

ALHA



AVON LOCAL HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY

Registered charity 270930

Newsletter 177

31 December 2023

**Material for printed Newsletter 178 by 12 noon
Thursday 21 March 2024 please:**

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

jonathan.harlow@uwe.ac.uk

Details of events to website manager
webmaster@ALHA.org.uk

Other news, comments and changes of contact
details to newsletter editor and membership
secretary, 5 Parrys Grove, Bristol BS9 1TT
wm.evans@btopenworld.com



*From the cover of ALHA booklet no.40, Rails in the
Avon Gorge, by Richard Coates*

ALHA NEWS

Committee business
Organising meetings
Health and safety
Speakers who don't turn up
ALHA finances
A social media policy?
An ALHA historic images calendar 2025?
ALHA booklet: Avon gorge railways
Handel Cossham local history day 2024
ALHA booklet – medieval friaries

GROUPS AND SOCIETIES

Speakers list 2024
Forming a new group – Kewstoke- (VB)
Oliver Dearden
Publications: print or digital?

SOURCES AND EVENTS

Handel Cossham local history day
Aerospace Bristol
Historic Buildings & Places journal
Get orf my land (DH)
Access to digital (JH)

REVIEWS (Edited by Dr J Harlow)
Shirehampton graveyard book

BOOKS ETC NOTICED

Bitton: Church Road or Court Road?

COMMENTARY

Underneath the words
Modern feudalism

QUOTE

Felipe Fernández-Armesto

CAN YOU HELP?

Somerset coal canal

The **EVENTS LIST** is on the ALHA website

ALHA NEWS

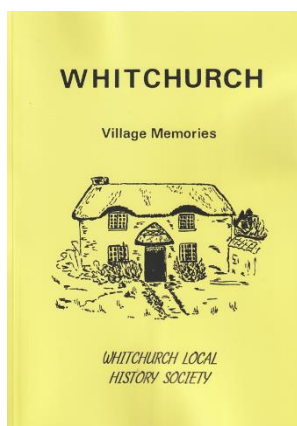
ALHA COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The committee has noted that more member groups and societies are resuming meetings in person as distinct from online: at the start of December 45 events were listed on the ALHA website.

The committee has discussed whether ALHA could usefully give advice for people organising an event for the first time; whether ALHA needs to adopt a health and safety policy (required by University of Bristol as a condition of students volunteering to help with ALHA activities); and how best to handle complaints from member groups and societies about booked speakers not turning up.

A review of the charity's finances was deferred to the next meeting. A further £1,000 worth of investment will be sold to maintain cashflow.

Preparations for the local history day on Handel Cossham, being organised jointly with ALHA member **Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society**, continues. More details and a booking form under EVENTS AND SOURCES, below.



The committee has expressed support for a project by ALHA member **Whitchurch Local History Society** to update and reprint two of its booklets long sold out. The amount of the grant will be decided once details of the finances of the project have become clearer.

The committee has reviewed ALHA's latest facebook statistics, much boosted by pieces by volunteer Ruby Keenan. Richard Stride's posts about his guided talks have attracted over 1,100 views.

Following guidance from the Charity Commission, and general concerns about aspects of social media, the committee has started a review of ALHA's use of social media, at present confined to facebook. One possible outcome is the adoption of a social media policy, which is not likely to affect ALHA's facebook usage, but is recommended by the Charity Commission.

As a possible fundraising measure, the committee has been discussing whether to commission a 2025 calendar of a dozen historic images of our area. Whether it would be worth doing would depend on how many copies could be sold. Could you please let us know whether you would buy an ALHA calendar were ALHA to commission one? And what is the maximum you would be prepared to pay for one?

NEW ALHA BOOKLET: **RAILS IN THE AVON GORGE**

ALHA's latest booklet, by Professor Richard Coates and edited by Dr Jonathan Harlow, about the railways that were and are in the **Avon gorge**, is now back from the printers. **A flyer for it, with a discount for early orders, accompanies this newsletter.**

NOT SO OLD ALHA BOOKLET: **THE MEDIEVAL FRIARIES, HOSPITAL AND CHAPELRIES OF BRISTOL**

Stocks of ALHA's first booklet, *The medieval friaries, hospital and chapelries of Bristol* by Joe Bettey, are running low. As this was ALHA's first booklet, it could become something of a collector's piece. Copies are available via the ALHA website, or from the treasurer, while stocks last.

GROUPS AND SOCIETIES

PRESENTERS DIRECTORY – FOR 2024

ALHA's committee aims to circulate to member groups and societies an updated directory of presenters every year. In order to keep costs down, the 2024 edition will be in the form of a supplement to the 2023 edition. Speakers, presenters and walks leaders listed in the 2023 edition will be asked over the next few weeks to update their entries. Members of ALHA are asked to suggest new names for inclusion. It is hoped to issue a 2024 supplement to groups and societies once they have paid their subscription for 2024-2025.

IDEAS FOR SETTING UP A LARGER LOCAL HISTORY GROUP REQUESTED

Veronica Bowerman writes: I live in a fairly rural part of North Somerset near **Weston super Mare**. A small village, **Kewstoke**, close to my home is hoping to continue and expand their local history group. There were two meetings in the village hall planned for the same day - 4 December at 2 pm and 7 pm. I was curious, so in spite of the torrential rain I decided to attend the afternoon meeting.

Nine people came along, two of whom, Sue Ryall and Tony Horry, had been, on their own, the **Kewstoke** Local History Group for the past twenty years. During these years some impressive archives had been set up to include some historical maps and photos. Many of the latter had been brought along by visitors to several exhibitions they held. Both Sue and Tony had now decided that it was time to step down, hence these meetings to see if other residents, with their help, would like to continue this invaluable work. A Facebook group known as **Kewstoke Local History Group** exists, so if you would like to know more about this area here is the link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/3626313347653590>.

It would be good if one or two of our member groups from ALHA or any of our individual members can offer some advice for this proposed new group. If you have any ideas please submit them to avonlocalhistoryandarachaeology@gmail.com so that Veronica Bowerman can forward them on.

OLIVER DEARDEN

ALHA's committee was saddened to hear of the death of Oliver Dearden OBE. [*Image, BBC*]. OD worked as a highway engineer with Avon County Council. After retiring he founded and was active in the return to **Patchway** of a Concorde, and helped found the museum that is now **Aerospace Bristol**. More at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-67626113>.



PAPER OR ONLINE?

ALHA's treasurer writes: If a local history group or society publishes anything – journals, books, newsletters and so on – one of the choices it will face is whether to continue to get paper copies printed or to issue copies online.

In favour of going online, the main arguments are:

- (1) cost: if editing and distributing are done by volunteers, so that the only cost is printing, going digital will save money;
- (2) speed: publication online is instant, whereas printing takes time. ALHA has to allow 5 days (longer at Christmas) for its newsletters and booklets to be printed.

(3) preference: some people would rather have a digital copy than one on paper. Younger people, it is said, are used to using digital media and prefer online.

Not everyone, however, prefers to go digital. Not all local history people are online; some would rather hold and leaf through a paper book than scroll on a screen; some people with disabilities may not be able to use online media; institutions, especially libraries, tend to want paper copies. Of ALHA member groups and societies, 11% opt to receive paper copies of newsletters and other communications; of individuals, the proportion is higher, 24%.

Whilst some ALHA trustees think that ALHA should issue newsletters and other communications online only, because that is cheaper, quicker, and the way the world is going, in or without a handcart, the majority consider that ALHA should try to be inclusive and should accommodate the wishes and needs of as many people as it can and can afford to, so that ALHA should continue to offer members their newsletters and other communications in both online and print formats. Hence ALHA's different subscription rates, depending on whether a member chooses to receive online or on paper through the post.

For some societies such an inclusive approach presents problems, especially if the society publishes a journal or book regularly. Suppose a society has 500 members and the only thing it does is to publish a printed journal. Suppose that costs £10,000 to print, of which £9,000 is the fixed cost of setting up and £1,000 is the variable cost of 500 copies at £2 each. If that total cost of £10,000 is divided between 500 members, the subscription will be £20 a year. Now suppose half the members opt for digital. If that does not require setting up, that will cost nothing, but the print cost will be £9,000 plus £500, total £9,500. Divide that by 250 and the cost per printed copy goes up to £38. Should the society

- Increase its subscription for all members to £38? But that might lead to members resigning. And would it be fair to demand a £38 sub from those whose online copies cost nothing?
- Leave the subscription at £20 for all members? That would mean that members as a whole would be overcharged £500: useful for the society's finances, especially if inflation looms, but not acceptable if the subscription is to be kept to the minimum.
- Reduce the subscription to £19? Probably not worth the hassle. Posting notice of the change to members and getting them to change their bank standing orders would eat up nearly all the £500.
- Alter the subscription rates to £1 for digital and £38 for paper? Fair, perhaps, but that would mean abandoning the principle that all members pay the same subscription.

That problem is likely to affect only the largest societies, and only those that publish. Large societies will have other activities, and within the society's finances there will be cross-subsidising, which will change from year to year. For a small society the sums involved may be too small to be worth bothering about.

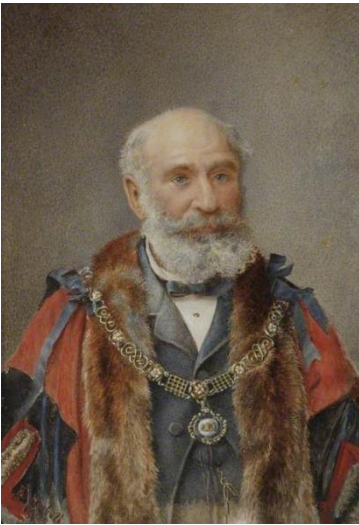
But the basic fact is that the more people opt for digital, the greater the unit cost of an item printed on paper is going to be, simply because the total cost is shared between a smaller number of copies and therefore a smaller number of subscribers.

One thing groups and societies contemplating offering digital might consider doing is to watch and learn from the experience of other societies that have gone, or are going, digital. For example, ALHA member **Bristol Record Society**, which reckons normally to publish one volume a year, charges individual members a basic subscription for which they receive a digital copy, and charges those who want a paper copy the actual cost of a paperback version. As BRS's latest accounts have not yet been published, it is

not possible to see how the sums add up and balance, but it seems a workable solution acceptable to members.

EVENTS AND SOURCES

HANDEL COSSHAM LOCAL HISTORY DAY 2024



ALHA member **Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society** and ALHA are organising a conference devoted to Handel Cossham, to mark the 200th anniversary of his birth. The event will be held on **Saturday 13 April 2024 at Turnberries community centre, Thornbury**, and the format will be similar to that of an ALHA local history day. **A booking form accompanies this newsletter.**

If you might be interested in helping in any capacity, please contact wm.evans@btopenworld.com or johnregstevens@outlook.com .

[Image, Victoria Art Gallery, Bath]

AEROSPACE BRISTOL

ALHA member **Aerospace Bristol** was recently featured in a BBC *Points West* segment appealing to the public for their special Concord(e) stories ahead of the 20th final flight anniversary. More at <https://aerospacebristol.org/news/2023/11/1/aerospace-bristol-featured-on-bbc-points-west> , which has a link to a piece about Colin Morris, test pilot: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-67270833> .

HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND PLACES JOURNAL

Historic Buildings and Places, formerly the Ancient Monuments Society, has digitised back numbers from 1953 of its *Journal*, at <https://hbap.pdfsrv.co.uk/> . There is a cumulative index in portable document format.

GET ORF MY LAND

Get Orf My Land. Farming around Yate from earliest times to the present day is an exhibition at **Yate & District Heritage Centre** from **13 January to 22 February 2024**. *David Hardill writes Get Orf My Land* charts the history of farming in the parish of **Yate** and surrounding areas since the early Victorian period. It has been a long time coming. **Yate Heritage Centre** regularly changes its local history displays, and since opening in 2000-2001, has tackled both dairy farming and farm animals, but not since 2011.

Since that time, the area has continued to change and expand. New housing developments to the north have encroached on farmland and for many **Yate** people farming seems more remote than ever. Although I am a relative newcomer and expat midlander I have seen the vestiges of our rural history go. Cooper's factory, the site of cow churns manufacture on Westerleigh Road is now under a housing estate.

Why cover farming?

Dairy farming is a distant memory for older residents. BSE and foot and mouth have diminished local dairy farming, although most farmers cite low milk prices as the key reason for leaving farming. One often

needs to travel distances to see a cow in a field these days. And yet, farming is at the heart of much of our current debates. The subject is intertwined with bio-diversity, climate change and eating habits.

A Farming World

And **Yate** does have a wonderful agricultural history. Like most parishes, **Yate** was dominated by sheep farming, wool and cloth during the late medieval and Tudor periods. During the 17th century, this trade moved to the Stroud valley and was supplanted by farms geared towards dairy farming.

Small, general dairy farms became the model upon which the **Yate** area flourished from the 17th century to the 1870s, and limped on thereafter to the mid 20th century. **Yate** farms normally had small herds of 20 cows and an assortment of other animals. The work was labour intensive and manual. Small, dairy farms were seldom at the forefront of farming technology.

Consequently, farming was a leading employer until the 1870s. In 1851 of a parish population of around 1000, 140 people were agricultural labourers. The recession of the 1870s effectively put paid to this source of employment. Nevertheless, farming remained rooted in the local economy. Saddleries, blacksmith, wheelwrights and carpenters abounded well into the 20th century.

The Swan Inn blacksmiths on Station Road, **Yate** has some of its tools manufactured at Newman Industries motor factory as late as the early 1960s. The rural economy remained was in living memory for older Yate residents.

Get Orf My Land

Get Orf My Land cover a host of historic and modern themes including farming families, employment, wartime farming (both,) and the rise and fall of local markets. The display also sheds light on our farming architectural heritage.

Yate can boast several high-quality former farmhouses. Many of the listed buildings within the modern parish are farmhouses. Three such farmhouses remain within the modern town. **Goose Green Farm** is a fine example of a Jacobean farmhouse with an outstanding wall painting. Other farms beyond the urban area were former manor sites. **Brinsham Farm** retains the residue of a Tudor manor court while **Yate Court** farmhouse is flanked by the ruins of a fortified manor house slighted in the civil war.

The Exhibition

Visiting *Get Orf My Land*, you will get a glimpse of life in the agricultural past. We are also indebted to the farming community, past and present, for some oral history which has informed the display, donated collections and the sterling work of local farming historian Mary Isaac, who will provide milking and dairy equipment from the last 100 years. **13 January to 22 February 2024 at Yate & District Heritage Centre** (funded by **Yate Town Council**).

Yate & District Heritage Centre, Church Road, Yate, BS37 5BG. Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays & Thursdays 10.00am to 4.00pm, and Saturdays 10.00am to 3.00pm. info@yateheritage.co.uk or telephone 01454 862200.

ACCESS TO DIGITAL

Dr Jonathan Harlow draws attention to a short article in The Local Historian 53 (November 2023) which may be useful to local historians in this age of on-line research: 'Web today, gone tomorrow: ensuring continued access to cited web resources' by Peter Burnhill (pp 357-359).

REVIEWS

by Dr Jonathan Harlow

Shirehampton Church-Yard Book Richard Coates (Bristol Record Society 2023, xxviii + 149 pp, 21 ill., ISBN 978-0-901538-46-8, paper cover, £15)

Elephants, it seems, do not have graveyards, which leaves us humans as the only animals that do. It is fortunate for historians that it should be so: burials are always a valuable kind of evidence; and often the main one for past societies. So there should be sociological and cultural interest in this volume, as well as a lot of family history value.

The volume is an edition of the manuscript book recording burials at St Mary's parish church, **Shirehampton**, begun by the incumbent in 1869 and ending in 1992. It contains notes of burials from 1765 as recalled by the sexton Sarah Richards at the inception of the volume. There is evidence that not only memory but recording may have been selective, with significant omissions of those too lowly or perhaps scandalous to be recorded. Social history already.

The written notes are a key to the map of numbered graves begun at the same time and showing 749 occupied sites by the end, containing over 1200 burials ('for graves have learn'd that womanhead, / To be to more than one a bed'). The mapped locations and spacings are also of sociological interest – a housing map of the district of the dead, with social status well indicated (rude forefathers and treaders of paths of glory yet).

The Grave-Yard Book is separate from the parish Register of Burials (and not quite a duplicate of the entries there). As well as the statistical information on deaths in a community (broken down by age and sex), it often contains extra information, such as cause of death, and in one case (or coffin) the inscription.

The volume has already been very fully 'noticed' in the October 2023 e-update, which quoted from the author's introduction to the book: 'It covers a period during which **Shirehampton**'s population expanded massively thanks to the creation of **Avonmouth** Docks, and funerary practices changed markedly. . . It is far more than an ordinary sexton's register, often giving details of the cause of death, street address, occupation and social as well as family relationships, the age of the deceased, the structure of the grave, and the depth of burial. No comparable document found in regional archives of the West presents anything like such a range of information, over anything like so long a period.'

Richard Coates is Professor emeritus of Onomastics (names) at the University of the West of England (yes, there is a section of the Introduction about place-names); General Editor of **Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society's** *Gloucestershire Record Series*; and author of three ALHA booklets including no 38 *Shirehampton Remount Depot*. This book reflects his continued productivity and achievement well beyond the confines of onomastics.

BOOKS AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS NOTICED

Mike Bishop, 'Court Road or Church Road?' <https://www.bittonhistory.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Church-Road-or-Court-Road.pdf> .

COMMENTARY

UNDERNEATH THE WORDS

Science tells us that there is more to things than we see. Water is a liquid but is made up of two gases. Common salt appears as white crystals but is a compound of a silvery reactive metal and a toxic green

gas. What appears to us as white light is composed of rays of seven colours, plus more below red and beyond violet that humans cannot see. What we think of as sounds come from the human ear's reception of waves of pressure in the air or other medium; there are sounds that some animals can hear but humans cannot. Modern atomic theory at its simplest posits very small electrically-charged particles in mostly empty space. And so on. That said, for most practical purposes it is sensible to rely on the world as we see it: even if a brick wall does consist of tiny electrically-charged particles in mostly empty space, which may or may not be there, you will know otherwise if you try to walk through it.

Something similar can be said about words, of which most histories, including local histories, are composed. (In spite of one splendid example, Eugene Byrne's *The Bristol story*, illustrated by Simon Gurr (2006), the graphic novel has not yet caught on as a local history subgenre in our area.) Most words have meanings that are generally accepted and understood in ordinary communications between people in a community. But there is more below the surface of a word. Its usage may have changed over time; its meaning may vary from one context to another; it may have special meaning within a particular sub group or description of people; it may be emotionally loaded.

Two characteristics of words ought particularly to concern writers of local histories and their readers. One is when a word has associations, a characteristic exploited in poetry and rhetoric, including dog-whistles in political utterances and social situations. Another is when a word is a generalisation or an abstraction.

Generalising and abstract words abound in history writing. Like collective nouns, they are sometimes useful as a sort of shorthand. 'The battle of **Lansdown**,' 'The **Bristol** riots' and 'The **Keynsham** flood of 1968' are shorter than full descriptions of everything that happened there and then. Phrases like the norman conquest, the reformation, the industrial revolution, the slave trade, agriculture, world war I, the coronavirus pandemic, public transport, football hooliganism and so on convey to the reader a rough idea of what the author is referring to, without the need to go into detail every time the expression is used. But the tighter the compression, or the higher the level of abstraction, the greater the risk of inaccuracy. And once historians treat abstractions as if they were real things or people ('Poverty causes revolutions'; 'Colonialism powered the **Bristol** economy'), we risk drifting into cloud-cuckoo land.

Modern feudalism?

In his *Technofeudalism: what killed capitalism* (Bodley Head 2023, £22) Yanis Varoufakis contends that the liberal capitalist economic system in which most western nations operate is changing towards one more akin to feudalism. YV argues that power is tending to accrue to a small number of very wealthy individuals and corporations who have acquired monopolies, or near-monopolies, in retailing (eg Amazon), communications (Alphabet, Microsoft, Meta), and other services considered near-essential, so that we are constrained to use them because either there is no alternative or alternatives are significantly dearer. The relationships we are thus forced to have with the owners of these businesses resembles, YV argues, the dependency and subservience of medieval vassals to their feudal lords. The new lords are not amendable to control by governments or political processes. They by-pass democratic and other institutions and procedures. A similar argument was put forward by Joel Kotkin in *The coming of neo-feudalism: a warning to the global middle class* (Encounter Books 2020).

Whether or not that argument is correct, it might be worth looking at our area's past to see whether there have been times since the disintegration of medieval feudalism when wealthy individuals or large businesses have exercised disproportionate power.

In England the crown and the church had near-monopolies on power until well into the 16th century. In many respects Henry VIII was the last English feudal monarch. After him various individuals and factions, including the crown, jostled for power. Those struggles were not resolved until the English civil war, in which **Bath** and **Bristol** suffered; or until the departure of James II in 1688. Land ownership replaced feudalism as the source of power. In what is now south Gloucestershire the Berkeleys and the Beauforts used their power as landlords to try to control and direct their tenants and other dependents, but their monopolies were limited to their landed estates and the sanctions they could deploy, such as eviction if you did not vote for the right candidate. In the towns there was no such control. Even where merchants came to dominate, as in **Bath** and **Bristol**, there were so many of them and their businesses so diverse that no one individual had a monopoly on power. The same applied into the 19th century when manufacturing and financial services came to dominate. The Mileses, the Robinsons, the Willises and so on may have had near-monopolies in their own trades, industries and other businesses, but none was powerful enough to dominate to the exclusion of others. Our area never had a Saltaire, a Port Sunlight or a Bournville.



It is true that if you wanted to participate in some activities, you had to obey rules imposed by someone. If you wanted to scintillate in georgian **Bath**, you had to comply with Richard Nash's rules, but your existence did not depend on him and you could show off somewhere else. [Image, David Bridgwater, <https://bathartandarchitecture.blogspot.com/2018/08/beau-nash-bust-by-prince-hoare.html>] If you wanted treatment at the **Bristol** infirmary ('Charity universal'), you had to have a note from a subscriber, but if your face or your politics did not fit you might get medical treatment at a dispensary or elsewhere.

Some monopolies are not objectionable. It would not make much sense for water supply, for example, to be open to competition. Experience with the privatisation of public transport in our area suggests that competition does not always deliver a benefit, or sometimes a service at all.

Perhaps that is one answer to the danger that YV warns of: the more diverse an economy, and the more healthy competition within it, the less the risk of one individual or business imposing a feudal-like grip/stranglehold/straitjacket/jackboot on the rest of us. All the more reason to support local small businesses, even if they are not as cheap, efficient, convenient, reliable or customer-friendly as some of the new feudal lords.

QUOTE

For most of the past cities were plague-ridden and fire-ravaged, places where criminals crept by night and mobs menaced by day. Industrialisation has polluted urban air and ringed habitable centres with slums. Technology now offers solutions to longstanding problems – of food, water, waste, transport, fire and flood – but city governments rarely make the best of what is available. Retirees, romantics and remote workers therefore flee from squalor and snarl-ups, dangers and diseases, racket and rowdiness. Some if they can afford it, 'divide their time', as the blurb writers say, between urban perches and rural

retreats. Yet the quest for gold-paved streets, real concentrations of wealth, creative opportunities and variety of cultural enchantments keep migrants coming and denizens in place.

Felipe Fenández-Armesto, 'City lights; the creative intensity of urban centres down the ages' (2023).

CAN YOU HELP?

VOLUNTEERS FOR THE SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL SOCIETY (SCCS)

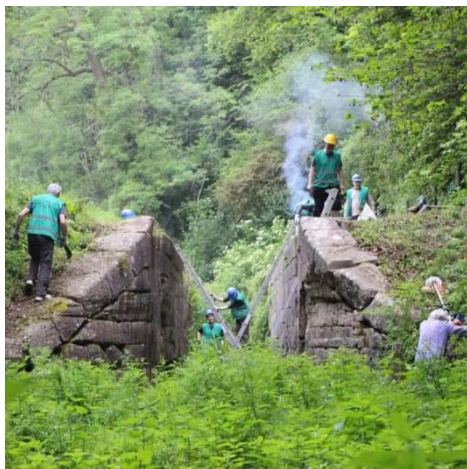
Posted by Ruby Keenan on ALHA's Facebook page on 6 November 2023:

The **Somersetshire Coal Canal Society**, founded in 1992, works to restore and preserve the **Somersetshire Coal Canal**, which was open from 1805 to 1898. The canal transported around 100,000 tonnes of coal a year, from up to 30 coal pits across the county at the peak of its use, and therefore was vital to the local economy.

Working with its 350 members, SCCS runs work parties weekly at **Paulton Basin** on a Sunday, as well as at the **Combe Hay Lock Flight** on a Tuesday, for restoration, maintenance and conservation of the canal. Restoral work began in 1986, and since then, volunteers have been clearing and restoring stretches such as the Dry Dock at **Paulton**, which was previously used for repairing canal boats. The society additionally works towards protecting the plant and wildlife biodiversity of the canal and holds social events such as evening talks on the canal's history.



Any volunteers would be enthusiastically welcomed and encouraged to help with these



conservation and restoration efforts. The society would also like to ask for volunteers interested in administration roles, including fundraising, which is another exciting way to get involved in the society. Joining the society costs £10 a year, which contributes to their important restoration work.

For more information, or to get involved, you can find **The Somersetshire Coal Canal Society** (The SCCS) on Facebook Coal Canal, Instagram (@coal.canal) or through the Home page of their website <https://www.coalcanal.com/>

To join a work party, organisers can be contacted at workparty_paulton@coalcanal.org.uk for **Paulton**, or

workparty_combehay@coalcanal.org.uk for **Combe Hay**.

[Images courtesy of Tracy Craven].