



ALHA  
Newsletter e-update  
31 October 2022

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# AVON LOCAL HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY

**Material for printed Newsletter 173 by 12  
noon 15 December 2022 please:**

Magazines and books to reviews editor  
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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 newsletter editor and membership  
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Website: <http://www.alha.org.uk>

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

Facebook:

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



*At the dispensary*

## ALHA NEWS

Local History Day 2022  
Annual general meeting 2022  
New booklet: Bath dispensaries

## EVENTS AND SOURCES

Weston super Mare museum  
Brunel conference  
Glos Archives workshops  
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## NEWS FROM GROUPS AND SOCIETIES

Ian Bishop  
Bitton Parish HS grant  
Bristol Medico-history Society resusssed  
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## BOOKS ETC NOTICED

*Bad blood in Georgian Bristol*  
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*Bristol Library Society minutes 1772-1801* (BRS vol. 75)

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Fashion  
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## EVENTS LIST

is on the  
ALHA website

## ALHA NEWS

### **ALHA LOCAL HISTORY DAY 2022**

ALHA's Local History Day resurfaced on 22 October 2022 at the St Michaels Centre, **Stoke Gifford**, BS34 8PD. The topic was *A roof over your head*. The committee would like to thank all who attended, participated, helped out and made the event possible. Two of the intended presenters cried off for health reasons, but one procured a replacement on a related topic, to both of whom ALHA expresses gratitude, and a substitute volunteered for the other. Fewer than half the usual number of attenders attended. There will be a substantial financial deficit on the day. The committee will discuss reasons, implications and suggestions at its December meeting. Also for health reasons ALHA chairman Bob Lawrence was not able to attend. His place was ably filled by Ian Chard, who as the only unstricken member of ALHA's events subcommittee worked hard to make the day possible. ALHA hopes to print in the December 2022 Newsletter no.173 summaries of the talks delivered.

### **ALHA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The Local History Day was followed by the ALHA Annual General Meeting, chaired by Ian Chard in the absence of Bob Lawrence. The trustees' annual report for 2021-2022, drawn up by ALHA secretary Catherine Dixon, was received, as were the accounts, which had been examined by Mike Leigh. Thanks was given to them and to ALHA's volunteers, who included Lesley Bowman (facebook), Dr Jonathan Harlow (publications, grants, and reviews editor), and Theo Mardell and Darcey Healey (facebook). In the absence of any new nominations, the committee was re-elected: Bob Lawrence (**Bristol and Avon Family History Society**: chairman, publications, events, grants); Veronica Bowerman (Facebook and new website); Jane Bradley (**Bitton Parish History Society**, publications); Ian Chard (**Frampton Cotterell & District LHS**: events; archive); Catherine Dixon (**Gordano Society**, honorary secretary); William Evans (treasurer, membership secretary, Newsletter editor and distributor, grants, publications); Mike Hooper (**Knowle & Totterdown LHS**: summer walks, events); Jan Packer (**Knowle & Totterdown LHS**: summer walks, Facebook, new website); and Jennifer Muller.

### **NEW ALHA BOOKLET - BATH**

ALHA's latest booklet, edited by Dr Jonathan Harlow, is Michael Whitfield's prize-winning *The Bath dispensaries: health-care for the poor before the NHS*. **A flyer and order form accompanies this newsletter update.** There is a small discount for orders before 30 November 2022.

This is ALHA's first booklet relating to **Bath**.

## EVENTS AND SOURCES

### WESTON MUSEUM – CITY EVENTS IN WESTON SUPER MARE

*Becky Walsh writes:* **Weston Museum** has been grabbing the attention of event producers who normally head to the larger cities.

Tucked down a side street between the Boulevard and Meadow Street, **Weston Museum** is housed in the town's former Gas Company workshops, with stunning glass roofs and views across a cobbled courtyard. [Image from Somerset Live].



If you are lucky enough to stumble upon this hidden **Weston** gem, you could relax with coffee or lunch in the café and then stroll through spacious galleries soaking up **Weston's** fascinating story. The collection contains thousands of amazing objects from the ancient past right up to the present. The Museum is becoming increasingly popular as a wedding venue, as well as hosting pub quizzes and lectures, Bath Bomb and Slime workshops, and has an education team who work with school groups.

In more recent times the Museum has become home to events you would normally expect to see in a city. The *Wildlife Photographer of the Year* exhibition is back this year and, unlike venues in **Bristol** that charge an entrance fee, at **Weston Museum** it's free.

Also *The World of Martin Brown: Horrible Histories and Other Dazzling Drawings* has an exhibition until November with Martin Brown running illustration workshops and book signings.

The Imperial War Museum and the British Museum have both loaned national treasures for temporary display, and an environmental exhibition from London's Natural History Museum will mark the collaboration between the SEE MONSTER project and **Weston Museum**. Though many exhibits are on permanent display there's always something new to see in the spacious ground-floor galleries.

Becky Walsh: [becky.walsh@wsm-tc.gov.uk](mailto:becky.walsh@wsm-tc.gov.uk). For more details about this hidden gem please see the website: <https://westonmuseum.org/>

## BRUNEL CONFERENCE

‘Organised by the Brunel Institute, *Brunel: History, Conservation and Legacy* is the first major conference centred around I K Brunel and his legacy held since 2006. This event is for transport and maritime historians and enthusiasts, engineers, researchers and anybody interested in architecture, design and the life and work of Brunel. It will feature contributions from Brunel historians, writers and engineers based around three themes:

- New historical perspectives around the life and work of Isambard Kingdom Brunel
- The ongoing conservation of Brunel’s architectural and engineering legacy
- Transforming Futures: Brunel’s engineering legacy in the 21st century and beyond.

The event will be held in the Brunel Institute, a collaboration between the SS Great Britain Trust and the University of Bristol. The Institute houses one of the most important Brunel-related collections in the world.’ **Saturday 12 November 2022, 9.30 to 5.30.** £34. Programme at [Brunel-Conference-2022-Agenda.pdf \(ssgreatbritain.org\)](#) and booking at <https://www.ssgreatbritain.org/brunel-history-conservation-and-legacy/>

## GLOUCESTERSHIRE ARCHIVES UWE RHC LOCAL HISTORY WORKSHOPS

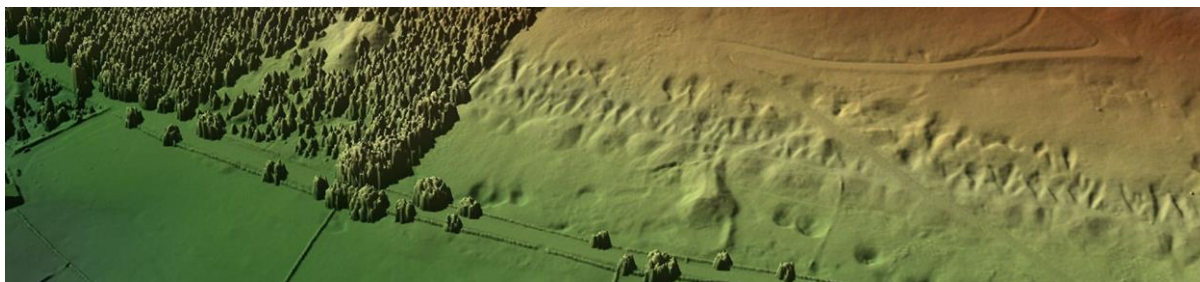
Jane Marley draws attention to a series of **Local History workshops at Gloucestershire Archives** run fortnightly, on a **Tuesday morning, (9.30–1.00)** in association with Gloucestershire County History Trust and The Regional History Centre, UWE. Each workshop will have two sessions with a refreshment break. Tutoring and discussion will be led by historians from VCH and UWE in a friendly and informal atmosphere. More at: <https://www.heritagehub.org.uk/local-history-workshops/>

Open to all, whether you are a beginner or have research experience, £10 per workshop; free to VCH volunteers and RHC members, two free sessions of choice for archive volunteers and FOGA members. Advance booking recommended.

This provisional syllabus may be amended as the course progresses, so please check that website before you plan to attend individual sessions.

**1 November:** THE LOCAL HISTORIAN’S TOOLBOX: key resources. Online – Ancestry, British Newspaper Archive, Historical Directories, BHO/VCH. Printed sources – record series, journals. Archival sources – by creator (local govt, diocese, parish, estate, etc).

**15 November:** THE HISTORY OF THE LANDSCAPE: landscape archaeology – maps – place-names – archaeological resources (HERs) – aerial photography and Lidar [Image Historic England].



**29 November:** THE HISTORY OF BUILDINGS: examining and describing buildings – vernacular and polite architecture – modern and recent buildings and housing – special types of building (religious, industrial, civic, etc) – documentary sources and techniques.

**13 December:** WORKING WITH DOCUMENTS: palaeography and techniques of reading documents – Latin – identifying and understanding different types of deeds, manorial records, parish records etc.

**17 January 2023:** OWNERSHIP AND GOVERNMENT: landownership – feudal tenures and manorial descent – manorial courts and control – development of the vestry and parish responsibilities – proliferation of local authorities and their functions.

**31 January 2023:** MOVEMENT AND MIGRATION: roads, canals and railways – the study of population, including settlement shift and desertion – migration, immigration – women's lives under-represented - drift from countryside to town.

**14 February 2023:** COMMUNITY, SOCIETY AND WELFARE: caring for the poor, sick and elderly – local and national justice – bringing up and educating children – social activities, legal and illegal, moral and immoral.

**28 February 2023:** WORKING LIVES: farming the land – rural and urban trades and industries – labour relations and conflicts – restoring the balance between male and female work.

**14 March 2023:** THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION: ubiquity of the medieval church – monasteries and chantries – effect of the reformation – puritans and nonconformists – Victorian religiosity and its aftermath.

## **SOMERSET SOUND ARCHIVES**

**Somerset Archives and Local Studies** offers a talk **Friday 18 November 2022, 10.30-11.30am** on sound archives and how to use them in research. Zoom, £5, booking required at [https://swheritage.org.uk/events/sound-archives/?dm\\_i=5KNS,N4U2,4G7S6,2UVXR,1](https://swheritage.org.uk/events/sound-archives/?dm_i=5KNS,N4U2,4G7S6,2UVXR,1)

## **COAL (and celestine) IN YATE**

*King coal in Yate* is an exhibition at **Yate & District Heritage Centre**, on the history of mining (coal and celestine) in the area. **Tuesdays, Wednesdays & Thursdays 10.00am to 4.00pm**,

and Saturdays 10.00am to 3.00pm, until 17 December

2022. <http://www.yateheritage.co.uk/>

## **NEWS FROM GROUPS AND SOCIETIES**

### **IAN BISHOP**

The death is reported of Ian Bishop, author of booklets on the history of **Oldland Common** and its neighbourhood, including *Oldland and the surrounding parishes* (2005), 'A social history of the communities of **Kelston, North Stoke, Swineford, Upton Cheyney, Beach, Wick, Churchley, Bridge Yate, North Common, Warmley, Cadbury Heath, Barrs Court, Gee Moor and Oldland Common**. Fourteen chapters cover war and skirmishes, industry, crime, topography and the way they spoke.' IB was a keen photographer, and his shots illustrated many of his books, such as *Around Kingswood* and *Around Oldland*. His interests included family and railway history.

### **BITTON PARISH HISTORY SOCIETY**

ALHA member **Bitton Parish History Society** has been awarded a grant of £600 by South Gloucestershire Council. [Image, Alchetron].



### **AEROSPACE BRISTOL ARCHIVIST VACANCY**

ALHA member **Bristol Aero Collection Trust** has a vacancy for an archivist. 'Aerospace Bristol houses a substantial company archive dating from 1910, which includes glass negatives, minute books, drawings on waxed linen and film, new media and ephemera.' Applications to be in by **11 November 2022**. More at <https://aerospacebristol.org/careers>

## **BOOKS ETC NOTICED**

Steve Poole and Nicholas Rogers, *Bad blood in Georgian Bristol: the murder of Sir Roger Dineley*, Redcliffe Press 2022, £20, but £16.50 including p&p if ordered from Marston Book Services, 160 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park, Abingdon OX14 4SB, 01235 465 577, quoting offer code 31BADBLOOD. Family rancour, press gangs, murder, trial, execution on the gibbet at the top of **St Michael's Hill, Bristol**, and a link to **Bristol** surgeon Richard Smith. Smith was the subject of Michael Whitfield's ALHA booklet number 26, copies of which are still available from ALHA's treasurer at £4.20 including postage.

Martin J Powell, *Maid of the haystack*, Bristol Books 2022, 248pp., softback, ISBN 9781909446342, £14. Historical fiction, based on Hannah More and others' involvement with a young, woman with graceful manners and a slight German accent who in 1776

appeared at **Flax Bourton** and set up home in a haystack. She stayed there for four years, attracted the interest of the rich and famous, and died in 1801.

<https://www.bristolbooks.org/shop/maidofthehaystack>



Max Skjönsberg and Mark Towsey edd., *The minute book of the Bristol Library Society, 1772-1801*, **Bristol Record Society** no. 75 (2022), free in portable document format to members of BRS; paperback £16.50 plus postage.

[Image Bisray]

## **COMMENTARY**

### **Whales**

At ALHA's 2022 local history day building surveyor David Hardwick generously stood in at short notice for a speaker who had withdrawn because of coronavirus. ALHA is all the more grateful to DH, because he was in the middle of preparing to travel a few days later to the south Atlantic to survey abandoned whaling stations.

Whales have not played a prominent part in the local history of our area. There are recorded sightings in the **Severn**, but none in the **Frome**, the **Boyd**, the **Yeos** or the **Malago**. But the whalebone dangling in **Mary Redcliffe**, be it a curiosity, a souvenir, or a thank offering after a dangerous voyage, shows that the animal was not unknown to our distant predecessors. The explanation in ALHA booklet no.3 can be dismissed as frivolous surmise.

The whale features in literature. One of Rudyard Kipling's *Just so stories* explains the aetiology of the whale's throat. For those with patience, stamina and a high boredom threshold there is Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851. How did it end? I never got that far). Practical advice is in Hilare Belloc's *The bad child's book of beasts* (1896):

The whale that wanders round the Pole  
Is not a table fish.  
You cannot bake or boil him whole  
Nor serve him in a dish,

as no doubt the inhabitants of **Littleton on Severn** concluded when a stray washed up there in 1885: <https://www.thornburymuseum.org.uk/whats-here/littleton-whale/>.

But you may cut his blubber up  
And melt it down for oil  
And so replace the colza bean  
(A product of the soil),

which is what happened to the **Littleton** whale after it had been taken to **St Philip's in Bristol** for display, where thousands came to view and sniff it before its purchasers dismembered it and rendered its insulation. Back in **Littleton** and **Oldbury**, the whale gave its name to businesses nothing to do with cetaceans.

In 1712, long before the location of **Bristol's** city docks became a political issue, some entrepreneurs constructed a quay where the Trym dawdles into the Avon at **Sea Mills**. Remains of the dock wall are visible today, opposite the house that used to be a public convenience. Maggi Stowers, secretary of ALHA member **Crockerne Pill & District LHS**, draws attention to evidence that in 1750 a consortium bought two ships to hunt for whales with a view to blubber-rendering by the quay. In 1752 the *Adventure(r?)* brought from Greenland two whales valued at £2,000. They were cut up and rendered. The business lasted just short of 11 years. Coal gas did not come on stream until 1853, electricity not until ten years later, so the demise of the operation will not have been caused by competition from new lighting technologies. Could staff shortages have been a reason? Newspaper adverts for whaling crew emphasising that few people were killed or maimed suggest that the danger of the operation was played down by the promoters. The locals may have taken a cautious view. It would be interesting to explore what caused the business to go belly up.

In 2015 Avon Wildlife Trust installed wicker sculptures of whale parts on the former Bristol & West playing fields by the **Portway**. They were probably not intended to celebrate the **Sea Mills** venture; more likely they were part of a national campaign by wildlife trusts and others to draw attention to human threats to whales.

## Fashion

One question that local history people might like to look into is how far fashion has influenced the pasts of places in our area.

It is not difficult to describe fashions or to give examples of them; less easy to define fashion in a way that embraces all examples but excludes behaviours and things that are not fashion. All fashion involves imitation. If you wear a feather in your hat, that may be an idiosyncrasy or an eccentricity, but only if a large number of people follow suit does it become a fashion. But if everyone does it, does it cease to be fashionable? In the eighteenth century in our area, as elsewhere, drinking tea was expensive and fashionable, but by the mid twentieth century tea drinking was cheap and widespread and one would hardly say it was fashionable. Was that because there is an element of social superiority in fashion? Of competition? Of keeping up with the Joneses? Of fear of being thought excluded? Fashions



can generate, and can depend on, social and class distinctions. After Edward VII was operated on for supposed appendicitis, many who could afford to do so had a similar operation, not because they needed it, but because royalty had had it. Another characteristic of a fashion is that it does not last long. If a practice continues, as with drinking tea, it ceases to be fashionable.

For some people, 'fashionable' connotes approval, and 'old-fashioned' is derogatory, except for those people who like tradition and complain that things are not as they used to be. One comes across them now and again in local history circles.

Fashion seems to occur in some human activities but not others. Clothing is an example. What about leisure activities, sports, games, food, music, reading matter, speech?

In our area two activities that became fashionable had significant and long-lasting local consequences. One was drinking spa water, as at **Bath** and **Hotwells**. Only at those two places in our area? In Wiltshire some thirty places claimed to have springs or wells whose water had, or was claimed to have, medicinal qualities. Would **Portishead** and **Clevedon** have developed differently if they had advertised medicinal waters? Both **Bath** and **Hotwells** started as medical attractions, but became fashionable and thus centres of social activity. That had consequences not just medical but also economic, architectural and social. Some of the consequences were unusual or unexpected: in **Clifton**, for example, long after the demise of **Hotwells** as a spa, the Society of Merchants Venturers' attempt to establish a health hydro at Sion spring led to the Clifton Rocks Railway. **Hotwells** soon went out of fashion. By contrast **Bath**, for years a market town dominated by merchants and a religious establishment, was transformed into a fashionable resort, a marriage market, a residential attraction, and a manufacturing town, with architecture that has led to it being given world heritage status.

Another leisure fashion that helped change parts of our area was sea bathing. Why did it become fashionable in the 19th century? Why and when did **Weston super Mare**, **Clevedon**, **Portishead** and **Severn Beach** become seaside resorts? Was there sea bathing at **Severn Beach**, or were all its delights inland? Who drove the changes, and how were they financed? How and when did the marketing change from health to holidays? What made **Weston super Mare** successful, other places less so? Something to do with main line railways? Why did these places decline as seaside resorts? Cheap air travel to sunshine abroad? Or were there changes earlier?

Another example of fashion helping to shape local history is the fashionableness or otherwise of neighbourhoods. That has happened in almost every large town in England. The BBC television series *A house through time* made the point that many houses, including the **Bristol** example of 10 Guinea Street, **Redcliffe**, were originally large ones built in a fashionable neighbourhood for occupation by a single family with servants living in; became less fashionable when other areas (**Clifton** in the case of **Redcliffe**) became fashionable; were turned into houses in multiple occupation as their social status and material condition declined; but later became fashionable again, whether because of housing shortage or because gentrification or an interest in period houses boosted their appeal. Similar changes

happened to other localities such as **Hotwells**, parts of **St Pauls** and perhaps **Montpelier**. House prices and rents are part of the story.

### **QUOTE**

When we teach history to young people, we sometimes do it in order to shift some of our burden to their shoulders. We want the young to keep carrying the beliefs, the memories and the conflicts that have weighed on us throughout our lives. That's unfair. A far better reason to reach history is to help liberate kids from fears, illusions and hatreds. ... I hope history becomes a tool to free people rather than bind them. A tool to forge new concords rather than perpetuate old conflicts. After all, the point of learning history is not to remember the past, but to be liberated from it.

Yuval Noah Harari, 'To shape the future, change how children see the past' 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.