



ALHA

# AVON LOCAL HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY

Registered charity 270930

Newsletter 177/1 e-update  
31 January 2024

**Material for printed Newsletter 178 by 12  
noon 22 June 2024 please:**

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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  
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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 Turnberrie's community centre, **Thornbury**.

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

## ALHA NEWS

### ALHA BOOKLETS:

- **ALDERMAN PROCTOR:** Professor Brian Vincent's latest booklet for ALHA, on Alderman Thomas Proctor, is being edited.
- **EDWARD LONG FOX:** *Veronica Bowerman writes:* Following the inability of Weston Museum to sell any copies of Dinah Moore's ALHA booklet no. 36, Dr Fox's Tearoom has kindly agreed to sell this publication in their historic building [in the old sanatorium by **Knightstone** causeway, Ed.]. I was able to deliver them 14 January. Alyson Medley often has enquiries about Dr Fox and the building - see the attached photo which I took today.
- **CHEMISTRY IN BRISTOL:** ALHA has sold 296 copies of Brian Vincent's ALHA booklet no. 18. ALHA's publications team has ordered a further printing.



### ALHA DIRECTORY OF PRESENTERS 2024

ALHA has asked those speakers, presenters and walk leaders who had an entry in ALHA's Directory of Presenters in 2023, and who wish to appear in the 2024 supplement, to update their entries. ALHA member groups and societies who wish to nominate a new speaker or presenter for inclusion in the list are invited to send their recommendations to any member of ALHA's committee. The committee plans to issue the 2024 supplement to member groups and societies once they have paid their 2023-2024 subscription, due 1 April 2024.

## GROUPS AND SOCIETIES

### PERIS JONES

ALHA's committee has been saddened to learn of the death of Peris Jones, who chaired ALHA's committee in the late 1990s. A school teacher by profession, Peris was keenly interested and active in researching and promulgating local history, and held strong views about the importance of history in school curricula. For many years she led with energy and enthusiasm the now defunct **Downend** Local History Society, at that time one of the largest and most active of ALHA members, regularly hosting well-attended meetings and running a library of local history books and other publications that members could borrow. Her own publications included histories of **Mangotsfield**, of **Betts Barton** (Salisbury Road, **Downend**), and of poor relief in **Mangotsfield** in the eighteenth century.

## **BANWELL BONE CAVES**

*Margaret McCarthy of ALHA member **Banwell Society of Archaeology** writes:* John the owner of the caves died last year. The house, land and bone caves were originally bought by John and his family jointly with Yvonne Sargeant and her family back in the 1980s. As Yvonne is frail now she cannot live there alone and so is going into a home. The property will, we assume, be put on the market as soon as Yvonne moves out which could be any time in the next month.

It is a worry to our society and village what will happen to the bone caves and all the hard work the families have undertaken over the past 45 years to restore the property and the follies.

So at this stage the Caves are closed and will stay that way until a new owner is found and someone who hopefully will carry the tradition forward of opening the Bone caves and tower etc to the public. If we hear any more we will let you know.

## **VICTORIA COUNTY HISTORY GLOUCESTERSHIRE**

John Chandler is standing down as county editor for the Victoria County History of



Gloucestershire. Gloucestershire History Trust's latest newsletter, which will contain a piece on progress on the planned Grumbold's Ash volume (XIV) which will cover part of south Gloucestershire, towards which ALHA has given grants, will no doubt be readable in due course at <http://vchglos.org.uk/>.

## **EVENTS AND SOURCES**

### **HANDEL COSSHAM CONFERENCE / LOCAL HISTORY DAY 2024**

Booking is now open 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 Turnberrie's community centre, **Thornbury**, the birthplace of Handel Cossham (the town, that is). **More details and a booking form accompany this update.**

### **HANDEL COSSHAM BIRTHPLACE**

*Roger Gosling writes:* Unfortunately the nearby Cossham Hall can't be used for events these days. It may be restored, redeveloped or demolished; the debate about this has been ongoing for several years.

Also nearby, the birthplace of Handel Cossham (Miss Saice's Cottage, 68 High Street, **Thornbury** – see photo attached from the auctioneers' website) is to be auctioned on **15 February 2024**. It's a small property in need of renovation. For details see <https://www.gazetteseries.co.uk/news/24003283.unique-historic-cottage-thornbury-hits-market/> , and more detail at [tinyurl.com/48a4ny4n](https://tinyurl.com/48a4ny4n) .



### **ORIGINAL WILLS – PRESERVE OR DESTROY?**

On 15 December 2023 the Ministry of Justice issued a consultation paper on a proposal to destroy originals of wills that have been digitised, except for wills of some famous people thought to be of historic interest. The motive is the cost of storage, put at £4.5m a year: a figure presumably based on storage in expensive property in London? The consultation document, at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/storage-and-retention-of-original-will-documents/storage-and-retention-of-original-will-documents#the-case-for-reform> , provoked a furious response from historians, family history enthusiasts, and other interested parties. An example of a more measured response is an editorial at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/jan/01/the-guardian-view-on-digital-only-archives-material-items-still-matter-to-historians> . The government's consultation closes 23 February 2024. E-mail: [civil\\_justice\\_poli@justice.gov.uk](mailto:civil_justice_poli@justice.gov.uk)

Although the consultation is confined to one class of document, similar arguments could be made with respect to any archival material. First they came for the wills ...

### **BOOKS AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS NOTICED**

In the BBC2 programme *Digging for Britain* (series 11, episode 3) on 4 January 2024 Alice Roberts looked at a dig on agricultural land at **Siston** in south Gloucestershire, which has yielded hundreds of finds dated to the late saxon and early medieval periods. Dr Stuart Prior of University of Bristol enthuses about an arrowhead, and watches a replica being forged. Available until December 2024 at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m001ttqx/digging-for-britain-series-11-3-a-norman-panic-room-and-a-mesolithic-fish-trap> . Nothing about the historic context, which for the **Pucklechurch-Siston** area might be thought to make the site important.

The following episode on 11 January 2024 included investigation by Dr N Papworth for the National Trust of soil under a mosaic in an extension to the roman villa at Chedworth in Gloucestershire. Clip at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0h1yj9d> ; programme at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001ttqt> . Outside ALHA's area, but of interest for two reasons. First, the scientific analysis of the samples was facilitated by a research grant from ALHA member **Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeology**. Second, the samples were dated to the sixth century CE, suggesting that the extension was constructed, and its mosaic laid, long after the Roman legions left in 410BC, and in the period of saxon invasions, whereas the

received view is that villa construction did not survive the roman occupation. Some implications of that are discussed below in **From villa to manor?** under COMMENTARY, below.

Peter Davies, *Flying machines*, <https://www.bittonhistory.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Flying-Machines101923.pdf> . McAdam, turnpikes, mail coaches, and postboys, one of whom was Harry Smith.

## **RESPONSES**

### **Print and digital**

*Mick D writes:* The piece in ALHA Newsletter 177 about the financial effects of allowing members or subscribers to choose between print and digital made some obvious points. But why the assumption that all members of a group or society ought to pay the same? Within ALHA that principle does not apply, because groups pay a higher sub than individuals, those who want paper newsletters pay more than those who do not, you pay for a local history day only if you attend, you pay for a booklet only if you want one, and if a group organises a trip you pay only if you go on it. The principle that you pay for what you get is fair. It applies in nearly all other walks of life. Airlines get a lot of stick for applying it, when what people should be complaining about is not that airlines tot up separate charges for different things, but that by quoting only the basic fare they mislead customers by giving the impression that a fare is lower than in fact it will be. Those who are content with digital ought to pay less, because digital is cheaper to produce, and those who want print on paper should pay the actual cost.

## **COMMENTARY**

### **From villa to manor?**

Most histories of England, local as well as national, give the impression, or seem to assume, that there was a distinct and long break between the roman occupation of Britain and the saxon era. It is as if nothing happened between 410CE when the last legion left, and the first saxon immigrations starting a century or two later. That may be true. A saxon poem, thought to refer to **Bath**, describes it as abandoned ruins, and historians infer that the same or something similar happened elsewhere.

But the idea that our area, and others, was empty space where no-one lived and nothing happened for centuries seems improbable. When the roman forces departed Britain, they must have left behind the Brits, and many Britanno-roman civilians. British tribes or other groups must have continued, albeit in decline. For most people – estimated at 3 or 4 million – life must have continued. [*Image, King's Weston roman villa mosaic, from A forgotten Landscape*]

That there are no records of what happened in Britain in late antiquity is no surprise. The only signs of literacy are a few inscriptions in runic (probably of Frisian origin) or ogham

(mainly in south Wales) and now associated with the saxons rather than the indigenous Brits, who seem to have been illiterate, like their iron age predecessors. Any literacy acquired from the roman military occupiers will have dwindled as there were fewer reasons or occasions to use or practice it. Not until the saxon immigrants started arriving do written records appear again. Similarly with coins, which were no longer needed to pay soldiers, and pottery, which was replaced by wood, leather or metal.



So was there continuity between britanno-roman estates

centred on villas and anglo-saxon manors? There seem to be three possibilities:

1. Continuity. When the roman occupying and defending forces left, those who lived in and ran villas and their estates remained. So long as they retained, used and passed on the necessary skills, the estates continued. When the saxon warlords arrived they imposed feudal relationships over what already existed. What had been britanno-roman villa estates became saxon manors. Why destroy, ignore or abandon what you can make use of, especially if it shelters and feeds you?

2. Discontinuity. Britanno-roman estates and villas were abandoned. Buildings, including villas, fell into ruin. Underfloor heating was no use if you did not know how to maintain or operate it. The immigrants killed local inhabitants. They brought with them their own farming methods and social and building practices, and had no need of what the romans had left behind. Isolated British place names such as **Walton** in Gordano suggest that there was no integration. This was the narrative told by later historians such as Gildas.

3. Discontinuity in some places, continuity in others. There is no documentary evidence, but archaeologists reckon that some saxon settlements were on the same sites as britanno-roman ones. Overlaying however does not necessarily mean continuity: there could have been a gap, which could have been long.

Dr Papworth's investigations at Chedworth (noticed under **BOOKS AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS NOTICED** above) have brought the issue to public attention. The soil samples from under the mosaic were dated to the sixth century CE, suggesting that the extension and its mosaic were added to the villa some two centuries after the roman legions left. The inference is that the site and its culture continued into the beginnings of the saxon period, and contradicts the received view that britanno-roman villas were built or added to only during the roman occupation. If the inference is correct, then similar evidence could be expected from elsewhere.

There were scores of britanno-roman villas in our area. **King's Weston, Brislington, Wellow, Wraxall, Cromhall, Gatcombe, Keynsham, Marshfield** and so on are but examples. Stephen Bird, then at the Roman Baths museum in **Bath**, plotted them in the 1980s, when radio carbon dating was in its infancy, not all archaeologists were convinced about it, and the scientific techniques applied to the Chedworth samples had not been invented. Other archaeologists have added later information, but some sites in or near our area might warrant further investigation:

- Mick Aston's work at Shapwick (recounted in his ALHA booklet no.12, copies still available from the treasurer at £3.50 plus postage) suggests continuity at one site there.
- Multi-age sites such as **Camerton** could give evidence of continuity or the absence of it.

Another possible clue is linguistic: the feudal term villein or villain, Latin villanus, usually interpreted as a low status agricultural labourer, could be an echo of a term to denote someone who worked in or was tied to a villa. There is a similar shift of interpretation with the translation of the Latin servus, eg in *Domesday*, as serf, when the simpler and more obvious translation is slave.

### **Tanning**

Nowadays leather items are few, and tend to be at the more expensive end of the market in things like footwear, clothing, upholstery, and fashion accessories such as belts, handbags, briefcases and suitcases. Armed police forces and tree surgeons buy leather holsters. In the 1950s there was much more leather about. Most shoes and boots were of leather. The coalman lugging sacks of nutty slack protected his back with a sheet of leather an inch thick. Workers in foundries wore leather protective clothing, often locally sourced. Welders, blacksmiths and other metal workers wore leather aprons, as did glassblowers. In the 19th century and earlier the harness, saddle and other accoutrements of a horse were of leather – and there were a lot of horses: at the outbreak of WW1 the Great Western Railway had 30,000; **Bristol** Tramways, 678. Before vulcanised rubber became available, machinery drive belts were of leather. In medieval times (and for the legal profession, much later) parchment was a sort of leather. When paper replaced parchment, books in private libraries continued to be bound in leather.

It is understandable that a predominantly agricultural economy should produce hides, whether on purpose to make leather, or as a by-product of rearing animals for food or motive power. So we can expect tanning to have been as important in our area's past as elsewhere. Tanneries could be located in the countryside, so as to be near their sources of raw materials; or in towns, where large numbers of customers were. In town or countryside, tanners needed a supply of water and, until chemical processes were introduced, a supply of bark, preferably oak. Urine and faeces helped, and had the advantage of being cheap and tax-free.

Tanner is a fairly frequent English surname, which suggests that there were lots of them. Tanning also gave its name to places and buildings. There are Tanners Courts in **Thornbury, Frenchay** and **Wickwar**. There are Tanners Lanes in **Marshfield** and **Thornbury**. Anywhere else? **Frampton Cotterell** has a building called Tanners. We could reasonably expect there to have been tanneries in places like **Chipping Sodbury, Midsomer Norton**, and **Bath**: there was one in **Bathwick** in the 19th century, another in **Kelston**, and one in **Wrington** (images on the Historic England website at <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1158197?section=comments-and-photos>]

The late Trevor Bowen identified a tannery at **Nailsea** in **Kingshill**, dating back to the 18th century. Census information shows that in 1841 it had 8 employees, 12 in 1851, but only 6 in 1861 and one in 1871, though it had 2 a decade later. Why the decline? Was there a similar rise and fall in tanneries in other places in our area? If so, was there a common cause? Or did the **Kingshill** tannery succumb to competition? ALHA member **Nailsea & District LHS** has helpfully put TB's 1997 paper online at <http://www.ndlhs.org.uk/ebooks/NailseaTannery.pdf> .

In **central Bristol** there were tanneries in Wade Street, Victoria Road, Haberfield Street/Redcross Street and **Earlsmead**. Elsewhere in Bristol PS Evans & Co ran the Avonside tannery by the **Feeder** in 1883; it did not close until 1945. **Bedminster** had a cluster of tanneries, at least eight. Not all were by the river or the New Cut: Stillhouse Lane, Whitehouse Street, Clark Street and Parson Street/Novers Hill might be considered to be well inland. One Bedminster tanner was James Cox. He tanned at **Long Ashton**, but moved that business to **Nailsea** in 1833, and built a tannery at **Court de Wyck**. He had yards at **Ashton** and **Yatton** as well. Wares, established as Thomas Ware & Son in 1840, took over Cox's **Bedminster** yard in 1878, and bought the whole **Clift House** estate about 1865. The Ware business continues, now selling into niche markets, many of them abroad. More about Ware's on their website, including images of the processes, at <https://thomasware.co.uk/our-leather-process/>

### **Bristol Stars of Stage and Screen**



*John Stevens writes: We mourned this month the passing of Glynis Johns (1923-2024), born in Pretoria where her actor father Mervyn was touring. She was educated at **Clifton** High School. She is remembered as the mother in *Mary Poppins* but it is less well known that she wanted to be Mary Poppins. When Julie Andrews was given the lead, Disney offered her the consolation of the "Suffragette" song (perhaps a parody of the famous *March of the Women* to the music of Dame Ethel Smyth?) in the movie. [Image, Studio Publicity, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons]*



Johns was not the only big star with **Bristol** links. Cary Grant (1904-86) had working class **Bristol** roots. After expulsion from the grammar school to which he had won a scholarship, he progressed from helping out at the Hippodrome and the old Empire Theatre to a touring company based in Norfolk and thence to New York and finally Hollywood. The rest is film history, but he visited the city of his birth regularly until the death of his aged mother in the 1970s.

Deborah Kerr (1921-2007) was educated at Northumberland House School, which seems to have been in **Durdham Park** (although Wikipedia says **Henleaze** – can anyone help?). Under the direction of Powell and Pressburger she starred in the epic *Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) and as a nun in the melodramatic *Black Narcissus* (1947). Ten years later she appeared opposite Grant in *An Affair to Remember* (1957).

The career of **Bristol** born and **Clifton** College educated Sir Michael Redgrave (1908-85) spanned the Shakespearean and Pinteresque theatre and the British and American cinema screen, including *The Dambusters* (1955). The theatre named in his honour is part of his old school but many members of am-dram groups (your correspondent included) have trodden the boards there.

Playwright Tom Stoppard (1937- ) was an *alumnus* of the **Bristol** Old Vic Theatre School. His *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* brings to the front of the stage two very minor characters from *Hamlet*.

Another quirky take on the Bard was provided by Chris Harris (1942-2014). After studying, like Stoppard, at the Old Vic School, he was a visiting lecturer there and a popular pantomime dame at the **Bath** Theatre Royal. He hosted *Hey Look That's Me!* on BBC television and his well-loved monologues included *Kemp's Jig*, in which he reprised the famous journey of Will Kemp, formerly one of Shakespeare's company of players, on one leg from London to Norwich. Kemp's breezy remarks as he hops along are by no means complimentary of our great national poet and playwright, or "Shakerags" as he persists in calling him.

### **Biblical advertising**

Tate & Lyle the sugar processors sell inverted syrup in green tins on which is printed a picture of a dead lion and some bees above the caption 'Out of the strong came forth sweetness.' The caption is a quote from the Authorised Version translation of a weird story in the Hebrew bible (*Judges* 14.14) about Samson posing a riddle. Applying bible texts to consumer packaging is common in America, but are there UK cases of biblical quotations being used for advertising?

One curious example is mentioned in Brian Vincent's forthcoming ALHA booklet no.41 about Thomas Proctor, who gave Elmdale in **Clifton** as a residence for Bristol's mayor; commissioned the drinking fountain at the top of Bridge Valley Road; and paid for the restoration of much of St Mary **Redcliffe**. H&T Proctor crushed bone and made fertilisers at premises in **Redcliffe**. One of their billheads of 1844 purports to quote the second letter of Paul to the Corinthians, 9.6: 'He who gives to the soil liberally will receive therefrom

abundantly.' The bible passage is not in fact an apostolic endorsement of chemical fertilisers. The Authorised Version of the text, which the Proctors presumably heard and may have read, says, 'He who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.' It refers to the quantity of seed sown, not of fertiliser applied. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that at least one local worthy was not above misquoting the bible for commercial purposes. Other examples?

## **QUOTE**

The traces from the past are never complete.

John Warren, *History and the historians* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1999).