

ALHA



# AVON LOCAL HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY

Registered charity 270930

Newsletter 175/3 e-update  
31 August 2023

**Material for printed Newsletter 176 by 12  
noon 24 September 2023 please:**

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

[jonathan.harlow@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:jonathan.harlow@uwe.ac.uk)

Details of events to website manager

[webmaster@ALHA.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@ALHA.org.uk)

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

[wm.evans@btopenworld.com](mailto: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

Booklets: Shirehampton remount  
depot in WW1 and Cossham memorial  
hospital

Grant: Lorymer's park, Portishead (PH)

## GROUPS AND SOCIETIES

BALH insurance

Publicity for new groups  
and perhaps not so new groups (VB)

## EVENTS AND SOURCES

Stanton Drew guided tours (JR)

Women's history network conference  
Chew valley floods

Coronavirus in South Gloucestershire  
(AC)

## EVENTS & SOURCES CONTINUED

Development proposal at Crews Hole

Lower Hazel research project

South west Anarchy research project

Topographical images free

B&AFHS family history fair (GG)

Cleveland baths reopen

Bristol castle

## REVIEWS

edited by Dr Jonathan Harlow

Civil war sieges

*The Regional Historian* 4

B&GAS *Transactions* 140

Somerset monasteries dissolution and  
gentry pickings

## BOOKS ETC NOTICED

Dissolution of Somerset monasteries

Hartygrove Brake, Lower Hazel,  
Alveston

Bristol ferries

Roman town near Charterhouse

## RESPONSES

Civic ceremonial and ritual (DRE)

## COMMENTARY

Thornbury canal

First horse tram?

Legal history

The accidental

Museum stocktaking

## QUOTE

JRR Tolkien

## CAN YOU HELP?

Coronavirus in South Gloucestershire

Chew valley floods

Belluton House, Publow

and Highfield House, Chew Magna

James and Bush families

## THE EVENTS LIST

Is on the ALHA website

## ALHA NEWS

### ALHA BOOKLETS

ALHA booklet no. 38, *Shirehampton remount depot (1914-27)*, by Professor Richard Coates and edited by Dr Jonathan Harlow, has already sold over 175 copies. You may order via the ALHA website, or from the treasurer, price £3.50 plus postage.

A new booklet by Dr Michael Whitfield on *Cossham memorial hospital* is ready for issue. An order form for early purchase with a discount accompanies this newsletter update.



### ALHA GRANT – LORYMER’S PARK, PORTISHEAD

*Peter Hills writes:* ‘The early planning of this restoration set us up for work to commence in late 2022, but due to the extreme cold weather at that time and subsequent rain etc, work was finally commenced on the surfacing in April this year.

This has now been completed, two new seats fitted and the *Portishead in Bloom* planters re-instated. The replica metal railings are to be installed later this month and we are promised the work should be completed by mid-September 2023. The information board will then be fitted to complete the work.’

## **GROUPS AND SOCIETIES**

### **BALH INSURANCE**

Like ALHA itself, some ALHA member groups and societies are members of British Association for Local History, not least because membership carries with it insurance against public liability and some other risks at no extra charge. BALH will increase its annual subscription from £75 to £90 from 1 January 2024 for members who want to receive paper copies of BALH's *Local History News* and *The Local Historian*, but the sub remains at £75 for those who are willing to receive digital copies in portable document format.

### **PUBLICITY INFORMATION FOR NEW GROUPS**

#### **(or Groups aiming to increase their current number of members)**

*Veronica Bowerman writes:* One of our group members wrote to ALHA Facebook page recently asking how they could attract more members. They were emailed the following 10 ideas. Other groups might find some of the suggestions sent to them helpful? Some of our successful societies may say 'We do all that already,' but it is possible that there could be a useful nugget or nuggets in this copy that may be worth pursuing? The suggestions are in no particular order:

- 1 - Initially email and/or ask your existing members for their thoughts about publicity to help increase membership and pursue any useful ideas.
- 2 - If you have your own website, this should highlight forthcoming events, preferably with an image or a poster each time to make more impact.
- 3 - If you do not have a website, or even if you do, a link from a local amenity group to the email contact of your group could reap rewards,
- 4 - ALHA should be emailed your programme of events, with images if possible - see <https://www.alha.org.uk/events/category/events> so we can include it not only on our website, but also on our Facebook page and email magazine.
- 5 - Free local magazines are delivered in many areas. These may well offer free space for events or an article about your group penned by you. This can be a good way of attracting interest, but plan ahead, as deadline dates need to be taken on board.
- 6 - Local amenity societies could be encouraged to include for free your forthcoming events in their magazines, take posters for their halls/members etc.
- 7 - Contact names and email addresses could be researched for local community halls, schools, a library if you have one, pubs etc to see if they would be willing to give you a free ad and/or put up posters for you, and more importantly if willing as well, to circulate their members.

8 - Local Facebook pages may have members who want to highlight a forthcoming event - again with an image or poster, and a suggestion that the posting could be shared with others.

9 - Devise template emails/Facebook copy/ magazine copy to make your ongoing relationships with these contacts work to help your group.

10 - It is worth spending time researching the right contacts so you can send regular emails about your forthcoming events with images and/or posters and/or deliver face-to-face to the right contact.

Finally:

**Groups that do not have problems attracting new members**

We would really appreciate feedback from you to help others who are finding it difficult to increase their membership.

**Groups that are finding it difficult to increase their membership**

If you can comment on this article and also say what could work for you.

Feedback on this article should be addressed to the Newsletter editor, William Evans

[Members@ALHA.org.uk](mailto:Members@ALHA.org.uk) .

## **EVENTS AND SOURCES**

### **STANTON DREW GUIDED TOURS**

*John Richards writes:* The guided tours on the *Stukeley 300* weekend at **Stanton Drew**, 22/23 July, were very popular. They got booked up quickly, so quite a few people missed out. Now there is another chance. To help celebrate Heritage Open Days, on **Saturday 9 and Sunday 10 September 2023**, English Heritage volunteers will be leading free guided tours of **Stanton Drew** Circles and Cove.

Join the knowledgeable volunteers to find out more about this fascinating site. Tours are being held at 10:00, 11:00, 12:00, 13:00 and 14:00 on 9 and 10 September. Booking is essential:

<https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/visiting/event/stanton-drew-stone-circles-and-cove-guided-tours>

### **WOMEN'S HISTORY NETWORK CONFERENCE**

West of England & South Wales Women's History Network holds its 30th Annual Conference *Women and the Natural World: Historical Perspectives on Nature Climate and Environmental Change* **Saturday 30 September 2023, 10am – 5pm, Exeter Central Library, Castle Street, Exeter, EX4 3PQ**. Topics include: Landscape, memory and the life-course in the travel writing of Celia Fiennes; Women and the rural environment; Land and water; When environmental history and women's history intersect; Natural science; Women, horticulture and land-based education. Full programme at <http://weswwomenshistorynetwork.co.uk> .

For further information email [katherineuna.holden@gmail.com](mailto:katherineuna.holden@gmail.com). Bookings via above website.

## CHEW VALLEY FLOODS

*Dr Ioanna Stamataki, lecturer in engineering at the University of Greenwich, writes:*

South West England has a history of devastating flash floods. Notable examples include the Lynmouth flood of 15 August 1952, the 10 July 1968 flood in the **Chew Valley**; and the 16 August 2004 flood in Boscastle. Flash floods are localized, quick events, and the existing river gauging network rarely records their details. Evidence after such floods is often secondary, like flood marks on buildings, photos, surveys, and news reports. These events hold great importance for local communities, sparking considerable interest in their historical significance. To better understand these events, a pioneering research project DocuFlood (<http://www.docuflood.uk/>) aims to develop and test a new framework for reconstructing historical flash floods with an initial focus on the 1968 flash flood along the **River Chew**. By combining diverse data sources and modern hydraulic modelling, the project aims to shed light on past floods, enhance flood risk understanding, and design effective mitigation strategies for the future.

On **Saturday, 30 September 2023**, the **University of Bath** and the **Pensford Local History Group** are hosting a unique workshop at the **Pensford Memorial Hall** that promises to be an insightful experience for all members of the local community. The focal point of the event will be the July 1968 flood, a momentous event in the **River Chew's** history that left an indelible mark on the region. Academics from the **University of Bath** and the University of Greenwich will present talks, delving into the nature of the 1968 flood and why it continues to capture our attention to this day. This workshop is an opportunity for the community to come together and participate actively in the conversation. Round table discussions, facilitated by the academics and local residents, will enable attendees to share their memories, knowledge, and even photographs of past flooding events. By pooling our collective wisdom, we aim to enhance our shared understanding of flood risk and discover valuable insights to safeguard our future.

**Event:** Workshop on *Past, Present and Future Flood Risk on the River Chew*

**Date and Time:** **Saturday, 30 September 2023; 10:00 – 12:00 and again 14:00 – 16:00**

**Location:** Pensford Memorial Hall, 10 Publow Lane, Pensford, BS39 4HW

**Information:** [www.docuflood.uk](http://www.docuflood.uk)

**PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE**  
A dialogue on flood risk on the River Chew

Saturday 30 September 2023  
10:00-12:00 and again 14:00-16:00  
Pensford Memorial Hall, BS39 4HW

Programme: Welcome by the University, the 1968 flood on the River Chew, round table discussions with refreshments, archives from the Pensford Local History Group.

The University of Bath and the University of Greenwich in collaboration with the Pensford Local History Group.

[www.docuflood.uk](http://www.docuflood.uk)  
[docuflood@gmail.com](mailto:docuflood@gmail.com)  
[@docuflood](https://twitter.com/docuflood)

LEVERHULME TRUST

UNIVERSITY OF BATH

UNIVERSITY OF GREENWICH

The poster features a stylized landscape with a bridge, trees, and a church, set against a green and blue background.

## **CORONAVIRUS IN SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE**

*Alison Catlin writes:* Gloucestershire Archives is looking for photographs that depict lockdown in our local area (within South Glos and Gloucestershire), be it signs in shop windows, oddly deserted highstreets, unusual one-way systems, or anything that defined lockdown for you.

The material will be added to the archival collections at the Gloucestershire Heritage Hub, but will also be used to create an image layer on [Know Your Place Gloucestershire](#), the publicly accessible digital mapping resource that layers historic maps of the county on top of one another. They can add digital images to their exact location on the map, and these form 'image layers', to which suitable photographs deposited with them will be added. All images will be credited to the photographer accordingly.

If you have any material you would like to contribute, would like to hear more about the project, or would like to take part in the project as a remote volunteer, please contact archivist Max Parkin at [max.parkin@gloucestershire.gov.uk](mailto:max.parkin@gloucestershire.gov.uk).

Alison Catlin, Museums and Heritage Officer, South Gloucestershire Council, 01454 865835 mornings Tuesday – Friday.

## **HAZEL ANARCHY RESEARCH PROJECT**

This University of Bristol archaeology research project involves investigations 'to assess the impact of the Anarchy Period [sc. 1135 to 1153] on rural populations through excavation and analysis of a twelfth-century building complex in the south Gloucestershire village of **Lower Hazel**.' Details are at <https://archaeology.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/hazel-anarchy-research-project/> from which the image RIGHT is taken. More under the following item, and under **BOOKS ETC NOTICED**, below.



## **SOUTH WEST ANARCHY RESEARCH PROJECT**

'SWARP aims to explore the heritage and aftermath of direct action, evidenced across a thousand-year span. The project focusses on four case studies that are linked with anarchy, direct action, social division and resistance in the South West. From The Anarchy period (1125AD-1153AD) site at **Hartygrove, Alveston**, the **Bristol Castle**, the **Royal Fort in Bristol** and the street art landscapes of **Stokes Croft**, SWARP is headed by Dr Konstantinos Trimmis and Dr Stuart Prior at the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Bristol and it is delivered in collaboration with Bristol Museum and Art Gallery and Thornbury Museum,' it says. Details at <https://swarp.org.uk/> .

## TOPOGRAPHICAL IMAGES: VIEWS OF ENGLAND AND WALES

Leicester University has digitised and made available online its collection of over 2,000 topographical prints and other images, mostly from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. An example is below. The digital images are all available free under a Creative Commons licence. 'Subjects in this useful resource include rural and landscapes, castles, churches, ruins, country houses, architecture, maps and building plans, as well as portraits, objects, depictions of historical events and more,' it says. An online exhibition at <https://elhleics.omeka.net/exhibits/show/an-introduction-to-views-of-en> gives an introduction to the collection. Many of the images relate to Gloucestershire (under which 117 images of Bristol are included), fewer of Somerset (including Bath). View at <https://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/digital/collection/p16445coll16> : click on Browse, tick the box for Views of England and Wales, then under Location select from the list the area you



are interested in. Other filters eg Engraver can be applied.

## CREWS HOLE: PLANNING APPLICATION AND SALE OF WOODLAND

*Susan Acton-Campbell from Friends of Troopers Hill draws attention to*

(1) a planning application for development of land south of Hencliffe Way and east of Castle Farm Road, **Hanham**: <https://developments.southglos.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=map&keyVal=RSYJVVOKK5R00> . The application is for outline permission for 'the demolition of 1 dwelling and the erection of up to 149 dwellings, provision of public open space, landscaping and planting, drainage and ancillary works with all matters reserved except for means of site access;'

(2) a sale by online auction on **13 September 2023** of 5 acres of woodland that includes the remnants of a garden to which ALHA Trustee Mike Hooper led an ALHA summer walk in

2016: <https://www.hollismorgan.co.uk/property-details/32472270/bristol-city/bristol/crews-hole-road>

A charity Protect Earth UK <https://www.facebook.com/protectearthuk/> is appealing for crowdfunding to enable it to buy the woodland for the long-term benefit of the community, wildlife and the climate: <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/save-blackswarth-road-wood-crews-hole?fbclid=IwAR2SDQDth4L8M1rjHMK5X6WBEkydyWOAAEZ4cOtsDzwbduMjYkEDRkAxyz-g> SA-C's note to Friends of Troopers Hill members about the woodland for sale can be read at <https://mailchi.mp/dc57b0481db0/save-blackswarth-rd-wood>.

Concerns about the proposals have been expressed by ALHA member **Barton Hill History Group**:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2825746037530482/posts/6210948612343524/>; in the *Bristol Post* at

[https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/concern-five-acre-woodland-overlooking-8635837?fbclid=IwAR2DXcMpl6vNdou4dA\\_z8ZiHToM6EpEP9N-Jj6Zz2d5lJ9kdokiCGKuHnxc](https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/concern-five-acre-woodland-overlooking-8635837?fbclid=IwAR2DXcMpl6vNdou4dA_z8ZiHToM6EpEP9N-Jj6Zz2d5lJ9kdokiCGKuHnxc);

and by Historic England about the nearby 18th century bath house being destroyed:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1202182?section=official-list-entr&fbclid=IwAR2ylyR2cx9Oot7PRoVzCA Siv5yAHM3qjjafzR4lGRh-xXNC6HmX1a5ofcl>

## **B&AFHS FAMILY AND LOCAL HISTORY FAIR**

*Geoff Gardiner writes:* **Saturday 23 September 2023, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. – FREE ENTRY**

This is an opportunity for anyone interested in family or local history to attend a free event to be held at the **British Aerospace Welfare Association (BAWA) Leisure Centre on Southmead Road, Filton**. This is being organised and hosted by the **Bristol & Avon Family History Society (BAFHS)** and is the first local event of its type since the Covid pandemic interrupted such activities three years ago.

The exhibitors will include a number of regional family history societies who will be able to offer you advice on research into your ancestors, with tips on how to crack those brick walls to unlock the stories behind those old family rumours and mysteries. Also in attendance will be local Record Offices (Archives) and national organisations.

A number of local history groups will be attending to reveal the work they have done on their districts and communities and to give tips on how to research and record the history of your own areas.

There will also be commercial exhibitors selling genealogical software and data CDs, old maps, new and second-hand books, old postcards and archival-quality storage materials.

There will be a live talk on historic maps and how to find and use them, an absolute must for anyone interested in the history of places and people.

Light refreshments will be available.

For more information and details please see the website [www.bafhs.org.uk](http://www.bafhs.org.uk), Facebook page [facebook.com/bristolandavonfhs](https://facebook.com/bristolandavonfhs) or email contact [fhfair@onmicrosoft.com](mailto:fhfair@onmicrosoft.com).



## CLEVELAND BATHS, BATH

Cleveland Baths, Bath's Georgian lido, built in 1815, have been restored with a national raffle grant and a lot of hard work by volunteers. The baths, now called Cleveland Pools, are due to reopen **10 September 2023**. More essential information, including access, booking and charges, at <https://www.clevelandpools.org.uk/> , from which the image below is taken.



Media reports at <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2023/aug/23/cleveland-pools-bath-lido-reopens-to-public> ; and <https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2023-08-23/uk-oldest-lido-to-reopen-for-public-swimming-next-month>

## BRISTOL CASTLE

The area of the **Bristol** castle precinct scheduled as an ancient monument has been extended: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1006987?section=official-list-entry> .

## REVIEWS

By Dr Jonathan Harlow

***'Cannon played from the Great Fort'; Sieges in the Severn Valley during the English Civil War*** by Richard Israel, Helion & Co, *Century of the Soldier 1618-1721* series no.64, 2021, 165 pp, pb, fully illustrated, £25.

This is a comprehensive study of sieges from Gloucester in 1643 to Worcester in 1646 including the two sieges of **Bristol**: perhaps underestimating its strategic importance to the Royalists in 1645: not just money and munitions but also the first base for the Welsh and Irish recruits on whom Charles increasingly relied.

The author gives full attention to the military techniques – siegeworks, mining, gunnery and storming; perhaps too little to the cultural background. To storm a city when it refused to surrender conventionally meant allowing the successful troops to sack and pillage. But in England the generals were not the professionals of the 30 Years War and so were far more sensitive to the concerns of the townsfolk, more inclined to surrender early, as happened in both Bristol sieges.

A pricey book for its size, but worth it if you want a detailed discussion and comparison of the military factors.

#### ***The Regional Historian 4*** (2023), UWE Regional History Centre

The region covered is a wide South-West, but nine of the ten articles here are **Bristol**-related. Bananas, Banks, Bars, Baths [*more below: Ed.*], Broadmead and Drains are all addressed, with the careers of some enterprising fellows including ‘a cunning man’ (in effect, witch doctor) who flourished – despite all legal efforts to suppress him – in the early 19th century. An article I look forward to following up on the ground is by Professor Richard Coates on 11 **Bristol** pub names. And there is an engaging account of the lively community local history project in **Downend**. 75 A4 pages, fully illustrated and very worthwhile: why not join the Regional History Centre (£12) and make sure of the next (and on-line access to the previous issues)?

#### ***Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society Transactions 140*** (2022)

At over 350 pages, this is one stout issue. Eight of the articles are archaeological, and of these five are from Cotswold Archaeology (and a substantial volume on *The Archaeology of the South Wales Gas Pipeline* well reviewed here), so well done them! Six deal with Roman occupation, with earlier or later development. I am not an archaeologist but it looks as though none transforms, though all add to, our understanding of the historic area. There is the usual delay in publication: the archaeological work involved was done from 2015 to 2020, average 2017 or six years before circulation here. However there is the usual survey of recent archaeological work.

On the non-archaeological side, President Michael Hare accounts for the survival of 17th-century chancel fittings at St Mary’s, Deerhurst. Clive Burgess re-examines the life and benefactions of William Cannynge with Richard Whittington as comparison; omitting however the most salient difference – Cannynge had no cat. It is very good to see Joe Bettey still at work: here on the cultivation of teasels in **South Gloucestershire**, used to raise the nap on cloth right through to the 19th century. And John Stevens discusses the narrow Liberal electoral victory in **Bristol** South in 1910: a gentlemanly contest turning more on local issues and personalities than on the national agenda.

There are substantial reviews, including one by Joe Bettey on John Bryant’s *Excavations at Minster House, Bristol, 1992* (see Newsletter 171); and one on Peter Malpass’s *Housing the People in Victorian Bristol* (Newsletter 170). Also of our area is Richard Israel’s *Cannon Played from the Great Fort: Sieges in the Severn Valley in the English*

*Civil War* (Helion & Co. 2021); and *Bath & Wells Ordinations 1465-1526* edited by Robert Dunning for the Somerset Record Society. No less than three of our own ALHA “excellent series of booklets” are favourably reviewed – nos 33-35; and also *The Forest of Dean Miners’ Riot of 1831* by Chris Fisher, a Bristol Radical History booklet – I always like to see a book fair where their scarlet sits near to our gold covers.

The obituaries include a handsome tribute to Dr Martin Crossley Evans.

***The Local Historian* 53.3** (July 2023) contains only one article relating to the ALHA region; ‘The gentry of Somerset and the Dissolution of the monasteries’ by Simon Lambe. The author demonstrates that the local gentry were not typically able to acquire ex-monastic land on particularly favourable terms – that was for courtiers and politicians at the centre – but often had the benefit of first-hand knowledge of the lands in question, often through previous leasings or administrative arrangements, so they knew what the land was worth. A curious claim is often repeated: that apart from making good investments, the local gentry were driven by a determination ‘to block the progress of outsiders within the county’. This claim is made several times and is included as a key factor in the conclusion. Yet there seemed to be no evidence for it. The only reference is to an article dealing with the Tudor *nobility* on a national basis. What one wants is any examples of Somerset gentry buying land at a disadvantageous price in order to outbid some ‘outsider’; but examples there are none. One tends to assume that gentry were more interested in acquiring land that neighboured their own than in remoter holdings; and it would have been interesting to see how many of the acquisitions here fitted this pattern.

### **BOOKS ETC NOTICED**

Simon Lambe, ‘The gentry of Somerset and the dissolution of the monasteries,’ *The Local Historian* vol 53 no 3, July 2023, 250-261, reviewed above by Dr Jonathan Harlow. Mentions the St Loes of Sutton Court (**Stowey Sutton**); **Keynsham**, **Woodspring**, and **Bath** abbeys; and **Locking**.

Stuart Prior, ‘Hartygrove Brake, South Gloucestershire,’ 192 *British Archaeology* September/October 2023, 12-13. Excavations at **Lower Hazel** near **Alveston** have unearthed traces of ‘a high-status Norman structure; potentially a 12th century hunting lodge with an earlier Saxo-Norman phase beneath,’ it says. Some of the work has been done by a community group from **Thornbury & District Museum**.

Andrew Swift, ‘A city of ferries,’ 225 *The Bristol Magazine* August 2023, 36-37. Includes some historic photographs including a simple but evocative one of the **Pill** to **Shirehampton** ferry. More about ferries in Michael Manson’s *Bristol miscellany volume 2*, Bristol Books and Tangent books 2022, 31-133.

*Digging for Britain*, series 9, episode 5 was repeated from 2021 on 21 August 2023 on BBC4. One of the sites visited was said to be near **Charterhouse**, where Oxford Archaeology excavated before the laying of lines by The National Grid for when Hinkley Point C is powered up and connected. The main feature was a previously unknown and comparatively affluent britanno-roman settlement, with a metre and a half of stratification from the iron age to late saxon times. The settlement and road were dated to the reign of Constantine, who became emperor in 306. The programme is available on the BBC iplayer **until 18 September 2023**. More at <https://www.nationalgrid.com/stories/grid-at-work-stories/going-underground-archaeological-finds-somerset> , and at <https://www.somersetlive.co.uk/news/somerset-news/roman-remains-unearthed-somerset-revealed-6472881> , which locates the site as near **Winscombe**.

Peter Cullimore, 'Thomas Rennison and his grand pleasure bath: a maverick entrepreneur in Georgian Bristol', in UWE Regional History Centre's *The Regional Historian* 4 (2023) 2-11. About the history of Rennison's baths in **Montpelier, Bristol**, dating from 1765, remains of which are still visible behind the health centre. The article refers to other early swimming baths, including Cleveland pools, **Bath**, mentioned under EVENTS AND SOURCES above. More at <http://museums.bristol.gov.uk/narratives.php?irn=2732> and <https://www.montpelierconservationgroup.uk/d/Thomas-Rennison-and-his-Grand-Pleasure-Bath.pdf> .

## **RESPONSES**

### **Ritual**

A COMMENTARY piece in ALHA newsletter e-update 31 May 2023 titled **Constitutional ceremonial** provoked a response by John Stevens in Newsletter 175 titled **Ritual, the Human Condition and Local History**. *David Evans responds to that*: I feel I must reply to the comments by John Stevens in ALHA 175 concerning ritual. His main point is the protection of 'ancient' rituals.

The most informative work on ritual is that by Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger: *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), which demonstrates that many traditions are invention and that most are recent and entirely made up with no historic basis at all. The fancy dress party that was the coronation is such a tradition. If anyone wants to get involved then why not – just don't expect others to take it seriously!

Mr Stevens's extensive quotes from Burke are amusing. However, it is sadly rarely noted that his 'let things take their course attitude' effectively delayed the abolition of the slave trade by many years.

Mr Stevens also suggests that we need a head of state. While I accept that in the present development of civilization a case can be made for this, if only to reassure those who doubt Britain's greatness, however, the question to be asked is 'Why this type'? Allegiance to a particular culture has caused, and is causing, immeasurable misery to the world. While

morris dancing, the FA cup, Welsh bards and the kilt are mainly harmless, we need to choose our 'rituals' and 'traditions' carefully.

The change in ritual invention is not static, but to cliché it; it moves with the times. Pertinent to the current discussion is the change in Welsh symbolism. The gradual change from the subservient *ich dien*, 'I serve' but close to the Welsh for 'your man,' to the now almost universal dragon must reflect modern independent thinking.

I shall end with a quote from William Morris's *News from Nowhere* on the invented monarchy: 'Parliamentary commercial sham-kings', you get what you pay for!

## COMMENTARY

### **Thornbury canal**

In 1871 Cotteswold Naturalists' Field Club (which still exists, explores, observes, investigates and publishes) held a meeting at **Thornbury**. The visit included a look (only a look: they had been refused entry) at Thornbury 'castle,' built by the Duke of Buckingham. The guide, a Mr Niblett, noted that 'He [the duke] also contemplated bringing a canal from the Severn to **Thornbury**, a distance of between 2 and 3 miles, traces of which may be seen in the Pithay Field, also between the present Gas Works and the Union Workhouse, where it has a width of 42 feet at bottom, and 60 feet at top, cut through very hard magnesium conglomerate.' In an article in *B&AAS Journal* 29 (2023) ALHA individual member David Evans plots the route the canal would have taken. DE suggests that Buckingham had the canal dug in order to facilitate access from his **Thornbury** house to Newport castle, of which he was constable.

The source of Mr Niblett's comment about Buckingham's intentions must have been a passage in John Leland's *Itinerary*. Leland's tours of Britain took him to Gloucestershire in 1544. At **Thornbury**, he wrote, 'There cummith an Armllet of Severne ebbynge and flowing into this Parke. Duke Edward had Thowght to have trenchyd there and to have browght it up to the Castle.'

DE's article proposes a route for the canal, or at any rate a route that Buckingham might have intended. DE maintains that Buckingham wanted to facilitate access from his house in Thornbury to Newport (real) castle, of which he was constable. Mr Niblett's observation in 1871 of the then visible traces of the canal show that it was at least started. That has been corroborated by a geophysical survey in 1992. That the canal was never cut throughout its intended length can be explained by Buckingham's death in 1521. Henry VIII had him executed on a charge of treason (which Thomas More reckoned was false), then posthumously attainted and his lands forfeited to the crown. Had the canal been cut, the local history of the area between **Oldbury and Thornbury**, and perhaps of **Thornbury** itself, might have been different.

### **Our area's first passenger tram?**

On Wednesday 17 May 1871, which would have been a working day for most people, Cotteswold Naturalists' Field Club had an excursion, as mentioned in the piece above, to **Thornbury**. The party assembled at Gloucester, and took the 10.10 train to **Yate**, 'where they were met by Mr Thurston of **Thornbury**, and Mr Macdonald, engineer of the new line

between **Yate** and **Thornbury**. Mr Macdonald had kindly fitted up a railway-truck with seats, and, with a team of horses, the party started on the new line.’ On the way to **Thornbury** the geologists marvelled at the rock formations exposed by cutting and tunnel, and had a look at **Iron Acton**.

Horses had been used to pull wagons on railways from the eighteenth century. Ralph Allen transported stone down a tramway from **Combe Down** to **Bath** until 1764. Nineteenth century examples included the Swansea to Mumbles railway (1804), tramways from pits at **Radstock** to the **Somersetshire Coal Canal** (from about 1798 to 1805); the Plymouth & Dartmoor railway (1823), the railway between Stockton and Darlington (1825), and that between Whitby and Pickering (1836). As with the dramway from **Coalpit Heath** to the Avon (opened 1830), described by David Hardwick at ALHA’s 2021 local history day at **Thornbury**, most of these railways were for hauling minerals such as coal, china clay and stone from mines and quarries.

So in 1871 horses pulling goods in wagons over rails was not new. Nor was a steam locomotive pulling passengers in carriages over rails: IKB’s **Bristol** to **Bath** line had been working for thirty years, and the 10.10 from Gloucester to Yate would have been steam-hauled. But was what amounted to a horse tram between **Yate** and **Thornbury** in 1871 an innovation?

The first public train to **Thornbury** ran from **Bristol** on 2 September 1872, so the CNFC field trip was more than a year before the **Thornbury** branch line opened to public passenger traffic.

It was to be another four years before horse trams appeared in **Bristol** on regular passenger routes. The first route was from Perry Road at the foot of St Michael’s Hill to Apsley Road on the borders of **Clifton** and **Redland**, and ran from August 1875. Later routes went from the centre to **Horfield** and to **Ashley Down**; from **Hotwells** via the centre to **Temple Meads**; from **Bristol Bridge** to **Ashton Gate** and to **Arnos Vale**; and from **Old Market** to **Redland**, to **Eastville** and to **Kingswood**. Electrification began in 1895, and horses were made redundant.

Use of a converted truck between **Yate** and **Thornbury** in 1871 looks like a one-off arrangement. Presumably horse power was cheaper than steam traction. Or had the steam locomotives not been delivered yet? Or had the line not yet been passed by the Board of Trade on the recommendation of HM Railways Inspectors? Or did the naturalists, geologists and antiquarians of CNFC put more trust in horses than in steam? Steam traction could hardly have been regarded as new-fangled or unreliable. Whatever the reason for using horses to pull the antiquarians, was this our area’s first horse-drawn passenger tram?

### **Legal history and local history**

The history of the law has several aspects. One is how the legal system of a nation developed and changed: things like the courts, their hierarchy, their jurisdictions and powers, and the relations between courts and parliament. Another aspect is how legal procedures developed and changed: some procedures are to do with court processes, others to do with transactions between people. A third aspect is the history of substantive laws: how legal rules (as distinct from procedures) about crime, the family, property, voting, selling things

and so on have changed, whether as a result of changes in society, Acts of parliament, or judges' decisions.

Legal history helps us understand the past, national or local, in two main ways. First, the law at any given time is part of the context in which events occur and humans do things. The law may influence or control people; it may facilitate what they want to do, or may stop them from doing it. Second, much of the information we have about the past comes from documents, and many of those documents are legal in the sense that they were written in connection with legal proceedings or other legally-related events, and people, especially lawyers and public authorities, have kept those documents safe.

The older these archival documents are, the more knowledge and skill the investigator needs in order to understand them: palaeography for the handwriting, Latin for the language, and so on. But it also helps to know what sort of legal document it is. In the case of sale of land, for example, is the document a feoffment, a grant, a fine, a recovery, a bargain and sale, a conveyance or a transfer? In the case of a will, does it have effect immediately, or is some other document needed to bring about the testator's intentions? Is what looks like a conveyance actually a mortgage? Knowledge of some legal history may help answer questions of that sort.

Most legal history is written about changes in the law across the nation as a whole. The very phrase 'common law' denotes the laws that applied, and apply, to everyone in all places in England and Wales. But legal history ought to interest local history people, for several reasons:

1. What happened in a particular place will have happened, as mentioned above, in the context of what the law was at that time. We will have a better understanding of what happened in **Bristol** in 1131 or 1831 if we have information about the legal contexts.
2. Although most Acts of parliament apply to the whole nation, parliament also passes local Acts that apply only to a particular place. Some of these are private Acts promoted by individuals or businesses, such as canal, turnpike and railway companies; most have been promoted by local authorities, usually to extend their powers, to deal with a particular local problem, or to make possible the provision of local infrastructure. **Bath** and **Bristol** corporations in particular promoted their own local legislation, consolidated so far as still relevant in one local Act by Avon County Council in 1982. Sometimes a local authority has promoted a local Act to deal with a local problem, and the legal provisions have worked well enough for central government to copy or adapt the local provisions into general Acts of parliament applying to the whole country.
3. Although the common law applied and applies throughout the nation, the courts have taken account of local customs. This was particularly important in medieval and early modern times, and in relation to land and the manorial system. Some trades and businesses also had local customs. Courts would recognise and give effect to these customs, even if they were at variance with the common law. Such anomalies

are now rare, but the further back we investigate, the more important local customs are.

4. Borough charters, local Acts and general legislation have empowered local authorities and some other public bodies from improvement commissioners to river boards to make byelaws, which applied only in that authority's area. In some cases, as with local Acts of parliament, central government has copied or adapted the local byelaws into general legislation nation-wide.

### **The accidental**

Beliefs that history is fore-ordained go back a long way. Ancient civilisations believed in things like the fates, the wheel of fortune, the influence of stars, and the will of gods. Of modern historians, only Karl Marx – if he is properly described as historian rather than theoriser – seems to have contended that changes in history are inevitable. Even if there is much to be said for some of his ideas, on the question of inevitability events have proved him and his followers wrong. More widely held by historians is the view that much of what happens is contingent or accidental. Examples cited include Cleopatra's nose, Isaac Newton's apple, Alexander Fleming's petri dish, and Otto Stern's cigar smoke.

Nowadays most historians consider that any set of circumstances has a number of possible future outcomes, and that whilst chance may contribute to any of them, it is not sensible to attribute any outcome to pure accident alone.

Another view is that we misuse the word 'accidental.' If by 'accidental' we mean 'by chance,' the word is usually misapplied, because most things do not happen by chance. Road accidents, accidents at work, and accidental pregnancies are misnomers. They may be the result of carelessness, ignorance, lack of foresight, mechanical failure, illness, unsafe systems or practices, stupidity, or even deliberate act.

We often ascribe to chance something we have not foreseen or expected. 'God blew with his winds and they were scattered' may have been a handy and powerful religious or nation-building slogan, but the foundering of the armada might more reasonably be attributed to over-confidence, excessive ambition, and ignorance of British coastal weather patterns. The romans would probably have annexed Egypt, whether by marriage or armed force, whatever the sexual allure of its ruler. Newton's insights into gravity were the result of observation, enquiry and calculation: the apple he noticed was merely doing what apples do and have done ever since they evolved, unless picked first. Fleming's discovery was the result of observation: what he observed was the result of slack laboratory practice, and was a matter of chance only in the sense that it was unintended. Similarly with Stern: he could have got the result he was looking for if he had used a different chemical, or if he had realised that his silver would be precipitated in such small quantities as to be virtually invisible without further chemical reaction to show it up.

The examples above come from national or international history, though all nationally or internationally significant events must be local in the sense that they happen in a locality, a place. In the past of our area it is difficult to think of a historically significant change that



came about by chance or accident. The only one that springs to mind is the myth of Bladud and his itchy pigs at **Bath**, but even if that story were true, it was a case not of accident but of his observing something that he had not expected.

Most of the historically significant changes in our area – the roman, saxon and norman invasions, the anarchy of king Stephen, the wars of the roses, the reformation, the English civil war, the growth of international trade, the revolutions in agriculture, manufacturing, religion, democracy, transport and communications, the two world wars and the post-1945 cultural, social and political changes – have all been the result of deliberate human acts. That is not to say that the outcomes could not have turned out differently. But to attribute any of them to chance or accident or contingency seems absurd.

### **Museum stocktaking**

*Derek O writes:* Newspaper reports that items have gone missing, presumed stolen, from the British Museum are astonishing. Every January **Bristol Archives** closes for a week for stocktaking, a check on the record office's holdings. I believe this is common practice for archive repositories. Every year **Bristol** zoo used to conduct a census of its animals. The practice seems basic elementary common sense, and if museums do not do the same, they ought to adopt it.

## **QUOTE**

'Still, I wonder if we shall ever be put into songs or tales. We're in one, of course, but I mean: put into words, you know, told by the fireside, or read out of a great big book with red and black letters, years and years afterwards.'

Samwise, character in JRR Tolkien, *The two towers* (George Allen & Unwin 1954).

## **CAN YOU HELP?**

### **CORONAVIRUS IN SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE**

Gloucestershire Heritage Hub asks for material relating to the coronavirus: please see under **EVENTS AND SOURCES** above.

### **CHEW VALLEY FLOODS**

Researchers at University of Greenwich and University of **Bath** appeal for information about the 1968 and other floods: please see under **EVENTS AND SOURCES** above.

### **BELLUTON HOUSE, PUBLLOW AND HIGHFIELD HOUSE, CHEW MAGNA**

Chris James is a 3 x great grandson of Stephen James, a brewer from **Bristol**, who bought Highfield House in **Chew Magna** about 1865. He would be grateful for information about the history of that house, and also of Belluton House in **Publrow**, occupied by Stephen James's

son Alfred. Mr James is not sure whether Belluton House is the same as Belluton Grange. Family names include James and Bush from **Stanton Drew** and **Chew Magna**, and Mr James would be grateful for help in tracing those family connections. Please reply to [christoph.james@sky.com](mailto:christoph.james@sky.com) .

## **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.***

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.