

VCH Wiltshire Newsletter



INSTITUTE OF
HISTORICAL
RESEARCH

SCHOOL OF
ADVANCED STUDY
UNIVERSITY
OF LONDON



WILTSHIRE VICTORIA
COUNTY HISTORY TRUST

WILTSHIRE

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The Newsletter of the Wiltshire Victoria County
History Trust, keeping you in touch with news, events
and fundraising

Issue Number 23
August 2023

Bewley Court, Lacock

Our Summer Event this year, on the 8th June, was once again a glorious sunny evening. Around a hundred people enjoyed canapes and drinks in the beautiful gardens of Bewley Court, kindly hosted by the Pearce family.

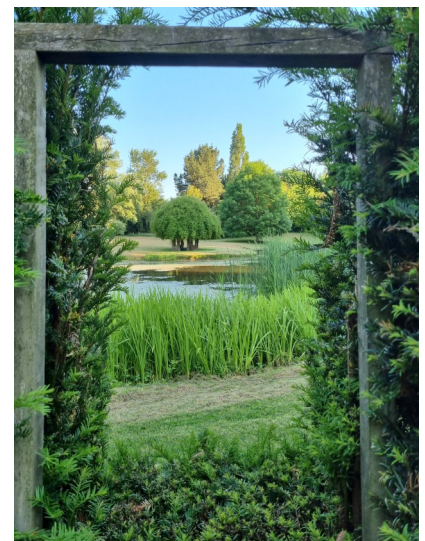
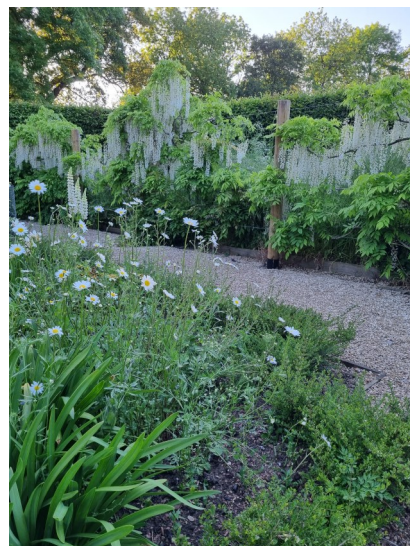
After a welcome by our Patron, Sarah Rose Troughton, the Lord Lieutenant of Wiltshire, echoed by our Chairman David Moss and President Michael Wade, local author and historian Julian Orbach spoke about the history of Bewley Court.



Originally dating from the 14th century, then named Beaulieu after Nicholas de Beaulieu the original owner, Bewley Court has been much altered by its various owners, among them Thomas Calstone, MP for Marlborough, who also owned Littlecote; Reggie Cooper, friend of Harold Nicholson and Vita Sackville-West; and Oliver Ford, who was an interior designer to the Queen Mother and added the ground floor chapel.

Bewley Court was one of those unloved medieval houses rescued and renovated in the 1920s. Responsible for its rescue was the Corsham architect Sir Harold Brakespear, who also worked on St George's Chapel Windsor and, locally, Hazelbury and Great Chalfield Manors.

The current owners, Gareth and Ginny Pearce, have painstakingly recreated the gardens, which had been neglected when they bought the house and were shown in their full beauty by the summer evening sun.



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Work in Progress

Our four researchers continue busily researching and writing parish histories for the three volumes in progress. Closest to the finishing line is the Chippenham area volume (20). Mark and Louise have almost completed the draft histories of Kington St Michael and Kington Langley, Rosalind has revised the draft history she produced some time ago of Hardenhuish, and I have nearly finished editing the whole of the long account of Chippenham – which will be around half the volume. I will then work on editing the drafts of the other parishes. So, apart from the introduction (which will fall to me), all the text drafting and a good proportion of the editing are done now, and we've also begun to consider the illustrations. In addition, Louise has engaged very fruitfully with the local communities in Langley Burrell and the Kingtons to develop standalone local history projects, as at Bremhill.

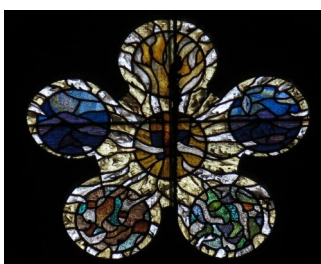
Mere and the Deverills (volume 19) is also well on the way to completion. Mark, having completed his research and a first draft of the histories of Mere and Zeals, is now making revisions, and will submit a final draft to VCH central office, which is overseeing this volume. That just leaves two more parishes to be worked on – Stourton and Maiden Bradley.

The south-east Wiltshire volume (21, Alderbury and Frustfield hundreds) is also making progress. Rosalind has completed her first draft of Clarendon, and Mark and Louise are dividing up the work to be done on Alderbury, which they will make a start on as soon as the Kingtons are signed off.

Plans are afoot, in conjunction with the Wiltshire and Swindon History centre and the University of the West of England, for us and other VCH colleagues to teach a series of workshops on researching local history, beginning in the new year. More details in the next newsletter and online as soon as we have made the arrangements.

As always, the four researchers are immensely grateful to the VCH Trustees and Fundraising Group for making our work possible, and to James Holden and the Project Group for steering and overseeing what we do.

John Chandler



The Millennium Window at St Peter's Church,
Kington Langley

Meet the Trust

MICHAEL HODGES, VICE CHAIRMAN



Michael was born in 1952 and educated at Pinewood School in Wiltshire, Eton (King's scholar) and Balliol College, Oxford (MA modern history).

He worked at Morgan Grenfell from 1973 to 1997 and then at HSBC until 2012, focusing on export finance in the Middle East. He was chairman of the Middle East Association from 2010 to 2012.

Michael married the Hon Veronica Addington of Highway Manor, Calne in 1989 and has a stepdaughter, Philippa, in France. Michael and Veronica live in Fonthill Gifford near Tisbury.

He set up the Friends of Wiltshire Churches in 2008 and is a trustee of the Wiltshire Historic Churches Trust and Wiltshire CPRE (the countryside charity), a governor of the Wiltshire Historic Buildings Trust, chancellor of the British Association of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, a deputy lieutenant of Wiltshire and fellow of the Society of Antiquaries.

Michael is extremely interested in local history and finds the volumes of the Victoria County History a very useful resource. He is the author of *Parish Churches of Greater London* (2015), *The Knights Hospitaller in Great Britain in 1540* (2018) and *Urns and Sepulchres of Mortality: The Church Monuments of Wiltshire* (2018).

Harnham Archaeological Discovery

If you live in the south of the county you may be aware that exploratory excavations in advance of a housing development in Netherhampton Road, Harnham have uncovered remnants of several burial mounds, thought to be around 4,000 years old and only 10 miles from Stonehenge.

The vast dig has uncovered evidence of burials, including a mass grave, and a large number of artefacts from more than one period of occupation: an exciting addition to the Stonehenge landscape.

Side-lights on history from our researchers

A runaway Chippenham bus

It was pitch-black, one imagines, in wartime Chippenham market place, when at 9.55pm on 22 December 1940 a double-decker bus bound for Hullavington, its headlights masked in accordance with blackout regulations, attempted to depart. The self-starter failed, so the driver freewheeled it down the hill and round the corner to try to start it in gear — a slightly hazardous manoeuvre fondly remembered by those of us of a certain age as ‘bump-starting’. At the second attempt, after inadvertently mounting the pavement, his stratagem was successful, and the motor sprung into life. He stopped, presumably to rev up the engine (and by now almost twenty minutes late) and then continued down the High Street, erratically, since he swerved to the offside outside the Co-op store (now Wilko) and crashed into the parapet of the bridge, causing damage calculated at £240 19s 10d. An upstairs passenger was thrown into the top front seat, and the driver suffered mild concussion and cuts and bruises; he could recall later that he had swerved but not for what reason. The bus, according to the *Wiltshire Times*, ‘remained precariously among the debris at the edge of the river.’

The driver was Harold Upjohn, son of a Welsh miner, 28 years old, and he had been a coach driver living in Dursley before the war. He was married to a girl from the same area of South Wales, although in 1939 they were apart — she was a waitress in Minehead. He was living in Chippenham at the time of the crash, though it may have cost him his job, as nine months later his address was Tetbury. The insurance claim dragged on for almost three years, and it is in its correspondence file that most of the information about the accident is recorded. It involved a protracted spat between Wiltshire County Council, HM Ministry of War Transport, HM Treasury, Western National Omnibus Company, Cornhill Insurance Company and various witnesses and solicitors.

The bus company claimed that the driver was not negligent — he had suffered a heart attack or fainting fit, and therefore the accident was inevitable. The Ministry of War Transport which, because it occurred on a recently designated trunk road (the A4), was responsible for Chippenham Bridge, cited the damage to the parapet itself as evidence of negligence — the bridge could not be to blame. The police had attended and taken statements but decided not to charge the

driver with dangerous driving. Witnesses were called, including driver Upjohn, who (perhaps unwisely) admitted that he had had a ‘gin and pep’ in the Bear earlier that evening, but no-one would swear to this being the cause of the accident. One passenger thought that the way the bus was being driven suggested that the driver must have been drunk. As the world war raged on, locally the correspondence continued and it was not until November 1943 that a hearing in Bristol resolved the matter and ordered the Bus company’s insurers to pay the ministry the full amount of compensation.

I came across this story while researching who was responsible for maintaining Chippenham’s roads in the early 20th century. It didn’t help that enquiry very much, but it does raise some interesting questions, and I will pose them — for others who may know the answers. How difficult would it have been with blacked-out headlights to drive a bus successfully across Chippenham bridge at night? One witness, waiting at the bridge for a different bus, apparently saw it coming (so much for blackout), stop and then crash. So how easy was it to identify the correct bus, or any bus at all, if you were waiting at a stop, and would the driver see you anyway? What about the conductor? Bus design before the 1960s required a second operator to take fares and issue tickets, but we do not hear what happened to him or her when the bus crashed, nor were they called as a witness. And was it normal for bus drivers to hang around in local pubs drinking gin before setting off? Did anyone worry if they did? And strangest of all, was it worthwhile, at a time of national emergency, to spend three years going to law over a £240 insurance claim.



Chippenham Town Bridge today showing the 1960s concrete structure with the ‘wave’ design railings added in 2001 and designed by blacksmith Melissa Cole.

Those are questions, but there are also observations. Bus drivers were at a premium during the war – it was the bus companies' finest hour, as private motoring was difficult and discouraged, and everyone used buses for war work and troop movements, so Upjohn's war effort probably continued at the wheel of his bus, rather than flying a Spitfire or crewing a battleship. But his employer may not have been too happy with his accident. Keeping buses roadworthy in wartime was a perpetual struggle, and only 11 days earlier Cheltenham coach station and the vehicles there at the time were destroyed by bombing. Three months later a raid on Plymouth knocked out 50 of his company's vehicles. One assumes that Western National would have taken a dim view of a driver who crashed a bus into a bridge after an evening in the pub. Ironical too that his passengers, airmen from RAF Hullavington who daily faced instant death from enemy action, should have to face the additional hazard of being pitched headlong into the Avon from a runaway bus after a night out in the local town.

What Harold began with his bus in 1940 was completed in 1966 by the ministry and the council, when the old bridge with its parapet was demolished and replaced by a characterless structure. A small piece of the parapet remains nearby, largely unnoticed, and two pillars are on display in Chippenham Museum.

(First published as a blog on our website in February 2023.)

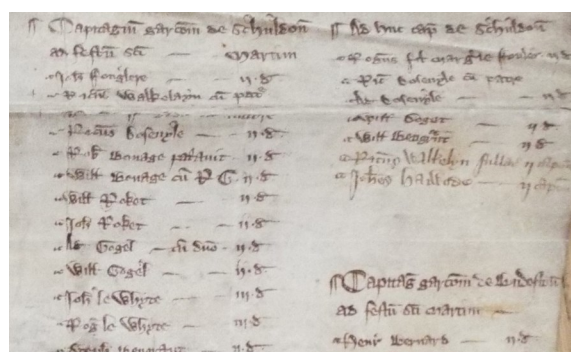
John Chandler



All that remains of the parapet of the Chippenham Town Bridge demolished in 1966 - situated next to the Rivo Lounge Café Bar

Medieval Tax Records

Throughout history it has been hard to escape from taxes and even the landless medieval peasants made their contributions. On many estates landless men over the age of thirteen who worked as wage labourers and servants paid a tax called the *chevagium garcionum* or *capitagium garcionum*, literally a head tax on the boys, actually an annual payment made by those men over the age of thirteen who made no other payment for owning property.



Few accounts of these taxes have survived. Those for the Glastonbury estates of Christian Malford and Kington St Michael will be fully discussed in the forthcoming VCH volume 20 as they may be used to estimate the mortality rates on those manors in the first wave of the Black Death. There is also a list for Sheldon, the manor to the west of Chippenham, compiled in 1281 for payments by landless men to be made at Martinmas, 11 November, which accompanies a rental listing twenty-three men and two women who paid rents for their agricultural land holdings.

In Sheldon the thirty-two landless men outnumbered the property holders. Three of them, Richard Walkelayn, Richard Hurde and Richard Dolevyle, lived with their fathers and Adam Harald and William Whydhond lived with their mothers; these five men, who were perhaps teenagers, paid nothing as they were covered by rents and taxes paid by their parents. Adam Gogel and Roger Croup were said to be living with the lord, presumably as farm workers or servants, and paid 2d and 3d respectively. Nineteen other men paid 2d, four paid 3d and two gave payments in kind of two capons each. This was a period of transition towards a monetary economy. At the adjacent manor of Biddestone of nineteen landless men only seven paid cash with the remainder giving payments in kind of a pound of cumin or wax.

There is very little indication of the occupations of the men at Sheldon. Richard Walkelayn, who paid two capons, worked as a fuller. William Bonage, whose entry is annotated "with R G", was presumably living in the household of the tenant Robert Gogel. Otherwise they were probably all engaged in agricultural work, perhaps for different tenants at different times.

In the late thirteenth century landless men made up three-fifths of the adult male population at Sheldon. Three generations later around half of them would die in the first wave of the Black Death. Of those who survived many would take on the vacant properties of deceased tenants and this large pool of labour all but disappeared almost overnight.

Mark Forrest

Revolting Rectors and Vexatious Vicars

The English Civil War and Interregnum during the 17th century were tumultuous times to be a Church of England minister. For one thing, they could be ejected from their livings for their politics. But beyond this (and assuming the military conflict passed them by), the institutions and even the civil and moral codes by which they lived became disrupted for decades. This led to some highly questionable behaviour by some of their number in North Wiltshire.

In Christian Malford, the rector John Still was deprived of his parish for his Royalist sympathies by Parliament in 1644. His replacement was William Dolman. Dolman was reputed to have been a soldier before becoming the local rector. He was 'rough and careless in the parish', and allegedly maintained his position by force. Perhaps he felt this was necessitated. At nearby Langley Burrell, the rector appointed by Parliament had been booted out; instead, local people had chosen their own minister. In Christian Malford, aided by armed cohorts, Dolman maintained his position and further levied whatever rates he decided on the presumably frightened inhabitants. Dolman died in 1653. When Still finally regained his living in 1661, he found the church lands wrecked and the parsonage in a 'ruinous' state. He died the following year. [His replacement, William Piers, also had a difficult time during the civil wars, likewise losing his position, but had suffered the indignity of 'being forced out of mere necessity for subsistence...to marry an ordinary woman with very small estate, to turn farmer or rather day-labourer upon it'. Piers was, furthermore, purportedly imprisoned at Ilchester for being godfather to a child named Charles, and 'he was forced to hang out a

glove and beg the charity of the town for subsistence.']

The 17th century commentator John Aubrey had a lot to say about the people of North Wiltshire. They fed 'chiefly on milke meates, which cooles their Braines too much, and hurts their inventions'. They were 'melancholy, contemplative, and malicious...[and] their persons are generally plump and feggy.' Their natures had several repercussions. North Wiltshire people produced lots of lawsuits 'at least double of the Southern Parts' and they were apt to be 'fanatiques'. In fact, they were 'the greatest Fanatikss'.

Aubrey used a churchman as an example, 'of ye strangest Extravagancies of Religion, that ever were heard of since the time of the Gnosticks'. This was the very man chosen by the people of Langley Burrell to be their rector, Thomas Webb. Webb is still infamous. His behaviour and doctrine are so extreme that he has been the subject of academic investigation and still has a listing in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Among his radical doctrines (too many to describe here), Webb encouraged 'liberty and freedom' in sexual relationships among his brethren, whether male or female, married or not. 'There was such blasphemy and uncleanness...in after ages 'twill scarcely be believed' wrote a scandalised Aubrey whose family owned an estate nearby. He added, 'The Bacchanalia of the Romans were not more licentious' - an allusion to the alleged orgies. Webb's sexual relationships included those with married women and men. Both of which were crimes punishable by death. Yet he evaded severe recrimination. Finally, in 1651 he was deprived of his living by Parliament and left Langley Burrell. He died the following decade, possibly from the plague.



All Saints Church, Christian Malford

Alongside their potential for fanaticism, the other aspect of North Wiltshire people characterised by Aubrey was their propensity for lawsuits. One of the best exemplars of this is probably the (allegedly) 'wicked' John Tounson, vicar of Bremhill. Called by one historian 'one of the most litigious clerics in Wiltshire', Tounson, like Still, was deprived of his living because of his Royalist sympathies. When it was returned to him, Tounson became irascible; prepared to defend his income, his rights and local religious conformity (as he identified them) to the hilt through legal (and likely illegal) means. Tounson was indiscriminate – the rich and poor alike were pursued, although his behaviour to one local Quaker, Joane Hale, bordered on the obsessive. He was not immune from removing all her household goods, rustling her cattle or using informers to infiltrate her Quaker meetings. Tounson was likely to have been unpopular. He complained to the Bishop that he was laughed at, and the churchwardens grazed their cattle in the churchyard. In one year, the community even chose a woman to be a churchwarden, something highly irregular and likely to be calculated to bait and undermine their minister. These things irritated Tounson, but the lawsuits against his parishioners continued, usually for their non-payment of tithes. When he died in the 1680s Tounson was still engaged in a two-decade-long court battle with the lord of the manor over his refusal to officiate at Foxham Chapel in Bremhill. Tounson was likely not particularly mourned.

These clergymen are from the three completed parish histories I have written for the Chippenham volume. If they are indicative of local churchmen (especially if Aubrey's observations are to be believed), then the revolting rectors and vexatious vicars of North Wiltshire are worthy of a book or even a bestselling novel. Who knows, it might be by me.

Louise Ryland-Epton

Online Talks—The season so far

As Autumn approaches we are over half way through this year's programme of online talks, with two still to come (details on p7). We continue to attract audiences of around 50, who are able to listen to a series of very interesting speakers without leaving the comfort of their own homes.

The first talk, on the 17th May, was given by Professor Caroline Dakers, Professor of Cultural History at Central St Martins in London.

Caroline guided us through the long, and often confusing, history of the buildings on the Fonthill Estate in the south

of the county from its earliest beginnings to the present day. It was a curiosity of the estate that buildings, including a church, were demolished and built at the whim of the owner of the time and it was at times a bloodthirsty story which included beheadings, mental instability and sexual misdemeanour involving some of the most powerful men in the history of Britain.

The 21st June brought us John Chandler's talk entitled *The Wiltshire Traveller*, in which he took us through a synopsis of his 40 years of research into the development of the roads we now take for granted as inhabitants of Wiltshire, and through-travellers merely use as a route to somewhere else.

From Roman roads and ridgeways, through turnpikes and coaching roads to the 'A' roads and roundabouts that are now so well-known to us, touching as well on the influence of canals and railways, John took us on a fascinating tour around the county.



View from the Ridgeway near Beckhampton with the A4 crossing the foreground and a hangar at the former RAF Yatesbury in the trees top right

On the 26th July local historian and author Mike Stone introduced us to the archaeology of North Wiltshire, which has provided us with evidence of Roman trade and industry and numerous sites of ancient brick and tile making, often exposed by digs prompted by the preparations for modern building developments.

Mike explained how the presence of clay, greensand and ironstone facilitated the production of bricks, tiles and iron in the Swindon area. In fact, clear evidence has been found of clay quarries and potters' workshops with stamped decoration on remains enabling the archaeologists to identify exactly where the items were made. He added that some excavations are currently ongoing and there are probably more sites to come.

Research and outreach

One of the perks for our researchers is the contact they make with the local communities that live in the towns and villages covered by the VCH volumes.

On the 12th August Louise was invited to take part in the Langley Burrell Summer Fete, where the Residents Association were promoting the Langley Burrell Heritage Trail and Kilvert Trail, which generated a lot of interest on the day.

The Heritage Trail was a collaborative effort that used the research Louise had done for the Wiltshire VCH, with the written pieces she was commissioned to do by the Parish Council and lots of hard work from the community of Langley Burrell, particularly Rosemary Waterkyn and Karl Eaves.

More information on the Trails can be found on the village website and Louise's online talk on the 11th November will give an insight into Kilvert himself through his writings and diaries.

<https://www.langleyburrell.org>



Researcher and contributing editor Louise Ryland-Epton at the Langley Burrell Summer Fete

The 2023 series of On-line talks

Wiltshire Manors and Manorial Documents

A talk by Mark Forrest, Consulting Archivist and Collections Manager, and Contributing Editor Wiltshire VCH

This talk is focused on post medieval manors and English language manorial documents.

We shall discuss the development and changes in the business of manor courts from the 16th century to the 20th century. The talk will cover developments across southern England with many of the examples from the manors around Mere and Chippenham in Wiltshire. The talk takes place on Wednesday 6th September at 7.30pm.

https://www.wiltshiremuseum.org.uk/?event=online-talk-wiltshire-manors-and-manorial-documents&event_date=2023-09-06

Francis Kilvert and Tales of Langley Burrell

A talk by Dr Louise Ryland-Epton, Contributing Editor for Wiltshire VCH, combining Kilvert's anecdotes with historical research and photographs.

The renowned Victorian diarist Francis Kilvert (1840-1879) knew the North Wiltshire parish of Langley Burrell well. During the 1870s he recorded many diary entries about the people, events and places he saw in the village. All life was recorded, from encounters with the sometimes morose squire over dinner to his conversations and observations of children at the village school. Kilvert wrote with empathy and affection. This talk combines Kilvert's anecdotes with historical research and photographs to illuminate some of these stories and the places where they happened. These include tales of murder, ghosts, melting butter and the dog which hung itself.

The talk takes place on Wednesday 8th November at 7.30pm.

https://www.wiltshiremuseum.org.uk/?event=online-talk-francis-kilvert-and-tales-of-langley-burrell&event_date=2023-11-08

All the above talks take place on-line and are kindly hosted again this year by the Wiltshire Museum, Devizes. Booking is essential and may be done through our own VCH website, the Museum's website, Events section, or using the link shown below each talk. The cost is £10 per screen.

<https://www.wiltshirehistory.org>

Forthcoming Events

WVCH On-line talks

There are still two talks to come in our 2023 season

Wiltshire Manors and Manorial Documents

By Mark Forrest, Wednesday 6th September, at 7.30pm

Francis Kilvert and Tales of Langley Burrell

By Dr Louise Ryland-Epton, Wednesday 8th November, at 7.30pm

Full details of all the above talks are given on page 5 of this Newsletter.

All the talks take place on-line and are kindly hosted again this year by the Wiltshire Museum, Devizes.

Booking is essential and may be done through our own website, the Wiltshire Museum's website—Events section, or using the link shown below each talk on page 7.

The cost is £10 per screen.

<https://www.wiltshirehistory.org>

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<https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk>

Over £600 raised so far. Please help us raise even more.

If you are reading this Newsletter and would like to make either a one-off or regular donation please contact our Hon. Treasurer,

Teian Dallaway, at wiltshirevch@gmail.com

Subscription rates are a minimum £20 pa single, £30 couple, £50 club/society, £100 corporate, £500 life

Considering making or updating your will? Please consider leaving a legacy to the WVCH Trust.

A gift in your will is an excellent way to support causes which are important to you and, as charities are exempt

This newsletter is distributed electronically to all those members and supporters who have supplied email addresses and given their express permission for us to contact them in this way, so saving on postage costs in the future and also ensuring that more of your contributions go towards the writing of the VCH.

Our newsletters are also available to read on our website: <https://www.wiltshirehistory.org>
gilalder55@gmail.com