council, and as some defections enabled one party to appoint aldermen, who ensured that that party maintained its control, there was little change.

During the 18th and 19th centuries several single-purpose authorities were created, such as bridge trustees (1756), turnpike trustees (1786), the docks company (1802), and paving commissioners (1806). Charity schools were founded, as was the waterworks company. There followed improvement commissioners, a health board, and in 1870 a school board, directly elected. Although city councillors became members also of those bodies, it was those bodies, not the city council, that made the biggest changes to the town and its local infrastructure and services.

County borough status in 1888 made the city council responsible for nearly all local government functions. But water, gas, cemeteries and public transport remained in the private sector, as did the voluntary hospitals.

Local government reorganisation in 1974 divided responsibility for those public services that remained with local government between the city council and Avon county council. Few changes resulted from that, except the addition of another playpen for local politicians and an opportunity for buckpassing on politically difficult issues such as highway maintenance, housing for homeless people, and sites for travellers. By the time that arrangement was replaced by unitary authorities in 1996, central government's reduction of local government to impoverished impotence was well in hand.

Change to a directly elected mayor happened in 2012. In spite of widespread exasperation with lack of leadership within the city council and with politicking taking precedence over meeting the needs of people, the fact that only 24% of those entitled to vote did so suggested a lack of enthusiasm. The change resulted in a 20mph speed limit in residential streets, residents' parking zones in two areas of the city, and a plan to erect an entertainment arena in the inner city, a project abandoned by a later mayor, who favours a site outside the city's northern boundary.

Whether creating a West of England Combined Authority with directly elected mayors from 2017 has made any difference is difficult to say: WECA's role seems to be primarily in economic development, which can be difficult to detect over time. Publicity, especially if self-generated, is not a criterion of historical significance.

It is arguable that civic constitutional changes have of themselves had little effect. Much that happened would often probably have happened anyway irrespective of the constitutional arrangements for the city council. Many changes have been brought about not by the city council but by individuals or by organisations other than the city council. Where change and improvement was effected by the city council, it happened largely as a result of the energy, commitment and foresight of some individual members working within the existing constitutional structures. Some of the changes, as in the case of accommodation for people with mental health impairments, were the result of central government legislation or other pressure that forced change on a city council disinclined to take action or spend money. Future local history people will tell us whether the 2024 change will have made much difference.

Coronavirus statistics

It is probably too early for local history people to think about writing histories of the pandemic in their localities. Whilst a mass of data has been published, much from reliable sources, one suspects that a lot of information, especially that held by central government, hospital trusts, commissioning groups, schools and private businesses, has not. It is not known whether the inquiry by baroness Hallett will result in the publication of material of local interest to our area. Nor is the pandemic over: notwithstanding the government's efforts to persuade people to resume the patterns of activity they followed before the first

variant of the virus appeared, cases are still being reported, more variants have been identified, many people who contracted the virus earlier are suffering long-term effects, and evidence is emerging of the ways in which the indirect effects of the virus, including interruptions to schooling, have delayed the development of children and young people.

When local histories of the outbreak come to be written, their writers will have the advantage of large amounts of statistical data. Much is already published, some of it broken down into quite small localities. From early in the outbreak the media reported day by day – with time lags of varying length – the number of cases reported, the number of patients admitted to hospital, and the numbers dying in hospital from, or within 28 days of, diagnosis. Because of the nature and variety of the data, statisticians struggled to answer media questions such as how many people died as a result of contracting the virus. One attempt made was to calculate the excess death rate, that is the difference between the number or rate of deaths in a given period in a given area and the number or the rate of deaths that would have been expected had the pandemic not occurred. That seems a simple and straightforward calculation, but it is open to the objection that it presupposes that all excess deaths resulted from the virus, whereas common sense suggests that some of the excess could have had other causes; many who died may have had more than one ill-health condition, which may or may not have been contributory or critical; and most causes of death will have been determined not by scientific investigation but by doctors' clinical judgements, formed under pressures in abnormal working conditions.

Several books, written for non-specialists, have appeared on the use and misuse of statistics. Local historians would be well advised to read some of them before applying fingers to keyboard.

Murals

The appearance of Banksy's latest on an outside wall might prompt local history people to look into how mural painting came to be what it is today.

Distinctions can be drawn between painting on internal and external walls, and between art and vandalism.

The earliest internal wall paintings, if that is what they are, were found in caves in Indonesia. They are thought to date from around 40,000 BCE. Much younger, dated about 15,000 BCE, are the paintings in caves at Lascaux in the Dordogne. Archaeologists argue about their purpose and cultural significance. One possibility archaeologists do not seem to have considered is that the images might have been educational, perhaps intended to teach a palaeolithic mixed infants reception class what lunch looked like. Archaeologists dismiss any suggestion that they may have been drawn for fun. Paintings in Egyptian tombs date from about 3150 BCE. Those in the palace, if that is what it was, at Knossos on Crete are put at about 1700 BCE. In fifth century BCE classical Athens a portico in the agora is known to have been painted: Pausanias (c.110-180 CE) described some of the subjects, some mythical, some historical. Remains preserved by volcanic fall-out at Pompeii and Herculaneum (CE 79) and at Livia's house, if that is what it was, in Rome show that internal walls of houses of

wealthier romans were painted, sometimes figuratively. In Pompeii it is not known whether a set of paintings in one building were advertisements or customer instruction manuals. Constantinopolitan churches, notably in Ravenna, had walls covered in mosaics, some figurative. From the 14th century in Italy frescos depicted biblical scenes, events and myths. Some English medieval churches had wall paintings: dooms and crucifixions seem to have been trending. At St John's on the wall in **Bristol** fragments were found in 2016 of medieval representations of the seven deadly sins, which might have reflected local interest. Were any of the faces recognisable? In our area modern buildings with internal murals include **Bristol** city council council house's council chamber (John Armstrong, 1953) and conference hall (Thomas Monnington). More at <https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/blog/the-painted-ceiling/> .

British weather being what it is, it would not be reasonable to expect ancient paintings, if there were any, on external walls to have survived. External murals in England seem to have started with outdoor advertising, which became common in the nineteenth century; photographs show streets in many towns cluttered with outdoor adverts. Several buildings in our area show traces of painted advertising, usually the name of a product or of a business's proprietor. An example is at Sussex Place in **St Paul's, Bristol**, advertising Jenners the drapers and milliners (about 1880), in your face as you come off the M32. More examples at <https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/features/bristols-ghost-signs-a-faded-reminder-of-the-past/> . The late Maggie Shapland, stalwart of Clifton Rocks Railway and ALHA member **Bristol Industrial Archaeological Society**, preserved the lettering on her premises in **Clifton**: image at <https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/news/tributes-paid-to-dedicated-local-campaigner/>

Use of walls for large-scale paintings for political purposes seems to have started in Mexico in the 1920s; Diego Rivera was one of several exponents. The practice emerged again in Belfast and elsewhere in Northern Ireland in the 1970s, with naïve paintings on the flank walls of buildings expressing religious sectarianism, inflaming political hatreds, and glorifying violence.

In our areas blank walls have always tempted small-scale defacement, particularly by small boys. Such defacements, though disapproved, used not to be seen as a big problem. Attitudes changed when spray cans facilitated quick clandestine defacement of buildings and, in some places eg London and Paris, public transport vehicles. The phenomenon, mainly an urban one, appeared in Bristol about 1960. Popular opinion is divided, some seeing the practice as visually offensive and damaging to property, others as a form of expression that ought to be tolerated or even encouraged. A festival of what was explicitly called street art was organised in **Nelson Street, Bristol**, in 2011. There are guided tours, though none has been offered to ALHA as a summer walk.

Mural painting now appears to be divided between serious (but not always humourless) large-scale works of art, generally approved, except by those who disagree with the work's message; and small-scale tagging, deplored as antisocial attention-seeking vandalism.

development, has the number of people in poverty been reduced, though it is estimated that more than 700 million still do not have enough food.

There were times, especially when there had been a poor harvest or outbreaks of animal diseases, when large numbers of people in our area did not get enough to eat. There were food riots in **Bristol** in 1709, 1753, 1756, and 1795-1796, and in 1801 when rioters attacked market stalls. On several occasions in the eighteenth century **Bristol's** common council bought up quantities of corn for sale at below market prices in order to stave off threats of violence from starving people. In **Bath** protests included threatening letters to the mayor, arson, a threat to burn down Stothert's iron works, thefts of food from gardens, and 200 women mobbing dealers in the market. Corporation responses included a Provision Committee in 1799, funded by donations, free stalls in the market for bakers, and distributions of rice and other grains. All this was happening around the time Malthus was thinking and writing.

But by and large our area has managed to feed itself, at least enough for most people to survive. Some of the reasons for that are geographical: large tracts of fertile soils; agricultural improvements and the use of fertilisers to get crops to grow in upland areas such as **Cotswold and Mendip**; a trading hinterland far up the Severn; and an international port through which food was imported. Although **Bristol's** port exported goods, notoriously on the first leg of the triangular trade and directly to the American and Caribbean colonies, imports were always an important part of **Bristol's** maritime trade. Many of those imports were foodstuffs. Sugar, grains and bananas come to mind, but a host of foods have been imported. Supplies have been interrupted by wars, piracy, strikes and the weather, but by and large there has usually been enough for most people to live on, even if it has not been equally distributed.

Whether that will continue, and if so, for how long, future local historians will tell. With global overheating, environmental pollution, and competition for water resources, the augurs are not good.

QUOTE

It's interesting to learn about less familiar and less glamorous parts of the county, such as the Leeds district of Hunslet, birthplace of Keith Waterhouse – but less fascinating to learn that Hunslet's railway station is now a Pets at Home superstore. Sometimes it's hard to care about which is the poshest part of Bridlington, or on which street in Filey the second branch of the amusement arcade Holdsworths opened (Belle Vue Road). This level of geographical detail is surely of significant interest only to local historians.

Jonathan Drummond, reviewing Andrew Martin, *Yorkshire: there and back* (Corsair 2022) in TLS 17 June 2022.

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 left (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.