

ALHA



AVON LOCAL HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY

Registered charity 270930

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Material for printed Newsletter 177 by 12 noon 12 December 2023 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 secretary, 5 Parrys Grove, Bristol BS9 1TT

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

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

Facebook:

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



Yate British School [Image: Yate & District Heritage Centre]

The British School at **Yate** was founded by Handel Cossham, the subject of the local history day being organised jointly by ALHA and Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society **Saturday 13 April 2024** at Turnberries community centre, **Thornbury**.

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ALHA NEWS

NEW ALHA BOOKLET: RAILS IN THE AVON GORGE

ALHA booklet no.40, *Rails in the Avon gorge*, by Professor Richard Coates, is with the printers and should be published soon.

PUBLICATIONS TEAM

ALHA trustee Jennifer Muller has joined the publications team, which now consists of Dr Jonathan Harlow (editor), Jane Bradley, Dinah Moore, Jennifer Muller and the treasurer.

FACEBOOK TEAM - RUBY KEENAN

Welcome to new volunteer Ruby Keenan. *Veronica Bowerman writes*: The Facebook team now has a new volunteer Ruby Keenan, a third-year Anthropology student at Bristol University. Some of you may have already met her at the recent ALHA annual general meeting held in Clifton Cathedral. Ruby has already produced several articles for the Facebook page which have exceeded the normal number of visits. Her recent piece on the **Somerset Coal Canal** attracted 773 visits.

ALHA FINANCIAL REVIEW

At its December meeting ALHA's trustees will be asked to review the charity's finances and adopt a plan for the next few years. Briefly, the charity has incurred losses in several consecutive years, but has investment which can be sold to provide cash for a few years, but not indefinitely.

LINKS WITH UNIVERSITIES

Trustee Veronica Bowerman is leading efforts to restore links with University of the West of England and University of Bristol.

GROUPS AND SOCIETIES

FRIENDS OF KINGSWOOD HERITAGE MUSEUM



Welcome to new ALHA member the **Friends of Kingswood Heritage Museum**. The group has 250 members, which makes it one of ALHA's larger groups and society members. Contact is Mrs Linda Payne, 106 Birkdale, Warmley BS30 8GH, 0117 967 8606, lindapayne4@yahoo.co.uk. [Image Kingswood Heritage Museum].

WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION, AVON BRANCH

Keith Nickless says that the Avon branch of the **Western Front Association**, which used to meet in the Royal British Club in **Kingswood**, has ceased. A branch in Cheltenham and Gloucester, which meets in the Ed Shed in Gloucester, continues.

EVENTS AND SOURCES

HANDEL COSSHAM CONFERENCE / LOCAL HISTORY DAY 2024

Planning continues for the conference-cum-local history day being organised jointly between ALHA and ALHA member **Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society**. The date is **Saturday 13 April 2024**, and the venue is Turnberries' community centre, **Thornbury**, the birthplace of Handel Cossham (the town, that is). Details of speakers and topics, and booking forms, will appear with the end of December Newsletter.

B&AFHS LEICESTER VISIT

Geoff Gardiner writes: **Bristol & Avon Family History Society** has announced a revised date for its coach trip to Leicester. After a couple of cancellations during the Covid period, it will now take place on Thursday 11 April 2024.

The trip will visit Bosworth Field and, in Leicester, the Richard III Centre Exhibition and the Cathedral. There will be options to visit any or all of these locations. Depending on what individual people wish to view, it may be possible to make party discount booking for individual locations. 2024 entry prices have not been confirmed at time of writing this notice.

Coach seat (only) will be between £22 and £27 per person depending on take-up of seats. Seats must be reserved. The pick-up point will be **BAWA, Southmead Road, Bristol** at 7.30am. Free car parking at BAWA. Pick up at **Chipping Sodbury** may be possible.

For more details and to make a reservation please contact Patricia Holmes at outings@bafhs.org.uk

BRISTOL ARCHIVES SEARCHROOM – SATURDAYS 2024

ALHA understands that from 2024 **Bristol Archives'** searchroom will be open on the second Saturday in the month, not the first and second Saturdays as at present.

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 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.

BOOKS AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS NOTICED

Tim Bryan, *Iron, stone and steam: Brunel's railway empire*, Amberley 2023, hb 288pp, ISBN: 978-1398112698, £22.99 at <https://shop.ssgreatbritain.org/products/iron-stone-and->

[steam? ga=2.215934103.1622172069.1699368152-2043554039.1699368152](https://www.amberley-books.com/iron-stone-and-steam.html) ; £20.69
online from <https://www.amberley-books.com/iron-stone-and-steam.html>

Andrew Swift, 'Sarah Guppy, an unstoppable force', 228 *The Bristol Magazine* November 2023, 62-63. Short article on the **Bristol Queen Square, Arnos Vale** and **Clifton** businesswoman, inventor and author, who had interests in engineering, agriculture and science. Her memorial in the churchyard of the former St Andrew's, **Clifton**, was restored earlier this year.

Julie Johns, 'Charles Bayer & Co., Corset Factory, **Oldland Common**, Bristol (1895-1929 approx.)' at <https://www.bittonhistory.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/C-Bayer-Corset-Factory.pdf> .

Rebecca Tropp, 'The interior topography of the picturesque: level changes and stepped floors in James Wyatt's **Dodington** Park and Ashridge House,' 66 *Architectural History* (2023) 155-185.

Bristol Books offers *Keysham & Saltford 1945-2000* at half price, £7.50:
https://www.bristolbooks.org/shop/keynsham-amp-saltford-1945-2020?ss_source=sscampaigns&ss_campaign_id=655b3a85d70b7378e38d162c&ss_email_id=6560582349195c320b1ae260&ss_campaign_name=Black+Friday+book+offers&ss_campaign_sent_date=2023-11-24T08%3A01%3A36Z

The Harptreenian no.24, September 2023. Articles include an exploration by Colin Budge of village pounds and related surnames; an account by Sue Emmett of opposition by local nonconformists to school board rates; a long summary by Pip Osborne of the excavations at **Chewton Mendip** minster by **Community Archaeology on the Mendip Plateau**, who received an ALHA grant towards scientific analysis of some of the finds; and reminiscences by Beulah Branch of her **East Harptree** childhood. Gill Hogarth adds to her previous piece on the family of William fitz John, who held **Harptree** and its castle in the twelfth century. Nick Roberts reports the find of a fourteenth century seal mould, probably from Bruern abbey in Oxfordshire, though **St Augustine's Bristol** cannot be ruled out.

Bristol & Avon Family History Society *Journal* no.134 (December 2023), the last one edited by Jane Bambury, who is standing down after 6 years as editor. Articles include one on a Cooksey family in **Ashton, Bristol**; Edward Byam's transcripts of the registers of **St Peter's, Bristol**, destroyed in WW2; JB's own on Victorian funeral practices, with lurid details; and on Eames & Cox, watchmakers in **Bath**.

Oliver Taylor, *Bath abbey's monuments: an illustrated history*, The History Press 2023, pb RRP £22, ISBN 978 0 750 993 739; <https://www.thehistorypress.co.uk/publication/bath-abbey-monuments/9780750993739/>; £19.45 from Hive.

Key Publishing, Aviation industry series vol.5, *Bristol 1910-59*. 160pp. A reprint from *Aeroplane* magazine's 'Bristol company profile 1910-1959'. From George White to the Concord prototype. Digital copy also available for £3.99 at <https://pocketmags.com/aeroplane-company-profile-magazine/company-profile-1910-1959-bristol>

Mike Jempson, '*No Cure, no Pay, Boarding excepted*': '*Mason's Madhouses*' in old Fishponds, Bristol Radical History Group 2023, ISBN: 978-1-911522-70-6, pb, 132pp, £11 including package and UK postage. An account of the asylum at **Oldbury Court** run by Joseph Mason and later by his relations Sarah Mason, John Cox, and George Gwinnett Bompas. Details of the 1848 inquiry from Bristol Archives 39801/F/16. <https://www.brh.org.uk/site/pamphleteer/no-cure-no-pay-boarding-excepted/>

RESPONSES

RAILWAY HOTELS – AVONMOUTH

A piece in *Newsletter* 176 about railway hotels mentioned **Bristol's Grosvenor at Temple Meads**, the *Railway* in **Old Market** and IKB's hotel in College Street, and asked whether our area had any more. *Chris F draws attention to the Avonmouth Hotel*, opened in 1865 by the terminus of the Bristol Port and Pier Railway, which ran from **Hotwells to Avonmouth** and opened in March 1865. [Image from *Know Your Place*]. The hotel closed in 1926, the year the Portway opened, and its site was subsumed into the



Avonmouth dock complex. That the *Avonmouth Hotel* lasted for over 60 years suggests that there was demand for hotel accommodation there, as does the existence of other hotels in **Avonmouth**, including the *Miles Arms* and the large and imposing *Royal Hotel*, though neither seems to have had any direct connection with the railway. It would be interesting to know what the railway hotel proprietors' business plans were. Did they envisage people having business at the docks needing somewhere to stay overnight, and in **Avonmouth** rather than **Bristol**? Or where the proprietors expecting passenger customers who, because **Avonmouth** did not develop as a passenger port, did not appear?

COMMENTARY

Women landowners

Most large landowners (in the sense of owners of large estates or other extensive tracts of land) have been men. That is not surprising: in medieval times land ownership or its near equivalent went with military service obligations; after the feudal system dissolved, family estates were entailed on eldest sons; unless specially protected, heiresses lost control of their land when they married; many widows who inherited land married again. There were exceptions. For example, in nineteenth century Cheltenham a Miss Monson owned and dealt in properties, including what later became the town's bus station. What about women of property in our area?

One woman landowner was Laura Pulteney, who owned the **Bathwick** estate. Henrietta Laura Johnstone, born 1766, was the only child of a William Johnstone who took his wife's maiden surname Pulteney. Angelica Kauffmann's portrait of Laura as a teenager is one of the most attractive exhibits in the Holburne Museum in **Bath** [*Image, Holburne Museum, <http://collections.holburne.org/object-1996-5>*]. Johnstone inherited vast estates, including slave-worked plantations in Tobago and Dominica. He developed the area east of **Bath's** city centre. Laura's mother died in 1782 and left substantial properties to Laura. At the age of 26 Laura was created baroness of Bath, and countess of Bath in 1803. It is not clear why, though she will not have been the only or the last woman to have been given a peerage for no apparent reason. When her father died in 1805 she inherited his remaining interests in property in England, Scotland, America and the Caribbean. She had a reputation as a shrewd and competent businesswoman, especially where landed property was concerned. She must have had plenty of practice. She died in 1807, aged 41 and childless. She was buried in Westminster abbey.



Laura managed and further developed the **Bathwick** estate that her father had begun. She has left us a visually elegant and architecturally pleasant part of **Bath**. Laura Place and Henrietta Gardens commemorate her. But it is probably the portrait of her picking flowers (a touch of the symbolicals?) by which she is most remembered.

Frances Braham was the daughter of an opera singer who performed in London and **Bath**. Born in 1821, she married, at the age of 18, John Waldegrave. He lasted only a year. She promptly married his brother George Waldegrave, who became the seventh earl. When he died in 1846, Frances, now countess Waldegrave, inherited the family properties in Essex, London (including Strawberry Hill, Twickenham) and Somerset, including the family seat at **Chewton Mendip** and the lordships of manors at **Radstock**. That gave her coal mining rights, which she used some aggressive coal agents to exploit. Frances Waldegrave had two ambitions: one was to be a society hostess and to host soirees, dinners, parties and receptions at which the rich, the powerful, the famous and the well-connected (and the would-be rich, powerful, famous and well-connected) could network and show off, and through which she could pull political strings. [Image, Strawberry Hill House, <https://www.strawberryhillhouse.org.uk/lady-waldegrave-an-independent-women/> [sic]. Her other ambition was to restore Strawberry Hill. That neogothic extravaganza had been built for Horace Walpole, the grandfather of John Waldegrave, who had let it fall into ruin. Both those ambitions needed money, hence FW's squeezing every penny out of her coal interests. She helped shape the **Radstock** area and its subsequent history, and much of her legacy there is still visible today. She went through two more husbands before dying in 1879, childless, like Laura Pulteney.



Networks

Some history writers focus on powerful or influential individuals – kings, generals, dictators, business titans, religious leaders, megalomaniacs – the ‘great men’ school of history. Others look at ‘history from below:’ the experiences of ordinary people. Both those sorts of history tend to focus on individuals. They narrate and explain events and changes in terms of what those individuals did or experienced.

Another approach would be to look not just at people but at the links between them: their networks. Networks are of various sorts. Physical networks include roads, railways, canals, pipelines, and gas, electricity and telegraph systems. Some communications and broadcasting networks involve prominent hardware but are now mainly electromagnetic. Less tangible are trade and distribution networks: shifting milk from cow to consumer involves networks of many people, some of whose connections with milk are indirect, even remote.

Almost every human activity has involved networks. Medieval kings depended on feudal structures; modern leaders on constitutional or extra-constitutional networks. Manufacturers depend on supply chains and subcontractors. Organised criminals and

politicians operate through networks. Building a house, car or ship requires hundreds of people doing different things in a networked and sometimes co-ordinated way. Shops employ staff, use business services, and depend on supply chains. Institutions are complex organisations of networks. Even the most individualistic sole trader depends on links with a host of other people, as did those in late antiquity who felt that squatting on a pole or column was an appropriate expression of religious faith: presumably they relied on other people relaying them food, water and seeing to other necessities. Most organisations are networks, and may have links with other organisations. On its website ALHA describes itself as a network. A local group or society is a network on a smaller scale.



In most cultures and at most times the obvious and basic network has been and is the family. Families are powerful networks because of the strength of the emotional and economic ties they generate. In England family networks have been important in descent of the monarchy, inheritance of the ownership of land and other property, politics, and business, which some families seem to have had difficulty distinguishing.

Few historians have given networks the attention they deserve. One who did pay attention was Ronald Syme, whose *The roman revolution* (Oxford University Press 1939) examined how the ancient roman constitution changed from republic to dictatorship, from Julius Caesar to Octavian/Augustus. RS looked at not only what the main protagonists did, but also at their families, who they were related to, what strategic marriages they entered into, whose children they adopted, and how they exploited and manipulated the networks they were part of.

A similar approach could be applied to local history. Obvious networks in our area include organisations such as **Bristol's** Society of Merchant Venturers and the Colston commemorative societies; political parties; churches and their denominational structures; trade and employers' associations; clubs and societies; freemasonry [*Image, The Provincial Grand Lodge of Bristol, <https://provinceofbristol.org.uk/the-building>*]; special interest pressure groups; trade unions. Business networks of various sorts have underpinned local aircraft and other manufacturing industries. People have belonged to more than one network. How those networks interconnected and how they were used is worth exploring. **Bristol** and **Bath** families in different businesses intermarried. Some networks have been somewhat exclusive. Is it true, for example, that seventeenth and eighteenth century quakers married into other quaker families and were mutually supportive of each others' businesses, and discouraged marriage to non-quakers? Did the same apply to families with publicised political allegiances? Or is there evidence that some individuals crossed the political and religious divides? William Wilberforce, for example, had no qualms about one

of his daughters marrying a Pinney, and resisted representations from family members who questioned whether that was altogether a good idea. Some family-business connections have been plotted. Examples include the family trees in Charles Henry Cave's *A history of banking in Bristol from 1750 to 1899*.

For the local historian investigation could have two stages: finding out what networks existed; and then working out how those networks, or use of them, influenced events and got us to where we are today. Family historians would be powerful allies in such investigations.

Wild nature and local history

Wild Isles was a series on BBC 2 in which David Attenborough looked at aspects of Britain's wildlife. The only reference to our area was a few seconds footage of the **Severn** estuary and mention of its large tidal range. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/p0f0t5dp/wild-isles>

Examination of the part the natural world has played in the pasts of different parts of our area could start with a definition of what we mean by nature. It could include phenomena such as sunlight and tides; climate and weather; landforms and geology, including both surface soils and what lies beneath; natural watercourses; flora and fauna. Some see humans as part of the fauna, but others, following ancient Hebrew mythology and Aristotle, draw a distinction between humans and the rest of nature.

One approach might write a history of a locality as an account of human effort to use and exploit nature, or to improve on it: agriculture and forestry, sailing ships, fishing, quarrying and mining are obvious examples. So are mills on watercourses, tidal bathing pools, reservoirs, cooling lagoons at power stations, windmills, brick making, and solar panels if you can get an appointment. Some mineral working has been extensive, with coal in south Gloucestershire from **Coalpit Heath** to **Kingswood** and from **Nailsea** to **Radstock** in north and northeast Somerset; others have been more localised, such as strontium salts around **Yate** and **Abbots Leigh**, and ochre at **Winford**, **Banwell** and **Wick**. Much exploitation of nature is complex and distant or indirect: broadcloth woven in **Redcliffe** and sold in **Bath** might have originated in grass near **Winscombe**, **Ubley** or **Hawkesbury**.

Another approach might see human activity not only as using or exploiting nature but as destroying or damaging it. A quarry scars a hillside, and removes whatever grew or lived on the original surface. Forestry cultivates trees, and cuts them down. Fossil fuels and stone for building or engineering works, once extracted, cannot be replaced. Commercial fishing destroys stocks. Converting land from its natural state into agriculture destroys wildlife and its habitats. Unless diverse, agriculture degrades soils. Waste of all kinds produces pollution of all sorts. One of the messages repeated by DA is that we have destroyed much of our natural environment, and that if our practices do not change there will be worse to come.

A different approach might see human effort not as using nature but as battling for survival against it, with the natural world seen not as neutral background or context, not as hosting and nurturing human life and activity, but as enemy. Sea and flood defences and land drainage are aimed at fending off the effects of nature. So is sunscreen. Public health

measures such as street cleansing, sewers, waste collection and water supply are treated as past and continuing attempts to ward off diseases. Housing and bus shelters protect us from natural elements. Much medical practice is directed at eliminating or reducing the effects of natural diseases of various sorts. Some of them have moved from wild animals to humans: coronavirus, according to one theory, among the most recent.

QUOTE

No text is guaranteed preservation, whatever the technology used to transmit it. Indeed, the paradox is that the more available literature is, the weaker our connection with it becomes. In 2023 anything can be read anywhere by anyone, via the internet, but if the signal drops or the power fails, all is lost. For half a millennium before the present generation, the printed text was indispensable. Mechanised printing, from Gutenberg onwards, made more books more accessible for more readers ever more cheaply. When a book succumbed to theft or fire, or was passed on to another reader, its contents vanished – until another copy turned up.

David Butterfield, 'Infinity in a reed,' reviewing Irene Vallejo, *Papyrus: the invention of books in the ancient world*, tr Charlotte Whittle, 2022.