Cheltenham Local History Society

Newsletter No. 111 Affiliated to Cheltenham Arts Council Registered Charity No. 1056046 http://www.cheltlocalhistory.org.uk **March 2025**

EDITORIAL

Here is one of the less familiar views of the Montpellier pump room, showing it before it acquired its distinctive dome in 1825-6. The dedication underneath, difficult to read on this old print, is interesting. It reads '*To Pearson Thompson Esq. This N.E. view of Montpellier Pump Room (engraved at his expence) is most respectfully enscribed by The Publishers*' - namely S Y Griffith & Co, prolific publishers of prints, guide books and much else. Pearson Thompson was the son and heir of the entrepreneurial Henry Thompson, who bought a large tract of land in Montpellier around 1800 and built the pump room (designed by G A Underwood) before he died in 1820. Pearson hired J B Papworth to add the rotunda not long afterwards. He may have commissioned this engraving just to record the building in its original form, as it was before he enlarged it.

Kath Boothman

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Society's AGM will be held on Wednesday 21st May 2025 at 7.00 pm in 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 2025-26

Officers and committee members (as listed in the 2024 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 John Beard (email secretary@cheltlocalhistory.org.uk or telephone 01242 514059) for a nomination form.

After the AGM business is concluded, **David Elder** will give a talk entitled **Cheltenham's Iconic Buildings.**

SUMMER VISITS

You are invited to take part in the following visits with the Society. **IF YOU WISH TO BOOK 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 14th April and, as places are limited on these visits, you are advised to book early to be sure of getting a place. If you wish to bring a non-member as a guest, please indicate this on the form when booking your own place. If there is any availability after 16th April, places will be offered to non-members in order of application. If you find that you cannot attend a visit for which you have booked, please inform Sue Brown (01242 231837) or another committee member of your cancellation, so that someone else may have the opportunity to take your place. If you don't let us know that you cannot attend, we shall expect you to pay the cost.

Tuesday 3rd June at 6.30 pm, repeated Monday 30th June at 6.30 pm

Around Leckhampton

Anne Bateman will lead this 90-minute walk, which begins at the Bath Terrace car park and goes around the streets to the west of the Shurdington and Bath Roads. It explores a little of the history of Leckhampton and its previous inhabitants, some of whom gave their names to places,

buildings and streets. Find out who the Giffords, Norwoods and Tryes were. Who was Mr Burrow and what is the connection to a certain green vegetable?

Wednesday 18th June at 6.30pm, repeated Wednesday 2nd July at 6.30pm
Old Charlton Kings
Mary Moxham will be the guide for this 90-minute walk starting and finishing at the Church Piece car park off Horsefair Street. Explore the wandering roads of Charlton Kings, past ancient timber framed houses down to Spring Bottom; hear about the failure of Sir William Russell's property development plans and admire the ancient parish church.

Tuesday 19th August, departing from Royal Well at 9.00 am and returning at 5.30 pm.

VISIT TO CHIPPING CAMPDEN


The Market Hall

On arrival in Chipping Campden, after a drive of about 45 minutes, we will first have morning coffee at the Cotswold House Hotel in the town centre. From there we will set out on a guided walk around some of the many places of interest in this historic market town, once an important centre of the Cotswold wool trade. Much of the town centre is a conservation area, and it is noted for its terraced High Street lined with houses dating from the 14th to the 17th centuries. The Grade I listed Market Hall, built in 1627, is still in use. On our walk we can expect to see St James' church, an Early Perpendicular 'wool church' founded by prosperous medieval wool merchants, the Old Silk Mill in Sheep Street and the alms houses built in 1612 by Sir Baptist Hicks, a silk merchant. We will also visit Hart's Silversmiths workshop, the last operating remnant of the Guild of Handicraft founded by C R Ashbee in 1888. After the walk there will be a break for lunch: options include the Old Arms, the Bantam Café and Huxleys, all in the High Street. Another alternative would be to take a picnic to the Ernest Wilson Memorial Garden, a small botanical garden not far away.


St James' Church

In the afternoon we will visit the Court Barn Museum of Craft, which celebrates the Art and Crafts tradition of the area. There we have the option of listening to a talk and seeing a special exhibition entitled 'Construction from Clay: the Centenary of Northcot Brick Company, Blockley'. At about 4.30pm we will return to the coach for the journey home.

EVENING LECTURE PROGRAMME 2025-26

We are continuing to hold evening meetings at St Luke's Church Hall, at 7.00 pm for 7.30 pm on Wednesdays. 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 September:
Margaret Jones—The Thomas Phillipps Collection at Thirlestaine House

Wednesday 22nd October:
John White—Roger Fenton, Mid-19th Century Photographer, and his Visit to Cheltenham

Wednesday 19th November:
Stuart Manton—The Genesis of Cheltenham South Town

Wednesday 21st January 2026:
Louise Ryland-Epton—Blood, Magic and Power: the Murder by Witchcraft of William Bayntun

Wednesday 18th February 2026:
Stuart Butler—The Elusive Digger Settlement at Slimbridge

Wednesday 25th March 2026:
Dr Steven Blake—George Rowe's 'Illustrated Cheltenham Guide' of 1845: then, now and in the intervening years

Wednesday 15th April 2026:
Tony Condor—Gloucestershire and the Atlantic Slave Trade

Wednesday 20th May 2026:
AGM followed by **Sue Rowbotham—Arle Court: a House Through Time**

MORNING LECTURES 2025-26

Tuesday 7th October:
Nicolas Wheatley—Funeral Trains: the Cheltenham and Gloucestershire Connections

Tuesday 2nd December:
Adrian Barlow—Down Winterbotham Road: the Enduring Legacy of a Cheltenham family

Tuesday 3rd February 2026:
Dr Matthew Andrews—Origins and Development of the University of Gloucestershire

Tuesday 7th April 2026:
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.

Tuesday 29th April:
Malcolm J Watkins—The Birdlip Grave Group, a 2000-year-old Mystery

Tuesday 27th May:
AGM followed by **Eric Miller—Treasures from the Bendall Archive**

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 28th April:
Max Keen—Prince Rupert

Tuesday 20th May:
Kat Keldeen—The Story of the old Baptist Chapel in Tewkesbury

Gotherington & Area Local History Society
Meetings are held in Gotherington Village Hall, GL52 9ER, normally on the fourth Tuesday in the month at 7.30 pm. Visitors pay £3, refreshments included.

Tuesday 22nd April:
Dr Ray Wilson—The Industrial Heritage of the Cotswolds

Tuesday 27th May:
Simon Randall—The English Civil War in the Cotswolds

Historical Association
Meetings begin at 7.30 pm and visitors pay £3. Cheltenham meetings are held In the Teaching Block, University of Gloucestershire Park Campus, and Gloucester meetings at the Oxstalls Campus. Some meetings are on Zoom—see the Association's website.

Monday 14th April in Tewkesbury Methodist Church, High Street:
Dr James Ross—Henry VI and the origins of the Wars of the Roses

Monday 12th May in Cheltenham:
Tom Wilkinson—Rural Crime, and Protest? Poaching and Incendiarism in early 19th century Gloucestershire

REVIEWS

On November 20th **Steven Blake** told us about **Views of Cheltenham, 1786-1850.** He said he would talk about just a selection of prints and the people who made them. There had been earlier pictures of Cheltenham, such as Thomas Robins' painting of 1748, but it was the town's growing popularity as a spa that led to the mass production of topographical prints, often sold as souvenirs. In 1786 a guide book was published with two views of the Well Walk by Steven Hewson, engraved by Thomas Bonner. Another early image was the nicely detailed sketch '*Cheltenham Wells*' by an unknown artist, featuring the pumper Mrs Forty. George III's visit in 1788 is commemorated in a print showing his carriage outside Bayshill Lodge. In 1803 Humphrey Ruff published a history of Cheltenham with three pictures by the Finnish artist Jacob Spornberg, who did some very good aquatints. Up to this time prints had been sold singly or in pairs, but from about 1813 George Dinsdale and others produced sets of them. Steven showed a set of six images of the spa by Thomas Hulley, including one of Montpellier with the artist himself sketching in the foreground. There were two Thomas Hulleys working in Bath, father and son, both landscape painters, and it is not clear which of them came here. Their pictures were engraved on copper plates, a process soon to be replaced by lithography, which was cheaper because it allowed many more prints to be made from each plate. The earliest set of such prints was published in 1821 by G A Williams, proprietor of Williams' Library. Steven showed some of his attractively detailed pictures, including Royal Crescent and Sherborne Spa. They were all engraved by the London-born D T Egerton, who travelled widely in North America and in 1841 left his wife to flee with his mistress to Mexico. There they were both killed by bandits, though oddly enough without being robbed. (Was it a contract killing?!) Henry Lamb came here from Worcester to work as a drawing master and took over the emporium called Fasana's Repository in Montpellier, where among other fancy goods prints were sold. He published some important sets, one of which contained ten views. Until 1827 all sets covered various parts of town, but in that year R McKay produced a set of six, sold at 1/-, all of the Promenade and the Sherborne spa.


Entrance to the Well Walk
by Thomas Hulley

The most prolific topographical printmaker up to the 1850s was the artist George Rowe from Exeter. His largest set of prints, titled *Illustrations of Cheltenham and its Vicinity,* includes many fine views, notably of the High Street and the Queen's Hotel. After 1837 he did pictures of events, such as a balloon ascent, as well as places. In 1852, having lost all his money in a failed scheme to convert some old spa buildings into a theatre, he went to Australia to recoup his fortune, finding no gold but returning seven years later as a successful artist. In 1862 he won a gold medal.

Philippa Turner's theme at the morning meeting on December 3rd was **Cheltonian Women featured in the Wilson Collection**. Her first example was a 1st-4th century sculpted panel found at Winchcombe showing hooded female figures, thought to be connected to a locally-worshipped mother goddess called Cuda. Next came Hannah Forty (1744-1816) who for 43 years was well known in Cheltenham as the pumper at the Old Well and served George III when he came here in 1788.There is a memorial to her in the Minster. Sarah Siddons (1755-1831), though brought up in the theatre, became an actress against her parents' wishes and lived a peripatetic life, visiting Cheltenham for the first time in 1774. Through dedication and perseverance she eventually found success in London, where she met some famous people and was painted by Reynolds. Dorothea Beale (1831-1906), daughter of a London doctor, was already an experienced teacher when she became Principal of the Cheltenham Ladies' College in 1858 at the age of 27. At a time when most girls were taught little more than 'accomplishments', she offered an academic education and encouraged girls to study maths and science subjects and to take public exams. She had to overcome much resistance, mainly from parents, but the College and its reputation grew apace. By 1900 there were 1,000 pupils, and 40 ex-pupils, trained as teachers within the College, had become headmistresses of schools around the world. Miss Beale also founded St Hilda's College, Oxford and served as President of the Headmistresses' Association.

Mary Agnes Wilson

Mary Agnes Wilson (1841-1930), mother of Edward Wilson the Antarctic explorer, besides being a doctor's wife and mother of ten children, achieved recognition as a scientific farmer with a special interest in poultry She was also active in local affairs and did much work with the Red Cross during World War I. Mary Theodora Mills (1878-1958) is remembered for her activism in the cause of women's suffrage. She was involved in the Women's Suffrage Pilgrimage of 1913, when 50,000 women converged on Hyde Park. Philippa showed a colourful banner made by Mary Mills bearing the motif 'Be Just and Fear Not'. Next came two archaeologists. Elsie Margaret Clifford OBE (1885-1976), a talented amateur who made discoveries by re-excavating existing sites, became the first woman president of BGAS. Helen O'Neil specialised in Iron Age settlements, working notably at the Salmonsbury Camp. She was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and was made MBE in 1968. Eleanor Freda Derrick (1892-1969) was a much-admired graphic artist, trained at the Cheltenham School of Art, who wrote children's books, was interested in architecture and travelled the country documenting old farming practices. Lastly, Isabella Blow (1958-2007), a flamboyant stylist and magazine editor, worked with Alexander McQueen and had a powerful influence on British fashion even though she died (of cancer) aged only 49.

On January 15th **Stephen Rowley** gave us a lively talk on **The History of Mummers' Plays**, wearing the traditional motley costume festooned with ribbons and bells. Mummers' plays, he explained, were traditionally part of Twelfth Night festivities, which in earlier times took the form of a carnival with games, feasting and boisterous entertainments. There are as many as 60 different plays on record in Gloucestershire, mostly collected in the 1920s and all involving similar groups of stock characters, notably St George, a Turkish knight, Father Christmas and a doctor. The Turkish knight was often a 'baddie', and the doctor character came from the Italian *commedia del arte* which satirised the 'quack' doctors of the period. Face-masks are sometimes worn and the dialogue is normally in rhyming verse.

Thirty years ago Stephen decided to seek out the origins of the plays, and found that they were commonly assumed to have developed from pagan festivals. This idea apparently came from J G Frazer's book *The Golden Bough,* first published in 1890, and although it was presented there as pure speculation, it had gained general acceptance. Unconvinced, in 2011 Stephen organised an International Mummers' Festival and Symposium in Bath which brought mummers from all over Britain and abroad to discuss the subject. (He showed photos of a vast colourfully costumed gathering.) Also present were academics including Professor Peter Harrop of Chester University, who has written a book called *Mummers Plays Revisited.* The word 'mumming' which takes similar forms in other languages, may be derived from the 'mom mom' nonsense sounds made by the actors. The first references to mummers in England date from the 13th century and refer to 'convivial mumming': people in disguise, with disguised voices, providing entertainment in private houses in the period between Christmas and Lent. There are records of mumming entertainments laid on at court for Richard II. Mumming survived the Reformation, and the Puritans later tried, without success, to stamp it out. With the advent of printing more people learned to read and cheaply-produced chapbooks telling popular folk tales circulated, providing many new themes for mummers' plays. One notable play was 'Alexander and the King of Egypt', an heroic drama in rhyming couplets published in 1840. In Victorian times the Robin Hood stories were popular and Nelson, being a national hero, sometimes featured as a character. By 1900 mumming had declined, and it was only when an American, James Madison Carpenter, became interested and went round England collecting mummers' plays, that a revival began. At the end, after showing a long list of places in Gloucestershire associated with mumming, Stephen recruited five audience members to enact a little play, complete with costumes, props and rhyming script. It made a most effective and entertaining finale.

On Tuesday February 4th retired judge **Dr Avery Jones** talked to us on Zoom on the theme of **Jane Austen's Wills and Legal Puzzles.** This year is the 250th anniversary of Jane Austen's birth, Dr Jones said, and he had discovered that for the 200th anniversary Cheltenham held a Jane Austen festival. Jane and her sister Cassandra came here in May-June 1816. He showed an image of her handwritten will, which was unwitnessed because until 1837 wills dealing only with personal property did not need witnesses. A note attached to the probate record on the back revealed that the value of her estate was under £800. Legacy duty normally had to be paid, and the Legacy Duty Account carried much detailed information about the deceased's assets. In Jane's case one thing missing was the copyright value of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, which were published after she died in July 1817. Her jewellery and books were also missing, but she may have given them away. More information could be found in the Legacy Duty Office's internal record. It showed that Jane left two legacies of £50, one to her uncle Henry and one to his former housekeeper. Legacy duty was charged on the beneficiaries at a varying rate (the lowest being for close relatives), and accordingly his was taxed at only 3% and hers at 10%. Cassandra, the residuary legatee, also paid 3%. Dr Jones quoted another case in which Mrs Jane Leigh Perrot, widow of Jane's uncle, left money to Jane's brother which was taxed at 10% because she and he were related only by marriage.

He then turned to land law, which often features in Jane Austen's novels. In her time, in addition to freeholds there were life estates, where the holder (the 'tenant for life') could not sell the property. If the land was 'entailed' it descended to the tenant's (normally) male 'heir of the body'. In the absence of such heirs it went to a 'remainderman'. Mr Collins in *Pride and Prejudice* was one such, destined to inherit Mr Bennet's house—but not the furniture, which was excluded from the entail. Only in 1833 did it become possible for the heir (the 'tenant in tail'), with his father's consent, to bar the entail by deed so that the land could be sold. In practice, the tenant in tail normally received an allowance so that he did not need to sell while his father was alive. Entails occur in all Jane's novels and are often important elements in the plot. In Jane's own family, her brother Edward could not inherit from Thomas Knight who had adopted him until Knight barred the entail. Females were provided for differently, widows normally receiving an income for life, or jointure, and daughters a lump sum, or portion. The portions mentioned in the novels vary widely, but the values are not comparable because there was much inflation in the 1790s when the books were written. Finally, Jane's father had a distant link to a plantation in Antigua, and it is interesting to see that many names on the map, such as Wickham, Martin and Lucas, also appear in the novels.

On Wednesday 19th February **Alan Pilbeam** told us all about **Sapperton, a Quiet Corner of Gloucestershire.** Alan said that this small village midway between Stroud and Cirencester near a bend in the River Frome had more of interest about it than might be expected. In the village church, St Kenelm's, are memorials to the Pole family, who built a grand manor house there but had to sell it when they were fined at the end of the Civil War for supporting the Royalists. It was bought by Sir Robert Atkyns, whose son, another Sir Robert, wrote *The Ancient and Present State of Gloucestershire,* the most splendid county history of any in England, covering every parish. It was published in 1712, the first of several significant dates associated with Sapperton. The next date was 1788, when George III came to see the work in progress on the Sapperton tunnel, which was to help link the Stroudwater Canal to the Thames. The first boats went through it in 1789, but it often suffered structural problems and finally closed to commercial traffic in 1911. The next significant date was 1893, when the Arts and Crafts designers and architects Ernest and Sidney Barnsley leased Pinbury Park, a manor house near Sapperton, and established furniture-making workshops there which developed into a community. The principal aim of their work was to preserve old skills and true craftsmanship by the hand-making of simple functional objects. They were joined by Ernest Gimson and later by Norman Jewson, who bought and restored Owlpen Manor. Gimson and the Barnsleys are all buried at Sapperton. One more date of interest was 2010, the year the Large Blue butterfly, long almost extinct, was successfully reintroduced to the Sapperton area where it once thrived. Alan described the curious life-cycle of the butterfly: the caterpillar, after feeding on wild thyme and marjoram, is taken by red ants into their nest where it eats ant larvae until it is ready to pupate.

The Daneway portal of the Sapperton tunnel

Alan then showed a series of slides, beginning with St Kenelm's church and, from Robert Atkyns' book, Johannes Kip's engraving of Sapperton Manor, which was demolished by its later owners the Bathursts. Pictures of the canal followed, including one of a Severn trow being man-hauled towards the tunnel, probably transporting such local produce as cider and cheese. The Daneway Inn was built for the benefit of the 'navvies' who built the tunnel. Alan showed one of the workshops at Pinbury Park, where ladder-back chairs were being made - a local style adopted by the Arts and Crafts people. A feature of their work, of which there are many examples in The Wilson (he showed some), was that joints in the woodwork were left visible. They also built cottages and larger houses, notably Rodmarton Manor. Most of their work was too labour-intensive to be profitable, but as they all came from well-to-do families it did not matter. They and their community of craftsmen got on well with the people of Sapperton, and often took local boys as trainees in their workshops.

SOCIETY NEWS

New members

A warm welcome is extended to the following:

Josie Simmons	Robert Stenning	Adrian and Paula Smith
Ruth Colyer	Simon Davies	Steve and Gail Jones

Society Update

We warmly welcome our new members and hope that you are enjoying all that the Society has to offer. Please do introduce yourself to any member of the committee at future meetings.

In the autumn of 2024 we received a large donation of framed and mounted prints and literally thousands of historic photographs covering local scenes from local historian David Hanks, to whom we are grateful. Many of the prints have been sold to members at our bookstall, through the efforts of Oliver Pointer. The photographs are a valuable resource and will be kept safely whilst we consider how to use them.

Following the Charity Commission's guidelines on the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults we have created a new safeguarding policy with myself as the Designated Safeguarding Officer. If anyone has any questions or concerns please either speak to me, or send a message via our website 'contacts' form. This, and all of our policies, can be accessed via the Society's website.

I am pleased to report that the new 'Working With Schools' group met in January, when it was decided to create a local history resources pack for primary school teachers. A first draft document has been prepared and will be completed in the run up to the next academic year.

On 27th February the Society held a joint meeting with the residents of the Richmond Village retirement complex. The event took the form of a talk by our member Sue Rowbotham on the appropriate theme of 'Arle Court—A House Through Time' together with a display about the Dowty Group, which was formerly headquartered in the mansion.

The Richmond Village event

Our AGM is on 21st May and we are already looking forward to our Summer Local History Afternoon at St Andrew's church on 12th July, our guided walks in June and July and the visit to Chipping Campden on 19th August. A flyer about the St Andrews event and a booking form for the other activities are enclosed with this Newsletter.

Stuart Manton

ORAL HISTORY RECORDINGS – A REMINDER

Back in 2018, a small group of CLHS members made some audio recordings of the memories and personal experiences of a number of Cheltonians, and the interviews are available on our YouTube channel. A wide range of topics was covered, including:

Education – Bournside School, Pate's Grammar School, Whitefriars School, Secretarial College, the re-organisation of secondary education, relocation from London to Cheltenham of the Universities Central Council on Admissions (UCCA), later UCAS.

Shops and businesses - Cavendish House, High Street banks, Leicester Permanent Building Society, hairdressing, life as a shopkeeper.

Cultural and sporting events - Literature Festival, cinemas and theatre, The Beatles, musical activities, the Civic Society, Magisterial duties, rugby, cricket and golf.

Please visit the Projects page of our website https://cheltlocalhistory.org.uk/projects/ to access the recordings.
If any members would like to set up a new group to make some additional recordings then please let us know –
email me at administrator@cheltlocalhistory.org or phone 01242 519413

Alison Pascoe

Congratulations David!

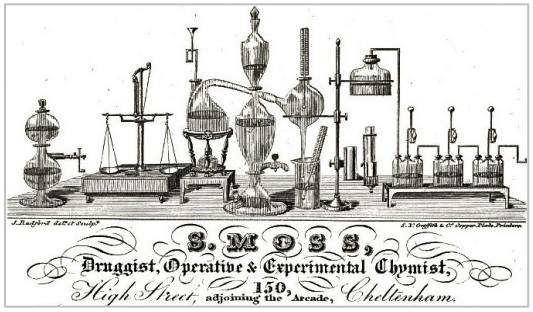
The Peter Smith Award goes each year to a member who has given outstanding service to the Society. At our morning meeting on December 3rd 2024 the award for this current year was presented by the Mayor, Cllr Paul Baker to David Elder.

The Chairman, reading the citation, said that David assumed the role of Chairman in 2021 after some difficult years in which the Society had no permanent Chair. He revitalised the Society and brought a new focus on stimulating our members' interest, encouraging their participation and attracting new recruits. He oversaw the celebration of the Society's 40th anniversary and personally produced an audio-visual presentation marking the Society's achievements. One innovation he encouraged was the recording of speakers, making the talks available to those unable to attend in person. He also initiated contacts with schools to engage young people in local history.

FEATURE

SAMUEL MOSS, EXPERIMENTAL CHEMIST

Born in Aberdare in c1794, experimental chemist Samuel Moss opened a shop at No 347/8 High Street in Cheltenham in 1819. By 1820 he had moved across the Street to No 150, renumbered No 149 after the neighbouring Market entrance and Arcade was built, where his business, which included pioneering clinical electrotherapy, remained for the next twenty years.



Described by the Revd T D Fosbroke as 'a man of ingenious and scientific mind', Samuel Moss showed a great interest in all aspects of science. He published weekly meteorological tables, an innovation at the time, in the *Cheltenham Chronicle* throughout the 1820s and 1830s. Although he did not attempt weather-forecasting, his accurate weather reports were often quoted and he was admitted a member of the Meteorological Society in 1837. He was also a member of the Cheltenham Zoological Society, which had hoped to set up a 16-acre zoo in Pittville. Moss was an early member of the Cheltenham Literary and Philosophical Institution where, at the monthly meetings, he presented his own scientific papers. In July 1837 Moss was one of the passengers in a Royal Nassau balloon flight, which took off from Montpellier Gardens and landed near Ashton Keynes an hour and a half later; his scientific report of the flight was published in the *Cheltenham Looker-On* the next day.

Samuel Moss frequently wrote to the newspapers about his scientific observations, including those on interspecies bonding in the first ever rodent behavioural study. His letter to the *Cheltenham Chronicle* in 1822 concerned an albino rat, captured at the Berkeley Hunt Kennels. He expanded on this study in a scientific article published in 1836 in *The Magazine of Natural History*. Millions of albino rats have been bred over the last 150 years, for laboratory use and as pets, but they were extremely rare in the 1820s. Moss detailed how the soon-tamed rat bonded with his dog, a trained rat-catcher. Once the female terrier, Flora, was introduced to the rat, Scugg, she developed protective behaviours towards him, accepting him as a member of the house's social group and growling at strangers before deciding if Scugg would be safe with them. When Scugg stole food from the table, he would leave some of it for Flora, striking her on the nose with his forepaw if she was too keen. The two animals would play a chasing game in Moss's walled garden and return to Moss when he blew his whistle. Scugg also bonded with Moss, nestling in his pocket when they went out into the town. An article by Raffaele d'Isa about Moss has recently been published in *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 15, 2024. See https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1532975/full. The CLHS helped the author with his research.

Jill Waller

MORE SOCIETY NEWS

RECENT ADDITIONS TO OUR ONLINE DATABASE

Our online database continues to grow, so please visit our website regularly to see the latest additions. In the last few months we have added:

- A summary of all items available, and a searchable Contents and Index for Journals 1 to 40 – see https://cheltlocalhistory.org.uk/contents/
- CLHS Newsletters – all editions July 2004 to July 2024 are now online.
- Transcriptions of Cheltenham Probate Inventories pre-1660 and post-1740
- *The Anglican Churches and Clergy of Cheltenham* by Alan Munden – searchable edition
- Gallery of Anglican church images
- Link to Adrian Courtenay's thesis on Cheltenham's Parliamentary elections 1832-1848

We have a small list of items which are available to members on request:

- Information on Luftwaffe bombing raids on Cheltenham
- *The Cheltenham Charity Organisation Society* – dissertation by Polly Baynes
- Cheltenham Gas Works – images of the site in Gloucester Road and some technical diagrams of the workings

Please visit https://cheltlocalhistory.org.uk/database/ to see the above, plus Street Directories 1837-1952, illustrated newspapers 1901-1942, research articles, record transcriptions, and Journals.

Alison Pascoe

FEATURE

Incandescent light sets the Winter Gardens aglow in December 1881

Cheltenham's Fanatasie Fayre illuminated by electric light

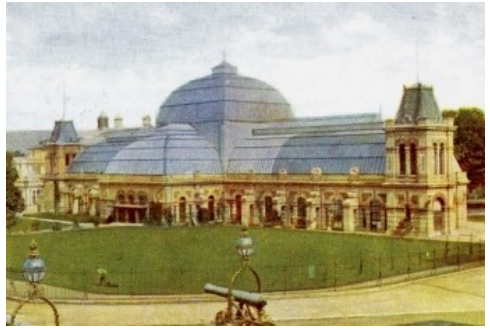
Otway Woodhouse, a Londoner, visited Cheltenham on at least three different occasions in 1881 for three different purposes – for sport, for social duties and for business. In April he lodged at the Queen's Hotel to play in the Cheltenham open tennis tournament, and lost to William Renshaw and partner in his three doubles events; in July he lent his presence at St Mary's Church to act as best man at the wedding of family friend John Mackenzie; and in November he set up shop as an electrical engineer in the Winter Gardens to introduce Cheltenham to the wonders of the Brush system of electric light. On two of the visits he played tournament mixed doubles in partnership with Ella Ramsay, sister of Sir Alexander Ramsay of 2 Montpellier Parade, and in December he met and won favour with her close family by providing electric light for an enormous tea party at the Ramsay home. This, according to local newspapers, was the first occasion on which electricity was used to light a private residence in Cheltenham.

From late 1880 several electric light systems were being marketed in Britain, and a number of local authorities elected to test them for street lighting. London led the way by contracting with three different companies to light three different areas for a year, and Edinburgh followed suit in 1881 by committing to a three-month experiment with the Brush system for lighting Prince's Street and Waverley and North bridges. It was early days, and the lighting of private houses was scarcely contemplated yet, although at the beginning of 1881 the engineer and industrialist Sir William Armstrong announced that he had successfully installed a hydro-electric system to light his Cragside mansion using 45 lamps. Also, in the spring the Queen was said to be experimenting with electricity at Osborne House with an eye to replacing the gas lighting at Balmoral. In Cheltenham contractors came knocking on the door of the Town Council with Messrs Woodhouse and Rawson, engineers and electric light contractors, among them. Otway was the senior partner of the firm. The Council's Gas Committee gave initial consideration to all proposals but their regular reported decision was for further consideration to 'be adjourned'. In August 1881

Cragside, Northumberland

Woodhouse and Rawson submitted a letter proposing the adoption of the Brush system and enclosing a cost estimate for lighting 1,000 yards of street for 3,000 hours, and the Clerk to the Council was instructed to write back and make further inquiries. By the beginning of November the Gas Committee seem to have progressed no further than discussing with their contracted gas company the terms on which experiments in electric lighting could be conducted. Woodhouse, in the meantime, entered into a private contract to provide lighting for the Winter Garden in December on an experimental basis.

The arrangement seems to have been for a three-day test period – 1st to 3rd December – and if the system proved itself, then a contract to illuminate a grand charity bazaar in the Winter Gardens over five days from 6th December. Vernon and Ewens, a large local firm which had provided the ironwork for the roofing of the Winter Gardens and were suppliers of engines and boilers, furnished a '25-horse portable engine' to power the 'dynamo electric machine' of the Woodhouse apparatus. The guinea pigs for the test days were apparently members of Cheltenham Lawn Tennis Club. On the first day there were teething problems, and the players had to twiddle their thumbs until 9pm when the light finally shone forth from the suspended lamps. The next day both courts were ready for play at 5pm and the players enjoyed 'as powerful and effective illumination as they could well desire' (*Cheltenham Looker-On*). The system passed the test and the Fantasie Fayre went ahead on 6th December with the benefit, in the dark hours, of the artificial sunlight of Messrs Woodhouse and Rawson.



The idea of the Fayre was to recreate an Elizabethan marketplace with Tudor-style buildings and vendors in period dress. The Winter Gardens, something of a leisure cathedral with its cruciform shape, provided a central rectangle of space roughly 250 feet by 50 with 'transepts' of 40 feet by 50. The covered area was substantial and the dome at the centre of the 'nave' rose majestically to a height of nearly 100 feet. With its glass roof, the building must have provided a beacon of light in the centre of Cheltenham when the Brush system went to work in the evenings – a fine advertisement for the new technology. The Fayre, as described by the *Looker-On,* consisted of a series of representations of shops of the Elizabethan period forming two streets, the main street beginning with entry under an 'embattled tower' and finishing with a 'stately mansion', and the second branching out to one side and finishing at a bandstand.

The *Looker-On* bore witness to the effectiveness of the electric light, which

'each day from dusk to the close of the Fayre, effectually lit up every portion of the Winter Gardens, shedding a bright light upon every object contained therein, and bringing out the blended colours of the numberless articles in the stalls with wonderful clearness'. On the third day of the Fayre, Woodhouse extended an electric tentacle from the Winter Gardens to 2 Montpellier Parade, where Sir Alexander and Lady Ramsay were hosting nearly two hundred of their Cheltenham and County friends at a private tea party. The Vernon and Ewens engine and the Woodhouse dynamo were positioned at the back of the Winter Gardens, and from there cables were run over the Queen's Hotel stables and across into the Ramsays' rear garden, a distance of about a quarter of a mile. A Brush lamp, similar to those in use in the Winter Gardens, was positioned outside each of the two windows of the drawing room with a white blind as background, and then inside the house pink muslin curtains were drawn across the windows to soften the light. The guests responded with universal admiration 'for though the room was as bright as daylight, there was a softness in the light which astonished everybody'. The *Cheltenham Chronicle* pronounced this to be a first for the lighting of a private residence in Cheltenham: a first it may have been, but given that it consisted of two lamps in the garden, it fell something short of the system of 45 lamps indoors that illuminated Sir William Armstrong's Cragside.

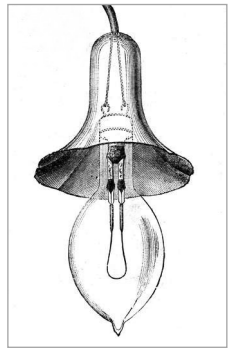
Montpellier Parade

The Woodhouse and Rawson system was kept on at the Winter Gardens after the Fayre, and next to benefit was a mixed tournament organised by Cheltenham Lawn Tennis Club. This time Woodhouse himself was numbered amongst the guinea pigs. The civil engineer was ranked amongst the nation's top ten singles players, having achieved the unique double in 1880 of defeating William and Ernest Renshaw in successive rounds at Wimbledon, and he teamed up with Ella Ramsay in a repetition of their April partnership. William Renshaw was in town, fresh from a season in which he captured all Britain's major singles titles, and he took to the court with his first choice doubles partner Marian Bradley. Other Cheltenham LTC stalwarts were present, such as Mary Abercrombie and Henry Porter, and all told eight pairs competed over three days in a knockout format. William and Marian starred and won through all their rounds despite a heavy handicap. The *Looker-on* gave this description of the lighting arrangements for the final day:

'Mr Woodhouse had concentrated his six lamps, or carbon points, within an enclosed white shade pendant from the roof, which had the effect of throwing the light over the area below with a brilliancy that well-nigh equalled that of sunshine, greatly to the delight of the Lawn Tennis

players present, who felt they need be no longer restricted to daylight for the enjoyment of their favourite pastime.'

Unusually *The Field* found the space to report what was a closed tournament played off-season, and Charles Heathcote in his *Badminton Library Review* of 1881 observed that 'a spirited attempt was made to play the game by electric light at Cheltenham….and the experiment was so far satisfactory that the result was not a matter of mere chance…'. The attentions of *The Field* and Heathcote suggest this may well have been a first for lawn tennis - the first competition in the kingdom played to completion under electric light.



The Lane-Fox incandescent lamp

The Brush system continued to light the Winter Gardens for the rest of December, 'enabling the Lawn Tennis players and the frequenters of the Skating Rink to pursue their favourite pastimes during hours when they could not possibly have done so but for its assistance…' (*Looker-On*). Late in the month members of the town corporation were invited along for a demonstration and Woodhouse provided a briefing for the men who, he hoped, might be persuaded to commit to his system for public lighting. In presenting the Lane-Fox incandescent lamp – about the size of a large pear – he drew their attention to the wire that carried the electric current and which emitted '*in vacuo* a light so intense that the naked eye could but for a moment gaze at it steadily; although when enclosed within a ground glass globe it was pleasant enough to read or write by'. The *Looker-On* observed that the presentation went well enough and the audience came away with the clear impression 'that at no very distant period Electricity must take the place of Gas, not merely for public, but to a great extent, also for private illumination'. However, reliability and the cost of production were issues that remained to be addressed, and the town councillors were to keep faith with gas technology for some years to come. Active consideration of electrification by the town council seems to have been deferred until 1888 and an electricity supply came on stream only in 1894/95.

At the end of the year the *Gloucester Chronicle* reported that Vernon and Ewens were about to light their extensive workshops by electricity, and this probably amounted to the only business Messrs Woodhouse and Rawson garnered from their stay in Cheltenham. And of Otway and Ella? If it was the prospect of romance that brought the engineer and Brush lighting to the residence of Sir Alexander Ramsay, then there was to be no marital fulfilment, for four years later Ella Ramsay was married to Ernest Browne of Tullamore, an Old Cheltonian and the best tennis player in Ireland.

Nigel Lawford

OBITUARY

Carolyn Greet (1941-2025)

Carolyn receiving a BALH Award for her article in the Society's Journal in 2010

The Society was saddened to learn of the death of one of our longest standing members, Carolyn Greet (née Oram), who died on January 3rd, following a short illness.

Originally from Birmingham, Carolyn gained a BA in English and a teaching qualification from the University of Durham, before moving to Cheltenham to teach English at Pate's Grammar School for Girls in 1963. Carolyn eventually taught at Pate's for 28 years, initially at Albert Road, but later at the main Pate's Grammar School in Princess Elizabeth Way, before taking early retirement in 1991. During that time she was very much involved with music, as a member of both the Bach Choir and the Gloucester Choral Society, and with her enduring interest in the life and works of Jane Austen, on whose Cheltenham connections she later published an article in our Society's Journal.

Carolyn joined the Local History Society in the first year of its existence (1982-3) and it was on a CLHS evening visit to the local history collection at Gloucester Library in May 1983 that she first chatted to the Society's then Chairman, Mike Greet, whom she married four years later, in 1987.

Carolyn remained an active member of the Society for the rest of her life, regularly attending its meetings and publishing ten articles on aspects of the town's late-18th and early-19th-century history in our Journal between 1995 and 2017. Among these was her 2009 article, '"Every measure that may gratify the public": Humphrey Ruff's contribution to Cheltenham', which, in 2010, won her a British Association for Local History Award 'for a published article presenting sound original research in well-written form'. In 1997 Carolyn edited and published a 230-page transcript of the 1856-61 diaries of Edward Welch of Arle Court, and in 2012 (with her co-author, the late Dr James Hodsdon), a 76-page study of the previously little-known Town and Tithing Plan of c1800.

The Society extends its sincere condolences to Mike, to Michelle, his daughter from his previous marriage, and to her partner Rob.

Steven Blake

FEATURE

Sir Charles Irving

Thirty years ago this month Sir Charles Irving, the most prominent local politician in Cheltenham in the latter half of the last century, died. For almost half a century from 1947 he was a Borough Councillor, serving three times as Mayor (1957,1958 and 1971), and as a County Councillor. He was the town's Conservative MP from 1974 to 1992.

He was born in Cheltenham in 1923 and had a twin sister. The children were given their parents' names, Charles and Ethel. In the same year his parents purchased a large house called Sandford Lawn, now 105-7 Bath Road, on the corner with Suffolk Road. Ethel ran it as a dance and drama academy while her husband, who worked at Lloyd's Bank in Gloucester, started building up his hotels business. He died in 1935 aged only 50, and in 1937 Ethel opened the Irving Hotel at Sandford Lawn. Meanwhile, Charles had been educated at small private schools, Glyngarth in Cheltenham and Lucton in Hereford, then briefly at Cheltenham Grammar. Having shown little academic ability, at the age of 14 he left school to learn about the hotel trade, working in many towns including Bath.

The original Irving Hotel

When the war came he applied to join the army but was rejected on the grounds of being 'insufficiently robust'. In 1943 his mother made him manager of the Irving Hotel, and in the same year his sister married the Oxford University academic historian Michael Wallace-Hadrill. Charles never married and never made much of a secret of his homosexuality, which, thanks to his hard work in building up various businesses, and his dedicated public service, seemed to make little difference to his public popularity. In 1949 his mother made him Chair-man of Irving Hotels. In the same year his sister went through a rather bitter divorce. Their mother died in 1957 aged 73 and the Irving Hotel later moved to the High Street, nearly opposite the entrance to Sandford Park.

After many more years of council service in Gloucestershire, Charles set his sights on becoming an MP. After unsuccessfully contesting parliamentary elections at Bilston and Kingswood, he was elected as Cheltenham's MP in 1974, taking over from the retiring Douglas Dodds-Parker. Although he didn't always agree with her, he got on well with Margaret Thatcher, and rather endeared himself to her by sending her a fresh bunch of flowers every day for 15 years. His debating style, whether in the council chamber or in Parliament, was always quietly persuasive and his method

of disagreeing with opponents was gently mocking and joking. Once in Parliament a lady member interrupted him in full flow with his speech. He told her 'If you were the only girl in the world and I was the only boy, I would not give way'. He became Chairman of the Commons Catering Committee, and insisted that menus were printed in English rather than French. He shared the Prime Minister's euro-scepticism but opposed her views on many matters, most notably her decision in 1984 to ban trade unions from GCHQ. He was involved with the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, and was a campaigner for prison reform. This probably stems from when his mother, always a supporter of what she saw as worthy causes, took her twins over to Gloucester Prison when they were 13 to join a picket protesting at the death penalty that had been passed on one of the prisoners there. He also served on the All-Party Mental Health Committee and supported action to help the homeless. He was knighted in 1990.

He still maintained his seat on the County Council, where he was Chairman of the Social Service Committee, and on the Borough Council, where he was for a time Conservative leader. Up to 1979 the Conservatives were always in power in the town but the Liberals, later Liberal Democrats, enjoyed a surge and for several years control alternated between the two parties until latterly the Lib Dems took control; Charles would be most disappointed now to see that there is not a single Tory councillor at present on the Borough Council.

He resigned as an MP before the 1992 General Election. As well as having become disillusioned with parliamentary politics, his health was failing and he died on 30th March 1995 aged 71, probably of AIDS. Having lived in style he was determined to go out the same way. His body was borne on a funeral carriage pulled by four plumed black horses through the streets of Cheltenham, with Aldermen and Councillors walking behind. He had left instructions that his ashes, together with those of his twin sister who pre-deceased him, should be scattered from a helicopter over Leckhampton Hill. Leading councillors were also on board, and Charles would have been amused that the helicopter had to circle around for a few minutes before the ashes were released because a man was walking his dog directly below. He had always been a generous donor to good causes, and this continued after his death. In 1987 he had set up the Charles Irving Charitable Trust, which was specifically for the people of Cheltenham and Gloucestershire and benefitted health, disability, poverty alleviation and the saving of lives generally. Several million pounds have been given to local organisations since his death.

Although there are possibly parts of his private life that may be left untold, there can be no doubt that through his lifelong commitment locally to public service and his charitable generosity, Charles Irving was a worthy Cheltonian.

Martin Ward

BOOKS FOR SALE

To adapt an opening from Jane Austen, *"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a traveller planning a visit, must be in want of a guidebook".* And so, dear Reader, as the weather improves and the days get longer, here are a few that we have in stock – generally at next to nothing prices.

Carolyn Greet and James Hodsdon's *Cheltenham Revealed: The 'Town and Tithing' Plan of c.1800* is an ideal book to wander around present-day Cheltenham with, open at the relevant page in order to explore and understand the town's development, **£2.50**. For a quiz-led walking tour of Cheltenham we have **Barb Drummond**, *Cheltenham Gyratory (*2009) **£3.00;** and for two authoritative guides by **David Elder,** try either *A-Z of Cheltenham Places – People – History* (2019) or *Literary Cheltenham* (2013), both **£6.00. Peter Smith and Sue Rowbotham**, *Commemorative [Blue] Plaques of Cheltenham* (2009) **£5.00**, is also a great way to get to know different parts of the town.

Somewhat older (and perhaps worth checking on details before setting out) are **Peter Ryland and Nancy Pringle's** *Cheltenham Walks and Rides: Six short tours in Cheltenham* (1971) **£1.00**; and **Aylwin Sampson's** *South Cheltenham and North Cheltenham town trails* (1980s?) or his *Cheltenham Sculpture Trail (*1990), each **50p**. Or try **Steven Blake's** *Cheltenham Historical Walks No 2, Bayshill and Lansdown* (1977) for just **75p.**

Further afield: Jeremy and Anne Davis, *Country Walks in and around Leckhampton (*2002) **£2.50; Aylwin Sampson**, *Holst's Country Places to visit associated with the composer* (1997) **50p; R R Gordon**, *The Little Book of Little Walks Around Little Villages In The Cotswolds: 2. Painswick Valley* (2015) also **50p**; Julia Owen, *The Secret Cotswolds Exploring the Cotswolds* (1995) **£2.50**; **Reginald Dixon**, *Cotswold Curiosities A Guide to Follies, Curious Tales Unusual People & Architectural Eccentricities* (1988) **£5.00; Christopher Knowles, and Aylwin Sampson**, *The Romantic Road:Tours to discover the romance of the Cotswolds* (1999) **£1.50**; and **Gordon Ottewell**, *Literary Strolls around The Cotswolds and The Forest of Dean* (2000) **£3.00.**

For Gloucester, **Philip Moss**, *Historic Gloucester: An Illustrated Guide to the City & its Buildings* (2009) **£5.00** is unbeatable; and for the wider county, **Gordon Ottewell**, *Gloucestershire Countryside Access, Exploration, Walks, Nature and Local History* (c1990) **£3.00.**

There are many more surveys of parts of the county and The Cotswolds, and guides to specific buildings, to be found in the complete listing of all the books we have for sale under the Resources tab on our website: www.cheltlocalhistory.org.uk – where you will also find some self-guided **PocketSights** walking tours. Whatever would Miss Austen have made of all that?

Oliver Pointer
hardy_pointer@hotmail.com (07400 197989)

Heritage Open Days 2025: 12-21 September

Heritage Open Days is England's largest community-led festival of history and culture, involving thousands of local volunteers and organisations. The theme this year is Architecture.

- **Who built the structures around us?** – Who commissioned, designed and constructed them?
- **Why were they built?** – What was their purpose and has that changed over time?
- **How were they built?** – What skills and materials were involved? Do they reflect the local environment, or have they come from further afield?
- **What impact have they had?** – Are they simply useful or have they become beloved landmarks? Will we remember them when they are gone?

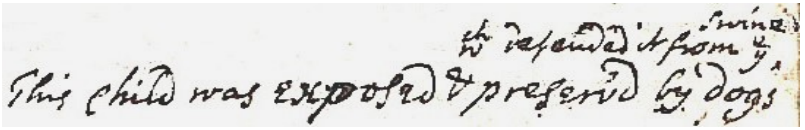
If you have an idea for a walk or a talk, please get in touch with Mary Moxham marymoxham@gmail.com

CONTENTS

FEATURE

UNUSUAL PARISH RECORDS

I have come across many unusual parish register entries while researching queries for the CLHS. A poignant example in the Cheltenham St Mary's registers records the burial, on 13 October 1593, of 'a poor man that died in the church porch'. Sometimes a comment is added in the margin, as in the burial of Joseph, son of Thomas Mason, on 23 Jul 1690 – 'should not be here; Quaker'. An entry recording the burial of Francis Gregory of Alstone on 28 April 1726 bluntly states 'murdered'.
Further afield, the register of St. Peter's Church, Winchcombe, contains a puzzling record dated 8 September 1846, of the baptism of Curosoa Almsbury – 'This child was exposed and preserved by dogs which defended it from the swine.' It seems likely that Curosoa was a foundling, as no parents are named in the burial entry. The surname does not occur in any other local parish records, suggesting that she may have been abandoned at Almsbury Farm, Vineyard Street. Sadly Curosoa did not survive her ordeal and was buried a month later on 10 October.



Another unusual Winchcombe entry was the burial of William Harvey on 8 April 1754 – 'She was a woman but baptised William'.
An entry of 10 November 1878 in the Corse burial register records the tragic death of John Gough, a shoemaker of Newent – 'accidentally shot while visiting his cousins, the Baileys of Horridge St., Corse'. Local newspapers reveal that Gough saw some quists (wood pigeons) flying about and called to his cousin to bring a gun and shoot them. The gun inexplicably went off, shooting Gough in the thigh from five yards away. John Gough, described as 'a quiet, harmless fellow', died within 20 minutes.

Jill Waller
Sources: Parish registers, Ancestry; the British Newspaper Archive.

NEXT ISSUE

Please forward any material for inclusion in the July 2025 issue by
Monday 16th June 2025
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.