



Cheltenham Local History Society

Newsletter No. 87

Affiliated to Cheltenham Arts Council
Registered Charity No. 1056046
<http://www.cheltlocalhistory.org.uk>

March 2017



EDITORIAL

The Minster has been in the news recently, since work began in January to recast all twelve of its bells. It is one of few churches in the county to have a ring of twelve, though it did not reach that number until 1911. Originally there were just six, one of which bore the quaint inscription:

Abraham Rudhall cast all we

One thousand six hundred and twenty three

It seems they were actually hung in 1680, and another two were added in 1697. Much later, in 1821, a survey revealed that all the bells needed re-casting. The Vestry Committee was keen to increase the number to ten or twelve, but the motion was defeated and a new ring of 8 was cast, again by Rudhall's. In 1833 the ringers themselves raised the money to add two more. Ten years later, while they were 'engaged in their melodious vocation', the tenor bell suddenly crashed to the floor, fortunately not hitting anyone. It was put back. In 1883 they were all re-hung and Rudhall's recast two of them. Another two, given by Alderman and Mrs Winterbotham in 1911, brought the total to 12. The present work will replace the 12 old bells with 13 new ones, which we can look forward to hearing for the first time in August.

Kath Boothman

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Society's Annual General Meeting will be held on Tuesday 23rd May in the Council Chamber, Municipal Offices, Promenade, Cheltenham at 7.30 pm prompt. (See **Agenda enclosed with this Newsletter—please bring this with you to the meeting. Copies of the minutes of last year's AGM will be available on the door.**) The Mayor, as President of the Society, will chair the meeting and give a short address.

Election of Officers and Committee 2017-8

Officers and committee members (as listed in the 2016 AGM Minutes) will resign in accordance with the Society's constitution, although they can be re-elected if they so wish. Nominations are invited for Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer and for committee members. If you would like to nominate someone or be nominated yourself, either for one of these posts or as a committee member, please contact the Secretary Chris Conoley (e-mail chris.conoley@btopenworld.com) or phone 01452 700428 for a nomination form.

After the AGM business is concluded there will be a talk by **John Dixon** entitled **Beguiling Barbara Cartland: 'Stranger in our Midst'**.

SUMMER VISITS

You are invited to take part in the following visits with the Society. **IN ALL CASES PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN THE SLIP ENCLOSED WITH THIS NEWSLETTER WITH YOUR PAYMENT AND A STAMPED ADDRESSED ENVELOPE. There will be a priority booking period for members only until 14th April and, as places are limited on these visits, you are advised to book early to be sure of getting a place.** If you wish to bring a non-member as a guest, please indicate this on the slip when booking your own place. If there is any availability after 14th April, places will be offered to non-members in order of application. **If you find that you cannot attend a visit for which you have booked, please inform Sue Brown (01242 231837) or another committee member of your cancellation, so that someone else may have the opportunity to take your place.** If you don't let us know that you cannot attend, we shall expect you to pay the cost.

Tuesday 20th June at 6.30 pm and Thursday 29th June at 6.30 pm

Pittville walk

As a 'follow up' to his talk to the Society in December 2016 entitled 'Pittville after Pitt: house building in the Pittville estate 1842-1890' Steven Blake will lead

a walk from Pittville Gates to the Pittville Pump Room, identifying and telling the story of the houses that were built on land sold at the 1843-1845 auction sales following Joseph Pitt's death in February 1842. These included the completion of earlier projects, such as the west side of Pittville Lawn and the south side of Clarence Square, and a number of entirely new developments, including Wellington Square West and many large detached villas in Evesham Road, Albert Road, Pittville Crescent and – for the first time – north of Pittville Lake.

Wednesday 12th July leaving at 9.30 am from Royal Well, returning at 5.00 pm.

MADRESFIELD COURT and MALVERN

Our morning will be spent on a historical tour of Great Malvern led by Malvern Civic Society guides. As a neighbouring spa, Malvern shares a similar history to Cheltenham, having expanded from an ecclesiastically centred community to a burgeoning resort in the late 18th century with more substantial development in the Victorian era. Having said that, even the most loyal Cheltonian probably has to admit that Malvern's situation on the flank of the Malvern Hills and its church architecture are both considerably grander than Cheltenham's. Should you be in any doubt of this, perhaps the visit will enable you to come to a final decision!



Madresfield Court

The afternoon will be spent visiting the moated Madresfield Court, which has been home to the Lygon family since the 15th century. The house today is mainly a Tudor/Victorian mix with the Victorian predominating, although all ages are represented, including some impressive Arts and Crafts fittings. The gardens of the court are extensive and time will be available for these to be explored. The book "*Madresfield – The Real Brideshead*" by Jane Mulvagh, which concentrates on the human history of the house, is highly recommended as preparatory reading.

Thursday 17th August at 2.00 pm

The Jet Age Museum, Staverton

Meet at the Jet Age Museum, Meteor Business Park, Cheltenham Road East, GL2 9QL, home of the Gloucestershire Aviation Collection, which includes Gloster-built aircraft such as the Javelin and the Meteor. There is also a replica of Britain's first jet plane, the Gloster E28/39 and various restoration projects. A guided tour of the displays takes up to 2½ hours. Refreshments are available.

Travel: The number 94 bus service from the Promenade operates on the hour and every 10 minutes thereafter. The journey takes around 15 minutes. The 'Dowty' stop is two minutes' walk away from the Museum.

EVENING LECTURE PROGRAMME 2017-8

Meetings start at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Municipal Offices, Promenade
Visitors pay £2.

Tuesday 19th September:

Julie Sargent—History of Sandford Lido

Tuesday 17th October:

Angela Applegate—Music, Friendship and the Cotswold Hills: a Life of Gustav Holst

Tuesday 21st November:

Steven Blake—Who was John the Muffin Man?

Tuesday 12th December:

David Aldred—Cleeve Hill, the Cotswold Health Resort

Tuesday 16th January 2018:

Research and Display Evening

Tuesday 20th February 2018:

David J H Smith—The Fifth Earl of Berkeley and Mary Cole (1784-1811): a Regency Scandal

Tuesday 20th March 2018:

Barry Simon—The History of Swindon Village

Tuesday 17th April 2018:

Alex Craven and Beth Hartland—VCH Cheltenham

Tuesday 22nd May 2018: AGM followed by

Alan Pilbeam—A Week's Holiday in the Forest of Dean in 1880

MORNING LECTURES 2017-8

Morning lectures will take place in St Luke's Hall, St Luke's Place, Cheltenham. A donation of £2 from all attending these lectures is appreciated. Tea/coffee and biscuits are served (no charge) from 10.00 am. Lectures start at 10.30 am. All welcome. Parking at the Hall is for disabled only—please contact Chris Conoley (01452 700428) if you wish to reserve a space.

Tuesday 3rd October:

Dave Walton—Gimson and the Barnsleys

Tuesday 6th March 2018:

Ray Wilson—The Quarries and Tramroads of Leckhampton Hill

Reminder...

MORNING LECTURE

*Tuesday 4th April, 10.00 am for 10.30 am
at St Luke's Hall, Cheltenham*

**John Chandler—Cheltenham's History
in Black and White**

*The 2017 CLHS Journal will be available
for collection at this meeting.*

Tuesday 3rd April 2018:

Carrie Howse—Rural District Nursing in Gloucestershire, 1880-1925

FOR YOUR DIARY

Prestbury Local History Society

www.prestburyhistory.com

Meetings are held at Prestbury Women's Institute Hall (corner of Bouncers Lane/Prestbury Road), starting at 7.30 pm unless otherwise stated. Guests pay £2.

Monday 24th April:

Norman Baker—Prestbury Manor Court Rolls

Monday 22nd May:

Val Porter—Prestbury's Stables and Jockeys

Monday 26th June:

Village History Walk (details to be announced)

Leckhampton Local History Society

www.llhs.org.uk

Note new venue: Meetings are normally held at Glebe Cottages, Church Road, Leckhampton (next to the churchyard), at 7.30 pm. Admission £2 for visitors.

Wednesday 19th April:

John Peters—Trying to photograph listed and historic buildings

Wednesday 17th May:

AGM followed by Angela Applegate—Music, Friendship and the Cotswold Hills; a Life of Gustav Holst



Historical Association

Meetings normally begin at 7.30 pm and visitors pay £3. Cheltenham meetings take place in the Teaching Block, University of Gloucestershire Park Campus, and Gloucester meetings at the Oxstalls Campus.

Monday 27th March in Gloucester:

Professor Chris Dyer, University of Leicester—Town and Country in England, 900-1540: how a society was transformed

Monday 8th May in Cheltenham:

Professor Michael Heffernan, University of Nottingham—Maps of War and Peace: cartography and propaganda, 1914-1920

Charlton Kings Local History Society

www.charltonkings.org.uk

All meetings are held at the Baptist Church, Church Street, starting at 7.30 pm.

Tuesday 28th March:

Edward Gillespie—Festivals of Cheltenham

Tuesday 25th April:

Alec Hamilton—the Arts and Crafts of the Cathedral

Tuesday 23rd May:

Liz Suckley—Belas Knapp

Swindon Village Society

Meetings are held at Swindon Village Hall at 7.30 pm unless otherwise stated.

Non-members pay £2.

Saturday 22nd April at 9.30 am, starting from the Village Hall car park:

Annual bird and nature walk

Wednesday 17th May:

Rosemary Westgate—Wildflowers of Gloucestershire

Wednesday 19th July:

Arthur Ball—The Birds of Cleeve Common

Gotherington and Area Local History Society

Meetings are held in Gotherington Village Hall, starting at 8.00 pm.

Visitors are welcome, £2 per meeting.

Tuesday 28th March:

Ray Wilson—Mills on the River Chelt

Tuesday 25th April:

Steven Blake—‘A Scene of Gorgeous Magnificence’

Tuesday May 30th:

Alan Pilbeam—Along the Banks of the River Severn

The present Playhouse Theatre (see opposite page) is shown here in its earlier, long-term incarnation as the Montpellier Baths ‘adjoining Mr Thompson’s Cheltenham Salts Manufactory’. The tall chimney, demolished only in 1984, served the evaporation process that produced bottled salts for sale in the 19th century. As this 1826 advertisement explains, the steam from that process was used to heat the water for the individual private baths.



REVIEWS

Our talk on November 1st, **A Brief History of the Cheltenham Playhouse**, was an entertaining double-act by **Paul Scott**, theatre manager, and **Alan Miller**, who is both stage manager and the theatre's historian. Taking turns to tell parts of the story, they began with the origins of the building. Erected between 1806 and 1809 by Henry Thompson, who had bought the Montpellier estate from the de la Bere family, it was designed not as a theatre but as a bath complex, unique in Cheltenham, drawing water from nearby wells. Paul showed a floor plan. There were heated dressing rooms and sitting rooms and assorted warm and cold baths, a novel steam-powered system being used to heat the water. Thompson also established a manufactory on the same site to evaporate the water and bottle the dried salts for sale beyond the town. In 1818 an extension was built offering more facilities, warm saline baths being advertised as particularly good for 'scrofulous afflictions'. In 1828, by which time Henry had died and his son Pearson had taken over, the Duke of Wellington came to Cheltenham and visited the baths every day, reading his newspapers on a frame over his bath. In the 1830s, Pearson Thompson having met with financial difficulties, the baths came into the hands of the Jearrad brothers, who developed them further. Thompson regained the property, but with a heavy mortgage, and in 1847 the baths were again advertised as having new facilities, including a 70ft x 25ft swimming bath. Things did not go well, though, and in 1849 he emigrated to Australia to escape his creditors. Then in 1855 there was a disastrous flood, very like the memorable event of 2007 and with similar results—the water poured into the baths ruining furniture and fittings and leaving a residue of mud everywhere. It was 'such a calamity as never before'. In 1856 the mortgage company foreclosed on Pearson Thompson, took possession of the complex, which by then included a shop, a mill and a bakery, and put it up for auction. There was no sale. A new lessee took over the bakery, but the baths were left empty until the 1860s when the Montpellier Gardens Company first leased and then bought and renovated them, creating separate establishments for ladies and gentlemen with first and second class individual cubicles. Later more varied use was made of the baths. In 1881 one Captain Webb, a channel swimmer, gave a talk and a demonstration of his swimming prowess; in 1896 the big pool was boarded over in winter and fitted out as a gym, where cycling lessons were also given. By then the building was in poor repair, and in 1899 it was sold to Cheltenham Borough Council. Refurbished yet again, it reopened in 1900 with renewed emphasis on medical treatments and a public swimming pool. It had a good reputation, and in 1920 15 new hydrotherapy baths were added, but it never made money for the Council and by 1939 was looking derelict. A new lease of life came only when it was suggested as a venue for amateur theatricals. In 1945 it opened as the Civic Playhouse, run first by the Council and later by a volunteer group. In answer to a question at the end, Paul said the theatre was now almost completely self-financing, though always hard up. If the lease could be extended he hoped it might attract Heritage Lottery funding.

Rose Hewlett's talk on November 15th about **Farming and Fishing along the Upper Severn Estuary** began with a swift tour through pre-history, tracing the pattern of settlement before and after the ice age, the arrival of New Stone Age and Bronze Age peoples from the continent and the development of organised farming and trading communities on both sides of the river. Before the Romans came the Dubunni on the east bank were trading for iron from the Forest of Dean with the Siluri on the west bank. The riverside land they farmed was very much prone to flooding, and the Romans built defences: a Roman sea wall is still visible at Longney. Meadows known as warths, protected by sea walls, are still used for grazing. After the Romans left in the 5th century the Germanic tribes arrived who were to become English, and they farmed these same tidal wetlands that have always been valuable farmland. The course of the river has changed much over the years. In the reign of Henry III land lost from the east bank was being deposited on the west bank, and it was decreed that the new land still belonged to Slimbridge because it had come from there. All manors in the upper Severn estuary have boundaries running down the middle of the river. In the 1670s there was a lawsuit in which the king tried to raise revenue from newly reclaimed land near Fretherne, and the oldest local inhabitants were called to witness that this 'new' land had been dry long before, only the 'cribs' built to defend it had worn away.

Records of fishing on the Severn go back to the middle ages. Rose showed a 13th century grant for 'putchers' (wicker fish traps for salmon) at Frampton. A boat with a very shallow draught was used, and ranks of putchers on a fixed frame were built across the river - very effective, but an obstacle to shipping. A Fisheries Act of 1801 challenged the legality of such 'fixed engines', and many were removed. In the early 20th century salmon packed in ice were sent up to London,



Lave net fishermen

many of them caught with a 'lave net', a Y shape of willow sticks with a loosely hung net. It takes skill, strength and an intimate knowledge of the river bed and currents to fish in this way, and knowledge is still passed down from father to son. Seine fishing, with a net strung between two boats, was also used. In the 17th century 53 varieties of fish were recorded in the Severn: now there are fewer.

In 1607 a storm coinciding with the spring tide caused a major flood, and in 1703 the port of Bristol was ruined by a huge surge. On Christmas Eve in 1999 a high tide and a gale overwhelmed the sea defences at Longney. Such events can cause serious loss of stock and salting of the land. Clearing up the debris is done nowadays by the environment agency, which is also concerned with wildlife protection. The estuary is an SSSI and an important wetland site, and local people can contribute to protecting it while still defending their traditions. Rose was proud to say that her ancestors had lived on the river for centuries. The audience showed by their questions that they had followed her story with great interest.

Steven Blake's subject on December 13th was **Pittville after Pitt**. Steven said that Joseph Pitt was for much of his life a successful self-made man, a boy of humble birth who had risen to be a lawyer, JP and speculator in land with a share in a bank. When he died, aged 83, in 1842 he was lord of the manor of Cricklade and an ex-MP, but he was also over £150,000 in debt. In 1835 it was said that Pitt 'possessed a million of money and did not think himself rich enough', and it seems he had been too ambitious. His woes were attributed to the Pittville Estate, where only about a third of the houses he planned got built, but among other misfortunes he had also lost £60,000 in a Bristol bank. He was married three times, and one of his sons, a solicitor also called Joseph, had to settle his affairs after his death. His biggest creditor was a Cirencester solicitor called Mullings, who was owed £63,000 and gained possession of Pitt's property in Wiltshire. Pitt had borrowed so much in the 1820s from so many people, including his partners in the bank, that after he died everything he owned had to be sold to pay his debts. Between 1842 and 1845 eleven auctions of his property were held in London, Cheltenham and elsewhere. In 1843 land between Hewlett Road and Hales Road was sold, and the first of many pieces of land in Pittville. Also auctioned off were 109 acres of land in Prestbury and 11 shops in Pittville Street. In the end, of his major assets only the Pump Room remained. Sixty-two new houses were built on land that had belonged to Pitt in the following few years, and 246 by 1886, but that was still barely half what Pitt had planned. Steven showed pictures of some of the new houses, such as those built by the stonemason Cantell on the west side of Pittville Lawn. Much land changed hands over the years, and the sale documents often have plans attached. Many different architects and builders were at work in the 1850s and 1860s, but gaps remained, some of them unused until the 20th century. North of the lake Pitt had planned 34 houses, none of which was built by his death. The earliest houses there were the villas in West Approach Drive, followed by others in East Approach Drive and Evesham Road, all large and quite individual. Pitt had decreed that anyone building on the estate must adhere to certain styles and standards, but this did not always hold good after his death. Steven speculated as to how the Pittville Estate had been managed: since Pitt himself never lived in Cheltenham, his architect Forbes must have done most of it. The 1825 banking crisis was a watershed for Pitt, who was probably disillusioned at having achieved so little by then. Now aged nearly 70, he retired to Eastcourt, his house in Wiltshire. His son Joseph helped him in his last years. Another son, William, had been involved in the estate up to 1842, but he too went bankrupt in 1843 and a few years later died in a private lunatic asylum. Engalls the estate agents carried on running the Pump Room and collecting ground rents, but in 1888 the bank offered the whole estate to the Cheltenham Corporation for 10/- in the pound and the offer was accepted. In 1890 the last debts were paid and Pittville became the property of what is now the Borough Council. A listener asked what Pitt would think of Pittville today. He would like some of it, Steven thought, but would be disappointed that his plans had not been followed through.

On 21st February **Adrian Barlow** gave a richly illustrated lecture entitled **From Burne-Jones to Tom Denny: Stained Glass in (and around) Cheltenham**. Adrian noted that his opening image, of an Art Deco screen from *The Daffodil*, was unusual in that it is on an inside door, yet stained glass depends on light. It is a complex craft usually involving several people from the designer and draughtsman to the cutter and fitter of the glass and lead and the painter who adds the fine detail. Then there is the task of fitting the completed window. The fact that many huge cathedral windows such as those at York and Canterbury have been there since the middle ages is a tribute to the skill of the early craftsmen. Stained glass windows also need maintenance: if they are not re-leaded every few hundred years they can collapse and fall out, which is what happened to many neglected windows after the Reformation when there were few craftsmen left. He showed examples of painted glass from All Saints, Pittville, designed by Burne-Jones and made by Morris & Co, pointing out how the details of the faces were done by silver staining. Another window there is by James Eadie-Reid, who also designed four windows depicting British saints in the Princess Hall at the Ladies' College, where he taught for a while. Adrian drew attention to the varied treatment of these figures and their backgrounds, part conventional, part experimental. Eadie-Reid later worked for the Gateshead Stained Glass Studio Company and made many more windows, one of which is in Staverton. Its theme is the Supper at Emmaus, treated with great originality. Another, which shows how his work matured, is a First World War memorial in St Stephen's church. It depicts St George but at the same time is a sensitive portrait of the young captain it commemorates. Cheltenham College chapel has a war memorial window designed by Louis Davis for James Powell & Sons in 1919 which in style has echoes of both art nouveau and the arts and crafts movement. Another window of four lights entitled 'Fortitude' shows heroes, one of whom is Edward Wilson. It is a 'narrative' window, with a realistic portrait based on a photograph. In St Philip's and St James' is a medallion window, made in 1927 by Christopher Webb in an interesting mixture of styles, with Christ in traditional robes and children in modern dress. Emmanuel church has a window by Joseph Nuttgens showing the Adoration of the Magi, notable for its variety of special painted effects. A window in St Christopher's, Warden Hill, designed in 1961 for Comper by John Bucknall, is more modern, light and bright though still with hints of traditional style. Tom Denny's work, in the same church and in Shurdington, is almost abstract. The windows are wider with little lead-work and show landscapes with just a few small figures, some of the painted effects being achieved by his own method using wax and acid. He is the leading stained glass artist at work today. Finally, St Mary's Prestbury has 1930s windows by Henry Payne in the arts and crafts style and a fine set of four apostles by Laurence Lee, who worked on Coventry cathedral. The audience clearly enjoyed this talk very much and asked many questions.



St David
at the Ladies' College

*OBITUARY***DOROTHY SETON-SMITH, 1930 – 2017**

Dorothy Seton-Smith (nee Cooper) was born in September 1930 at Portsmouth, with strong links to the Royal Marines Artillery at Eastney Barracks. She was the only child of Eric Cooper RM and his wife Dorothy (née Hayes), whose father was a long-serving Royal Marine at the same barracks; he was born in Martley, Worcestershire. Dorothy's Cheltenham connections included a great-grandmother who built up an enterprising laundry business in Old Bath Road, and William Field the chimney sweep. Dorothy's schooling was cut to half-

days due to the war. She spoke of the tanks blocking every road and by-way, waiting for the bad weather of June 5th to end, then coming home from school next day finding the men and tanks gone, but the house key and a note of thanks left on the table from the soldiers who had taken up her mother's offer of having a bath. After leaving school Dorothy qualified as a shorthand typist, and with her father coming to the end of his time in the Marines, the family came to live in Cheltenham. Dorothy was employed in the offices of Smith's in Bishops Cleeve and joined the Dramatic Society. In 1955 she married David Seton-Smith. A son was born, but the marriage did not last. Dorothy later worked at GCHQ and during this time studied for a degree. In 1993 she joined an adult creative writing group and was one of the nominees for the Adult Student Award. The class moved to the University, and although not then having a computer Dorothy took up a Computer Course there, and went to the University on Saturday mornings to practice on their computers. From then on, she attended lessons at various places, collecting City and Guilds certificates for various computer studies until Adult Learning classes were stopped in Cheltenham. Looking for something else to do, she then joined CLHS and soon took on a Church Watch at St Mary's Church (now the Minster) so that it could be opened on a Monday morning. She then became CLHS Membership Secretary, followed by taking on the Secretary's job, even though she could only use one finger of one of her crippled hands.

Unfortunately, Dorothy's health was failing and she needed an operation on her neck to stabilise some bone which had been inserted over 30 years ago. This operation took a considerable time, therefore recovery was delayed, and unfortunately, Dorothy could not stand or walk again, and was confined to a wheel chair. In spite of all her suffering, she put a brave face to the world. You never heard her moan about her lot, she enjoyed a debate and putting over her point of view. She was proud to be a member of CLHS.

The Society would like to express its sympathy to her son Christopher.

Joyce Cummings

Research and Display Evening

Although our annual social evening, held on 17th January this year, seemed slightly less well-attended than usual, there was as ever a wealth of interesting displays in the Sherborne and Montpellier Rooms and the Council Chamber. (The Pittville Room was not available this time.) The themes included Growing up in Cheltenham between the Wars, the Life of Father James Cotham, the Old Well and its



Pumpers, the Story of Pre-fabs, Immigration and Emigration to and

from Leckhampton, Widows of the Town from 1495 to 1768, Early Policewomen of Cheltenham and Gloucestershire, a miscellany on the theme of Skillicorne and the Spa, and Women and Local VAD Hospitals, 1914-19.

Geoff and Elaine North, who were selling books, had also brought along some pictures they had recently collected on subjects of local interest, including a remarkable sampler depicting the Normal Training College.



Journals and Chronologies were on sale.

The usual assortment of drinks and snacks was on offer during the evening in the Cambray Room, and a raffle was held in aid of the Mayor's charities, which this year are County Community Projects (CCP) and St Vincent's and St George's. It raised exactly £100.

*Photos courtesy of
Chris Bentall*

THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY

This year is the 950th anniversary of the Battle of Hastings, and several events have been organised to commemorate it. To see the Bayeux Tapestry in France involves a long and roundabout journey from Cheltenham. However, not many people know that there is a faithful copy a mere 75 miles away in Reading Museum. It was made in 1887 by 35 ladies who were members of the Leek (Staffordshire) Embroidery Society, and after being exhibited in a variety of places here and overseas it was acquired for Reading in 1895. I can thoroughly recommend a visit to see it. You may well have it to yourselves, leaving time to visit the adjacent Town Hall with its magnificent Father Willis organ (sometimes played at lunchtime recitals) and to explore the area beside the canal or wander in the fields beside the Thames.

Eric Miller



Photo courtesy of Mark Hopkin

As another mild damp winter draws to a close, here is a memento of winter in days gone by. Will scenes like this one from a 100-year-old album ever be repeated, at least in our lifetime?

SOCIETY NEWS

New Members

A warm welcome is extended to the following:

Tony Davies	Mr R G Broadie	Hans and Clare Swift
Janet Graham	Edward James	Toby Clempson

New members' interests:

Toby Clempson: Cheltenham's railway history, Pate's Junior School, Cheltenham Grammar School, development of the Regency spa, industrial history of the town.
Hans and Clare Swift: Photographs and photography

VCH News

First of all, very warm thanks to all those who responded to the VCH appeal letter before Christmas. Through a combination of regular donations and one-off gifts (plus in due course the Gift Aid), I'm delighted to say that some £2,000 has been given or pledged. This is immensely encouraging, and a great boost to the Cheltenham project. Speaking of which, the main news at the moment is that John Chandler, our senior editor, has been very busy pulling together all the material needed for the planned '*Cheltenham before the Spa*' paperback. He is drawing mainly on the drafts already completed by Beth Hartland and Alex Craven, setting these in the approved VCH structure, and writing a general introduction. The book will be in the VCH 'Short' series – essentially the same type of account that will eventually come out in hard covers, but in our case with rather more explanation of some of the medieval context and terminology. Plus as many illustrations as we can come up with! This is quite a challenge: by the time you've photographed the Minster itself, and the cruck beam that's visible (from the churchyard) behind the Two Pigs, there's not a lot of pre-Regency Cheltenham left on public display, so we shall be putting our thinking caps on and seeing what there might be in the Museum. Bright ideas welcome. All being well, the book will exist by the autumn, as we aspire to having a promotional spot at the Lit Fest under their 'Locally Sourced' heading.

Anyone who has visited Madresfield Court in Worcestershire will probably know there are historic family links with the Lygons and Dormers. They have some archives there, but not regularly accessible, so Alex Craven was very pleased recently to have a day with the documents, and this is going to produce interesting new detail, particularly on Redgrove. Because it became detached from the main manor of Cheltenham in early medieval times, Redgrove has always felt a little bit exotic and different, far away on the wild western frontier of the parish. (At least, that's how it feels if you live on the borders of Prestbury!)

Although conditions at the Archives are rather cramped during their 'For the



Record' building improvements, actually the temporary search room has developed a very friendly atmosphere, and one can usually count on seeing a familiar Cheltenham face or three, doing lots of things that one way or another will help towards the VCH work. We're immensely grateful to Sally Self and her colleagues for all the hours they're continuing to put in.

James Hodsdon

Volunteer Projects

Some people 'just sits and thinks'; some people 'just sits'; but Society volunteers just sit and work hard! Around 25 of our volunteers are actively engaged in projects that are continuing the work for VCH Cheltenham, Volume XV, our 'Big Red Book' or working for the benefit of the Gloucestershire Archives.

Some four years on, we are continuing to catalogue the records of Cheltenham solicitors. Winterbotham and Gurney were finished long ago and now it is the turn of Ticehurst and Wyatt. The cataloguing of this deposit of around 270 archive boxes, with about 40 bundles of maps, is making excellent progress, as we are now nearly two-thirds of the way through. Each document is looked at individually and the important details—the what, the where, the when and who are involved—is recorded into spreadsheets, each document having its own line of information. After checking for minor errors (which might break the Archives' 'golden rules' for archival information) the spreadsheets are uploaded into their digital catalogue. This information can be retrieved from anywhere in the world if one has access to a computer.

The Miles Scrapbook Project, which was reported on last November and is made up of ten large and very unwieldy books, has made significant progress. We have been lucky in recruiting Paul Stuart who has excellent knowledge of what is involved in digitising the scrapbook pages, which may well exceed 3000 images. He has already filmed five volumes and will have completed the others by the time you read this. Eleven volunteers have signed on for this project and are receiving these images, in small batches, on a USB memory stick, so that the work can be carried out at home. Each page's content is recorded, again using a spreadsheet. Alfred Miles has not made our work at all easy, as he has glued numerous cuttings and pages from books on to single scrapbook pages; but then he did not know that 100 years later computers would enable us to make his work available to all and at the same time preserve his scrapbooks from damage.

There are also three other volunteers working to assist Alex Craven, our Cheltenham contributing editor. They are researching urban development and the town's business/industrial firms during the period 1850-1945, while another volunteer is looking at the local newspapers for 1910-1911, a period of political interest, with three elections in 16 months.

No sitting and just thinking for us, we're hard at work!

Sally Self

*FEATURE***Fire Insurance Policies: an under-used resource
for local history**

Among the many records kept at the London Metropolitan Archives (and previously at the City of London Guildhall Library) are 1262 registers of Fire Insurance Policies issued by the Sun Fire Office between 1710 and 1863, and 173 registers of Policies issued by Royal Exchange Assurance between 1753 and 1883. Each register contains copies of up to 2000 policies, with details of owners and occupiers, and descriptions and valuations of the property insured – a veritable ‘gold mine’ for local historians.

Unfortunately, the volumes are unindexed, but there have been a small number of projects designed to rectify that, including a card index of personal names in Sun policies between 1714 and 1731 and a microfiche index to both companies’ registers between 1775 and 1786, both of which may be consulted at the Archives. An on-going volunteer project, initially funded by the Heritage lottery Fund and now supported by the City of London Corporation, entitled ‘A Place in the Sun’, began in 2003 and aims to index one of the two major sets of Sun Fire Office policy registers, Mss 11936. Although the bulk of the business in this set relates to London, it does include provincial policies, including some for Cheltenham. So far over 200 volumes, covering the period 1788 to 1839, have been indexed, and may be accessed through www.nationalarchives.gov.uk, the National Archives website. If you’d like to take a look, use the ‘Search’ facility in the top right hand corner of the National Archives’ home page and type the words ‘Cheltenham insured’ into the search bar. This will give you a list of relevant results, which you can click on to get the index entry (though to consult the actual policy you will need to visit, or order a copy from, the London Metropolitan Archives).

The other major set of Sun registers, Mss 11937, is a ‘country’ series, begun in 1793, and this includes far more Cheltenham references than Mss 11936. Some years ago, I spent many long days ploughing through no less than 220 of the ‘country’ registers and was rewarded with several hundred Cheltenham policies between 1797 and 1845. A majority of these relate to private houses, but they also include commercial and industrial premises and many public buildings. The latter include the Grammar School and Almshouse (regularly insured by the President and Scholars of Corpus Christi College, Oxford for £800 and £400 respectively), the Union Workhouse, and several churches and chapels. On 3 September 1839, for instance, builders Thomas and Richard Forty insured, for £1500, ‘a church now building, called St Peter’s, at Leckhampton, stone and slated, with the building materials for finishing the same thereon’ – a policy which must surely refer to the new church of St Philip, Leckhampton, which was eventually replaced by the

present church of St Philip & St James.

In addition to the Sun, I have also extracted Cheltenham policies from 20 Royal Exchange registers covering the years 1820-30, among them a policy taken out by the architects Robert & Charles Jearrad in May 1830, 'on a range of buildings, consisting of the Rotunda, Pumproom, Library, Reading Room, Conservatories, house keeper's apartments and offices all adjoining. Brick or stone built and slated or tiled situated at the Montpellier Spa Cheltenham. Warranted that no theatrical or scenic representation nor any masquerade or public exhibition be allowed in the aforesaid buildings' – the latter no doubt because of the danger of fire from stage sets. The insurance value of the buildings was £5,000.



The old Grammar School in the High Street

As well as familiar buildings, there are many familiar names among those who insured their property, among them Robert Capper, Francis Close, John Gardner, Thomas Henney, Charles Hale Jessop, Richard Eede Marshall, George Rowe, Pearson Thompson and many more.

If you'd like to see some examples of policies, and what can be learnt from them, take a look 'on line' at the work undertaken by, for instance, The Bromsgrove Society (www.bsoc.co.uk) and the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society (www.bucksas.org.uk), or, if you can get hold of copies, an article entitled 'Building History from Insurance Records', by Maurice Beresford (a pioneer in the use of the registers when studying early industrial buildings in Leeds), in *Urban History Yearbook* (1976), and James H. Thomas' article, 'Devizes in the Eighteenth Century: the evidence from Fire Insurance Records', in *Archives* (the Journal of the British Records Association), Volume 30 (October 2005).

As and when time permits I would very much like to complete my search through both sets of registers – and if any Local History Society member is ever in London with time to spare and would like to tackle some of the as yet unchecked volumes, that would be great! I would also like to produce a typescript (and an index) from my hand-written notes on the policies that I have already found, so that they can be made available to anyone researching our town's past – again, if anyone would like to help with this I'd love to hear from them!

Steven Blake

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AMINA CHATWIN – A POSTSCRIPT

The tribute to Amina Chatwin in last July's Newsletter reminded me of the time I was researching the history of the deserted medieval settlement at Roel (five miles south-west of Winchcombe) with Professor Christopher Dyer, which subsequently appeared in the TBGAS Volume 109 (1991). As we investigated the farm buildings we came across a pile of discarded publicity leaflets for Roel puppets. From the leaflets we read that Olive Blackham, the founder and director of the puppets and Amina's neighbour in Cheltenham, had opened a theatre and workshop in the former granary in 1932. Here puppets were made, plays performed, summer schools held and from here the company toured the country until the later 1950s.

We learnt in her obituary in the Newsletter that Amina involved herself in this movement to take puppetry to a new art form. Olive Blackham was a visionary, for these puppets were no ordinary string puppets; as tall as three feet, they were designed to replicate natural human movement. The title of Olive's book written in 1948 *Puppets into Actors* summarises her philosophy, that her puppets could bring plays as alive as if performed by humans and, as the two illustrations from the leaflet show, full length plays were performed. That Amina chose to become so closely involved with Roel puppets provides a further indication of the variety of her talents and interests.

David Aldred



THE BOY'S IN,
from 'The Tempest'
by
William Shakespeare
figure by
Gerald Ash

THE PROPOSAL
by
James Tetcher,
figure by
Olive Blackham



CLHS DISPLAYS IN THE LOCAL AND FAMILY HISTORY LIBRARY

14th February—27th March	Widows of the town, medieval and early modern
28th March—8th May	Elizabeth Baghott, a controversial woman
9th May—19th June	Cheltenham's Big Red Book—VCH update
20th June—31st July	Cecily Lewis and Grace Billings

*OBITUARY***ROGER JONES, 1942-2017**

We were saddened to learn recently of the sudden death of Roger Jones, who had been a familiar figure at our meetings since he joined the Society in 2000. Roger was staying with his brother Nigel at his house in Botswana when he was taken ill and died peacefully the following day, February 17th. He was an active member, supporting events such as History Days, helping with displays and contributing to the Newsletter. As a language graduate, writer of books and articles and an ex-teacher with much experience of working abroad he had a wide range of interests. Music was a great love, and he also belonged to several other societies, being particularly prominent in the Civic Society. The church was very important in his life and he was a deputy churchwarden at Cheltenham Minster. He was a great animal lover, but most of all he was interested in people. Despite leading a busy life he was a friend to all and ever ready to lend a hand. He was very well liked and will be much missed.

**The Deerhurst Lecture 2017**

**'The Deer of Deerhurst: Landscape, Lordship,
Custom and Ritual'**

Dr Graham Jones, University of Oxford

Saturday 16th September at 7.30 pm in St Mary's Church, Deerhurst

Admission on the door from 7.00 pm

Tickets (to include a glass of wine and cheese) £5, students £3

Further details available at <https://deerhurstfriends.co.uk>

*FEATURE***Something a little different in Cheltenham's WW2 local press:
rheumatic elephants and other stories**

Cheltenham was an official reception area for evacuation during WW2, and as would be expected, the local newspapers reflect news of the different people billeted here, the impact of new emergency measures, local events, gossip and letters as well as the wider overview of the war. However I came across a rather unexpected item, which led to discovering some other fascinating stories in the wartime press. In May 1940 the Graphic printed a rather splendid photograph under the heading 'Elephants take Cheltenham Waters'. The caption read: *'Six young elephants attached to the Bertram Mills Circus, whose average age is seven years, and who are affected by rheumatism, parading on Monday in front of the Cheltenham Town Hall to drink the spa waters. Each elephant was served by one spa attendant, drank a bucketful and seemed to enjoy it.'*

I was intrigued by both the mention of the spa water and the elephants. There is plenty of evidence relating to Cheltenham's past popularity as a spa town, when the well-to-do, including George III in 1788, came to enjoy the entertainments of the social season as well as taking the waters for medicinal purposes. Elephants were brought in to be included on the programme of lavish entertainment in the gardens for patrons taking the waters at Pittville Pump Room, rather than specifically to take the waters themselves. Neither had I come across the waters being used to ease rheumatism, as contemporary cartoons suggested that the mineral waters, which were supposed to aid digestion, had more of a diuretic effect!

At the outbreak of the war public centres where a large number of people gathered such as theatres and cinemas were closed by the Government, albeit temporarily, because they feared imminent aerial bombardment and gas attacks. Were circuses affected by the war, and were they still travelling around the country in safer areas to raise morale, or mothballed if circus staff were called up? In the case of zoos in London and the bigger cities feared at most risk, venomous animals and snakes were put down, and aquariums closed down. Southend Zoo killed its six lions and the hyenas. The Zoological Society of London owned both London and Whipsnade Zoos, and so was able to use the latter as a refuge for some of the larger animals from London Zoo. However as a safeguard against its being used as a landmark by German bomber pilots, the famous 140 metre white lion carved into Bison Hill near Whipsnade Zoo was covered up. Animals from Chessington Zoo were also evacuated, to Paignton or Primley Zoos in Devon. Some of the rarer breeds of cattle were culled during the war, but in the countryside the war effort concentrated on providing food for the nation. In case stray bombs dropped on the countryside the Government suggested that white stripes

should be painted on the backs of cattle so they could be seen if they escaped and caused further damage. Women were conscripted into the Land Army to raise production and replace the men away fighting. The local papers recorded milking competitions with photos of the land girls working in the rural areas around Cheltenham. The mother of Cheltenham resident Gillian Morss chose to move to become a land girl in Fairfield, in preference to remaining in Nottingham to work in the munitions factories, although she had no previous experience of rural life let alone milking a herd of cows. In the countryside rations could be boosted with rabbits, and she sent one back by rail to her family with a label tied round its neck. It arrived the same day, and although the extra meat was appreciated, it was the first time the townie relatives had prepared a rabbit complete with fur!

Thousands of domestic pets were put down in the first days of the war in London, as owners were worried about the safety of their cats and dogs in air raids and gas attacks. On 7th September 1939 the Times national newspaper printed a report denying that the Government encouraged this, and urging pet owners not to have their animals put down unless they were going away. If there was large scale aerial bombardment good ratting cats would be needed especially, to keep down numbers of rats and mice on the bomb sites. Domestic animals were not allowed in public shelters, although owners were advised to take them with them into their

own refuge room at home, *'otherwise they may come into contact with the gas, or get splashed by it, and contaminate you,'* with the reminder that *'animals will help to use up the air supply in the room. To be on the safe side, count two dogs or cats as one person in choosing the size of your refuge room.'* Owners could not be given a baby gas mask for their pets, although there were some designs to be had privately. (There is a cat's gas mask in Bristol City Museum & Art Gallery collections.) It was difficult to feed pets, as there were no special rations of pet food. Although domestic animals were not regarded as a war priority the Government set up a National Air Raid Precautions Animal Committee, which included the RSPCA and the PDSA. Voluntary street animal guards kept registers of all the pets in their area, issuing each a numbered disc so that the owners of lost or injured pets could be traced.



A duckling was found alive in Brunswick Street after an air raid in 1942.

Photo courtesy of The Wilson

Owners were advised that '*pets should, if possible, have been sent away to the countryside at the first sign of danger*'. Similar advice urged owners that '*if they cannot be sent to friends or relatives, they may be sent to special homes provided by animal care organisations*', but as this would be a private arrangement not everyone could afford that option. Interestingly this did happen in Cheltenham, and there was a request printed in the local press for billets for evacuated animals that had been rescued from bombed homes and sent to Cheltenham. There were many requests for billets for people but this is the only one I have seen specifically for animals. Since the beginning of the war the Animal Shelter in Swindon Lane provided a temporary home for 221 dogs and 128 cats of which 20 dogs and 18 cats had been evacuated from bombed areas. One local cat that was chosen for a special role in the war belonged to Mrs Quigley of Knapp Road, Cheltenham, who gave one of her Siamese cats to an RAF squadron who were looking for one as their mascot.

The final item is the photograph of Mrs. Peg Farnier of Brunswick Street with a baby duckling amazingly found alive after the air raid in July 1942. Among the photographs showing the destruction and devastation, the duckling brings a tiny glimmer of hope. Like the previous items in this article it draws attention away from the grimness of the war, even if for a moment, and provides something a little lighter to think about.

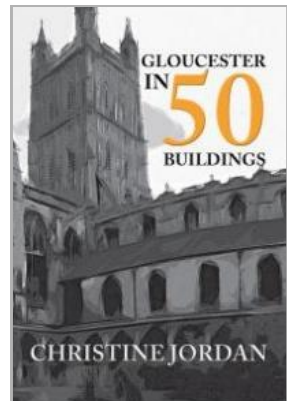
Virginia Adsett

NEW PUBLICATION

GLOUCESTER IN 50 BUILDINGS

by Christine Jordan

From Roman origins to Victorian grandeur, Gloucester has a proud and distinctive architectural identity. This extraordinary history is embodied in the buildings that have shaped the city. *Gloucester in 50 Buildings* explores the history of this rich and vibrant community through a selection of its greatest treasures. From its imposing cathedral to the striking Docklands development, this unique study celebrates the city's heritage in a new and accessible way. Well-known local author Christine Jordan guides the reader on a tour of the city's historic buildings and its more modern architectural delights.



Published in paperback in August 2016 by Amberley Publishing, price £14.99



BOOKS FOR SALE



News from the CLHS 'donated books' stall

We raised £56 from sales in November, including a few pounds from September (no book stall was held in October). December sales raised £69. The bookstall should be running again from March onwards, so look out for the table in the Council Chamber. As well as the usual selection, I'm hoping to highlight books I don't usually bring, such as some very old volumes, which are very interesting and a joy to handle. Another time I'll bring books on general subjects, mainly paperbacks, and some in 'as new' condition, which would make a good holiday read or gift. On my office shelves at home I have an almost complete set of the BGAS Gloucestershire Record Series, offered at various prices from £5 upwards, also 3 copies of the Archives & Local History in Bristol and Gloucestershire - Essays in Honour of David Smith (2007) at £5. I still have a number of guide books - Arthur Mee 'King's England' series for Worcestershire £4, Warwickshire £4, Somerset £4, and Monmouthshire (first edition 1951) at £15. In the Pevsner series are North Somerset and Bristol; North-East Norfolk and Norwich; North-West and South Norfolk; Suffolk, all at £10, South and West Somerset £7.50, and Cumberland and Westmorland at £5, which has some loose pages. If you are planning a holiday to any of these counties this year, one of these could be useful.

Here are some of the other books currently for sale:

A History of England (1962) GM Trevelyan, hardback, £2.50

Age of Extremes, 1914-1991 (1995) E Hobsbawm, paperback, good condition, £3

Frampton on Severn, portrait of a Victorian Village (2000) R Spence, hardback, signed copy, good condition, £6.50

A History of Tetbury (1978) E Hodgson, hardback, good condition, £10

A History of Cirencester (1978) K J Beecham, hardback, excellent condition, £15

Winchcombe, a history of the Cotswold Borough, 1st ed. (2001) D N Donaldson, excellent condition, £10

The English Spa, 1560-1815 (1990) P Hembry, hardback, good condition, £10 (including references to Cheltenham spas)

Kelly's directory (1978) Paperback, well-used copy, no map, (but difficult to find these days), £15

Thank you so much for bringing me your unwanted books, particularly the local history ones which sell very well at reasonable prices. As many are no longer available to buy new, it helps our newer members to build up their own collection as well as raising funds for the Society. If you are interested in any of the above books, or wish to donate books to CLHS, please contact me either at heatherbell71@hotmail.com or on 01242 232740 (ex-directory). Many thanks.

Heather Atkinson

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CAN YOU HELP?

Thomas Banbury, currier

An enquirer living in Banbury is researching one John Reeve of Shipston-on-Stour whose son Thomas was apprenticed to an uncle, Thomas Banbury, a successful currier and leather cutter in Cheltenham, in 1759. Thomas Banbury’s sons William and John both worked in the currier business in the late 1700s, and it seems that John subsequently went out to St Anne’s Bay, Jamaica, where he is recorded as owning several slaves between 1805 and 1828.

The enquirer wishes to know whether there are any records available in Cheltenham that might expand his knowledge of the family. Perhaps one of our dedicated researchers who frequent the Gloucestershire Archives may be able to help!

If you can help with this query please contact Joyce Cummings on 01242 527299 or e-mail joyce@cyberwebospace.net

NEXT ISSUE

Please forward any material for inclusion in the July 2017 issue by
Monday 5th June 2017

to the Editor : Kath Boothman, 3 Taylor’s End, Cheltenham GL50 2QA
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We are always very pleased to receive contributions from members—articles of any length, interesting facts and photos, memories, comments are all welcome.