



Cheltenham Local History Society

Newsletter No. 105

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<http://www.cheltlocalhistory.org.uk>

March 2023



EDITORIAL

We have had several views of Cheltenham and the surrounding landscape as cover pictures for previous Newsletters, all firmly identified. This one is more debatable. It's one of a pair of pictures painted by an unknown artist in about 1900 (the other is on the back cover— see the story there) that were sent in to our expert queries-handler Jill Waller. The enquirer wants to know whether it could be a Cotswold landscape, which at first sight looks at least possible. But if so, whereabouts is it? Have we any churches like that one? Do those animals look like Cotswold sheep? Perhaps there can be no definite answer.

Kath Boothman

March 2023

Cheltenham LHS

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Society's AGM will be held on Wednesday 17th May 2023 at 7.00 pm at St Luke's Church Hall, St Luke's Place, Cheltenham. (See agenda enclosed with this Newsletter.) The Mayor, as President of the Society, will chair the meeting.

Election of Officers and Committee 2023-24

Officers and committee members (as listed in the 2022 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 Alison Pascoe (email secretary@cheltlocalhistory.org.uk) or telephone 01242 519413) for a nomination form.

After the AGM business is concluded **Greg Godfrey-Williams** will give a talk entitled **The Spirax Sarco Story**.

SUMMER VISITS

You are invited to take part in the following visits with the Society. **IN ALL CASES PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN THE FORM ENCLOSED WITH THIS NEWSLETTER WITH YOUR PAYMENT AND A STAMPED ADDRESSED ENVELOPE.** There will be a priority booking period for members only until 10th 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 form when booking your own place. If there is any availability after 10th 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.

Wednesday 31st May at 6.30 pm and Wednesday 14th June at 1.00 pm
Contemporaries of the General Sahib

This walk, starting outside Christ Church and led by Jim Markham, uncovers some of the connections between Lansdown and the East Indies in the 19th century, telling many stories on the way. It goes via Douro Road to Montpellier, ending at the Rotunda Tavern.

Wednesday 5th July at 6.30 pm and Wednesday 19th July at 6.30 pm
Skillicorne to Skillicorne

Neela Mann will lead this easy walk of about 1½ miles around the centre of Cheltenham, tracing the Skillicorne family's history from Captain Henry Skillicorne in 1738 to William Nash Skillicorne in 1915. It starts outside the Minster where (Neela suggests) you should go in and read the Skillicorne memorial beforehand. The Minster is open 11.00 am - 1.00 pm.

Thursday 10th August, leaving Royal Well at 8.00 am, returning 4.50 pm

BLETCHLEY PARK

During World War II this large mansion near Milton Keynes, built in the 1880s for a wealthy financier with an eclectic taste in architectural styles, became the

principal centre of Allied code-breaking. From 1938 it housed the Government Code and Cypher School, which regularly penetrated the secret communications of the Axis powers, most importantly the German Enigma and Lorenz cyphers. The codebreaking team and support staff, who eventually numbered many thousands, worked in total secrecy, and the nature of their work remained secret until many years after the war. Bletchley Park opened as a museum in 1993, and now visitors can learn about the extraordinary men and women who worked there through films, interactive displays and exhibitions, all set within beautifully restored historic buildings and faithfully recreated World War II rooms.



An Enigma machine

Our tour leaves Cheltenham earlier than usual (it will also be possible to board the coach at 7.40 am at Marchants depot, 100 Prestbury Road, or at Sixways at 8.15 am) to arrive at Bletchley at 10.20 am. We will have a private one-hour guided tour, leaving plenty of time to explore independently before we leave at 2.30 pm. For refreshments there are several food and drink options, and picnic benches in the park. There is step-free access to all buildings, wheelchairs can be borrowed and there are sound enhancement systems.



Alan Turing, Bletchley's most famous codebreaker

EVENING LECTURE PROGRAMME 2023-24

We are continuing to hold evening meetings at St Luke's Church Hall, at 7.30 pm on Wednesdays rather than Tuesdays. For the benefit of members who are unable or reluctant to attend in person, talks will be recorded and can be viewed online for up to four weeks after the event.

Wednesday 20th September:

Dr John Chandler—The Gloucestershire Traveller: roads and their uses through history

Wednesday 18th October:

Dr Tim Brain—Faith in Stone: Gloucestershire's Historic Churches

Wednesday 15th November:

Phillip St Lawrence—General Sir Charles Harrington and the Chanak Incident, 100 years on: the man who brought down Lloyd George

Wednesday 17th January 2024:

Tim Bridges (Victorian Society)—Victorian and Edwardian Buildings of Birmingham and the West Midlands, including some Cheltenham buildings

Wednesday 21st February 2024:

John Putley—Gloucestershire Archives @the Heritage Hub

Wednesday 20th March 2024:

Steve Parkes (Cotswold Sheep Society)—Cotswold Sheep and their history from Roman to present times

Wednesday 17th April 2024: tbc

Wednesday 15th May 2024:

AGM followed by tbc

MORNING LECTURES 2023-24

Morning lectures will take place at St Luke's Church Hall on Tuesdays. A donation of £3 from all attending is appreciated. Tea/coffee and biscuits are served (no extra charge) from 10.00 am and lectures begin at 10.30 am. All welcome. Parking at the hall is limited and is on a first come, first served basis. If you need to reserve a space please contact the Secretary, Alison Pascoe (01242 519413).

Tuesday 3rd October:

Dr Stephen Draper—Making a Living on the River Severn

Tuesday 5th November:

Neela Mann—'Am I not a Man and a Brother': Cheltenham and the Slave Trade

Tuesday 6th February 2024:

Melanie King—The Secret History of Spas

FOR YOUR DIARY

Leckhampton Local History Society

www.leckhamptonlhs.weebly.com

Meetings take place in St Peter's Church, starting at 7.30 pm

Tuesday 25th April:

Caroline Alexander—Ladybird Books: Douglas Keen and his life in Leckhampton

Gotherington Local History Society

Meetings are held in Gotherington Village Hall, starting at 7.30 pm.

Visitors are welcome, £3 per meeting.

Tuesday 28th March:

Kirstie Bingham—Midwife, Herbalist, Surgeon.....Witch! Women and Medicine in Tudor England

Tuesday 23rd May:

Dr Alan Wadsworth—Farms and Farmers: a history of one farm from historical documents

Swindon Village Society

Meetings are held in Swindon Village Hall at 7.30 pm.

Saturday 15th April:

Guided walk around Painswick led by John Heathcott (Cotswold Warden and member of the Society). Meet at Swindon Village Hall at 9.30 am.

Wednesday 17th May:

Peter Pirie—Building a Mediaeval Cathedral

Winchcombe History Group

Meetings are held at Abbey Fields Community Centre, Back Lane,

Winchcombe GL54 5PR at 7.00 pm (tea and coffee available) for 7.30 pm

Monday 27th March:

Di Alexander—The Mitford Girls

Monday 24th April:

Michael Hare—Deerhurst

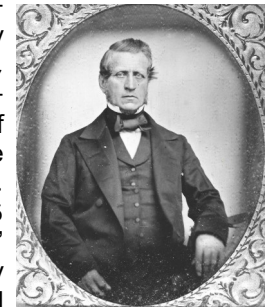
Monday 22nd May:

Andrew Breeze—The Real King Arthur

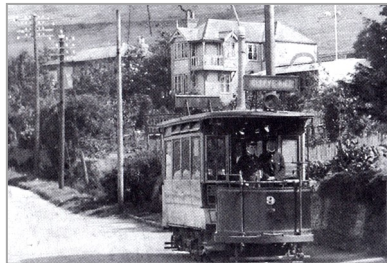
Monday 26th June:

Paul Barnett—Exercise Tiger (The Slapton Sands Disaster)

On November 16th **Steven Blake** told us the story of **John Bellamy (1808-93) a Gloucestershire Travelling Showman**. He first showed a picture of a model of Pittville Pump-room, made by John Bellamy in 1835 and bought by the Museum and Art Gallery in 1983 from Ted John, whose father Isaac was Bellamy's son-in-law. Ted also had Bellamy's unpublished memoir, which told his life-story from 1808 to 1873. He was born at Bidfield Farm, near Bisley, but the family soon moved to Gloucester and then to London. When John's father died of typhus in 1814 leaving his wife with 8 children, she kept the girls but sent the boys to live with relatives. John went to Wales and then to Birmingham. At 16 he became a servant, but disliked being a 'flunky' and at 22 went to stay with his grandmother Mary Bellamy at Stantway House near Westbury. He had already discovered a talent for model-making while working for a Mr Alvin in London, and he could sing and play the guitar. This gave him the idea of being an entertainer. He and his brother William earned money as 'Spanish minstrels' performing in Coleford one summer. John then moved to Lymington, Hampshire and made a living making and selling models, mainly of houses, out of cardboard and cork. In 1830, back in Gloucestershire, he was introduced to some wealthy people and made a model of Bushey Park, home of Lord Bloomfield. It was shown to the King, who admired it and gave John permission to call himself 'Professor of Models to King William IV'. He then travelled about getting commissions for models, and had his first exhibition in 1834 in Southampton. By 1835 he was in Cheltenham, where he got some good commissions. He lodged at the 'Lit and Phil' on the Promenade, had an exhibition there in 1836 and then was allowed to exhibit at the Pump-room. It was always difficult to find good venues for exhibitions until, in 1836, he thought of using large purpose-built vans and travelling from place to place. In 1839 he married Elizabeth Palmer, a miner's daughter from Littledean. They travelled for the remaining 45 years of his life, living in one of the vans, while John continued to build models for sale and display. He made a huge one of Windsor Castle and twice showed it to Victoria and Albert, who allowed him to call his display 'The Royal Model Gallery'. Steven showed a drawing of John bowing the royal couple into the exhibition. The Bellamys had two children, Tom who died aged 17, and Eliza Victoria. She was a pianist, which was useful when musicians were employed to help attract custom. After his wife died in 1861 John and Eliza travelled on, still making and selling models. He died in Wales in 1893 and was buried at Westbury, described in the burial register as 'the oldest showman in England'. Eliza Victoria married a showman and carried on for a while. Her family later gave some models to museums, but few now survive. Steven said he hoped the talk had given an insight into the lost world of travelling shows.



On December 6th **David Aldred** told us about **Cheltenham's Lung: the Long Making of Cleeve Common**. He said his aim was to show how the common had evolved to acquire its present shape and status, thus becoming an important part of people's lives. 'Commoners' had certain rights, enshrined in an Act of Parliament of 1890, that were defined on a signboard on the hill. In 1888 the people of Bishop's Cleeve had subscribed £50 towards the cost of getting the Act through Parliament, enabling five Cheltenham representatives to sit on the relevant board. He showed a map with the outline of the common marked in red. The hill would have been an important feature in the landscape from the earliest times. Not far away is Belas Knap, which was excavated in the 1920s revealing skeletons dating from 3600-3300 BC. Long barrows like this probably served as markers of territory. Evidence of a Bronze Age settlement (2000-500 BC) was collected by Emma Dent of Sudeley Castle, a keen amateur archaeologist, and Samuel Rudder in his *New History of Gloucestershire* (1779) mentioned four round barrows on the hill, said to be near Milestone Quarry. On Bishop's Cleeve common are Anta's barrow, which gave its name to Wontley, and Herriht's barrow, both recorded as early as the 11th century. When LIDAR was used in 2019 to scan the whole site it showed possible locations for these and several other barrows, and also a round house and pits. In 1890 conservators were charged with protecting all the 'monuments' on the site, but could exert no control when the golf course was made. In 1902 a dig at King's Beeches found Romano-British pottery and signs of quarrying. The old lanes up to the hill from Woodmancote all lead to iron age sites; when Severn Trent ran pipes up there in the 1970s they struck the edge of one of them. Among the many old tracks over the hill is the White Way, once called the Wheel Way (indicating vehicular use), part of an important long-distance route. There were areas of woodland, one of which is called Queen's Wood after the wife of Henry VI. So how did the hill come to be called a common? That it has long been shared land is indicated by the existence of a 'toor', a spot in the boundary where livestock from one part could pass through to get to water in another. Records of the 1470s contain the first reference to the common being divided between Bishop's Cleeve and Southam, with the boundary mostly following a bronze age ditch. There was much litigation over rights in the 17th and 18th centuries. The rules about numbers of sheep people could keep on the hill varied, and the rights were sometimes sold to non-residents. The main road, built in 1826, cut off the part now called Stockwell Common, and much land has been lost to housing and to the golf club, but the common remains a 'lung', a resource for all to enjoy.



Trams brought visitors to the hill from 1901. Visible in the background here are the Geisha Tea Rooms.

On January 18th we welcomed **Louise Ryland-Epton** to tell us about her work as contributing editor to the **VCH Leckhampton** chapter. She said she began work on Leckhampton Parish in 2021. Initially progress was slowed by the pandemic and other issues, but it is now half completed. She referred to some of the many published works that provide her with useful background before she looks at primary sources. In the VCH the subject matter is heavily prescribed—every paragraph, even every sentence is referenced to a primary source, thus guiding researchers to further information. VCH parish histories aim to be readable and attractive, creating a comprehensive history of every town and parish in the country. The VCH was founded in 1898 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Silver Jubilee. It was to comprise 160 volumes, covering England county by county and parish by parish, self-funded and assisted by private donations. It ran as a commercial project from 1898 to 1933 and by World War 1, 74 volumes across 9 counties had been published. Until 1933 the VCH was owned by Viscount Hambledon, then until 1947 it was supported by London University. Eventually the 'Wiltshire Model' involving Wiltshire County Council, Salisbury and Swindon, supported by London University, was adopted by 10 counties including Gloucestershire. From 2010 a new model was required and the Gloucestershire County History Trust was formed, supported by the local University and the County Council. The Trust raises funds, organises events, publishes a biannual newsletter and holds workshops on research techniques. Originally the VCH for each county followed a format whereby the first volumes were thematic, followed by topographical volumes for individual districts. The first thematic volume for Gloucestershire was published in 1907 and contained ecclesiastical history, agriculture and industry. The project then lay dormant for 50 years. There are now ten topographical volumes in print, and about half the county is covered. Louise showed a map of England illustrating the progress each county had made, noting that Devon had added nothing for over 100 years. The work of the Gloucestershire county team (Louise, Alex Craven and Mark Forest, with John Chandler as editor) is greatly assisted by a team of volunteers at The Hub, overseen by Sally Self, and a small team at the University of London. There is much work to do, since research on each parish must include the following topics: Landscape, Settlement and Buildings; Land Ownership; Economic History; Social History; Religious History; and Local Government. She illustrated each of these sections of Leckhampton's history with relevant documents. When all the sections on Cheltenham are complete, VCH cartographers will produce suitable maps. Then there will be revisions, a review by an external referee and an index compiled. In several years' time the volume will finally appear.

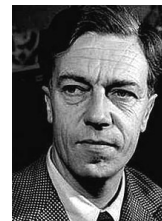
Sue Robbins

On February 7th **Neela Mann** took the theme **Aristocrats, Admirals and an Architect: Glimpses of early 19th Century Cheltenham Social History**. Her focus was on gravestones and memorials, specifically the large collection (188) in the church of St Philip and St James, popularly known as Pip and Jim's. Most of these are in the memorial chapel which is part of the original church, built in 1838. Many of the people recorded there had served abroad—it was said in the 1800s that everyone living in The Park area had connections overseas—and many were also aristocratic. One such was Lieut-General Sir William Nicolay (1771-1842), who had been born at St James' Palace, where his father was page to the King. He had a distinguished army career, was decorated at Waterloo and became Governor of Mauritius in the 1830s when the slaves were being liberated and slave-owners in England (including many in Cheltenham) were receiving compensation. Retiring to Cheltenham, he died at Oriel Lodge. His son Edmund died in India aged 29, leaving £4000 to a Miss Maria Jones. His mother said the bequest was invalid, but Maria was in fact Edmund's fiancée and the Jones family took the case to court and won. Major-General Sir John Thomas Jones, who died in 1843, was a military engineer much valued by the Duke of Wellington, who built new batteries at Gibraltar. His elder son was killed by robbers in India and his younger son Willoughby became Cheltenham's first Tory MP, only to be unseated for bribery. Many aristocrats in Cheltenham at that time were Irish, and Neela told stories about some of them before moving on to talk about admirals, who were also numerous. One was Admiral John Mackellar. Joining the navy at 13 after his father died, he served on HMS *Victory* but was later court martialled and dismissed for drunkenness, only to re-join the navy and gain the rank of admiral aged 79. He died in 1854 at Brandon Villa, opposite Pip and Jim's. His son John Patrick Mackellar was lost at sea in a cyclone off India in 1864, leaving among his effects a jug once belonging to Nelson, given to him by Captain Hardy. Another admiral was the oddly-named Hood Hanway Christian, son of yet another admiral, who had a successful career in the Napoleonic wars and became Rear-Admiral of the White in 1843, dying in 1849. His son George was Civil Commissioner at Sitapur for the East India Company and was killed along with his wife and children in the Indian Mutiny, one of several Cheltonians to die in that way. Finally Neela told us about her chosen architect, John Middleton (1820-85). In addition to the Delancey Hospital and parts of the Ladies' College he built or remodelled many churches, and notably enlarged Pip and Jim's by putting a temporary iron church in the nave while the church was rebuilt around it. When it was reconsecrated in 1882 it was described as 'a marvel of mechanical skill and ingenuity'. Now it has been remodelled again, and Neela thought Middleton would have approved.



Nelson's jug

Cheltenham's Poet Laureates was the theme chosen by **David Elder** on February 15th. He said there were three of them, Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-92), Cecil Day-Lewis (1904-72) and John Betjeman (1906-84), all very different. Tennyson knew Cheltenham before he came to live here because a favourite aunt, Elizabeth Russell, lived in Lansdown Crescent, and his father and sister had both come to take the waters. His father, who died when Alfred was only 21, had sought a cure for his drinking, and his sister Emily had secretly met her lover Arthur Hallam, a great friend of Tennyson. The couple were engaged a year later, but Hallam died on a trip abroad in 1833. Tennyson was very upset at his death and would later write his greatest work *In Memoriam A H H* in Hallam's honour. Worried about his own health and his financial situation that year, he wrote to a friend that 'for his nerves' he was attending a hydropathic clinic near Cheltenham. It was in a house called Sans Souci in Prestbury and was run by the Austrian Vincenz Priessnitz, seen as the father of hydrotherapy. The treatment was based on the belief that disease was caused by poor circulation, which could be improved by various cold water treatments. Tennyson stayed seven months and felt it did him good, though he complained of the discomforts and the jeering of local boys shouting 'shiver and shake' at him when he went out. His mother had taken a house in St James' Square, and from 1846 Tennyson lived with her, working productively and enjoying the company of a circle of literary friends. 1850 was a turning point, when *In Memoriam* was published, he became poet laureate, and he married and left Cheltenham. The Irish-born Cecil Day-Lewis was appointed as English teacher at Cheltenham College in 1930 and moved into Belmore House in Bath Road. David played an excerpt from his own audio play *The Man in the Grey Coat*, in which Lewis was criticised for wearing an 'inappropriate' green shirt. He was suspected of, and indeed had, communist sympathies. He made some good friends here, including other poets such as W H Auden. In 1932 he moved to Box Cottage in Bafford Lane, where he led a respectable middle class life but, in the current atmosphere of concern about communist influence on the country's youth, was monitored by M I 5 for some years. Although In 1935 Lewis won rave reviews for his poetry collection *The Magic Mountain*, he still had money worries, which prompted him to try writing detective novels. He used a pen name, Nicholas Blake, but even so the College did not approve, and Lewis left Cheltenham in 1938. He was poet laureate from 1968 until his death in 1972. John Betjeman, who succeeded him, never lived here but often visited. He admired much of the architecture (notably Christ Church), wrote a poem entitled *Cheltenham* and was a great supporter of the Literature Festival, where he gave talks.



OBITUARY

Mike Grindley (1937-2023)



It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of one of our longest-standing members, Mike Grindley, who died on 1st January 2023 following a decline in health. Working as a technical Chinese linguist at GCHQ, Mike was one of fourteen trades union members who were sacked in 1988 for defying the GCHQ trade union ban introduced in 1984. He became known nationally for leading one of the longest-running campaigns in British trade union history; his tireless battle ended in 1997 when Labour reinstated GCHQ unions.

He was better known to the Society for his passionate local history research, particularly of his own area, Albert Place and Portland Square. He spent countless hours in the Local Studies Library, and made sure to get his money's worth by printing out whole pages from the newspaper reels. In miniscule font, notated with his tiny writing, the unwanted parts of the page were cut up and meticulously filed under multiple topics. Many of these topics have been typed up by Vic Cole, including 'Murder' and 'Pubs', known between the pair as the 'Vickwick Papers'. Mike would willingly share his archive with other researchers, and many of his newspaper cuttings formed the basis of some of the CLHS Chronologies. He donated his cuttings archive to the Society in 2017, and it remains useful as it contains many items still not available in the online British Newspaper Archive.

With his wicked dry sense of humour, generosity of spirit and supportive friendship, Mike will be sorely missed by many of us.

Jill Waller

Memories and for the Newsletter?

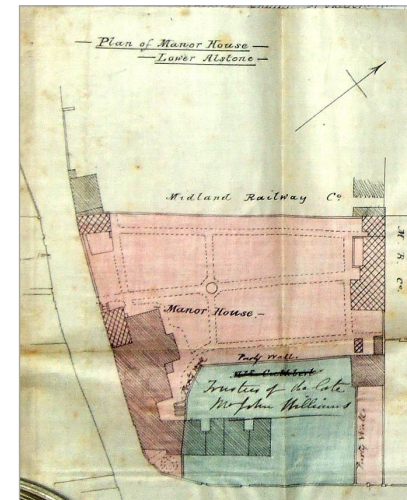
Writing an obituary like this involves collecting memories, not only of the individual in question but also of past events and activities. We can all remember so much of our lives, and for those who have lived many years in Cheltenham our memories are part of the social history of the town. Many of these could be stories for the Newsletter. Who remembers learning to swim at the old Alstone Baths, for instance? or watching motorcycle football at the Athletic Ground? Perhaps your grandparents lived and worked here. Please jot down some reminiscences, on any theme you like, and send them in for the July issue!

SOCIETY NEWS

NEW ONLINE NEWSPAPERS, DIRECTORIES AND TRANSCRIPTIONS

Our website is expanding! Thanks to the hard work and perseverance of two members, Sally Self and David Drinkwater, three new datasets will be made available online which will provide a valuable source for local researchers.

The enfranchisement books of the Manor Court of Cheltenham 1854-1935 record the transactions that turned the copyhold land held 'in the hands of the Lord of the Manor' into freehold tenure. They contain approximately 2,800 transactions covering many premises and parcels of land, and include the name of the property owner (ie the enfranchiser), the sum of money paid, date, details of the property enfranchised, and, occasionally, additional pencilled information. Sally Self has single-handedly transcribed the key information from the books into an Excel spreadsheet over the last four years and this is now available online. David Drinkwater has been equally busy digitising the *Gloucestershire Graphic* photographic supplement to the *Cheltenham Chronicle* newspaper, which was published from 1901 until wartime paper shortages led to its demise in 1942. David painstakingly photographed every page, and these have been combined into monthly pdf files which are fully searchable or can be browsed. The *Graphic* was launched as an adjunct to the *Chronicle*, and catered for 'a growing taste on the part of the public for presentment of notabilities and illustrated news and events of a local nature'. Family weddings and funerals, school and sports events, local shops and businesses, early motor transport, theatrical events and, more soberly, memorial images of the townsmen and women who died in the



Part of a map from the enfranchisement book of Cheltenham manor court, 1880-1896

Part of a
ment bc



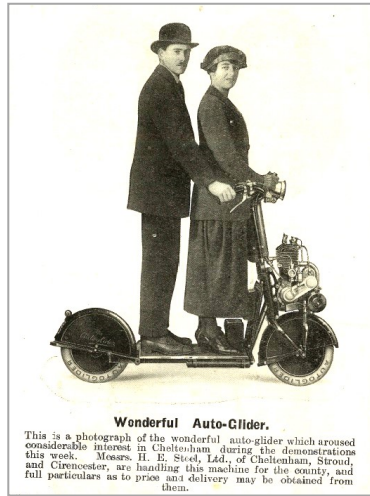
presentment of notabilities and illustrated news and events of a local nature'. Family weddings and funerals, school and sports events, local shops and businesses, early motor transport, theatrical events and, more soberly, memorial images of the townsmen and women who died in the

World Wars or at other times, make up a wonderful resource for all who are interested in the day-to-day life of Cheltenham and the surrounding county in the first half of the twentieth century. In addition, David has digitised a run of local *Street Directories* from 1837-1975, mainly *Annuaire*s, and other publishers such as Edwards, Hunt and Built-Leonard. These too comprise pdfs which can be searched or browsed, and will be invaluable in tracing residents, businesses and tradesmen through the years.

We are grateful to David Hewitt for help with moving the website to a new host which will enable us to expand what we can offer online. The *Graphics and Directories* were sourced from private collections, from CLHS's own collection and from Cheltenham Library, and it is hoped that the full collection will be uploaded in due course.

Please visit <https://cheltlocalhistory.org.uk> to check on progress.

Alison Pascoe



Wonderful Auto-Glider.

This is a photograph of the wonderful auto-glider which aroused considerable interest in Cheltenham during the demonstrations this week. Messrs. H. E. Strel, Ltd., of Cheltenham, Stroud, and Cirencester, are handling this machine for the county, and full particulars as to price and delivery may be obtained from them.

An illustration from the *Graphic*,
January 1920

MORE SOCIETY NEWS

New members

A warm welcome is extended to the following:

Kim Hampton
Ian MacLean
Robert Dixon

Carol Sadie
W Brian Sullivan
Guy Brent

Adrian Padfield
David Lyall

CLHS MEMBERSHIP SURVEY AUTUMN 2022

Many thanks to all who took the time to complete the survey - we were pleased to receive 88 responses out of our membership of 348, i.e. about 25%. A summary of the results has been emailed to all members, but if you would like a hard copy then please contact Alison Pascoe on 01242 519413.

The Survey covered our events, walks and visits, research and display meetings, our evening venue, Newsletter and Journal, research projects and 5 year plan. The responses were very encouraging and there were many helpful suggestions which will be followed up by the committee.

Alison Pascoe

SOCIETY UPDATE

It was most pleasing to achieve such a good and positive response to our members' survey. We are most grateful to the many people who put forward ideas and suggestions and also volunteered themselves to serve on the committee or contribute in other practical ways now or in the future.

We were also delighted to hear that Jill Waller has been awarded a Cheltenham Arts Council citation. Jill, who previously received a CAC citation jointly with Sue Rowbotham in 2006, receives this one for 'her exceptional diligence in researching and responding to Local History enquirers with outstanding attention to detail'.

Since 2018, Jill has dealt with over 300 enquiries on our behalf, covering many obscure and hard-to-research topics, such as the location of a Schafer beetle habitat at the Gas Works in the 1930s, the provenance of an Egyptian mummy, a tunnel beneath the High Street, a sampler stitched in Tivoli in 1854, and a set of large rusted hinges in a Montpellier flower-bed! In doing so, she has also unearthed many previously unknown facts about our town, and contributed articles about these to our Newsletter. This new award reflects in part the considerable gratitude we owe to Jill for everything that she does for the Society, and I hope that many of our

Congratulations Jill!

On 1st March at the annual ceremony at the Playhouse Theatre Jill Waller received a Cheltenham Arts Council Award with the citation: '*For exceptional diligence in researching and responding to Local History enquirers with outstanding attention to detail, which has broadened understanding and uncovered previously unknown aspects of Cheltenham's history.*'

In her nearly 30 years of researching and writing about the history of our town Jill has become, as one satisfied enquirer said, an extraordinary asset to the Society. We all feel her award is richly deserved.



Jill with Edward Gillespie, Lord
Lieutenant of Gloucestershire and
President of Cheltenham Arts Council

members will have been present in the Playhouse on 1 March to witness her receiving the citation and help her to celebrate in style.

David Elder

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES—and a story

The Cheltenham volunteer cataloguers have continued listing solicitors' deposits donated to the Gloucestershire Archives. Only Covid, domestic commitments and Monday Bank Holidays have stopped us.

Solicitors' business records form 99% of our cataloguing, mainly telling us under what terms Mr Y conveyed property to Mr X or that Miss A on her marriage to Mr B will have a secure settlement. Little is learnt about personalities, attitudes or emotions. Was Mr Y forced to sell because he faced bankruptcy? Was Miss A happy with her future husband, or was Mr B after her fortune?

Just occasionally we get a glimpse of life beyond the solicitors' office. Recently we came across a letter that gave a real insight into domesticity – blissful it was not! It is the case of Payne, Polley and Chirm.

Mr Polley died in May 1801 and a Mr Payne called on Mr/Mrs Chirm to enquire if Mrs Polley 'intended to carry on the business' and 'if she had enough to live on' – a kindly thought. The letter revealed that Chirm 'could not afford to keep her' but that 'two boarding together may live cheaper', and that 'one Servant Maid might do for both.' Mrs Polley was indecisive, 'but that She must do something'.

In October Mrs Polley 'arrived with such of her effects as She had not disposed of and without any notice of ... the conditions we were to be upon in joint housekeeping!' It then transpired that there was 'implacable animosity' between her and Chirm's maid, Anne Saunders, who had lived with her for five years and had been recommended to her by Mrs Polley. Anne's 'cooking, marketing and anything else' no longer suited her and she 'withdrew from all connection ... keeping even Coals', her reason being that 'Nanny made a waste in using the Coals', and that she herself would be blamed, presumably by Mrs Payne. The outcome was that Mrs Polley 'bought her own Coals by the Bushel ... dressed her own Food and kept her Room.' Chirm, who seems to have been living a life devoid of peace, felt that this was now 'productive of some Peace and quiet [and she hoped] nothing will induce me to consent to have it altered'.

The 'business' seems likely to have been lodging-housekeeping, though it is not totally clear if Chirm was male or female. The letter was signed T (or possibly S) Chirm. There was no envelope and no addressee. It reveals quite a stormy (if confusing) domestic disagreement – domestic bliss it clearly was not!

Sally Self

FEATURE

Local History in old Photographs



Here we have some previously unknown photographs of The Knole in Griffiths Avenue, St Marks. The Wilson Art Gallery and Museum has recently been given an album of photographs that include many of The Knole, a large Grade II listed Gothic Revival house adjacent to the Griffiths Avenue Nature Reserve.

Since 1963 this has been managed by the Langley House Trust as a residential home for men with multiple needs, having previously served as an old people's home since 1948.

The album appears to have been that of one E M van Zanten, whose name is written inside the front cover, and may show a visit or visits to the house during the late 1920s or early 1930s. The house's history does, however, go back much further than that, for it was built in 1860-62 as

a Rectory for the first incumbent of St Mark's church, the Revd George Pruen Griffiths, almost certainly to a design by John Middleton, the architect of the nearby church, which was built at the same time. The house was originally known as Hillfield and served as the Revd Griffiths' home until his death in 1910, after which it was occupied as





a private residence, including, from 1927, by a widow named Mary Jane Marsland and her two daughters, Margaret and Dorothy. The first reference to the new name of The Knole (as which it is identified in the album) is in 1927, which certainly helps to date the photographs; among the people shown is an elderly lady in a bath chair and two younger ladies – could these be Mrs Marsland (died

1933) and her daughters?

The house is still instantly recognisable, unlike its grounds, in which many of the photographs were taken, and which included a formal garden and a small thatched cottage. One part of the grounds (including what may be a remnant of a garden wall that is shown in several of the photographs) is now included in the Nature Reserve, while other parts are now occupied by modern housing.



Steven Blake and Stuart Manton
Collections Volunteers at The Wilson



Left: The Knole today

Older images courtesy of CBC/The Cheltenham Trust

FEATURE

Dr John Abercrombie
Friend of Dr Edward Wilson and co-founder of the Photographic Society
(now Cheltenham Camera Club)

Unless you are a member of the Cheltenham Camera Club or know about the origins of the General Hospital and Delancey Hospital it is likely that you will have no idea who Dr John Abercrombie was.

Following an email correspondence with David Elder several years ago I discovered that I am, indirectly, descended from John Abercrombie's mother Wilhelmina Young (1789–1883) who married his father John Abercrombie senior (1778–1860) in April 1816 in Aberdeen. She was the youngest daughter of William Young, the elder brother of James Young, who was the father of my great-great-grandfather Revd David Young (1793-1836). The Young and Abercrombie families lived in Aberdeen, and members of each family, including those named here, served as Provost of the city between 1778 and 1813.



The future Dr John Abercrombie was born in Paris on 1st March 1817. His father was a surgeon, attached to the 2nd Dragoon Guards, who were part of the Army of Occupation following the defeat of Napoleon. The family were back in Aberdeen by 28th April when John was baptised in St Nicholas' Church. He was educated at Tonbridge School and at Caius College, Cambridge, having been awarded a scholarship in mathematics. He graduated in 1839, rowed in the victorious Cambridge boat that year and played cricket against Oxford. He studied medicine at St George's Hospital, gaining his MB in 1845. He was then involved with the Public Dispensary in Lincoln's Inn. In October 1847 he married Louisa Worthington (1815-1883). The following year they moved to Cheltenham, to live at 3 Lansdown Crescent. Their first child, a daughter Clara, was born there on 13th September 1848. In early June 1855 he moved with his growing family to a house in Suffolk Square near to the former St James' Church. There he remained until 1883 when, with his unmarried youngest daughter, he left the town to live in London with one of his sons, also a medical doctor.

It is not immediately apparent what brought them to the town. I can find no obvious connections with Cheltenham apart from a relation, a cousin of his by marriage, Mrs Harriet Young, the widow of the aforementioned Revd David Young (who had died in Bombay in 1836). She lived in Park Place from around 1837 until her death in 1856. Also with her were two daughters and one son (my great-grandfather).

John Abercrombie was soon appointed to be Physician at the General Hospital, and the 1850s were years when four of his seven children were born and he and his wife became a part of the social life of the town. Local newspapers show that he was well known and respected and was a 'leading light' in many local organisations. The couple were keen gardeners and won many prizes at the local flower shows. Their growing family took part in many local social occasions and balls. His profession understandably led to his involvement with the local branch of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. He took a broad view of the local churches and, regardless of their styles of worship, was involved in fund raising for them. Neither did he forget his Scottish origins, because on 26th January 1859 he was present at a banquet in the Queen's Hotel to celebrate the centenary of the birth of Robert Burns. Abercrombie also took a lively interest in rowing, tennis and athletics. In January 1861 the

Examiner newspaper, in its report on 'Christmas week', commented on his ice skating abilities on the frozen Pittville lake: 'There were several accomplished skaters.....among whom we must rank as premier, by universal testimony, Dr Abercrombie, whose marvellous dash, ease and grace were the admiration of everyone.' But it was only a few weeks later that he again attracted the interest of another local newspaper when he pleaded guilty to allowing his chimney to catch fire! The *Mercury* reported - 'Mr Lingwood appeared on behalf of Dr Abercrombie and admitted that the chimney was on fire but that it was from no fault or negligence on the part of the defendant, inasmuch as it was swept at Christmas last'. The Bench dismissed the case!



Not Dr Abercrombie, but a well-known painting *The Skating Minister* by Henry Raeburn. Perhaps Abercrombie on Pittville Lake looked a bit like this.

In 1859 there was a vacancy for another physician at the hospital, and the man appointed was one Dr Edward Thomas Wilson. Though fifteen

years younger, he 'quickly befriended' the older Dr John Abercrombie. He too had trained at St George's Hospital in London and despite the difference in their ages they 'shared a similar temperament'. Wilson soon became involved in local organisations including the Working Naturalists' Association. There they were responsible for microscopic investigation of green algae, no doubt due to their interest in photomicrography (the study of objects under a microscope). Wilson wrote 'we were there working together on all spare evenings at photomicrography' and this led to the founding of the Cheltenham Photographic Society early in 1865. Wilson was the Honorary Secretary and Abercrombie its President. Abercrombie continued to work with Wilson and supported him in the creation of the Delancey Hospital, being one of the original trustees, and the two were present at the opening ceremony in 1874. (See David Elder's book on Wilson.)

Abercrombie's father died in 1860 in Kensington, and his widow Wilhelmina (née Young) moved to Cheltenham, presumably so as to be near her son. She lived in Lypiatt Terrace and later moved to Springfield, a house on the London Road near East End. Her two daughters Mary and Catherine were there too; they never married. The censuses suggest that over the years she acted as a 'grandmother' to several of the Abercrombie children and grandchildren while their parents were abroad.



Acton, the house in Suffolk Square where the Abercrombie family lived

Not long before he retired from practice Abercrombie and his coachman were seriously injured in an accident in Bath Road. The *Mercury* (10th April 1875) reported that on the previous Saturday while driving along the road the pony bolted and the carriage came into contact with the railings in front of Paragon Buildings, causing Dr Abercrombie and the coachman to be thrown out. Both sustained serious injuries – Abercrombie had severe concussion and the coachman a broken thigh. For a while there was concern over their survival. Four years later, in 1879, although only in his early '60s, Abercrombie resigned from his various medical posts in the town but continued to be much involved in sporting and charitable activities.

1883 must have been a distressing year for him. In February his mother, Wilhelmina, died at the great age of 93 and was buried with her husband in Brompton Cemetery. In early May his wife died, aged 68, and was buried in Leckhampton churchyard. At the time he was still living in Suffolk Square with his youngest daughter Mary, aged 23. Later in the year he and Mary left Cheltenham to live in Welbeck Street, Marylebone. By 1891 he was living at 23 Wimpole Street with two of his sons, John, who was another physician, and George, a solicitor.

Dr John Abercrombie and his wife Louisa had seven children, all born in Cheltenham. Of these, one died in infancy and, of the other two daughters, Clara married a solicitor and lived in Dublin and Mary, the youngest child, lived with her parents. She was, apparently, a talented artist, and was accepted to train at the Royal Academy. Of the four boys, Alexander, born in 1849, grew up in Cheltenham and was involved in Latham Abercrombie & Co, merchants in Bombay, where, presumably, he met and married in 1882 Emilie Robertson, daughter of Colonel George Robertson. One of the witnesses at their wedding was his cousin Colonel David B Young (my great-grandfather). Alexander died at his home in College Lawn in 1926. John (born in 1851) went like his father to Caius College, Cambridge and trained as a physician. Francis, born in 1854, who became a civil engineer, died unmarried in 1906 and was buried at Leckhampton. The youngest son, George, born in 1857, married Margaret Forbes in 1893 at St Stephen's church. He was admitted a solicitor in 1881 and practiced at Sergeant's Inn. He died in 1911.



St Peter's Church, Leckhampton, where the Abercrombies are buried. The family grave (with inscriptions now quite hard to decipher) is at the bottom right of the picture.

John Abercrombie died on 20 August 1892 in London and was buried in the family grave in Leckhampton churchyard. His death and funeral seem to have gone unnoticed in the local newspapers, the only reference being a paragraph the following month in the *Echo* (24th September) regarding his will. It would seem that the friendship with Wilson did not continue after Abercrombie left the town. A tribute in the *Medico-Chirurgical Transactions* vol. 76 1893 described him as 'modest and retiring' and 'content to live a quietly useful and an honourable life', which from my researches would seem an accurate and fitting tribute.

David Young



BOOKS FOR SALE



Thanks to the generosity of our membership, many of the Donated Books that we have for sale, hardcover or paperback, are in 'as new' condition. They make handsome presents with a local theme; ideal additions to one's own bookshelf for background reading on the area; and excellent prompts to get out and about exploring our wealth of local history. Here is a small selection.

- New Club – Neil Parrack, The New Club At Imperial Square (2012) £5.00**
Aylwin Sampson, Laid out with Taste and Judgement ... The Park and its environs in Cheltenham (2010) £8.00
Aylwin Sampson, A Cheltenham Sculpture Trail (1990) & Holst's Country Places to visit associated with the composer (1997) Both £0.50
Peter Smith & Sue Rowbotham, Commemorative Plaques of Cheltenham celebrating people, places and events (2009) £5.00
Alan Gill & Eric Miller, Leckhampton (Britain in Old Photographs) £3.50
AA, Walking in the Cotswolds (2006) £3.50
Archie Miles, Cotswolds Moods (2003) £4.00
Aylwin Sampson, Town Walks in the Cotswolds (Chipping Campden, Broadway, Moreton-in-Marsh, Winchcombe, Stow-on-the-Wold, Northleach, Burford, Painswick & Tetbury) (1992) £1.50
Richard Sale, Gloucestershire People and History (2002) £10.00
Gloucestershire Federation of Women's Institutes, The Gloucestershire Village Book (1987) £2.50
Ann Moore, Gloucestershire Past A Guide to Historic Places and People (1995) £3.50
Philip Moss, Historic Gloucester An Illustrated Guide to the City & its Buildings (2009) £5.00
Aylwin Sampson, Gloucestershire Worthies People and Places (1986), £3
Barry Cunliffe, Iron Age Britain English Heritage (2004) £5.00
Simon Jenkins, England's Thousand Best Churches (2004) £12.00
Neil Oliver, The Story of the British Isles in 100 places (2018) £8.00

David Aldred has donated copies of his new book, **Walking through the History of Bishop's Cleeve** – a fascinating trio of historical walks around village / parish church, followed by six detailed case studies of buildings. Here we can offer copies for £10.00 instead of the usual £12.95.

To browse our full stock, visit www.cheltlocalhistory.org.uk/resources. Orders can be placed by contacting me: hardy_pointer@hotmail.com or 07400 197989. I am happy to deliver locally, payment on delivery (or in advance if by BACS).

Oliver Pointer

Heritage Open Days 8th -17th September 2023

Heritage Open Days is England's largest grass roots community-led heritage festival. This year's (optional) theme is Creativity Unwrapped. If you would like to:-

- Greet visitors
- Lead guided tours
- Research the history of a place
- Sell refreshments
- Take photographs
- Distribute leaflets
- Spread the word through social media

Please contact Mary Moxham via email: marymoham@gmail.com



Having a **spring clean** of your bookshelves? Please consider donating books to us for sale. We are particularly looking for more stock focused on Cheltenham, Gloucester/shire and the Cotswolds. Pamphlets and shorter private publications are often as useful to us as more mainstream published books; being ephemeral they are less commonly found – and hence more sought after. I am happy to come and look, and to collect any that you wish to donate.

Oliver Pointer

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QUERY CORNER



An enquiry recently came in from New Zealand about a couple of paintings (see the front cover for the other one) that had come down through the family. The enquirer was trying to identify the subjects of the pictures, painted about 1900 by a New Zealand artist, and suggested two possibilities. Her great-grandfather, Edward Pearce, who spent two years in New Zealand, is buried with his spinster sisters in Cheltenham, so she wondered if these paintings were of the Gloucestershire countryside. Alternatively, her other ancestors, the Marshall family, lived in Amersham and the paintings may depict rural Buckinghamshire. We feel that the stepped spire and small Norman windows of the church are untypical of the Cheltenham area. The red-roofed farm also seems unlike any hereabouts, where one would expect slate or Cotswold stone tiles. The paintings are perhaps more likely to be of the Amersham area, (or possibly Lancashire, where her ancestors also spent time)—or does somebody know otherwise?

Jill Waller

NEXT ISSUE

Please forward any material for inclusion in the July 2023 issue by **Monday 12th June 2023** to the Editor: Kath Boothman, 3 Taylor's End Cheltenham GL50 2QA
Tel: 01242 230125 e-mail: kboothman3@gmail.com
We are always very pleased to receive contributions from members—articles of any length, interesting facts and photos, memories, comments, are all welcome.