



Cheltenham Local History Society

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November 2023



EDITORIAL

This old print, probably familiar to many people, is a glimpse of Regency Cheltenham in the heyday of the spa. Dated 1813, it shows the view looking north from Montpellier, down the Well Walk towards the town centre. On the left is the Long Room built in 1776 by William Skillicorne (son of Henry who first developed the spa) and on the right is the original spa building, occupied at this period by Fasana, a purveyor of arts, silverware and fancy goods from Bath. The artist was Thomas Hulley, also from Bath, who is known to have been here in 1812. He made six drawings of Cheltenham. They were sold as a set for one guinea, and would have been a popular souvenir.

Kath Boothman

November 2023

Cheltenham LHS

For CONTENTS and NEXT ISSUE please see page 23

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. All parking spaces at St Luke's Hall, both front and rear, are available for members' use. A donation of £2 from all attending is appreciated. 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 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:

Alan Pilbeam—William Tyndale and his Gloucestershire roots

Wednesday 15th May 2024:

AGM followed by Christine Whittlemore—A Glimpse of Cheltenham in 1850: from monster flower show to anti-Catholic riot

MORNING LECTURES 2023-24

Morning lectures 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. If you need to reserve a space please contact Alison Pascoe, tel. 01242 519413) or email administrator@cheltlocalhistory.org.uk

Tuesday 5th December:

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

Tuesday 2nd April 2024:

Members' Research and Display Event

FOR YOUR DIARY

Leckhampton Local History Society

www.leckhamptonlhs.weebly.com

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

NB: locations for January and February meetings are to be confirmed.

Tuesday 28th November:

Anthony Nanson—King Arthur in the Cotswolds and Surrounding Region

Tuesday 30th January 2024:

Tony Conder—A Gloucestershire Odyssey, the history of the formation of the county

Tuesday 27th February 2024:

Steven Blake—The Cotswold Way: 100 miles of history

Tuesday 19th March 2024 at 2.00 pm at St Christopher's, Warden Hill:

Adrian Barlow—Stained Glass Windows by Tom Denny

Gotherington & Area Local History Society

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

Visitors are welcome, £3 per meeting.

Tuesday 28th November:

Tony Conder—The Secret World of Gloucester Docks

Tuesday 19th December:

Andy Meller—Cider Making in Gloucestershire: from Foxwhelps to Firkins

Tuesday 23rd January 2024:

John Putley—The Gloucestershire Mummy!

Tuesday 27th February 2024:

Simon Draper—Place Names in the Landscape

Tuesday 26th March 2024:

Barry Simon—The History of Swindon Village

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 18th December:

John Putley—A Gloucestershire Christmas

MORE FOR YOUR DIARY

Historical Association

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

Monday 11th December at the Exmouth Arms, Bath Road:

Beat Kümin, Professor of Early Modern History, Warwick University—The World of the Tavern in Early Modern Europe

Monday 15th January 2024 in Cheltenham:

Simon Butler, University of Gloucestershire—The History of Holocaust Education

Monday 19th February 2024 in Gloucester:

Professor Christian Raffensperger, Wittenberg University, USA—The War in Ukraine: Past is Present

SOCIETY NEWS

New members

A warm welcome is extended to the following:

Martin Ward and Andria Cole	Michael Gay	Jane Whittaker
Stephen and Barbara Bennett	Susan Cater	Cholita Godwin
Ian Jones and Gillian Steels	Geoff Bridgman	Angela Freeman
Richard and Dinah Jefferies	John and Lynn Spendlove	Bill Lowe

We are very pleased that John Beard has been co-opted onto the committee, and has taken over the role of Secretary. John will arrange our committee meetings and AGM, and take the minutes. Alison Pascoe has stood down as Secretary but will continue in an Administrator role, including looking after the website and circulating email updates to members. John and Alison can be contacted at secretary@cheltlocalhistory.org.uk and administrator@cheltlocalhistory.org.uk respectively.

New Online

The Chronologies compiled by members of CLHS and illustrated and edited by Jill Waller are now available on our website (excluding the revised 2023 edition of Trade & Industry, which is only available as a hard copy).

The Southtown website and guided walks (covering Bath Road and The Suffolks) have recently come under our umbrella, following the winding up of Cheltenham Connect which previously oversaw it. Full details will appear in the March Newsletter.

Alison Pascoe

REVIEWS

At 6.30 pm on July 5th, and again on July 19th, Neela Mann led a walk entitled **Skillicorne to Skillicorne**. It started at the vast memorial to Captain Henry Skillicorne in the Minster, said to be one of the wordiest memorials in the country. It tells of his birth in the Isle of Man, his trading voyages to all parts of the world and his great project to develop Cheltenham's spa. His son William, who had the memorial erected, is also commemorated on it and makes a point of mentioning that when George III and his family came here they stayed in a house he owned. Neela noted that Henry had always been keen to attract the upper ranks of society to the spa, and to that end had enlisted the help of 'many worthy persons of the town and neighbourhood', as the memorial says. Many celebrities did come, notably Handel, Samuel Johnson and David Garrick. Walking out of the churchyard we came to Norfolk House, which would have been the start of the Well Walk, if Royal Crescent (private land) had not been in the way. Nearby, where John Dower House now stands, was Lady Stapleton's Great House, which until the 1820s provided lodgings for wealthy visitors such as Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire. Across Clarence Street was St Matthew's church. Before it was built, Neela said, there was a temporary building on the site which from 1859 to 1877 served as an overflow church for the Minster. We then walked up St George's Place to the site of a house where Dr Jenner practised. Four or five other eminent doctors also lived in this street, making it the Harley Street of Cheltenham in its day. The Reverend Roland Hill, a well-known preacher and friend of Jenner, often preached at a chapel for dissenters in a side street nearby, and after the services vaccination sessions were held in the chapel. Crossing Clarence Street we saw the Italianate electricity station on the corner, designed by the borough surveyor who also created Neptune's fountain, and stopped next at Shaftesbury Hall, built in 1869 by William Hill Knight, architect of the synagogue. It was previously the site of a farm owned by the Skillicornes. A quantity of land in Bayshill was left by the childless William Skillicorne to his nephew Richard Nash, who added Skillicorne to his name. We walked on to Bayshill Road, where Neela explained that Richard's son William Nash Skillicorne inherited the land in his turn and sold it in 1834 to the Bayshill Estate Company, which however went bankrupt. In 1848 George Rowe and Samuel Onley bought the land and rebuilt the pump room (on the site of the Ladies' College Princess Hall), turning it into a music hall. This was an unsuccessful venture, and George Rowe had to go to Australia to restore his fortunes. William Nash Skillicorne became Cheltenham's first mayor in 1870. Rich and influential, he was also a Town Commissioner and JP. His son, of the same name, became mayor in 1901 but died in a car crash in 1915 leaving the equivalent of £6.5m. He was the last of the Skillicornes.



Visit to Bletchley Park, Thursday August 10th

We were lucky enough to have a beautiful day for our visit to Bletchley Park on August 10th. It meant an early start—8.00 am from Royal Well—but the two-and-a-half-hour journey in each direction was very much one of the pleasures of the day, because we took a scenic cross-country route through many attractive and less familiar places. On arrival we were divided into two groups and taken by a guide to the Visitor Centre, where there was time for coffee before one group gathered at a building called the Chauffeurs' Hut for an introductory talk followed by a private guided tour. At our first stop we were told how Admiral Sinclair, Director of Naval Intelligence, founded the first Government Code and Cipher School in the 1920s and how in 1938, with war looming, he decided that it needed to move to much bigger premises. He chose Bletchley Park, a mansion with 43 acres of land, for its location not far from Oxford and



Cambridge and its good transport links and communications. The first 150 cryptographers moved there from their London base in 1938 but did not settle in until 1939, by which time many more had been recruited. They were sought from a great variety of backgrounds: our guide conveyed this

by inviting each member of the group to imagine that they were, for instance, a professor of mathematics, a promising language or science student, a crossword addict or a Wren used to team work and military discipline. Technicians of various kinds were also needed. All were vetted and interviewed, and when needed they were sent train tickets and summoned to Bletchley. They were made to sign the Official Secrets Act and told where they would be working and which buildings they were allowed to go into. Moving on, the guide explained how the radio traffic the de-coders worked on was intercepted and delivered to Bletchley: in the early days much of it was picked up and sent in by radio 'hams', but soon listening posts were established and systems for delivering the material to Bletchley by teleprinter or motor cycle courier were developed. We stopped next in the stable yard behind the mansion, where there is a bungalow and cottages that were among the first buildings put to use. We learned that Alan Turing, who came in 1939, would have worked here. The Enigma machines that were to play such an important part were invented in Germany in the 1920s and at first were on the open market. The British government bought some, as did the Poles, who worked on ways to break into them. The results of their pre-war work, passed on to

the British, were critical to the success that was to be achieved later.

Near the stable yard is a group of huts, each with its own function. Hut 8, for example, the guide said, was devoted to naval intelligence. He then talked about the long struggle to achieve decryption swift enough to be of real



value. Early efforts had taken months, and it was Turing's task to find a quicker way. The first Bombe machine, an electro-mechanical device that to some extent automated the process of identifying the Enigma settings, was superseded by an improved version that could find the settings in two or three hours. Eventually there were nine such machines at Bletchley. He explained the process of decrypting and translating the intercepted messages and finding out their relevance and potential value. At our last stop the guide told us how the carelessness of a German operator, not changing his settings as he should, led to a vital break-through. The sheer volume of traffic also sometimes gave a clue that something important was about to happen. In September 1941 Churchill came to Bletchley to make a speech and asked what more was needed. As a result, much more accommodation was built and communications were improved. At the end of the war Bletchley closed down, the last staff leaving in March 1946, but only in 1975 did the government begin declassifying its records and allow the veterans to talk about it. About 2,000 of the 9,000 who had worked there in 1945 moved to Cheltenham in the 1950s, while Bletchley was used for training until it became redundant in the 1980s. The site was to be sold for housing, but was saved by the Trust that runs it today.



An Enigma machine

There the tour ended and it was time to return to the Visitor Centre and buy sandwiches for lunch to eat by the lake. Afterwards we had more than an hour to explore the site independently, visiting the mansion itself, (where there is a re-creation of Commander Denniston's office and of the Library), some of the old huts and the displays in the modern blocks A and B. There are short films to watch, interactive cipher games in Hut 8, exhibitions of Bombe and Lorenz machines and much information about the people who worked at Bletchley Park. It was all very impressive and thought-provoking and left one, inevitably, conscious of not quite having seen it all. At 2.30 pm we reassembled at the coach and headed off for another long ride through lovely countryside on a fine summer evening. It had been a most enjoyable and interesting day out.

On September 20th John Chandler gave a talk on **The Gloucestershire Traveller**, subtitled **Roads and their Users through History**. The story began with the Romans, who built their network of roads not just to move troops about but for the rapid delivery of official messages. At intervals on the roads were lodgings called *mansiones*, complete with bath houses: John showed a photo of one that has been excavated at Wall in Staffordshire. Medieval people travelled much more than we used to think. In that period royals signed documents wherever they went, and others such as merchants, scholars, priests and the many pilgrims often left traces of their visits too. People also migrated, generally from village to town, and in the process often acquired a surname revealing where they came from. As evidence, John showed a list of taxpayers in Gloucester dated 1327. Maps are rare, but one, the Gough map of 1355-56, has roads marked in red ink. John showed a list of road and place names ending in 'way' (the usual word for a road until the 17th century), 'bridge' and 'lode' (a river crossing). Some medieval bridges survive, such as Tewkesbury's King John Bridge and Westgate Bridge in Gloucester. The latter was the lowest crossing point on the Severn; John showed pictures of the causeway that led to it across the adjacent marshy land.

Turning to travellers, he recalled William Worcester who, visiting Bristol on business in 1480, explored the city and recorded distances from place to place as a number of 'steps' - an excellent source for the topography of Bristol. Later and better-known travellers included the well-educated John Leland (1503-1552), who travelled around planning to write a description of the country to present to Henry VIII. He visited Gloucestershire three times in the 1540s seeing places, interviewing people and consulting



John Leland

written sources. Sadly, in 1547 he became insane, and only his detailed notes survive. John read extracts from them, adapted to modern English. Next came John Taylor, who went from here to London and became a waterman, then found he could make money by travelling and writing about his journeys. He came to Gloucestershire in 1641, always travelling as far as possible by water, convinced that waterways could and should be improved and made more useful. John described his travels and read extracts. Celia Fiennes, writing and travelling in the 1690s, left a description of Gloucester, observing with evident interest the variety of trades carried on there. Thomas Baskerville, a well-connected and inquisitive traveller, made several journeys in this area and left lively descriptions. His writings are to be published soon. One traveller of the 1690s, Abel Wantner, wrote unusually detailed descriptions of roads, a valuable source for historians. The development of turnpikes from the 1720s led to a great expansion of stagecoach services: advertisements for these are another useful source of information. In conclusion, John said we should celebrate the road-builders who made the roads we all use today.

Simon Draper's talk at our morning meeting on October 3rd was entitled **Making a Living on the River Severn**, but he explained that his main focus would be on the parishes of Minsterworth and Elmore, which he had been researching for the VCH. The Severn cuts between the two parishes, and to go from one to the other now involves a 14-mile road journey, whereas in the past they were linked by ferry. Minsterworth belonged to the Duchy of Lancaster, which for the residents had the advantage that they could claim exemption from market tolls. Some parts of the parish were on the Elmore side of the river, where there is an impressive manor house and the land is low-lying with drainage ditches. It was probably first drained in Roman times and by the Middle Ages offered fertile plough-land and good pasture. At the river edge are beds of osiers (a type of willow) called pershes, where withy rods were harvested to make fruit baskets and fish traps. In the 19th century there were extensive orchards—Simon showed a photo of long ladders being used to pick fruit from tall apple trees—and most farms had a cider mill house. Flooding was always a problem. Minsterworth parish church was flooded so often that it was rebuilt, raised on a plinth, in the 19th century. The particularly severe flood of 1770 caused much damage and loss; the silt it left behind, however, produced an excellent wheat harvest the following year. People had ways of living with the floods. Minsterworth has a paved causeway above road level that could be used to drive cattle back to the farms. There are sea walls on both sides of the river, probably of medieval origin: records from the 1590s show people paying taxes to maintain them. Fishing has always



Making basket traps

been important. Some fisheries are mentioned in Domesday, and by the 1300s there were at least three weirs on this stretch of the Severn. A weir was a V-shaped wickerwork fence with a basket trap of withies called a putt in the centre, designed to catch fish on the ebb tide. Gloucester Abbey, like other monasteries, owned weirs to provide fish for the monastic diet. The abbey also leased a 'weir house' on an island formed by a canal that served as a diversion round the weir. Weirs obviously impeded boat traffic, and after the dissolution of the monasteries they were removed. A muster roll of 1608 shows people still making basket traps, as does the census of 1851. Everyone did some fishing, and there are still 19th century brick shelters called fish houses on the river banks. Long-net fishing, which meant four men on a punt laying out and hauling in nets, died out in World War II. As for trade on the Severn, by the late 16th century the river was open to ocean-going ships, cargoes of wool, apples and grain were carried to Devon, south Wales and Ireland and ship-builders flourished. The Irish trade failed around 1700 and the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal opened in 1827, so that shipping on the river virtually ceased. Now there are few boats of any kind and the only fishing is for eelers.

On October 18th **Tim Brain** took the theme **Faith in Stone: Gloucestershire's Historic Churches**. Tim said he thought everyone should share his enthusiasm for historic churches, which had the unique quality of being very old buildings still in use for their original purpose. From the changes that have taken place within them and their architecture we can decode the story of Christianity in this country, as he would show, taking parish churches in Gloucestershire for his examples. St Matthew's, Coates has 13th century foundations but, like many churches, was much altered by the Victorians. A low wooden pulpit has replaced the double- or triple-decker it would have had earlier, where the parish clerk read the office below and the priest preached above. That system was swept away by the 19th century High Church revival. The rood screen that once separated the nave from the chancel, concealing the mystery of the mass from the common people, was removed in the Protestant Reformation of the



St John's, Cirencester

16th century, as were the statues of saints once seen in many churches. The medieval church of St John the Baptist, Cirencester with its fine Perpendicular porch (1480) represents an earlier phase of church history: before the Dissolution it belonged to Cirencester Abbey. In the middle ages the church owned one-third of all the land in England, its wealth attributable to people's belief that only prayer could protect them from harm and shorten their time in purgatory. Gifts to the church ensured that prayers were said. The very earliest period of the church in England has left little trace, though there are vestiges of a Romano-British monastery at Uley Bury camp near Stroud. The Saxons built few churches: Deerhurst and Bibury are examples, and Bibury's little round window of thick glass is a typical Saxon feature. The towers of Chedworth and Ampney St Peter are Norman, and Elkstone too has the distinctive round arches with dog-tooth decoration. The font was always prominently placed, baptism being essential for a soul to enter heaven. (The original function of godparents, Tim explained, was to stand in for infants too young to make the baptismal vows.) The Early English period brought lancet (pointed) windows, sometimes in groups of three, which became larger and more elaborate in the Decorated period that followed (1250-1350): see St Mary's, Charlton Kings. Many medieval churches had wall paintings, often painted over in the Reformation. Those at St Mary's, Kempeley, are particularly fine. Fairford church, rebuilt by rich wool merchant John Payne in the late 15th century, has a unique series of stained glass windows telling the whole story of the bible for the benefit of a still illiterate congregation. St Mary's, Tetbury, built in Gothic Revival style in the 1780s, is high, light and plain, as is St Paul's, Cheltenham, founded in 1831 by the evangelical Francis Close. The nearby Anglo-Catholic All Saints, by contrast, has a highly ornate interior. Finally St Michael's, Whaddon, is a rare example of good modern church architecture.

BOOK REVIEW

The History of Leckhampton Church

by Eric Miller (3rd edition)

Following his revision of *Leckhampton Yesteryear* for the LLHS in 2021, Eric Miller has just published a third edition of his exemplary history of St Peter's Church, Leckhampton, for the PCC.

Eric notes in his Introduction that it has been over 35 years since the first edition in 1987, and nearly 20 since the second; with his residence in Leckhampton since 1959 and close involvement with the Church since 1969, who better to undertake this new edition?

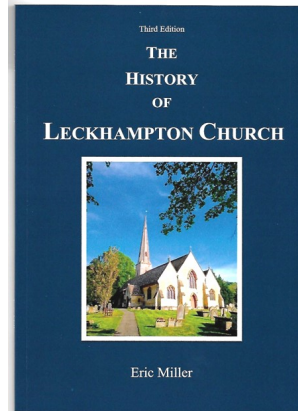
Though broadly following the running order of its predecessors, the section on the Stained Glass now has its own chapter, containing additional information on the dedicatees of each window, drawn from the author's monograph on the windows published in 2013.* The whole book is some nine pages longer, primarily due to inclusion of new information about the pre-1866 appearance of the building and more detail on the work carried out in the 1830s. However, careful reading reveals subtle up-dating of the text throughout, in the light of new research or reflecting recent changes to the layout and furniture of the Church.

There are some changes, and a good number of additions to the illustrations, all fifty of which appear far crisper and more detailed than they were previously. The inclusion of the illustration of the vivid heraldic colouration once applied to the effigy of Sir John Giffard, on the rear cover, is a revelation.

Fully realising his aim of providing 'a comprehensive account of the evolution of the building and its furnishings, set in the context of the ecclesiastical parish of Leckhampton' Eric Miller has again raised the bar on church histories: a gold standard to which others might aspire. At only £5.00 it represents excellent value and is a must-buy for all who are interested in the history of Leckhampton.

Oliver Pointer

* Copies of this Third Edition and both previous incarnations, together with *St Peter's Church Leckhampton The Stained Glass Windows* (£3.50) and *Leckhampton Yesteryear* (£3.00) are all available from the Donated Book stall at CLHS Meetings.



LOCAL NEWS

Reclaiming Cheltenham's River—an Appeal

In early 2022, a friend and I walked the entire length of the River Chelt, from its source near Dowdeswell to the place near Wainlode where it joins the Severn. Along the way, several things struck us. First of all, that the source of the Chelt is hidden away on private land, wedged between a now defunct railway line and the A40, and sadly uncared for. Secondly, that much of the river is generally inaccessible, bar a few stretches in Sandford Park and further out, around Arle, with most of it buried under car parks, especially in the town centre. And, thirdly, the volume of litter and rubbish lining the river's edges, not just in town, but also – and even more so – out in the countryside where it runs through fields and meadows on its way to the Severn. It therefore occurred to us that there seems to be a need for a group of people who speak up for our river and work



Near College Road



Out of town to the west

together to improve things, organise litter picks, maybe also check on water quality and call out polluters (again), or campaign for better access to the river – perhaps even reclaiming its source. A group of guardians for the River Chelt.

I have a dream that maybe one day we could have a network of dedicated groups of guardians for every river in the country, people who look

out for their river and make sure it gets the care and appreciation that our springs and waterways deserve. So, if you're interested in helping me start a group like that for the Chelt, please get in touch with me at betti@apriltext.co.uk. I can't do it alone!

Betti Moser

Death of a Smallholder, 1684

As one of the volunteers who transcribe old inventories from the Archives I have often been struck by their great variety, from the grand households of gentlemen who owned such luxuries as clocks, mirrors and cushions to humble dwellings containing little more than the basic necessities. I thought readers might be interested to see one such inventory (chosen both for its brevity and for its entertainingly erratic spelling), exemplifying the lower end of the scale. William Staple lived in Frampton-on-Severn.

August 4 1684

*A imfitorey of William Stapells Goodes and
Chatteles Latley desesed*

	£	s	d
<i>His waring Aparill and money in poket</i>	0	10	0
<i>Five Cowes To yearlines five Cafes on hors to peages [pigs] and some hay</i>	12	0	0
<i>For weate on the Ground</i>	0	10	0
<i>For bedsteds and bedes and bedding theronto belonging</i>	1	10	0
<i>For sume ould bras & pewter & ould friinpan & a ould board</i>	0	10	0
<i>For one fier bar Tongues Shuffell and woden ware and ould ler [iron?]</i>	0	5	0
<i>For sume small passell of Cheese</i>	0	10	0
<i>For on old Cofer and boxe & other Trumpery</i>	0	4	0
<i>Same is</i>	15	19	0

Praised by uss

Samuell Marling, Tho. Wood, Edwd Cage

The deceased's clothes and loose cash are always listed first, normally followed by domestic effects such as furniture and kitchen ware. In larger houses it is taken room by room, but even where there is much less to record the job is usually done with care. This one looks slapdash - was there nothing to sit on, for instance? The listing of the livestock and crops before the house contents is unusual, but reflects their importance: out of the total of £15 19s his household goods account for only £2 19s, and that includes the cheese which was part of everyone's staple diet. The final word, 'trumpery' (more usually 'lumber') covered anything the appraisers did not think worth valuing. It is surprising, incidentally, to see that the three men here all signed their own names, whereas usually at least one used a mark. Literacy was not essential for appraisers. William Staple himself was illiterate: his neatly written will, in which he left everything to his 'deare and loving wife Elinor', is signed by him with a simple mark.

Kath Boothman

MORE SOCIETY NEWS

Society Update

This year, September has quite literally had the feel of 'new term' and 'back to school'! One of the Society's recent initiatives has been to establish new links with local schools. On 7th September we responded to a request from the History teacher coordinator at Twynning School, near Tewkesbury, by visiting their school and spending a morning with their students to support their local history projects and enthuse them about Cheltenham's unique and remarkable past.



Twynning School

It was a most uplifting experience to see how positively the children responded to the visit with such interest and enjoyment, as well as much curiosity, judging by the number of follow-up questions I received. The format for the session was to provide a presentation in three sections, which covered:

- an overview of the history of Cheltenham
- some unusual and interesting people connected with Cheltenham's history; and
- two explorers (Dr Edward Wilson and Sir Raymond Priestley) with strong local links.

This was repeated for four separate classes (Owls, children aged 9-11; Hedgehogs aged 7-9; Squirrels, aged 5-6; and Foxes, aged 6-7). This learning was then, later, followed up with a visit to The Wilson in early October. We will keep in touch with the school and share any interesting updates arising from our collaboration and support.

David Elder

Your *Journal* needs your input!

As we move into autumn, it is time to start thinking in detail about next April's *Society Journal*. This will be issue 40 and we are hoping to make some exciting changes in format and appearance to mark the occasion. I am pleased to say that we already have some very interesting articles submitted or promised.

However, as the new Editor, I am keen that more Members of the Society should start to feel a greater sense of ownership towards, and participation in, our premier annual publication.

To that end I would like to encourage Members to consider offering short articles—perhaps just a few hundred words—based on their research. While the criteria for inclusion in the *Journal* are that articles should be based on original research, reasonably definitive and well referenced, they need not cover a research topic in its entirety. They could, for example, discuss a completed stage in a larger project, or explore a side-story thrown up while researching a main subject. For older Members this might also include recollections of an aspect of Cheltenham's life or heritage that is no longer practised or extant.

If you have an idea of something that you would like to write about, please do contact me so that we can discuss it. I am also usually at meetings selling the Donated Books and would be happy to talk informally there too.

One immediate project that Members can contribute to is a photo-essay that I am co-ordinating for the next *Journal* on letter boxes. Not the red street versions but the rich variety of shapes, sizes and types found on your front doors. Please send me photographs of your letter boxes in all their glory, preferably in jpeg format. I will not be mentioning any actual addresses in print, just the area of town/period of house; so avoid including your house number in the shot.

Quite apart from celebrating an aspect of Cheltenham's visual heritage that has not been looked at before, this also ties in with the current British Association for Local History's 'Up My Street' 2023 photographic competition. BALH is encouraging local history photographers to focus on the street view, individual buildings, some aspect of street furniture or just small details on walls or the ground. It would be nice to develop this as a regular annual feature in our own *Journal*.

Please support your Society's *Journal*. I look forward to seeing what you send me!

Oliver Pointer

(hardy_pointer@hotmail.com 07400 197989)

Following Colin Miles' piece in the last issue, here are some more

Memories...

Impressions of Cheltenham 1941–1945

My brother Tom and I were born in North London (I in 1932, he in 1937) and experienced the first part of the Blitz before moving to Cheltenham in early 1941. Our father – who had served in France, Belgium and Germany in the First World War – was chief accountant of the Severn Valley Gas Corporation whose head office was in the City of London, and became an Air Raid Warden when war broke out again on 3rd September 1939 (his 41st birthday!). In the evenings during air raids Father was patrolling the streets while Mother, Tom and I slept under the stairs as being the safest place. This was a wise move, as it turned out, when a nearby bomb blew in all our front windows.

Shortly before this our father's company had decided to move the head office staff to a safer area: it owned a number of gas works in the West Midlands and, as Cheltenham Gas Company had some vacant office space (on the corner of Gloucester Road and Tewkesbury Road), Father was sent there to reconnoitre and report back – but it was on the very day when the gas works were bombed (together with Stoneville Street)! However, it was decided that this was a one-off event and much less alarming than the constant raids on London, so we duly settled in Cheltenham.



The High Street, early in the war

We knew very little about the town: we had heard of the Promenade, but knew that this did not imply the seaside, the nearest being Weston-super-Mare. To a nine-year-old Londoner it was a bit of a culture shock: no trams or trolleybuses, or indeed underground railways. There were buses, but rather infrequent and you had to study a timetable. Telephone dials had numbers but no letters. There was comparatively little traffic, partly due to petrol rationing, and in the 1930s private car ownership was low. There were only three sets of traffic lights: Park Place/Suffolk Road,

Bath Road/Thirlestaine Road and London Road/Hales Road. Horse-drawn hackney carriages with top-hatted drivers had stands near the Queen's Hotel and in the Promenade gardens by the *Echo* office. There was a blacksmith's forge on the corner of St George's Place and St James's Square where one could watch horses being shod.

Cheltenham had had a reputation as a retirement place for former service officers, of whom we encountered a few, and the average age of the residents seemed high. However, light industry had already arrived on the outskirts with Dowty, Rotol and Smiths, all mainly to do with aviation, joined by the Gloster Aircraft Company which was essentially a spin-off from the famous joinery and decorative interior designers H H Martyn in the Lansdown industrial estate.

Father had resumed his duty as an air raid warden, but he had comparatively little to do in Cheltenham as raids were rare. A spectacular one had been a stray bomb which destroyed Pilley Bridge over the railway east of Leckhampton Station: it was replaced by a temporary footbridge which remained for many years before the road bridge was reinstated. Surface air raid shelters



Pilley Bridge bombed, December 1940

were provided, one behind St Philip's & St James's Church remaining for several years after the war. In Lypiatt Road there was a large static water tank, as an emergency supply for fire engines in case of damage to the water mains. Connected to this was an extraordinary iron water pipe which was buried until it surfaced round the corner at Back Montpellier Terrace, where it was laid in the gutter (no worries then about trip hazards!) until it reached the Bath Road where it again went underground until College Road. Here it regained the gutter before turning off into the little side road behind the hospital leading to Sandford Park. One presumes that it must have been connected to the Lido swimming pool and/or the River Chelt.

As is well known, the warning of an incipient air raid was by powerful sirens emitting a warbling note; there was later a brief steady note for All Clear. Cheltenham's central siren was mounted on the roof of what was then Shirers & Lances on the retail block in which Martins the jewellers is now the sole survivor of the original shops. The blackout was of course in

force from a specified time each evening, and everyone was enjoined to make sure that no chinks of light escaped from the black curtains which had to be drawn. There was no street lighting, buses had their mudguards painted white and all vehicle headlamps had to be masked. Kerbs at road junction were painted black and white, and pedestrians carried small dim torches. Cafés and fish & chip shops which stayed open after dark had to have a double set of curtains in the doorway as a 'light lock' to ensure that no light leaked out.

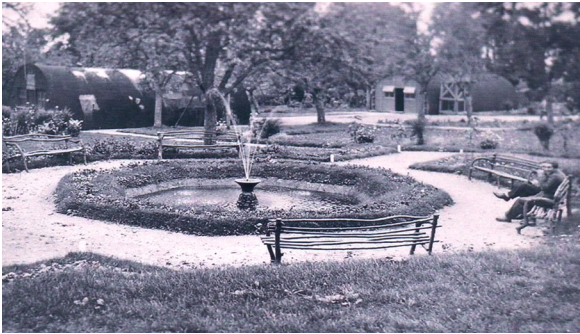
Early in the war Cheltenham District Traction Co had borrowed three buses from Oldham Corporation and, later, several London buses of a primitive design with outside staircases: it was strange for me to go to school occasionally on an old London bus! Some time later 'austerity' buses were painted grey and had wooden seats. Services beyond the town limits were provided mainly by Bristol Tramways & Carriage Company, with a few routes by Red & White, Midland Red and Western National. Associated Motorways ran the Black & White coach station in St Margaret's Road, which was a major interchange hub for motor coaches going all over the country. A few small bus firms operated from the Plough Hotel yard and other hostelries to serve outlying smaller towns and villages.



Leckhampton Station

Cheltenham had railway stations at St James's and Malvern Road (both GWR) and Lansdown (LMS), with GWR also at Leckhampton and Charlton Kings on the Kingham line. We lived in Leckhampton, and favourite family outings were to Bourton-on-the-Water from our local station, the highlight being a visit to the model village beside the New Inn. We could also visit Malvern by changing at Ashchurch.

Later in the war, during the build-up to D-Day, great excitement was caused by the arrival of US forces. It was the first time that any of us had seen a Jeep, and there were large lorries with 'Left-hand drive – No signals' on the back. The vehicles had a large white star on the side. The US Army uniform was much smarter than our battledress, especially the officers' with two-tone jackets and trousers. Their military police wore white helmets, were nicknamed 'Snowdrops' and patrolled the town centre in the evening to maintain discipline. At Leckhampton Court there was a German Prisoner of War camp, adjacent to the parish church. As time went on it became an open prison,



The rest station at Leckhampton POW camp
(Photo courtesy of Leckhampton LHS)

and some prisoners were employed by local residents as gardeners. Others made little wooden toys for children. Many of them settled in Cheltenham and the surrounding area after the War.

On VE Day there were great celebrations. The town centre was crowd-

ed, and people were waving flags and climbing up lampposts. Our father took us into the town to witness the historic event: Tom, who was only eight, felt overwhelmed by being surrounded by so many taller people so we didn't stay long!

Some months later VJ Day arrived, marking the end of the Second World War, and things gradually began to return to normal. Cheltenham was to remain our home for almost another seventy years.

David Lyall

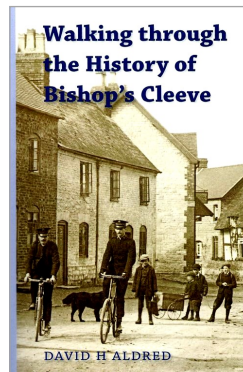
NEW PUBLICATION

Walking through the History of Bishop's Cleeve

by David Aldred

In this profusely illustrated book David Aldred tells the story of Bishop's Cleeve by means of three walking tours around the village centre and six detailed studies of important sites. The reader learns how Bishop's Cleeve developed out of small scattered prehistoric settlements into an Anglo-Saxon village and continued to evolve through the turbulent years of the Middle Ages and up to the 19th century. The arrival of Smiths Industries in the last century influenced the emergence of the modern village. All these changes are carefully explained, and we meet some of the interesting people who helped to shape the village's history.

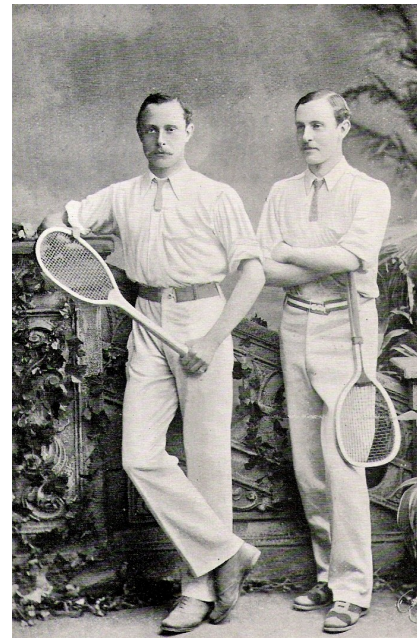
Published by Hobnob Press in November 2022, paperback, price £12.95. Copies available from Donated Books stall, donated to CLHS by David.



FEATURE

Cheltenham Lawn Tennis Club, a club to remember

In July 1884, after the All England club had crowned its first ladies' champion, Cheltenham could congratulate itself that its tennis club reigned supreme on the tennis lawns of the nation. The singles champions, William Renshaw and Maud Watson, were both members of Cheltenham LTC. William had learnt his tennis on the grass of Cheltenham's Montpel-



The Renshaw twins, William and Ernest

lier Gardens and the hard courts of its Winter Garden, and had launched his tennis career by winning the first Cheltenham open tournament in 1879. Maud had established herself as best in the nation in 1882 by winning the ladies' singles at the Cheltenham open—then the premier women's event—and had joined the club the following year. The prestige that flowed from the success of its players was just reward for the role the club played in the early development of the tournament game.

Cheltenham embraced lawn tennis when it was first introduced in 1874 and held its first tournament in June 1875, prompting what appears to have been the Field magazine's first report of a tennis tournament. The event was organised in Montpellier Gardens by the town's croquet club, with the croquet secretary Arthur Lillie as prime mover, and the tennis

club came into being the following year. As with the All England Club, croquet club spawned tennis club and this was no coincidence, as the croquet club had been co-founded by Arthur Law, one of the inaugural committee members of the All England, and Lillie too was an All England member and leading croquet player. Lillie closely followed the lawn tennis rules debate of 1874/75 and acted as rules guru for Cheltenham.

Croquet languished in Cheltenham after 1876 while tennis flourished in Montpellier Gardens and grew ever more popular. In 1878, the year after Wimbledon gave birth to the modern rules, Cheltenham LTC reorganised and assembled a core of administrators and players who together were to

shape the development of the club over the next five years.

A key figure in the new regime was a doctor on the brink of retirement by the name of John Abercrombie*, and it was he who organised Cheltenham's first open tournament in 1879. John's teenage daughter Mary was keen to play match tennis, as were several other young women, and 1878 saw the coming together of a group of Cheltenham ladies who were to compete in open tournaments over the next four years. The Field was to describe them many years later as 'some half-dozen of the best lady players in the kingdom', but we can call them the magnificent seven: Florence Mardall, Marian Bradley, Mary Abercrombie, Fanny Morris, Clara Hill, Ella Ramsay and Beatrice Mardall/Kay. Between them they competed in singles and doubles events in Cheltenham, Bath, Dublin, Brighton, Edgbaston and Leamington and assembled a collection of the major singles titles. They were a driving force behind women's tournament tennis in the days when society at large felt that a woman's place was almost anywhere other than in a public arena rushing around swatting small balls in competition for a piece of silver. The club enjoyed first class facilities both indoors and outdoors, hard and grass, and it is no surprise to find Maud Watson joining up in 1883, even if Cheltenham was a long ride from Berkswell.



After the Irish Championships of 1884: Standing, Lilian Watson and Herbert Lawford, sitting: Ernest Renshaw and Maud Watson. Also in 1884 Maud won the first Wimbledon women's singles.

At a time when the All England championships featured just a men's singles event, Cheltenham worked with the Fitzwilliam Club in Dublin to develop a modern tournament format which incorporated singles and doubles events for both sexes as well as mixed doubles. The club staged the first reported open women's doubles event in its 1879 tournament. Cheltenham LTC played a key role in the development of women's tournament tennis and should be remembered for this as much as for nurturing the talents of the Renshaw twins in their formative years.

Nigel Lawford

* Dr Abercrombie was the subject of an article in the March *Newsletter*.



BOOKS FOR SALE



We have recently been donated a large collection of books rarely encountered, only a few of which I can flag up here. Full details and condition, and more titles, are available on-line: www.cheltlocalhistory.org.uk – where many other tempting titles can, of course, be found. I bring to meetings a selection of our stock; if there are books you would like to see before committing to purchase, do contact me and I can pack them for you to browse.

William Byrne, The Legends of Cheltenham and Gloucestershire, ... Sketches in Verse ... (Cheltenham, S H Brookes, 1871) 52 pp; no cover, outer pages slightly dusty; £7.50

We also have eleven separately bound local turnpike / road improvement Acts of Parliament, 1698- 1777, the earliest concerning Birdlip/Crickley Hill; £7.50 / 8.00 each

The North Cotswolds A Descriptive Guide (Cheltenham, Ed J Burrow, [1930s]) 72 pp, b&w illus, foldout map; card covers; £2.50

G W Bacon, Fredk. Workman's Cycling Road-Map Worcester and District (Worcester, Frederick Workman, no date [1890s]) 26 pp, large foldout linen-backed map; £7.00

Charles G Harper, The Oxford, Gloucester and Milford Haven Road. (Chapman & Hall, 1905) 1st edn; two volumes; £15.00

Roger B Wilson, Go Great Western A History of GWR Publicity (1970) £5.00

Chipping Campden – Edward R Vyvyan, Dover's Annalia Dubrensis [1636]. A Reprint (Cheltenham, Williams & Son, 1878) 1st edn thus; cloth, gilt; £10.00

Churchdown – Hermione Oram, Churchdown 1904-1954 A Village History (Cheltenham, Burrow's Press 1954, 68 pp, many photos; card covers; £4.00

G B Grundy, Saxon Charters and Field Names of Gloucestershire (BGAS, 1935) 2 vols, 306 pp; black cloth, as new; £12.00

Hereford Cathedral – Rev F T Havergal, Monumental Inscriptions in the Cathedral Church of Hereford (London, Simpkin, Marshall & Co, 1881) xxiii + 103 pp, plans/drawings; dec parchment boards, good; £12.00

Francis A Hyett & Rev William Bazeley, The Bibliographer's Manual of Gloucestershire Literature ... A Classified Catalogue of ... Printed Material

Relating to ... Gloucestershire (Gloucester, John Bellows for Subscribers, 1895/6/7)

Edn of 250 copies; 3 vols, approx. 1,100 pp; brown cloth; **£25.00**

F A Hyett & Roland Austin, Supplement to The Bibliographer's Manual of Gloucestershire Literature (Gloucester, John Bellows for the subscribers, 1915/16)

Edn of 110 copies; 2 vols, approx 639 pp; brown cloth, dedication by author to G E Lloyd Baker [of Hardwicke Court]; **£15.00**

E A B Barnard, ed, Notes & Queries Concerning Evesham and the Four Shires (1911) 2 vols, 520 pp ; **£10.00**

G L Gomme, ed, Topographical History of Durham, Essex, and Gloucestershire ... [from] "The Gentleman's Magazine" from 1731-1868 (1893) 1st edn; xii + 341 pp; brown cloth, gilt, bright; **£10.00**

Picturesque Broadway A Charming Worcestershire Nook A Place To Spend A Quiet Holiday (pre-1900) 37 pp, dec paper covers; **£4.50**

Oliver Pointer

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CONTENTS

Lecture programme 2023-24	2	Features	13, 20-21
For Your Diary	3-4	Journal appeal	15
Society News	4,14	Memories	16-19
Reviews	5-10	New publication	19
Book Review	11	Books For Sale	22-23
Reclaiming Cheltenham's River	12	Local News	24

NEXT ISSUE

Please forward any material for inclusion in the March 2024 issue by
Monday 12th February 2024

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.

LOCAL NEWS

THE GREAT ESCAPE PICNIC - 1st July 2023

Jill Waller and Sue Rowbotham were amongst the few members of Cheltenham Local History Society who were lucky enough to experience this spectacular day-long event, which was hosted by MOD and GCHQ at Cotswold Airport, near Kemble, Gloucestershire.

The event was held in aid of SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity, and Combat Stress, the veterans' mental health charity. Despite the uncertain weather conditions about 1,000 attendees were treated to a splendid day.



A Spitfire

There were vintage and modern aircraft, both airborne and on the ground, including flypasts by three iconic Spitfires and a Bristol Bulldog biplane. GCHQ put on a fascinating display of artifacts relating to their history which proved very popular, and there was an extensive and enviable collection of classic and super cars. Even Postman Pat was there with his cat Jess and his red van! There were other displays too, covering many aspects of the armed services from 1914 onwards. There was even the surreal sight of riders in First World War army uniform astride two beautiful horses, walking sedately amongst the crowds between the aircraft and display tents.

More than 200 Dowty guests attended the picnic, and the company's presence on the day was significant. Dowty provided three Hughes helicopters with crews in old-style MOD flying suits. There was also a fascinating display of Dowty memorabilia, including Sir George Dowty's original pillar drill, the company's first machine tool, which had been bought for about 50 shillings in 1931. John Whittaker, grandson of A W Martyn, the first Dowty Chairman, recalled being driven at speed by George Dowty in his huge American car. Jill and Sue joined the World War Two Dowty singalong, singing with gusto. The day's highlight had to be the spectacular low-level fly-through by an RAF Lancaster, the only one still airworthy, with its Dowty undercarriage. Jill and Sue agreed that it had been a very memorable day.



Sue Rowbotham