



NEWSLETTER

The Victoria County History of England

Wiltshire VCH Trust

WVCH Trust Registered Charity No 1196961 (formerly 1102882)

Newsletter No 22, April 2023

**The Newsletter
of the Wiltshire
Victoria County
History Trust**

**Keeping you in
touch with news,
events and fund-
raising.**

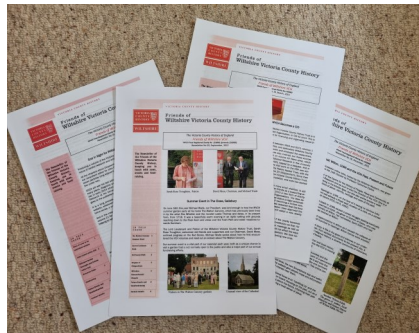
Our Newsletter is changing

You may have noticed the change of style to our front page straight away and inside there are more changes to discover.

Most notably, there are two extra pages and the new capacity will enable us to share more news, articles and pictures, including two regular features:

Meet the Trust will feature a member of our Trustees or Editorial/Research team in each issue.

Sidelights on History will feature snippets of history that are uncovered by our researchers and may not make it into the VCH red volumes but are no less interesting.



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More of these historical gems are available for you to read on our web-site,

<https://www.wiltshirehistory.org>

which has also undergone an update in recent times and is a user friendly window on the work of the Wiltshire Victoria County History Trust.

If you find the Newsletter difficult to read in its electronic form, the current issue and back issues are available to read on our website in a pdf format

<https://www.wiltshirehistory.org/newsletter-and-reports>

And for the braver among you, we also have a presence on Twitter and Facebook. Just type *Wiltshire History Twitter* or *Wiltshire History Facebook* into your search engine.

The Coronation of King Charles III

The Wiltshire Victoria County History Trust wishes to congratulate His Majesty *King Charles III* on the event of his Coronation on May 6th.

The Victoria County History project was initially dedicated to Queen Victoria to celebrate her Diamond Jubilee in 1897. In 2012, on the occasion of our late Queen's Diamond Jubilee, she permitted the Victoria County History to rededicate its series of county volumes in her honour. To mark that occasion, the Queen was presented with a copy of the Wiltshire Victoria County History volume 18 on Cricklade and Environs by the then Wiltshire VCH editor Virginia Bainbridge.

During her 70 years on the throne, the Queen provided a thread of continuity during which time Wiltshire has changed and developed. The work of the Wiltshire VCH began in 1947 during the reign of the Queen's father, George VI, and continued throughout her reign, producing authoritative histories of the county from the earliest archaeological records forward. We hope that this continuity can be maintained during the reign of her son, King Charles.

Today, the Wiltshire VCH is working on three volumes (19, 20, 21) covering Mere and the Deverills, Chippenham Area and South East Wiltshire. These will capture both the history of these communities from ancient times and their evolution, based upon the same meticulous research and encyclopaedic writing that has characterised all the Wiltshire VCH volumes since the publication of its first in 1953.



Meet the Trust

DAVID MOSS, CHAIRMAN



David grew up in Cheshire, read history at Magdalene College, Cambridge, and has maintained an interest in history ever since. After university, he joined the civil service, working in the Department of the Environment, HM Treasury and, principally, the Department of Transport.

Much of his work was international, leading for the UK in air services negotiations with many countries including EU members and the USA. In the early 1990s, he was chairman of the European Civil Aviation Conference (a UN body based in Paris). He then joined Railtrack Group as director, commercial and then director general, European affairs.

Retiring to Bradford on Avon in 2000, he became chairman of the town's preservation trust in 2004. After 14 years he felt in need of a change and in 2018 took on the chairmanship of the Wiltshire VCH Trust, whose chairman was retiring.

David is also chairman of If Opera (formerly Iford Arts) and the Bradford on Avon Station footbridge canopy project. His interests are opera, historic buildings (particularly churches), historical biography and wine.

His interest in local history was fuelled 20 years ago by moving into a house which dates back to the 15th century. He was soon busy researching its history, including delving into the pages of the VCH.

Side-lights on history from our researchers

Organised Crime in Langley Burrell

When an elderly couple in Langley Burrell, Thomas Barnes and his wife, were awoken at midnight in July 1850 and went to investigate, three men accosted them. The couple handed over a purse and a watch and were told to lie still while the miscreants ransacked the house and took refreshment. The men afterwards absconded. A few days later, two of them were identified and arrested in Bath with a woman, whom the police searched. Three pieces of canvas were hidden in her bustle (an item worn under a skirt to puff it up). On these were written about fifty names of homeowners in different parts of the country to be burgled, how to gain access to their houses, what should be taken, and whether there were shutters, police nearby or an unchained dog. The Barnes robbery was no random misfortune but part of an organised plot. One of the prisoners, Thomas Cleverley, was found guilty and transported for fifteen years.

Just one of the more sinister side-tracks to distract a VCH researcher when scouring old newspapers, in this case, the *Bath Chronicle*.

Louise Ryland-Epton

A fire at Mere.

When building upon the work of previous historians and in parishes as well covered as Mere it is often the earlier records that provide new material for the Victoria County History. At Mere the 19th century historian T H Baker described a catastrophic fire in 1671 in an account that has been subsequently used by later historians.

There was also a major fire in 1536 which destroyed houses, shops, the market centre and the George Inn. This earlier event occurred before the surviving locally produced records and passed out of the folk memory, no doubt eclipsed by the later fire. Undocumented in the local family and estate collections, and predating the earliest churchwardens' accounts by a decade, the only reference thus far discovered to the 1536 fire is in a financial account at the National Archives. This annual audit of income from the manor details the loss of income from those properties that had been damaged.

The destruction caused by this major fire may partly

explain why Mere, which was one of the wealthiest towns in Wiltshire at the end of the Middle Ages, had declined in importance by the start of the 17th century.

Mark Forrest



Detail from an engraved window in St Michael's Church, Mere, depicting the local clergy of the time, with the Bishop of Ramsbury in the centre.

On the shoulders of giants

The villages north of Chippenham have produced more than their fair share of historians, including two—John Aubrey and John Britton—of way beyond local reputation. But the one whom I sense is looking over my shoulder the most, as I pull together and edit all our research on Chippenham, is Canon John Jackson, who died in the rectory at Leigh Delamere in 1891, his home and living for more than 45 years. A founder of the Wiltshire Archaeological Society, he wrote a history of Chippenham in an early volume, in 1857, and continued to collect historical documents, take and keep notes, and publish articles about Wiltshire history until he could no longer hold a pen.

Relations with the society were sometimes strained and when he died most of his voluminous notes went not to its library at Devizes, but to the Society of Antiquaries of London (and some to the British Library). It was my privilege last September to visit the Antiquaries library, in its august surroundings next to the Royal Academy, to explore the treasure chest that are the huge bound volumes of his notes, and to photograph some of the more useful, to inform our work on the Chippenham area. There are spidery handwritten transcripts, newspaper cuttings, some original documents (including a medieval court roll) and—best of all perhaps—drawings and water colours of Chippenham, Kington St Michael and elsewhere, some of which I hope we may be allowed to publish.

John Chandler

Whitparish's Medieval Chapels

The church of All Saints, much altered in the 19th century, is a prominent building in modern Whiteparish. But the medieval inhabitants had a choice of four chapels in which to worship, in addition to the parish church. These 'free chapels' were largely built in the 12th century or later to serve the more remote parts of the larger parishes. There were four in Whiteparish: at Abbotstone (dedicated to St James), at Whelpley (dedicated to St Leonard) and at Barn Court and Testwood where the dedications are unknown.

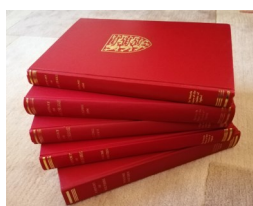
All four chapels appear to have been dissolved at the Reformation, when the parishioners would have been expected to attend their parish church. But research for volume 21 of the Wiltshire VCH has uncovered evidence that the Whelpley chapel of St Leonard remained in use by a family of Catholics in the parish.

No Clergyman is known to have been presented to the Whelpley chapel after 1538, and the chapel has been assumed to have fallen into disuse. But in 1636 Thomas Cable of Whelpley directed in his will that he should be buried in the chapel of St Leonard—a chapel that was supposed closed a century earlier. Furthermore, a 'free chapel' at Whelpley is mentioned in a deed of 1652.

The Cable family had remained true to their Catholic faith after the Reformation, despite the consequences. Family members were cited as recusants on several occasions from 1583 onwards, and it seems likely that the chapel was the focus for their worship. There were still Catholics in the parish in 1664, though by 1676 only three Catholics remained. At some point after this tiny group ceased to exist altogether, and by 1783 the vicar reported that there were no Catholics in Whiteparish.

No remains are known to survive for the three medieval chapels. But above-ground remains of the Whelpley chapel still stand, although on private land not accessible to the public. A short description can be found in the 2021 edition of Pevsner's *Wiltshire*.

Rosalind Johnson



The 2023 series of On-line talks

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 the Museum's website, Events section, or using the link shown below each talk. The cost is £10 per screen.

The houses of Fonthill: lost, recovered, rebuilt

A talk by Caroline Dakers, Professor Emerita, University of Arts, London

Fonthill is traditionally associated with the eccentric writer and collector William Beckford, who built his Abbey at the end of the 18th century. The collapse of the tower in 1825 transformed the name Fonthill Abbey into a symbol for overarching ambition and folly, a sublime ruin. Fonthill is, however, much more than the story of one man's excesses.

Dr Caroline Dakers will take viewers on a tour of all the Fonthills and also look at some of the men who equal and even surpass Beckford in terms of their wealth, their collections, their political power and, in one case, their sexual misdemeanours.

The talk takes place on-line on Wednesday 17th May at 7.30pm.

https://www.wiltshiremuseum.org.uk/?event=online-talk-the-houses-of-fonthill-lost-recovered-rebuilt&event_date=2023-05-17



The remains of Beckford's Old Fonthill Abbey, built in 1796 with its 21st century extension in the background.

The Wiltshire Traveller

A talk by Dr John Chandler, Consultant Editor for VCH Wiltshire, who began studying and writing about Wiltshire roads in the 1970s and has kept up his interest ever since.

A rapid guided tour, exploring the history of our roads and their users, from prehistory to the M4.

Roman soldiers, drovers, pilgrims, merchants, tourists—Wiltshire has always been a place of travellers, trekking along our highways, and usually on their way to somewhere else. But our roads are also for those who live here, to visit friends, to go to market, to drive to work. They have a long history, which most of us take for granted.

The talk takes place on Wednesday 21st June at 7.30pm

https://www.wiltshiremuseum.org.uk/?event=online-talk-the-wiltshire-traveller&event_date=2023-06-21



The Yelde Hall, Chippenham, one of the oldest buildings in Chippenham, sits at a busy road junction with a former coaching inn beyond.

Roman Trade and Industry in North Wiltshire

A talk by Mike Stone, Archaeologist and Local Historian

The Borough of Swindon is justly famous for its rich railway industry history. Over the last 30 years excavations in advance of developments have shown that the area around Swindon also had a rich industrial past in the Roman period.

This presentation will look at the resourcing and manufacturing of building materials, pottery and iron production.

The talk takes place on Wednesday 26th July at 7.30pm

https://www.wiltshiremuseum.org.uk/?event=online-talk-roman-trade-industry-in-north-wiltshire&event_date=2023-07-26

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

Forthcoming Events

WVCH On-line talks for 2023

The Houses of Fonthill: Lost, recovered, rebuilt

By Caroline Dakers, Wednesday 17th May at 7.30pm

The Wiltshire Traveller

By John Chandler, Wednesday 21st June, at 7.30pm

Roman Trade and Industry in North Wiltshire

By Mike Stone, Wednesday 26th July, at 7.30pm

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 pages 4 & 5 of this Newsletter.

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Booking is essential and may be done through the Museum's website, Events section, or using the link shown below each talk. The cost is £10 per screen.

 easyfundraising

You can help Wiltshire Victoria County History Trust raise more FREE donations

Sign up today

£525 raised so far



Please help Wiltshire Victoria County History Trust by signing up to support us for FREE on #easyfundraising. You can raise donations whenever you shop online with over 7,000 brands including John Lewis & Partners, eBay, Argos, M&S and more. Plus, once you've raised your first £5, easyfundraising will double it! Sign up today - it will make a BIG difference to us this year:

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

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

Tean Dallaway, at wiltshirevch@gmail.com

Subscription rates are £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