

# *Local History News*

*Number 155 May 2025*

*[www.balh.org.uk](http://www.balh.org.uk)*



*Magazine of the British Association for Local History*

## AWARDS FOR LOCAL HISTORIANS

- *To encourage research and publication*

One or more certificates may be awarded each year for a published **article** presenting sound original research in well-written form. To be eligible a piece of work, of any length, must appear in a journal, newsletter or similar publication produced by a local voluntary body, which is sent to Heather Falvey the Reviews Editor for review or listing. All relevant material sent to the Reviews Editor is automatically considered, and a shortlist prepared for the Awards Panel.

- *To recognise outstanding individual contributions*

Up to six awards may be made each year to publicly honour local historians of all ages who have made outstanding and significant voluntary contributions to the subject. The awards will embrace as wide a spectrum of activity as possible. Nominations and references must be submitted between 1 July and 31 December on the form available from our website at **[www.balh.org.uk/awards](http://www.balh.org.uk/awards)**, where further details can also be found.

- *To encourage societies to share information locally*

An annual award for newsletters used by local societies to correspond with their members and other interested readers. Newsletters can be of any length, published at any regular interval, in any style, by any printing method. The contents, and the clarity of communication, are the key factors rather than the glossiness of production. All newsletters sent to the Reviews Editor will be considered for this award, the final decision for which lies with the Publications Committee of the BALH.

*The next awards will be presented at the BALH AGM in 2025*

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British Association for Local History Awards

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Sheffield S1 2EX

### Front cover

The Cotton Famine Road on Rooley Moor, Lancashire – see page 16.  
(Rooley Moor Neighbourhood Forum)

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# *Local History News*

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# How to contribute

The success of the Association in supporting and promoting local history throughout the country depends very much on contributions made by members, readers, and all those interested and concerned.

Material published in *The Local Historian* is written by a wide variety of people from many different backgrounds. Offers and suggestions for articles are welcomed, and the editor, Alan Crosby, is always pleased to discuss ideas for contributions and to advise on their preparation. 'Notes for contributors' is available on request, and can be found on our website at [www.balh.org.uk/thelocalhistorian-contributors](http://www.balh.org.uk/thelocalhistorian-contributors).

*Local History News* relies on material – articles, news, pictures, advice, questions etc – from local societies and individual local historians. We also welcome your newsletters and other regular publications. Information about local initiatives is particularly welcome, and we are always keen to publish items that give examples of best practice, illustrating the diversity and vitality of local history. Readers' comments and queries allow our members to share their knowledge and enthusiasm. If there is a specific event you wish us to mention please allow plenty of time ahead of the date – we can also list larger events such as conferences at the BALH website and in the BALH e-newsletter. *Local History News* is normally mailed at the end of February, May, August and November, with these copy deadlines respectively: 3 January, 1 April, 1 July, 1 October.

The BALH Reviews Editor is Dr Heather Falvey; if you have a newly published work, either as an individual or a society, please send a copy for listing and possible review to her at the address given below. Be sure to include all relevant details such as price and where to purchase.

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## *Centre pages (Supplement)*

BALH autumn conference • BALH publications • BALH Outstanding Individual Contributions award  
Membership matters Inside back cover

# 'More churches and ruins'

Alan Crosby

Recently I have been making much use of a volume in the 'Buildings of England' series, aka the Pevsner guides. The particular book in question is Clare Hartwell and Matthew Hyde's *Lancashire: Manchester and the South-East*, which was published in 2004, although I still think of it as new and hot off the press. It's indicative of the ambitions of the 'second series' of Pevsner guides that the original two volumes for Lancashire (North and South) were replaced by three much larger ones (the other two being *Liverpool and the South-West* and *Lancashire: North*). Nikolaus Pevsner said that South Lancashire was 'the most difficult area I have had to describe', and clearly to include two world cities in one volume was simply unmanageable. The three-part division of this large, complex and historically challenging county works well, and the acknowledgements sections in the prelims of each volume demonstrate powerfully that the authors consulted and discussed details and general points not only with absolutely everybody involved in Lancashire's architectural history, but also with just about every local historian worth his or her salt in the county – that's the way to find the inside story, the local quirks and details. These are truly authoritative works.

I now have 20 of the 'new' Pevsners, their distinctive shiny black covers forming a most satisfactory subsection of my bookshelves. Years ago I developed the costly habit of buying the relevant Pevsner for the areas where we went on holiday – I don't think the sight of that fat black volume necessarily brought instant acclamation from my children (more likely was a groan and 'not *more* churches and ruins' or words to that effect). My set of 20 volumes actually includes one 'Buildings of Scotland' (Fife) and one of Ireland (North West. Ulster), and two 'Buildings of Wales' (Pembrokeshire and Clwyd), because this inspirational project has produced offspring in the other nations of the British Isles. I also have half a dozen of the older first series volumes but, despite their pioneering nature, I rarely look at them. They are more like catalogues, lacking the lyricism and the elegance of their successors.

A special pleasure of reading the latter is exactly that – you can read them. The introductory essays are generally outstanding and work brilliantly as stand-alone accounts of the history, geology and of course architecture (that being divided into periods and categories). A most valuable aspect of these essays is that they place the local experience of building and architecture in the context of regional, national and even international trends and fashions, so introducing contrasts and comparisons, and giving us a sense of perspective.

A further delight is that in the new series the authors or editors or compilers are more likely to express personal opinions, and to be honest about the inadequacies of a design or a structure. For certain buildings in the place that I'm currently researching, the new Pevsner uses such terms as 'cold', 'bleak', 'indigestible concoction', 'ill defined space with no sense of enclosure', 'low and mean' and 'disastrous'. That was less common in the past, although the outspoken architectural critic Ian Nairn, who edited the Surrey volume in the 1960s, did say of my home town of Woking that it was 'A period piece, though not a creditable one' (and he was quite right).

Unlike chocolate bars, the volumes have undergone that rare phenomenon, an expansion in size. The main reason for this is that the definition of what constitutes an architecturally or historically significant or interesting building has changed so much in the 60 or 70 years since the first generation of Pevsners were being written. Lancashire exemplifies that more than most counties. Its wealth of cotton mills, board schools, Victorian churches, colliery buildings and the other physical legacy of the industrial revolution was largely ignored in the first incarnation, but is now given a prominent place. To Nikolaus Pevsner and his contemporaries, much Victorian church architecture and design was beneath contempt, but the tide of taste turned, as it always does, and now it is assured of an equitable coverage. And now, I must order another volume – we are going away in September and I need to read up: 'more churches and ruins'.



# AWARDS



## FOR OUTSTANDING INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTION

**Dr Hugh Pihlens**, known as 'Mr Hungerford History', having founded the **Hungerford Historical Association (HHA)** and masterminded the online Hungerford 'Virtual Museum'.

**Dr Julia Neville** for her contribution to Devon history over several decades, leading on many substantial initiatives and coordinating links between academic and a wide range of local history societies across the county.

## FOR RESEARCH & PUBLICATION

### SHORT ARTICLES

**Richard Hobson**, "'He is old, lame and poore": when English Civil War veterans petitioned for welfare payments', *Huddersfield Local History Society Journal* no. 35 (2024/25) 35–42.

**Mary Bennett**, 'Hugh Laner, curate and vicar of Odiham 1541–75: his life and work through the period of the Reformation', *Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society Newsletter* no. 81 (Spring 2024) 16–18.

**Paul Barnfield**, 'Hampton Wick's first theatre and the dairy in Park Road', *Borough of Twickenham Local History Society Newsletter* no. 194 (December 2023) 3–6 and follow-up in no. 195, 'Hampton Wick's first theatre: an exciting new find' (14).

# BALH Awards for Local Historians 2024–5

**Jennifer Britton**, 'The origins of Hextol Court', *Hexham Historian* no. 34 (September 2024) 47–53.

### LONG ARTICLES

**Phil Wild**, 'Clara Ann Whiteley (1880–1900) the role of milk in an untimely death?', *Saddleworth Historical Society Bulletin* vol. 53 no. 4 (2023) 97–104.

**Ann Stephenson**, 'The enemy in our midst? The Wandsworth Board of Guardians' Alien Relief Register', *Wandsworth Historian* no. 117 (Spring 2024) 4–9.

**Karina Shirfield**, 'Eleanor Frewen Turner (1786–1879) "angel in the house" and "woman of substance"', *Leicestershire Historian* no. 59 (2023) 56–62.

**Jane Shermilt**, 'The Ruislip Drainage Scheme', *Ruislip Northwood and Eastcote Local History Society Journal* (2023) 20–27 (and also including 'Evidence for the Ruislip Drainage Scheme from the 1901 census', 17–19).

## FOR A SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

**Barnes and Mortlake History Society Newsletter.**



To nominate someone for next year's BALH Outstanding Individual Contributions awards, visit [www.balh.org.uk/resources-balh-annual-awards](http://www.balh.org.uk/resources-balh-annual-awards) (deadline 31 December).

# Popularising local history (seen through a Hampshire lens)

Roger Ottewill

As mentioned in the November 2024 issue of *Local History News* (153) one of the themes that has emerged from the Hampshire Field Club & Archaeological Society's Celebrating Hampshire Historians project (CHH) has been the development of what might be termed the 'democratisation' or popularisation of local history. Simply stated, during the 20th century local history has been transformed from what was essentially an elite pursuit into one in which many participate. In the early days it was primarily the preserve of antiquarians with plenty of spare time and clergy keen to find out more about the past of the parish they served. With the proliferation of local history societies in the years following the Second World War, the growth of interest in family history and, in recent years, the explosion of websites hosting a wide variety of resources, it has become an increasingly popular pursuit. Indeed the existence of the British Association for Local History is one manifestation of this development.

From the profiles of individual historians prepared for the CHH project it is possible to discern three main strands in the process of popularisation within Hampshire and it would be interesting to know how far these have been replicated in other counties. The first is the utilisation of the local press in disseminating topics of a historical nature. During the 1920s and 1930s two Southampton historians were very much to the fore in this regard. One was Wesley Horrocks (1877–1930), who was employed in the History Department of University College, Southampton. Alongside his editing of a number of volumes in the Southampton Record Series, he wrote articles for the *Hampshire Advertiser*, including one about the birthplace of Isaac Watts (6 August 1927), which generated a considerable number of follow-up letters, and under the general heading of 'Little Known Chapters in Southampton History', a series about the Taunton Family (see, for example, 17 March 1928). The other historian was Edgar Mitchell



Wesley Horrocks (1877–1930).  
(Picture: University of Southampton)

aka Townsman (1877–1939). In the 1930s he penned a popular column, not very inspiringly named, 'Occasional Notes', again in the *Hampshire Advertiser*. These began with observations about his own experiences, but later they reflected his thoughts on, and researches into, the history of Southampton. Topics included 'The history of Stoneham Park' (3 July 1932); Southampton as a health resort (5 November 1932); and the 100th anniversary of the floating bridge (17 March 1934). Many of his articles were published in a subscription volume in 1938, which proved to be so successful that a popular edition soon followed.

Other Hampshire historians who have contributed material to local newspapers during the post-war period include Barbara Carpenter-Turner (1915–1997), with a series of local history lectures she gave to Winchester branch of the WEA being published in the *Hampshire Chronicle*, and Catherine Kenyon (1887–1981), a prolific writer of articles, short



essays and letters which appeared in the *Hampshire Chronicle*, *The Times* and *Country Life*.

In making use of the press, historians brought history to a wider audience. They avoided being overly academic and adopted a more accessible style and vocabulary and intrigued some readers to the extent that they wanted to find out more or perhaps set the record straight. They also laid foundations on which later contributors could build so that today it is rare for a local newspaper not to have a regular heritage/history page or column.

A second strand was the mobilisation of membership organisations, initially the Women's Institute (WI), in researching aspects of local history. It is not clear whether this was a national or local initiative, but either way in Hampshire the trailblazer was Winifred Beddington (1878–1952) of Longstock, a WI member who was responsible for overseeing and financing the project. Ably assisted by Elsa Christy of Ringwood and Vera Love, its purpose was 'to collect and chronicle the life and customs of... villages as observed and assembled by members of... WIs.' By involving members throughout the county it encouraged them to reflect not only on the histories of their communities but also on their personal histories leading to what became known as 'oral history'. It was, in the words of the *Hampshire Advertiser*, 'perhaps, the most remarkable example of all the county's examples of co-operative work' (27 March 1937). The resulting publication, entitled *It Happened in Hampshire*, proved to be a best seller running to at least five editions. It attracted considerable attention in the local press and did much to stimulate interest in Hampshire's past, with chapters on subjects such as village churches, industries past and present, legends, stories and sayings, and smuggling.

It is not known whether any other counties immediately followed Hampshire's example. However, it did prepare the ground for similar projects and publications in the years following the Second World War, specifically (a) *The New Hampshire Village Book*, published in 1990; (b) *Hampshire Within Living Memory*, published in 1994; and (c) *Hampshire: A Century in Photographs*, published in 1998, all of which were compiled by the Hampshire County Federation of WIs and included contributions from many branches in the county. It is noteworthy that there is a *Within Living*

*Memory* volume for most English counties.

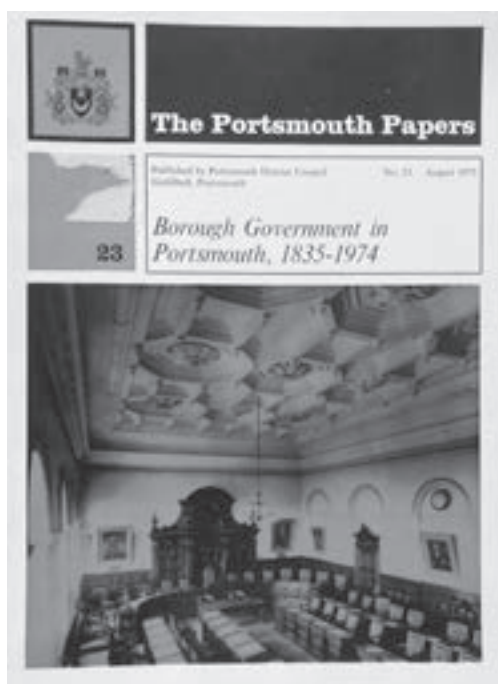
The third and final strand has been the previously mentioned rapid expansion in the number of local history societies which serve both as symptoms and as champions of the increasing interest in local history. A considerable number have initiated research projects aimed at engaging as many members as possible and leading to the publication of well-received books on their locality. A substantial number of historians involved in these initiatives have not been covered by the CHH project because it was decided to include only those who had died by 2000. Nonetheless they deserve recognition. A good example is Doug Jones of the Heritage Society in Buriton, a village situated in the south-east of Hampshire close to the South Downs Way. Doug and a number of fellow members were responsible for *Buriton and the First World War: Through Local Eyes*, published in 2019. Every household in the village was presented with a free copy, thanks to charitable donations and other income. Underlying this and similar publications is the principle of collective endeavour, through, in this case, 'sharing family histories, military records, old photographs, family letters, diaries, newspaper



cuttings, other memorabilia, their research and their memories'. In other words, a rich array of sources is utilised with a heavy emphasis on the visual, which has received a considerable boost in recent years from the explosion of social media sites devoted to the sharing of historic images. On Facebook examples from Hampshire include: *Historic Hampshire in Old Photographs*; *Basingstoke Through the Years*; *Southampton Heritage Photos*; and *Shirley Local History Group, Southampton, UK*. However, these are only the tip of a very large iceberg.

Also of note is the *Hampshire Papers* series, with the first being published by the Hampshire Record Office between 1991 and 2010, and the second from 2015 by the Hampshire Field Club, and *The Portsmouth Papers* series published by the City Council from 1967 onwards. Covering a wide diversity of topics and profusely illustrated these not only provide an interesting read but also serve to stimulate interest in topics worthy of further research.

Popularisation can be linked to the emergence of what might be termed 'blended history'. This involves the fusing of three modes of communication – the written word, the spoken word and the pictorial with respect to both inputs and outputs. Of course, at its heart, local history remains the discovery,



interrogation and utilisation of historical material of every shape and size.

*This is an expanded version of an article which was originally published in the Autumn 2024 edition of the Hampshire Archive Trust Newsletter.*



*Local History News* provides your opportunity to:

- **announce** your society's news
- **inform** the wider history community about your research projects
- **share** your advice and experience on different aspects of running a local history society or conducting research
- **tell** readers about useful resources
- **ask** questions that other societies may have answers for

We welcome your news items, short reports and features. Please send items or proposals to [editor.lhn@balh.org.uk](mailto:editor.lhn@balh.org.uk)

(Feature articles are best between 500 and 1500 words)

# Remembering Bradford (1920s–30): living at ‘back a mill’

Malcolm & John Cowburn

At Malcolm’s request for memories of his childhood, sometime in the mid-1990s our father gave him a C60 cassette tape; written on the cover in his, now shaky, handwriting was ‘Reminiscences of Bradford’. The recording was not done at one sitting, but was likely to have been completed over a few (not necessarily consecutive) days. The recording has been digitised and transcribed. In March this year, Malcolm delivered a presentation to Bradford Family History Society using much material from the recording, structuring the talk to consider local traders, living by Lister’s Mill and leisure. John edited the audio file, likewise organising the material thematically. This article presents a few selections about life at the Mill from this unique oral history resource.

## **Lister’s Mill, Bradford**

As a child and teenager our father, Ian Cowburn, lived in a corner shop near Lister’s Mill. The Mill still exists today as luxury accommodation; in the 1920s–30s it was still a place of textile manufacture. The current

building was erected in 1873 to replace the earlier mill destroyed by fire in 1870. It is located in the Manningham district of Bradford and is also known as Manningham Mills. It rests on a footprint of 27 acres, and the mill chimney 249 feet (76 metres) high, remains an imposing landmark on the Bradford skyline. Until 1934 the Mill was driven by steam engines (using 1,000 tons of coal per week). While the Mill provided employment and housing for the local population, wages were poor and working conditions unsanitary. One of the Mill’s frequently cited achievements was the production of 1,000 yards (910 m) of velvet for the coronation of King George V. What follows are the words of Ian Cowburn.

## **Living at back a’ mill**

*Where I used to live in Bradford, in Beamsley Road, back at Mill, there were, let’s see, one, two, three, four, five streets. The farthest one that opened on the recreational ground was called Fairfield Street, then there was Chatham Street and Beamsley Street, which were regarded as being the two roughest,*



OS six-inch (1888–1915) map of streets around Lister’s Mill marking the two streets where Ian Cowburn lived.





*Lister's Mill in 1889.*

then there was Silk Street, so called because the Mill was Lister's Mill, which was a silk mill mostly, though they did have wool because I remember seeing wool being unloaded in Lilycroft Road.

But down at the bottom of Silk Street was a Velvet Department where they made velvets for King George the Sixth's coronation robe, the velvet to make robes for the peers, not actually for the King himself, but that was Lister's velvet that was used there.

... to walk down Beamsley Road on the right you could hear all the looms rattling away and on a hot day when the windows were open, when you looked in you could see the parts of them clicking away, you couldn't see the actual weaving, but you could see the looms working there. The street between Silk Street and the Mill was called Patent Street because it was paved with some kind of greyish coloured blocks rather than the usual cobbles and they were a patent block, it had patents stamped on them, that's why it was called Patent Street. [It] was the street where the big chimney was, the big square chimney, 15 feet square, 240 feet high.

We often used to go and play at the base of that chimney, especially on a cold day because it was quite warm just down there. A little bit lower down was a garage, two sheds, one was a garage for the lorries and the other was called the engine shed because it had two steam lorries in it, two or else three steam lorries. They spent all the day running up and down between the coal depot and the mill bringing up loads of coal for the furnaces. That of course was before it went electric, and we often used to go sit in the engine shed and watch these and play around there. Also at the foot of the chimney was a kind of, I don't know what it was, but the two tiny little holes in the pavement that opened up, that were open and if you put a piece of cardboard over and flicked it you used to get a real buzzing sound from it, and we quite often used to do that.

Immediately opposite my father's shop was the

dye house or "dye 'us" as it was usually called and I remember one of my earliest memories was hearing clogs of people going to work. Clogs weren't worn generally in the mill but they were always worn in the dye house because they were more waterproof, there was water sloshing around the place and rather than wear wellingtons which would tend to be a bit slippery on the wet floors and also wearing them all day long indoors like that wasn't good for the feet, people used to wear clogs which were quite waterproof with the wooden soles raising them out of the water sloshing around.

They'd had a couple of fires in the dye house on occasions and each time they built an extra storey on it, it seemed to start off by being quite a low one and then it got two storeys built onto it afterwards and so it was rather higher.

Two occasions where the community living by the mill came together were 4 November, Mischief Night, and 5 November, Guy Fawkes Night. Mischief Night seems to have been a peculiarly Yorkshire custom and is now largely replaced by American-style Halloween activities.

Mischief Night was quite a feat, quite an institution I mean, what kind of things you'd do would be fasten two door knockers together and then knock one and then run off and as soon as a person came to that door and opened it, it would lift the knocker on the next door and when they closed the door and saw nobody there down would go the knocker on the next door and it would knock that one and things like that. You used to fasten a button on a piece of string and a pin by a window and a long piece of cotton to it and pull that and tap the windows or if there were any garden gates anywhere around, there weren't in that area back at Mill but if there any you'd possibly take the gates off and hang them up from a lamp post or something like that. Nothing vandalism, it was just sort of good honest mischief and it was sort of accepted as a Mischief Night.

On bonfire night, we used to light the bonfires in the middle of the street. It didn't harm the street because the street was all cobbles. It wasn't tarmac which would have melted and burnt, and we used to get the fires going on there and have fireworks all around them, for weeks before starting the end of September actually, any wood we could find, the Mills gave quite a bit of old wood, broken shuttles and things like that and also from the Mills we got Mill band which was a kind of cotton rope which has got soaked in oil because it was used for driving pulleys or something like that and when they renewed it they used to give the old rope to

*the kids for bonfire night and used to light it and it used to glow with a steady glow which was very useful for lighting fireworks with rather than use a match and also you could swing it around and make all patterns of fire in the air with it, well you know not fire really but a glow and that was a mill band.*

(Mill band was also called wheel-band in some parts of the West Riding.)

*At that time of the year as well they used to prune the trees in the park, I think they probably did it on purpose because it was one good way of disposing of the branches, as soon as they cut the old branches off and pruned the trees all the kids were*

*down there with ropes tying around and hauling them back for the bonfires.*

*Before bonfire night was quite hectic because you've got to put guards on your pile of wood because another party might come and raid it, well if they did that of course what happened is you went off and raided somebody else's kind of guerrilla warfare for that but anyhow it probably ended up with a general exchange of fuel for the bonfires because nobody ever was without one or even if the night before on the 4th of November, Mischief Night, if anybody had had it all raided then and they hadn't a chance they just simply went to someone else's bonfire because they're usually two or three in the same street.*

## Network to preserve local newspaper archives

A Coventry University researcher is bringing together experts, archivists and community groups to create a network to preserve the historical archives of local newspapers.

As local newspapers transition to digital formats and close their physical offices, the historical materials they have accumulated over the years – such as photographs and article cuttings that record community life – are in danger of being lost. Without a formal system to save them, or a recognition of their importance, most material is simply thrown away.

Drawing on her 15 years working in the local newspaper industry, Dr Rachel Matthews from the university's Research Centre for Arts, Memory and Communities, is working with Gary Collins, an experienced archive specialist, to develop a new approach to acquiring, cataloguing and making these valuable archives more accessible.

"Local newspaper archives are often the only repository for the stories that tell the history of a place. This project is a vital step in safeguarding that history. In addition, they are key artefacts relating to journalism history and tell the story of the local newspaper itself," says Dr Matthews. "By collaborating with local groups, we can ensure that the heritage captured in our local newspapers is protected for future generations to explore and appreciate."

The project will develop guidelines for those who step in to salvage newspaper records by working with stakeholders to map existing newspaper collections in the Midlands, understand current preservation efforts and identify areas where additional support is needed to ensure their long-term sustainability.

A central aspect of the project, funded by a resilience grant from The National Archives, is the development of a comprehensive toolkit to guide people in preserving newspaper archives effectively. Four workshops will bring together specialists in cataloguing, intellectual property rights and digital preservation, which will collectively shape the toolkit's content.

In addition to drawing on professional archival practices, the project recognises that local communities have often been the first responders in preserving valuable records before they are lost forever. By collaborating closely with these community groups, the initiative aims to formalise and strengthen grassroots preservation efforts.

The toolkit will be published online and made accessible to archivists, community groups and the public. A formal launch event to celebrate the project's outcomes and establish a long-term network dedicated to preserving local newspaper heritage was held online on 1 May.

Details of the project can be found at [www.coventry.ac.uk/research/areas-of-research/centre-for-arts-memory-and-communities](http://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/areas-of-research/centre-for-arts-memory-and-communities)

# Bathgate's historic Bibles – saved for the town

David W. Main

When it was announced at a meeting of Bathgate Together that two of the town's Church of Scotland congregations, namely St John's and Bathgate 'High', were to merge with the loss of one of the church buildings as well as its small vestry library, there was a natural feeling of sadness and regret that after some 200 years of Christian witness as evidenced by the congregation of St John's were to come to an end. (Bathgate Together is a small group composed of volunteers from a range of Bathgate charities, musical bands, the local radio station, the guardians of the local nature reserve, several of the town's churches as well as the town's Community Council, its Community Development Trust and Bathgate Community Centre management.)

Those feelings were to be exacerbated further when it was revealed that two of that church's historic Bibles – both dating from the 17th century (1624 and 1668) – were threatened with being lost to the town – and Scotland – for good since neither the Church of Scotland HQ in Edinburgh nor the National Library were interested in acquiring them. It looked like the future of both these Bibles would be abroad since it appeared that they would be auctioned off, with the proceeds from the sale going to Oxfam. However, I was to be proven wrong.

It was at this meeting that initial steps would be taken which would result in all three Bibles from these churches being saved for the town. The significance of two of these earlier Bibles had already been uncovered both by Margaret Hardy of St John's and Alastair Small of Bathgate Churches Together, on whose research this article is based. For it was their research into the background of the 17th-century Bibles which uncovered the fact the later of the two was a 1668 reprint of the original 1611 Authorised Version of the Bible, itself published under the authority of King James VI (of Scotland) / I (of England). It has the added distinction of having been printed under the supervision of a woman – Agnes Anderson – whose husband, Andrew



*Title page of Bathgate's 1668 Bible. (Alastair Small)*

Anderson, had been the 'King's Printer in Scotland' but who had died in 1676, leaving the printing works in Edinburgh 'to his heirs and successors'. Agnes carried on with the business until she herself died at the then great age of 78 in 1716.

Subsequently, after several further meetings over the past year – the church closed its doors in April 2024 – and with grateful acknowledgement of the help, expertise and financial support from this unofficial grouping of volunteers, all three Bibles have now been saved for the town. With agreement from the elders of St John's, the Bibles have now been transferred on a long-term renewable loan basis to West Lothian Council from Bathgate Parish Church – the name taken at the merger of the two congregations. This agreement ensured that the church has been able to call upon the skills of Emma Peattie, the council's



museums and archives officer who helped with the initial safeguarding of all three Bibles, with particular attention, of course, being paid to the two 17th-century copies.

With additional funding provided by Bill Weir of Bathgate Community Centre management committee, the binding of the 1668 reprint was restored under the expert eyes of a team of professional binders at Riley, Dunn and Wilson, based in Falkirk. Subsequently, two of the Bibles are now on public display in a special air-conditioned and temperature-controlled cabinet which was donated by Harburn Community Development Trust with the cost of the transport of the cabinet by a local haulier being met by Alastair Small.

What does all this signify? For my own part I see it as something of a triumph of local teamwork. In addition, these Bibles bear important testimony not only to the town's Christian past but also to its continuing role in the present – after all, Bathgate still has six churches in its vicinity.

Again, the initiative to save these three Bibles for the town has been but one of a series of local projects over the past few years to preserve as well as revive interest in the town's significant past, which has seen the creation of plaques on several of the town's more important public buildings – a joint initiative by one of our local councillors, Harry Cartmill, and **Bathgate History Group** – as well as the publication of an illustrated booklet under the auspices of the town's community council

with information provided by members of the Bathgate History Group and which details several walks which can be undertaken within the town starting from the local museum – the 'Bennie'.

In addition, the community council was also responsible for erecting an information panel in the town square (aka 'the Steelyard') highlighting the background of several local figures prominent in both Scottish and British history, most notably, Peter McLagan, Scotland's first black MP (see LHN 151) and George Harvie-Watt, who was Winston Churchill's parliamentary private secretary during most of WW2 – thus substantiating the tagline of the council, which is 'small town, BIG history'.

Finally, that these Bibles could have been so very nearly lost had it not been for the commitment and dedication of several local townspeople and local organisations serves as a reminder to us all that 'localism' is an essential component not only in preserving a town's sense of self but also those physical items of that past which can otherwise be so easily lost through apathy or indifference unless local people can be persuaded to take up the fight on behalf of their own communities.

Now, happily, a brighter future awaits these Bibles in Bathgate, which still in their own quiet way continue to serve the people of the town as a reminder of that wider Christian witness and service which the congregation of St John's offered to the town for around 200 years.



*Mid Street, Bathgate in the early 20th century, with the spire of St John's. The present building dates from 1894 but the congregation dates back to 1811. (Picture: Almond Valley Heritage Trust)*

# The continuing story of Hoar Oak Cottage

Bette Baldwin

Hoar Oak Cottage is located in the beautiful and remote valley of the Hoar Oak Water in north-west Exmoor. Near to the Hoar Oak Tree and close to the Devon/Somerset County boundary, the cottage is located close to the border of the old royal forest of Exmoor. Its history is rooted in sheep farming. It started life as a one-roomed hut, thought to be medieval in date, which was used by shepherds taking sheep up onto the moor for summer pasture. Although local farmers paid for this privilege, it was part of their age-old commoners' rights on the royal forest.

Once the forest was sold in 1819, the nearby landowner, the Vellacotts of Furzehill near Barbrook, began to extend the cottage with the addition of ground floor rooms and an upper story. From around 1818, they began using it as a permanent home to accommodate their agricultural workers including the shepherd of their Hoar Oak herding. By the beginning of the 20th century it had become a substantive two-storey farmhouse and the permanent home to the Hoar Oak shepherd employed by Frederic Knight and later the Fortescue family. James Johnstone, shepherd from 1886 to 1904, lived there with his wife Sarah and 13 children. The cottage never had electricity, running water, sanitation, telephones or a proper road or track to reach it. Nowadays our younger visitors often ask about whether it had Wi-Fi.

In 1958, the cottage and 25 acres around it



*James Johnstone at Hoar Oak Cottage, c.1903.*

was purchased by the Exmoor National Park Authority and the last shepherd family was removed to nearby Simonsbath. Left uncared for, the cottage fell into disrepair and plans were being made, in the early 21st century, to completely remove the building. In 2010, The Friends of Hoar Oak Cottage was set up by Will Bowden and me – we are descendants of James and Sarah Johnstone. We did so in response to our own and many other locals' wish to save the cottage from destruction. The Friends worked with the Exmoor National Park Authority, which agreed to conserve the building as a 'heritage ruin'. Grants were secured and the building work completed, including preservation of the original, medieval, one-roomed shepherd's hut in the lower south-west corner of the building (see picture, back cover).

The Friends acquired a further Heritage Lottery grant to undertake a year's project to collect, preserve and share the history of the cottage, the story of the people who once lived there and to provide answers to the often-asked question, 'What was it like to live in such a remote spot?'

Since then, the Friends have continued their research and engagement activities by giving talks, hosting exhibitions, leading 'walk and talks' to the cottage and keeping a website and social media presence active.

The Friends have researched and published three books – *A Portrait of Hoar Oak Cottage* (2022), *The Women of Hoar Oak Cottage* (2023)



*A 'Walk and Talk' group heading up the  
Hoar Oak Valley.*

and *The Soldiers of Hoar Oak Cottage* (2024) – and worked with the University of Exeter on a 2024 research project, ‘Revisiting the reclamation of Exmoor’ (a book based on this has been published by Palgrave Macmillan).

This year sees the launch of a new pilot project to trial creating ‘Virtual Visits’ using drone and fixed photography.

Hoar Oak Cottage, although in a beautiful part of Exmoor, is a remote and challenging heritage site to visit. It is a five-to-six-mile walk there and back, across open moor, and can involve difficult climbs down into and up out of steep valleys. Although a beautiful hike for some it is, for many people for a variety of reasons, an impossible place to visit. The Friends have always harboured a wish to

create ‘Virtual Visits’ hosted on our website which these people can watch and enjoy. This spring we have funded a pilot project, to be undertaken by Exmoor photographer Shaun Davey, to make a short, trial ‘Virtual Visit’ in order to learn about the challenges, costs and timings involved. The aim will then be to raise funds for further such tours, hopefully replicating the three routes for walking into the cottage. Also in 2025 is the Friends’ ‘travelling’ exhibition, based on the *Soldiers of Hoar Oak Cottage* book, which is being hosted around several sites in north Devon.

*To find out more about Hoar Oak Cottage, the Friends charity and these projects, visit [www.hoaroakcottage.org](http://www.hoaroakcottage.org) or follow @hoaroakcottage on Facebook and Instagram.*

## Letter to the editor

Send your letters to: [editor.lhn@balh.org.uk](mailto:editor.lhn@balh.org.uk)

### **Saving the albatross**

I read Mike Petty’s letter, ‘Fenland albatross?’ (LHN154), about what to do with 70 years of information gathered on his village in the Fens. This rang a bell with me having come across a website full of wonderful information on something I was researching. I contacted the curator/owner, in his late 80s with a serious medical problem. He said he had no idea what would happen to the website when he died, probably a lot sooner than later. After some discussion with him I got an email from his daughter saying my emails had prompted her father to hand over the maintenance of the website to her. It will live on, for now.

This has made me ponder about my Tamworth Heritage Magazine and Archive websites. What will become of them? Hopefully the magazine will have a new team to take it over. The archivist and videographer are half my age. However, there are many small heritage and history groups who are shrinking and ageing too. There needs to be a solution and I think I have found one...

It is not difficult or expensive to get web hosting – proper hosting, not things like Squarespace, Ionos etc. but, a step on. What I am looking at doing for my own outfit is to have a computer in the rack at a data centre. That is we own, or rent: an entire computer in the data centre. Not just web space but an FTP

server, basically the organisation’s own cloud that won’t drift away, and its own email server and a lot more. This would cost as little as £1,000 a year for 500GB of space that is far more secure than any computer in a home or office.

The thing that occurred to me is BALH could get a computer in one of these data centre racks and be able to archive some of the members’ archives, like that Fenland albatross, making them secure for as long as BALH lasts. So rather than these collections and archives disappearing they could have a permanent digital home.

This is not hosting websites for member groups but BALH gaining digital archives that would be donated to the Association. Going forward BALH would have an archive in its own right.

I do stress digital. Whilst I have 20,000 heritage images going back to the 1860s, I don’t have the physical photos. We can donate those to the local town council archive, which has a physical store. But this is vastly more expensive than digital storage. Better a digital archive than it all be scattered to the winds or destroyed.

So can BALH look into running its own computers in a data centre as a permanent archive for collections that would otherwise be lost? What do the members think? This could be the start of a BALH Local History Archive!

*Chris Hills, editor, Tamworth Heritage Magazine, [www.tamworthheritage.org.uk](http://www.tamworthheritage.org.uk)*

# England's cotton famine, John Bright and Abraham Lincoln

Alan Rawsterne

American cotton supplied the textile mills of north-west England to great effect for both supplier and manufacturer. Yet the millhands there took an early and strong stand against the Confederacy and its reliance on slave labour, even to their own detriment.

By early 1862 there were thousands of men, as well as women, out of work due to their refusal to handle the Confederate States of America's chief product; the number doubled by November 1863, to 8,400 in one town. US president Abraham Lincoln wrote a well-known letter 'To the Workingmen of Manchester' in January 1863 to thank them. Local authorities appropriated funds – analogous to the New Deal's Civilian Conservation Corps in 1930s America – to put those hands back to work, even as soup kitchens fed tens of thousands.

The Cotton Famine Road, pictured on this issue's cover, is the chief surviving product of their work. With 327,600 stones, hammered and chiselled from local quarries, men paved more than a mile over rugged terrain in the borough of Rochdale, Lancashire that served shepherds, travellers and, then as now, bird-watchers. This borough was home to John Bright, a Quaker manufacturer and the leading anti-slavery voice in Parliament, a regular correspondent of Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, and through him a voice to Lincoln.

The anteroom of Lincoln's office had a portrait of Bright on the wall. What is more, in early 1864 Lincoln pardoned 20-year-old London-born Alfred Rubery for a federal crime, because 'his pardon is desired by John Bright, of England'.

Over the years our local history group, the **Rooley Moor Neighbourhood Forum**, has worked to raise the profile of the Cotton Famine Road, as we believe it to be of international importance in reminding all of the determination of people across the globe to bring about the abolition of slavery.

However, having defeated two previous attempts to develop this area of moorland, we find ourselves now confronting a Canadian



*John Bright (1811–1889).*

investor whose hope is to finance a wind farm development that would place turbines along either side of the Cotton Famine Road, leaving a path a few feet wide under the turbines. If this development were to go ahead, we believe it would destroy the Cotton Famine Road and its setting in an historic landscape (as well as its bird life and views of this 'Yellow Brick Road' from miles around Lancashire and Yorkshire).

We are reaching out to anyone who can lend support to help us preserve this unique monument to Abraham Lincoln and the millworkers of Rochdale who took a decisive stance to end slavery. We have approached members of Parliament, and if you wish to help, please write to me at [info@rmnf.org.uk](mailto:info@rmnf.org.uk) or see [www.rmnf.org.uk/donate/](http://www.rmnf.org.uk/donate/) – the 'Say No to Scout Moor 2' campaign needs funds to help with printing, website, banners and potential legal costs. We are a registered non-profit charity.

*For further information see [www.rmnf.org.uk/area/cotton-famine-road](http://www.rmnf.org.uk/area/cotton-famine-road). This is an edited version of an article in *For the People*, newsletter of the Abraham Lincoln Association, reproduced with permission.*



# The Regional Ethnology of Scotland Project (RESP)

Heather Falvey

The main aim of this innovative project, conducted by the European Ethnological Research Centre (EERC) at the University of Edinburgh, is to collect and make widely available primary sources that illustrate everyday life and society in Scotland, past and present. ('Ethnology' is the study of characteristics of different peoples and the differences and relationships between them. The project has two main themes: the spoken word and the written word. Local participation is at its heart: volunteers can get involved in all aspects of collecting material.

## The spoken word

Research staff at the Centre work with local people and organisations (e.g. archive and library services, voluntary organisations and schools) to reach as many people as possible so that the recordings made represent all parts of the community. Trained local volunteers conduct the interviews and base them on whatever aspects of the interviewees' lives, and where they live, are most appropriate or meaningful to them.

Thus the archive will, in theory, be an accurate reflection of life and society as experienced by the individual in the place where the recording was made. The project's website provides access to the recordings. Detailed summaries for each item are provided, together with keyword, name and place search options. Most of the interviews have been transcribed in full and those transcriptions are also available.

## The written word

Account books, diaries, journals, letters and other personal documents are rich sources for ethnologists, historians and students of everyday life. Separately, the sources provide first-hand, detailed information about individuals, communities and occupations, offering an opportunity to investigate life at the level of parish, town, workplace or family. Collectively, they demonstrate variety

in everyday life and how its rhythms, forms and customs differed over time and place, and between occupations, social groups and genders. Professor Sandy Fenton, founder of the EERC, recognised the value of such documents for ethnological research. In 1994 he launched the 'Sources in Local History' series to promote their use more widely. One of the objectives of the RESP is to create a free-to-access, digital collection of fully edited and transcribed historical sources, so the 'Sources in Local History' editions have been made available on the site.

The documents published by the project date from the late 18th century to the early 20th century as this period is beyond the reach of first-hand oral reminiscences but, due to increasing levels of literacy, it was when wide range of people were recording their daily affairs. To date (December 2024) 34 volumes have been published, covering a wide range of subjects, such as: The Grand Tour Journal of Alexander Penrose Cumming 1770–1771; Love Letters between Lady Susan Hay and Lord James Ramsay, 1835; The Letters of the Smith Family, Emigrants to Australia, 1854–1891; A Farm Ledger from Glenquicken, Galloway, 1942–1947.

*Transcribed sources can be found at the project website: [www.regionalethnologyscotland.llc.ed.ac.uk/written-word/sources-in-local-history](http://www.regionalethnologyscotland.llc.ed.ac.uk/written-word/sources-in-local-history)*



# Paignton local history book: a community collaboration

Tim Lomas

January 2025 saw the launch of the book *Paignton – Our Home Town*. What is distinctive is the collaboration between a local history society and a primary school: Paignton Heritage Society has worked with Oldway Primary in the town. Published by Silver Fox Publishing, the book is aimed at Key Stage 2 pupils (7–11 years old). This 18-month collaboration starting in summer 2023 was helped by funding from the Local Heritage Grants Scheme, Torbay Council, Torbay Culture and the English Riviera UNESCO Global Geopark and some investment from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The production aimed to instil knowledge and pride in local heritage. At the same time, there was a desire for an attractive educational resource that also took account of National Curriculum requirements and classroom needs. The end result was a readable text and high-quality visuals. The direct input from pupils led to features such as glossaries, timelines and maps.

It was launched with a presentation involving pupils to the local media, MP, deputy mayor, councillors, MAT (multi-academy trust) trustees and heritage society members. There was also much press coverage including BBC Spotlight, local papers and social media. It was distributed initially to 10 primary schools, Paignton Library,

Torquay Museum and Paignton Parish Church. Although the book is not technically for sale, a big demand has resulted in a second print run of 300 being planned.

There has been considerable follow-up including taking children to present at a local theatre to history groups, civic society, English Heritage, museum, library, community groups and media. They will also attend a local author group meeting at Paignton Library in March 2025. Also planned is an event at the local Picture House Trust – another major local initiative restoring and reopening one of the earliest purpose-built cinemas, this one frequently attended by Agatha Christie.

Building on this success, there is a plan to follow up with a collaborative venture on a Second World War-themed booklet for classrooms covering Torbay. The Heritage Society is coming into school to talk about what a historian is and there are plans to set up a junior heritage group at the local library.

There have been many benefits – positive publicity for the school and society, staff enthusiasm and interest, enhancement of the curriculum, pupil commitment, broadening community contacts beyond history and links across generations (average 60-year gaps between the historians and pupils). It has also given some pride in a fairly deprived area.





# Local History News

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[www.balh.org.uk](http://www.balh.org.uk)

## Supplement

### CROSSING COUNTIES: TRANSPORT HISTORY IN HERTS, BEDS AND BUCKS

*Save the date!*



**Saturday 11 October 2025, 10am–4pm**

**St Andrew's Church Hall, Kingston Road, Taunton TA2 7SB**

BALH is delighted to be working in partnership with the local history associations of Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire to present this conference focused on local transport history. Further details and tickets will be available soon on the BALH website..

**[www.balh.org.uk/events](http://www.balh.org.uk/events) • @BALHNews**

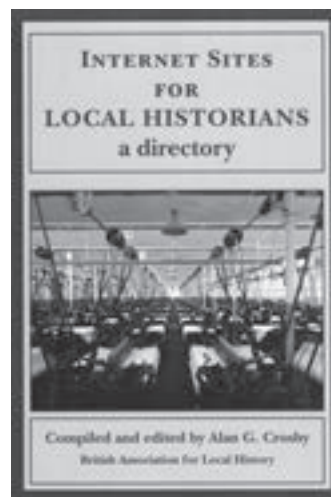
# BOOKS PUBLISHED BY BALH



This 88-page practical guide covers handwriting from 1500 to 1700, illustrated with facsimiles and transcripts of more than 20 documents of types most frequently encountered by researchers.

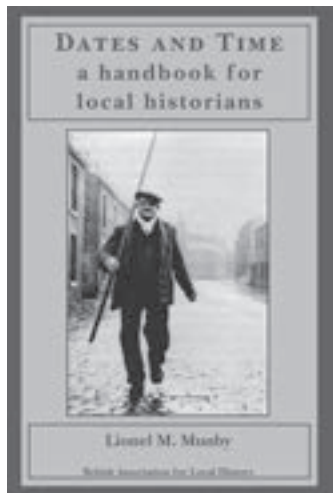
It also offers advice on transcribing.

**£8 to BALH members, £10 to non-members**



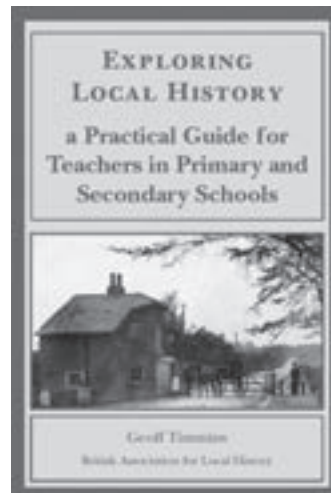
The 5th edition of this popular guide, greatly expanded in 2020, listing, describing and briefly evaluating 1,000 internet sites of particular interest to local and family historians. There are place and subject indexes and a useful brief introduction.

**£8 to BALH members, £10 to non-members**



An authoritative, concise guide to systems of recording time and dates exploring how time has been measured in the past. It covers regnal years, the Julian and Gregorian calendars and various religious dating systems.

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This 130-page paperback is full of detailed guidance and case studies to stimulate the interest of young people and develop key skills. It explains how a wealth of readily available sources can enrich understanding of local history.

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## LATEST TITLE FROM BALH



### **Manors and Manorial Documents after 1500**

*Mark Forrest, with Helen Watt*

Manorial documents are an under-used source for local history. They offer a wealth of information about farming practices, village customs, inheritance, crime and local government, essential to understanding past communities. This comprehensive 95-page guide to post-medieval manors details how they were managed and presents illustrated examples of administrative documents – custumals, accounts, surveys and maps – as well as the court rolls and books that record the court in session. It includes case studies of how they may be used, a bibliography and a glossary.

**£8 to BALH members, £10 to non-members.**

**March 2022 ISBN: 978-0-948140-06-8**

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#### **WOULD YOUR ORGANISATION BE INTERESTED IN SELLING BALH PUBLICATIONS?**

One of the core aims of BALH has always been to assist its members by publishing handbooks and other useful information on local history topics. We currently have in print books about internet sites, handwriting, dates and times, manorial records and teaching local history, and these are available for anyone to purchase through our website. We are keen that these should also be available for sale in archive offices, museums, and through member societies, and we are prepared to offer copies, if ordered in multiples of five or more, at a generous discount for resale. If your organisation would be interested in selling BALH publications please contact John Chandler, chair of the Publications Committee, for further information: [jh.chandler@hotmail.com](mailto:jh.chandler@hotmail.com).

# BALH Awards for Local Historians

## OUTSTANDING INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The purpose of this award is to honour publicly local historians of all ages who have made outstanding and significant voluntary contributions to the subject in their own areas and more widely. Such contributions might include raising awareness of the subject or developing innovative ways of collecting and disseminating research into local history. It is intended that the awards should embrace as wide a spectrum of activity in local history as possible.

The most important thing the recipients have in common is their enthusiasm for local history and their ability and inclination to share this with others.

Nominations may be made by anyone who feels they recognise such a contribution, using the form on our website at **[www.balh.org.uk/awards](http://www.balh.org.uk/awards)**. Nominations are considered by the Awards Panel made up of experienced local historians who are members of the Association's Board of Trustees or one of its advisory committees. Up to six awards are made annually. Awards certificates are normally presented at the BALH AGM in the summer.

The nominator is responsible for submitting the nomination form and for ensuring that the two referees each complete the reference form available on the website (if necessary, please ask for a paper copy). References each require 300–500 words in support of the nomination outlining how, in the experience of the referee, the nominated local historian deserves this recognition. If not submitting online, those three forms should arrive together by post to British Association for Local History Awards c/o Moore Insight, St James House, Vicar Lane, Sheffield S1 2EX or by email to [admin@balh.org.uk](mailto:admin@balh.org.uk) **by 31 December**. Please do not send any additional material.

If you have not received an acknowledgement within three weeks please contact the BALH Office [admin@balh.org.uk](mailto:admin@balh.org.uk)

### BALH INSURANCE FOR LOCAL SOCIETIES

Insurance cover is provided for societies within the BALH Society annual membership subscription fee. Subscriptions are valid for one calendar year (1st Jan – 31st Dec) and need to be renewed each year to continue a society's insurance cover. The policy covers these types of activities:

Meetings, walks, talks, AGMs/conferences with less than 150 attendees • Visits/trips to places of interest  
Collections of local archive material • Photographing places of interest for recording purposes  
Having a stand at a fair or arranging small-scale publicity displays • Research  
Other non-manual activities of a history society

A fact sheet about the policy and the full policy schedule are available to download here:

**[www.balh.org.uk/resources-balh-insurance-for-local-societies](http://www.balh.org.uk/resources-balh-insurance-for-local-societies)**

# Finding historic Perth

Laura Yeoman

In the first talk in BALH's 2025 series delivered in partnership with the Historic Towns Trust, David Bowler spoke about medieval and early modern Perth, and how the development of the burgh was tied to the natural topography of the area. David is Director of Alder Archaeology Ltd, and past president of the Perthshire Society of Natural Science. He has lived and worked in Perth since 1983 and was an adviser to the Perth Historic Map project.

David introduced the talk by explaining why Perth was a suitable location for a Historic Towns Trust mapping project. Thanks to archaeological excavations since the 1970s, a lot is known about the burgh, and the natural topography of the surrounding area means that mapping is a good way of articulating its history. Located towards the centre of Scotland on the River Tay, Perth is situated at the lowest crossing point of the river, where it is still navigable by boat from the North Sea. The burgh itself is bounded by the Tay, as well as the North and South Inches. The Tay is prone to flooding, particularly in late winter with snowmelt from surrounding hill systems and, as David pointed out, this likely explains the location of the original settlement.

Beginning his talk in 1027, 100 years before Perth became a royal burgh, David explained how the initial settlement was situated on a slightly raised area around the nucleus of St John's Kirk and Watergate. The settlement was surrounded by boggy ground on all sides, making it a naturally defensible site. A wooden bridge across the Tay connected the settlement to Kinnoull parish church on the other side of the river, and to routes to Dundee and Scone Abbey. In later years, defensive ditches would be built along the site of today's Mill Street, Methven Street and Canal Street, enclosing this original medieval settlement and giving the burgh its very distinctive form, shape and character.

David went on to explain that the proneness of the area to flooding, and general wetness of the land, has resulted in archaeological remains surviving particularly well under the modern-day city centre. Buildings were often erected on top of the rubble of former



*Detail from an 1820 copy of the 1774 Rutherford map of Perth referenced in David Bowler's talk.  
(National Library of Scotland)*

structures, meaning the modern street level is now up to two metres higher in places than the level of the original settlement. The anaerobic conditions under these buildings have allowed organic materials to survive well, particularly in midden deposits. Daily debris from medieval Perth, including bone, leather, wood and textiles, have all been excavated in the city centre. David likened the archaeology of Perth to a cow pat with a crust on its surface – the modern masonry buildings are sitting on top of a more liquid level of wet anaerobic deposits. Unfortunately, as David pointed out, the sulphuric smell of these deposits has also survived particularly well!

David used St John's Kirk as an example of how the ground level has risen over the centuries. He showed a picture of the West Door of the church, which appears to be completely out of proportion (and, in fact, visitors today must walk down steps into the church, with the church floor about a metre



Turning his attention to historic maps of Perth, David began by looking at the 1774 map by A. Rutherford. At this time the town (today a city) hadn't really extended much beyond its medieval limits. The map showed the burgh plots along the High Street and South Street. Work by R.M. Spearman has shown that the town likely developed from the waterfront westwards, and then southwards, eventually surrounding the St John's Kirk enclosure. David then considered the slightly earlier Petit map of Perth from 1715, which is more of a sketch plan showing fortifications adding during the Jacobite Rising. The plan also shows the importance of the river as a trading route into the centre of the burgh, particularly for goods like coal.

similar way to the Royal Mile in Edinburgh. The upstairs of these buildings would have been divided into individually owned or rented flats (known as houses) with the entire building being known as a 'land.'

David also considered the importance of Perth as a royal burial site. King James I (of Scotland) chose Perth as his burial place, as did his wife Joan Beaufort, and Margaret Tudor, older sister of English King Henry VIII. All three were buried in the church of the Carthusian monastery in Perth; however, the exact site of the monastery is currently lost to history. The event concluded with a lively question and answer session.

The publications and research produced by David and his colleagues at Alder Archaeology and its predecessor The Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust were an important source for the information presented in the Perth Historic Map. To find out more about the Historic Towns Trust map of Perth, see their website: [www.historictownstrust.uk/maps/an-historical-map-of-perth](http://www.historictownstrust.uk/maps/an-historical-map-of-perth). Many of the archaeological artefacts found in excavations in Perth city centre can be found in the recently opened Perth Museum (see [perthmuseum.co.uk](http://perthmuseum.co.uk)).

*Laura Yeoman is a BALH Trustee and an archivist at the Borthwick Institute for Archives in York.*



*A detail from the Historic Towns Trust's Historical Map of Perth.*



# News round-up

*With thanks to Trevor Baker, Claire Cross, Heather Falvey, Jane Howells, Joseph Kelly, Neil Langridge, Susan Moore, Martin Peagam, Bob Ricketts, Marissa Trimble*



*St Clement's Church in Sandwich, Kent, with a cart and thatched buildings. Taken by W G Campbell, c.1854–57. (Historic England Archive/Janette Rosing Collection)*

Historic England has announced the acquisition of the **Janette Rosing Collection** of England: a world-class collection of some of the finest earliest landscape photography of England, taken by leading practitioners of the time. The Rosing Collection includes over 8,000 original black and white photographs of English architecture, landscapes and maritime history from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s, when England was undergoing large-scale changes powered by industrialisation, urbanisation and developments in transport. The photographs cover every English county. Janette Rosing (1942–2021) was a renowned photographic consultant, connoisseur, and collector who dedicated her life to studying and amassing the collection.

Meanwhile, the latest issue of *Historic England's* research journal is now available – it includes Joanna Smith's article 'England's Suburbs 1820–2020', tracing the long evolution of an internal programme to research 200 years of suburban growth. Details: <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/research/introduction-to-issue-28/>

The Church of England General Synod has proposed to deregulate the disposal of church buildings, as well as their fixtures and fittings, apparently without discussing its new Mission and Pastoral Measure and Regulations with heritage stakeholders, including the

Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The **Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings** and the **Victorian Society** have issued a joint statement expressing concern over the proposals – see [www.balh.org.uk/GUC205](http://www.balh.org.uk/GUC205)

Archaeologists excavating at **Sheffield Castle** have uncovered the only surviving examples of Civil War wooden stake defences, used to protect the castle from Parliamentary attack. The stakes, all around 1 metre long, were found in the castle moat. A team from Wessex Archaeology has been excavating the remains of Sheffield Castle as part of Sheffield City Council's Castlegate regeneration project. Analysis so far suggests that the stakes could have formed part of an 'abatis', a method of fortification constructed from large tree branches with the ends and side branches cut down and sharpened to points. The discoveries made during this project have also led to the dig being awarded Rescue Project of the Year at the Current Archaeology Awards 2025.

**Behind Bars: Memory, Justice & the Future of Penal Heritage** is a two-day symposium featuring panel talks, breakout events and a prison tour, taking place at Shrewsbury Prison on 21–22 August. The symposium will bring together interdisciplinary perspectives across academia, practice and the public sphere in an effort to address how penal heritage is used and to further explore the broader implications of penal heritage for society and culture. Details: [www.shrewsburyprison.com/penal-heritage-symposium/](http://www.shrewsburyprison.com/penal-heritage-symposium/)

The **Banbury Heritage Project**, a partnership between Historic England, Age UK Oxfordshire and a group of older people from Banbury, was set up to explore and overcome some of the barriers to engagement with heritage for older people living with sight loss and mobility challenges. The project has now come to a close, but a short film it has created can be viewed at <https://creativelaterlife.com/heritage-project-project-film>

# Research on the Rails competition

To mark the 200th anniversary of the opening of the Stockton & Darlington Railway, **Cleveland and Teesside Local History Society** and the **Friends of the Stockton & Darlington Railway** are collaborating in offering an S&DR 200 Research Prize Competition for original research into the Stockton & Darlington Railway.

The best entries to the Research on the Rails competition will be published in their journals (*The Globe* and *Cleveland History*), or the groups may decide to publish a separate new, joint publication.

The original research can be on any subject connected to the history of the Stockton & Darlington Railway up to 1863, including its impact beyond that date. It can be about people, technology, events, archival research or impacts.

The prize will be £1,000 provided jointly by the groups – the closing date for submissions is 31 August 2025. Papers should be a maximum of 10,000 words. Further details from Caroline Hardie, editor of *The Globe*, [caroline@aenvironment.co.uk](mailto:caroline@aenvironment.co.uk), or John Little, editor of *Cleveland History*, [jkittle@btinternet.com](mailto:jkittle@btinternet.com).

For information about events commemorating the 200th anniversary of the Stockton & Darlington, see [www.sdr200.co.uk](http://www.sdr200.co.uk) and [railway200.co.uk](http://railway200.co.uk)



CILIP, the UK's library and information association, is looking for nominations for its **Local Studies Volunteer Award**. Nominations for an outstanding volunteer should be made in either under 25 or 25 and over categories by 10 June – anyone who volunteered in an archive or library setting in 2024 can be nominated. Details: <https://localstudieslibrarians.org/local-studies-volunteer-award/>

The **Oxford Heritage Asset Register** is a project from Oxford City Council to identify what is significant about local features in the historic environment and highlights their aesthetic, communal, architectural, archaeological and historical contribution to the city – see <https://www.oxford.gov.uk/oxford-heritage-asset-register>. Nominations for additions this year include two local bathing sites, a 1970s mural, two former schools and the home of C.S. Lewis.

Rare 16th-century wall paintings have been uncovered at **The Ashes**, a Tudor hunting lodge in Cumbria. Although some of the paintings – depicting fantastical beasts and foliage – have been known since the 1970s, recent restoration work at the property by Historic England has revealed many more. The paintings are believed to mimic textile hangings in wealthy homes of the era.



**Devon History Society's** February newsletter has an interesting article on using the AI tool ChatGPT to translate medieval Latin documents (though use with care, of course!). This year the society is also running a celebratory Festival of Devon in the 1920s through a dedicated website, [devontwentiesfestival.co.uk](http://devontwentiesfestival.co.uk). In the latest issue of *The Devon Historian*, the last under editor Mike Sampson, every article is on a 1902s theme. Mike is succeeded by Dr Rob Campbell.

As mentioned in LHN154, this year **Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society** celebrates its 175th anniversary. The society reports that its conference on 8 March and an accompanying exhibition at Taunton Library were very successful. Future issues of the SANHS e-bulletin will showcase some of the material from the exhibition. According to

Rev T.F. Dymock, the first secretary of the SANHS, it was formed 'to explore the treasures of nature and art which this county contains, and to accumulate a body of facts in aid of the studies of the antiquary and natural historian'.

**Huddersfield Local History Society**, whose secretary Richard Hobson has won one of this year's BALH short article awards (see page 5), reports that he is now working on a short book about more recent veterans, *Boys of the Old Brigade*, which will be the group's autumn publication this year. Last year the society ran a crowdfunding campaign to publish a book on the renovation and reuse of northern textile mills, by photographer Neil Horsley. *Mills Transformed* has now been published and a linked exhibition held at Bradford Industrial Museum may come to Huddersfield this autumn.

**Lewes History Group's** February Bulletin reports on the findings of a survey about members' preferences for the format of meetings. A third favoured live meetings all year, 55 per cent supported the current hybrid live/Zoom meetings, and 13 per cent preferred Zoom-only meetings. A third of members responded to the survey.

**Heanor & District Local History Society** in Derbyshire has now published more than 450 editions of its newsletter (published nine times a year), which has varied between four and 16 pages in different issues. The colourful April issue includes an interesting follow-up of letter sent to the society in 1972 about a plot of land between the Erewash and Nottingham Canals.

**Avon Local History & Archaeology** (ALHA)

reports that member group **Whitchurch Local History Society** is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, and has already held a one-day exhibition. ALHA also has a new member, the **Weston Clevedon & Portishead Railway Group**, which has been running since 2006. On Saturday 7 June, the Gloucester & Bristol Branch of the **Richard III Society** is holding a study day in Tewkesbury on The Wars of the Roses in Severn Vale (see [www.richardiiiigloucester.co.uk](http://www.richardiiiigloucester.co.uk)).

**Kent Archaeological Society** once again welcomes applications to the Allen Grove Local History Fund, established by a former president of the society and curator of Maidstone Museum. Applications for a wide range of local history projects are welcomed and encouraged from individuals, groups or societies. The average grants recently awarded have been in the region of £500. Applications should be made by 30 September – contact [allengroveadmin@kentarchaeology.org.uk](mailto:allengroveadmin@kentarchaeology.org.uk)

**West of England & South Wales Women's History Network** will be holding their 32nd annual conference on Saturday 11 October 2025 at Exeter University. The theme is Historical Perspectives on Women and Food, and the keynote speaker is Polly Russell, food historian and curator at the British Library. Further details will be on the website as they become available: [weswwomenshistorynetwork.co.uk](http://weswwomenshistorynetwork.co.uk)

**Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society** will be holding its History Fair this year on 5 July at Oakham Castle, Rutland – details via [lahs.org.uk/events/lahs-history-fair-2025](http://lahs.org.uk/events/lahs-history-fair-2025)

## Good ideas to borrow...

Members of **Ulverston History Group** in Cumbria have recently published two books (*For These Are the Stones That Speak* and *Stones Still Speaking*) detailing the stories of more than 60 people buried at local churchyards. Chapter titles include Aristocracy, Pole Leapers, Trades & Professions, Characters and Personalities, Misadventures and Sticky Ends. Could your group work together to tell similar local tales?

**Stowupland Local History Group** in Suffolk has launched a local history leaflet providing brief information on a number of notable buildings and places in the village – it includes a QR code which when scanned will link to a page on the group's website where far more information can be found. To help find the locations, as well as a map they have included 'What 3 Words' codes. (For the uninitiated, [what3words.com](http://what3words.com) provides an easy way to convert any location to a series of three easily typed words.)

**Abbots Langley Local History Society** in Hertfordshire recently launched its own YouTube channel ([youtu.be/Oi9bYDwZMS8](https://youtu.be/Oi9bYDwZMS8)), which is already proving popular – its first video was a slideshow of the village between 1974 and 2024, including many archive images. Another video is about Nicholas Breakspear, the humble farm boy from Bedmond who became the only Englishman to be elected pope.

**The Society of Antiquaries of London** is holding a free exhibition this year to mark the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta (the 1225 version enshrined in English law) and the Charter of the Forest. Exhibits will include the Black Book of Peterborough (pictured), possibly derived from an early draft of Magna Carta. It will be open from Wednesdays to Fridays from 23 July to 19 September at Burlington House, Piccadilly.



**The Scottish Council on Archives** (SCA) has announced that the 2025 edition of its project *A Year in the Life of a Community Archive* will shine a spotlight on **Ness Historical Society** (Comunn Eachdraidh Nis), a community archive based in the Outer Hebrides. Throughout the year, the showcase will feature regular blog posts, interviews, photo essays and updates highlighting the many aspects

## Online news

**TheGenealogist.co.uk** has recently released complete collections of records from the 1910 Lloyd George Domesday Survey' of land values for the counties of Essex and Cambridgeshire, adding to those already available at the site. Earlier this year the site also released more than five million records from trade directories across the UK, many of them dating after the Second World War.

**Findmypast.com** has released a variety of record sets relating to Wiltshire, including police records, Great Western Railway hospital admissions, Trowbridge parish settlement examinations and early census returns (1650–1887), thanks to a partnership with Wiltshire Family History Society.

The **Victoria County History** website has recently added draft text for Oxford parishes including Spelsbury, Chadlington and Kiddington – see [www.history.ac.uk/research/victoria-county-history](http://www.history.ac.uk/research/victoria-county-history). The VCH has also announced new projects for Dorset (Isle of Purbeck), Kent (Maidstone), Lincolnshire (Spalding) and London (a VCH Short publication on St Anne Soho).

The **National Library of Scotland's** map site now has a new tool to search the full map text of more than 2.5 million names and geographical features (e.g. churches, schools, curling rinks) on Ordnance Survey six-inch maps of England, Scotland and Wales (1888-1913). Users can also generate their own custom distribution maps from searches and download the results. Find the tool at <https://maps.nls.uk/projects/os1900>

Exploring Names is a new web project from the **Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland** – [www.snsbi.org.uk/exploring-names](http://www.snsbi.org.uk/exploring-names) – as part of an outreach project seeking to produce core materials about names and their study that will be informative and attractive for anyone who is interested in the subject but perhaps unsure where to find reliable information.

of the Society's work – from cataloguing historical records to hosting community events and educational outreach. See [www.balh.org.uk/ATR206](http://www.balh.org.uk/ATR206) and [nesshistorical.co.uk](http://nesshistorical.co.uk).

This year the **Archives and Records Association** will hold its first ever hybrid conference, based in Bristol from 27 to 29 August. The theme will be Next Generation: Innovation and Imagination in Record-Keeping. See <https://openingdoors.eventsair.com/ara2025/>

**The National Archives** is partnering with North East Museums (NEM) to pilot a collaborative learning programme which will use workshops and creative sessions to engage a variety of audiences with its records and the collections at **Tyne & Wear Archives**, part of NEM. One of the programme's audiences will be school students, with taught sessions being delivered at the Discovery Museum in Newcastle and South

Shields Museum, and at local schools, giving the students first-hand experience with records relevant to their communities. The partnership will also develop a programme for families and adults with additional learning needs.

**Wirral Archives Services'** free local history workshops this summer and autumn are on the Argyle Theatre, Birkenhead (5 June), Victorian Wirral (3 July), Wirral and the Cold War (2 Oct) and maritime stories in relation to interesting graves in Bebington Cemetery (6 November). Bookings via [archives@wirral.co.uk](mailto:archives@wirral.co.uk)

Due to Shropshire Council leaving the Shirehall in Shrewsbury and staff needing to move records, **Shropshire Archives** has reduced public opening to one day per week (Thursday, until 5pm). To view archive material please book in advance via the website at [www.shropshirearchives.org.uk](http://www.shropshirearchives.org.uk)

## Bedfordshire Local History Awards

Last year Bedfordshire Local History Association (BLHA) launched its inaugural Local History Awards. The aim was to stimulate original research into aspects of the county's history, encourage the publication of the outcomes, engage local people through community outreach and accessible best-practice websites and raise the profile of local history societies. There was a strong response, with high-quality entries across all the four classes. A

well-attended and lively awards ceremony was held in January 2025 to hear the results. The winners were:

- Best book: *The Friends of Bedford Cemetery for Bedford's Victorian Cemetery.*
- Best Journal: Bedford Architectural, Archaeological & Local History Society for a special issue of *Bedford Local History Magazine, A History of Some Faith Groups in Bedford.*
- Best project: A collaboration between Bedford Theatre Trust and Bedford Tour Guides, led by Dawn Allen', for a costumed reenactment celebrating the 800th anniversary of the siege and fall of Bedford Castle.
- Best website: Turvey History Society. A 'highly commended' award was made to Colin Watt (Clophill history website)

Pamela Birch, County Archivist, spoke to emphasise the importance of research and community engagement and presented the awards. Des Hoar, BLHA's chair, described the awards scheme as 'a great success which generated an enthusiastic response and a wide range of impressive entries. Building on the scheme's success, we plan to hold it again in two years and hopefully add a new class for schools and colleges'.







**Yorkshire Museum** has launched an appeal to purchase and conserve the material from the major Iron Age Melsonby Hoard found in 2021. See [www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/save-the-melsonby-hoard](http://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/save-the-melsonby-hoard) for details of the appeal – and the museum has a temporary display about the hoard.

Devizes-based **Wiltshire Museum's** exhibition this summer – now open and running until 6 September – is *Un/Common People: Folk Culture in Wessex*, which showcases how Wessex's folk traditions have been embraced, reimagined and enriched over time, blending traditional crafts with modern customisations. It features a collection of over 100 objects from Wessex Museums (museums in Devizes, Dorchester, Salisbury, Swindon and Poole), the Museum of British Folklore and private lenders. Details: [www.balh.org.uk/TUA207](http://www.balh.org.uk/TUA207)

**The River & Rowing Museum** in Henley-on-Thames may have to close after it's trustees agreed in February that its current model is "not viable in the long term". The museum's dramatic riverside premises, designed by architect David Chipperfield, were described by chair of trustees David Worthington as "simply too large and the galleries too ambitious in scale" to be financially sustainable. The trustees are exploring options and no specific plan for closure has been announced.

**The Museum of Cannock Chase** in Staffordshire closed its doors in April after 36 years, originally as the Valley Heritage Centre, following cuts by the district council. Other museums under threat from cuts across the country include **Abbey House Museum** in Kirkstall, Leeds and **Blaise Castle House Museum**, **Georgian House Museum** and **Red Lodge Museum** in Bristol.

The Museums Association also reports that friends' groups are under threat – the **Friends of the Bowes Museum** in County Durham, for example, recently voted to dissolve. In a statement, the charity said, 'Over several years, we have seen steadily declining memberships, a fall in income, a rising age profile of members, and increased difficulty recruiting volunteers to become trustees.'

**Combe Mill**, a working industrial museum in Oxfordshire (formerly the sawmill for Blenheim Palace) is celebrating the 50th anniversary this year of the Combe Mill Society, which runs the Grade II\* listed venue. The mill has regular 'steam days' through the spring and summer.



**Oxford University's Continuing Education** department is hosting a hybrid lecture on *Exploring Medieval Place and Society Through Local History*, by Dr Simon Townley, at Rewley House, Oxford on 11 June. VCH contributor Dr Townley will reflect on what a local history approach can offer to the study of medieval society. Details: [www.balh.org.uk/BYR208](http://www.balh.org.uk/BYR208)



**The National Library of Scotland** is celebrating its centenary this year with its 'Outwith' programme to take its collections on the road and enable local communities to connect with their heritage and history. It is



seeking donations to support this work – see [www.nls.uk/support-nls/centenary-appeal](http://www.nls.uk/support-nls/centenary-appeal)

The University of Leicester, De Montfort University (DMU) and Loughborough University are opening up their libraries to anyone aged 18+ who lives, works or studies in Leicester, Leicestershire or Rutland, in a partnership with city and county councils. Library services will be accessible seven days

a week, and up to ten books can be borrowed at a time – see [universitiespartnership.org/open-libraries](http://universitiespartnership.org/open-libraries)

The Working Class Movement Library in Salford is hosting an exhibition to mark the 40th anniversary of the miners' strike, including photographs showing the events from the miners' perspective. It runs until 25 July – see [www.wcml.org.uk](http://www.wcml.org.uk)

## Wincanton History Day, 5 April 2025



BALH was delighted to support society member the Wincanton History Society at their third annual History Day. This is a day for the community with activities all over the town for children and adults – all with the theme of history. The theme this year being 'the horse', the usual parade of classic cars was joined by a parade of horses, many of which had riders in historic costume. There were people all over the town in costume, all the churches opened their doors and laid on exhibitions, ancient rural crafts were displayed, metal detecting was organised for children, a Victorian schoolroom entertained those who were a little older. BALH joined family history societies in the Ask the Experts room, along with two auctioneers who were kept busy valuing and discussing a wide variety of antiques and curios. The Wincanton Museum, which is run by the society, received its largest number of visitors to date – a magnificent 360, the normal on a Saturday being more like 20!

Sadly this may be the last of these events, as the Society failed to be awarded a couple of significant and vital grants and so the whole day made a loss, which has been funded from the society's small savings account, thus jeopardising the life of the museum.

Despite this financial setback this year, this sort of day is a real opportunity for any local history society to engage with the local community and to illustrate many aspects of history both local and social to the old and the young.

# Book reviews

Heather Falvey

**Poppyland Publishing**

**Andy Reid, *A Market Town Through Time: Watton, Norfolk* (Poppyland Publishing, 2025) £14.95**

**Tom Mollard & Geoff Gale, eds., *Millgate, Aylsham* (Poppyland Publishing for Aylsham Local History Society, 2nd edition 2006, reprinted 2013 and 2025) £10.95**

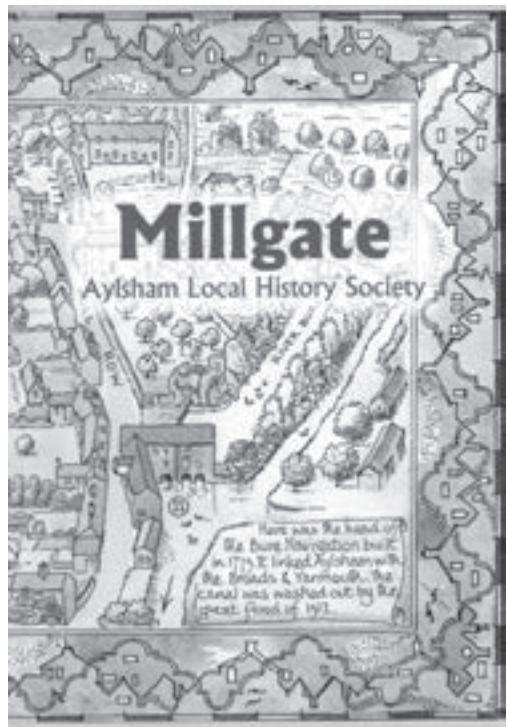
**Jonathan Hooton, *This Was Formerly a Port called Blakeney and Cley: Important dates in the maritime history of the Glaven Ports* (Poppyland Publishing, 2021) £12.95**

Local historians of Norfolk (and, to a lesser extent, of Suffolk) have an excellent supporter in Poppyland Publishing. New books appear regularly, most of which are monographs by individuals, but some originate from local history societies' projects.

An example of the former is *A Market Town Through Time: Watton, Norfolk* by Andy Reid, which traces the history of Watton from a



Mesolithic hammerhead to life in the town in 1911. Surviving records from medieval Watton are scarce, but a 16th-century copy of a 14th-century perambulation of a nearby manor permits the reconstruction of some of the manor of Watton's boundary. An inquisition of 1384 identifies the place as 'Watton Market', indicating that the main settlement was around the marketplace. Indeed, Reid notes that



several 17th-century testators specified that legacies were to be paid to recipients at the market cross, which was another name for the market house rather than simply a cross.

When a huge fire broke out in Watton on 25 April 1674, more than 60 houses and outbuildings and the butchers' shambles were burned down. A charitable brief was issued enabling the town to collect money all over the country for the relief of inhabitants. Clearly the town was rebuilt rapidly, as a visitor in 1681 noted 'Watton is a small town, lately burnt, but now rebuilt'.

Watton in the 18th century is introduced via a newspaper report of the town's celebrations of George II's accession; prominent tradesmen are identified using articles in the *Norfolk Chronicle*; and overseers' accounts permit a reconstruction of the treatment of the local poor. The early 19th-century parliamentary enclosure of Watton's fields and commons changed the nature of town: small allotments along the roads over the former Mill Common were laid out in a manner that facilitated their acquisition as building plots, and thus Watton began to expand westwards.

Other chapters include a walk round the town in 1841 and 1911 based largely, but not solely, on censuses; the significance of two notable inns, The George and The Crown, the latter still surviving as a public house; St Mary's church, once central to life in the town, but its influence waning as Methodism and Independents became established; and the coming of the railway in 1869. This is an excellent example of a local study which uses local and national sources, is well illustrated, and has endnotes and a comprehensive index.

Rather than cover the long history of a whole town, *Millgate, Aylsham* considers the 'corner' of Aylsham (i.e. Millgate), which links the core of the town around the marketplace with the water mill on the Bure and covers the late 18th and 19th century. The initial research for the book grew out of the Aylsham Local History Group's (ALHG) examination bundles of deeds belonging to Tom Bishop of Bridge House, Millgate. As well as these 'Bishop's bundles', other sources include census returns for 1821 and 1841-81 and local wills. The area of Millgate developed considerably following the opening of the Bure Navigation in 1779, linking Aylsham by canal and river with Yarmouth and the Broadland river system. This brought new occupations to Millgate such as wherryman

and boat builder and increased outlets for the malting trade in Aylsham.

The book was first published by the ALHG in 1993 and proved very popular. In 2006 a second edition was produced by Poppyland Publishing. This edition included new chapters on Millgate public houses, millers in the area, the Belt estate and the gas works. The new editors also amended the text to cover changes to buildings, whether sold, altered or demolished.

The book is nicely illustrated with line drawings, maps and photographs. The eye-catching jacket is adapted from a modern pictorial map of Aylsham. Although there are no endnotes, there is a comprehensive list of sources, a detailed index and an appendix listing the contents of the 'Bishop's bundles'. The second edition was reprinted in 2013 and, having sold out, is being made available again.

Anyone who has visited the Cley and Salthouse Marshes owned by the Norfolk Wildlife Trust is aware that the coastline there has changed dramatically but perhaps only in relation to the terrible flooding in 1953. *This Was Formerly a Port called Blakeney and Cley* describes the 'medieval maritime powerhouses' of Blakeney and Cley, which thrived until the Glaven estuary gradually silted up in the 19th century. In 1996 *The Glaven Ports*, by Jonathan Hooton, was published with the help of the **Blakeney Area Historical Society**. This new version, published by Poppyland in 2021, includes much supplementary information that has since come to light. The maritime history of the area is structured around key dates in the development and demise of the ports. In addition, 'evidence boxes' indicate some of the surviving relics of the ports which can be seen today, such as the 'Blakeney guildhall', not actually guildhall but a merchant's basement or warehouse for the storage of goods. Helpfully, the locations of the evidence boxes' subjects are marked on a map.

Perhaps most astonishing is the documentary evidence of the area's 'Tudor heyday': surviving port books provide details of trade with Iceland, Holland, Flanders, Norway, the Baltic, France, Spain and even Crete. And then there is the 'Cooke copy' of the wonderful map by John Darby entitled 'Map of Blakeney Haven and Port of Cley', dated 1586. This book has illustrations on nearly every page, endnotes and an index.

*(Reviews continue overleaf)*

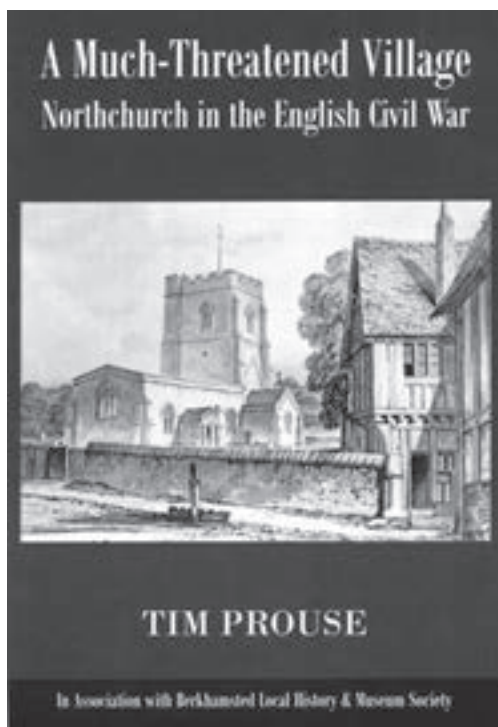
**Tim Prouse, *A Much-Threatened Village: Northchurch in the English Civil War* (New Generation Publishing, 2024) (ISBN: 978-1-835634-53-0) £9.99 via Amazon**

*A Much-Threatened Village* reveals what happened in and around West Hertfordshire during the English Civil War, an area that was 'strongly Puritan' even by 1640. Northchurch, situated near Berkhamsted on the road from London to Aylesbury and beyond, was an 'unremarkable' village, but which, due to its location, was greatly affected by the civil war. Early on, Aylesbury had been created a Parliamentary garrison town, and thus Northchurch was on the direct line for supplies and reinforcements, and probably supplied men to serve that garrison. Prouse describes various military raids near the village, and the likely effects of the king's base in Oxford, the major Parliamentary army encampment at St Albans, and garrisons at Aylesbury and Newport Pagnell. Using local wills and inventories he reconstructs what houses, farms and businesses in the village would have been like, and identifies some of the villagers who, in 1642, contributed to the appeal for the 'distressed Protestants in Ireland'.

He discusses changes in religious practices, giving examples from neighbouring parishes where parliamentary soldiers destroyed stained glass windows and altar rails in protest against fixtures advocated by Archbishop Laud. 'Life under arms' describes life as a soldier in the Parliamentary army and how each community was expected to contribute in terms of money, men and weapons. 'Active service' covers how the Hertfordshire regiments were formed under the Earl of Essex and where they were in action, in addition to garrison duty at Newport Pagnell and Aylesbury. The issues of death, disease, discipline and desertion are also considered.

Feeding and paying the Parliamentary army was prohibitively expensive, in terms of crops and animals requisitioned, as well as money in the form of taxation. On the other hand, accounts presented to Parliament indicate that some locals had provided services for which they expected to be paid.

'The shock of the new' looks at the aftermath of the war in Northchurch, revealing, among



other individuals, Richard Tisdell, a disabled veteran of several battles, who was granted a pension of 40s per year and lived until 1691. Having assessed the overall effects of the war on the village, Prouse closes with the celebrations recorded at Berkhamsted when Charles II was restored.

This very well-researched history of the civil war's effect on one village draws on a wide range of primary and secondary sources. Since the purpose of record society volumes is, in general, to make documents more accessible to local historians, it is interesting that the author has drawn on various Hertfordshire Record Society volumes, including Volume XXIII, *The Impact of the First Civil War*, Volume XXXVIII, *Berkhamsted St Peter Churchwardens' Accounts* and *Hertfordshire Population Statistics*. Indeed, following up records transcribed in Volume XXIII, Prouse also consulted related documents at TNA and elsewhere. The book has been self-published but the author gratefully acknowledges support, encouragement and practical advice from members of the **Berkhamsted Local History & Museum Society**.

**Books for review should be sent to: Dr Heather Falvey, 119 Winton Drive, Croxley Green, Rickmansworth WD3 3QS – or contact her via [reviews.editor@balh.org.uk](mailto:reviews.editor@balh.org.uk)**



# BALH Trustees say thanks to Paul and Iain

This month's AGM saw two notable changes in the Trustee line-up at BALH – Paul Dryburgh has stepped down after three years as Chair, and Iain Taylor also leaves the Trustees, having acted as Treasurer for several years, until the 2024 AGM. Everyone at BALH would like to extend their thanks to them both for steering the organisation through some challenging times.

After almost a year of effectively overseeing the day-to-day operations of BALH, as Vice-Chair and then Acting Chair, Paul formally took over the Chair's role in summer 2022. By then he had already been a Trustee for four years, as well as a member of the Publishing Committee, on which he remains.

As if those responsibilities weren't enough, his day job is as principal records specialist at The National Archives, where he has worked for over a decade as an expert medievalist with a particular interest in government and society in the 13th and 14th centuries. His other roles include joint general editor of the Pipe Roll Society, honorary secretary of the Lincoln Record Society and president of the Mortimer History Society, and his publications include *Royal Seals at The National Archives* (2020) – all that as well as being an ardent football fan.

In his three years as Chair of BALH, Paul has been renowned for his warmth, generous spirit and pragmatic approach, as the following words from some of his colleagues attest:

- Paul seemed ready made to be chair of the Trustees; he volunteered to fill the gap, went about his work with gracious kindness and great efficiency (he took precise and excellent minutes for part of the time I was Chair), was enormously efficient and remained unflustered in times of crisis. Added to these virtues he promoted new ideas and encouraged fellow Trustees to think imaginatively and creatively outside the 'box'. BALH owes him a great debt of gratitude for his work on its behalf. *David Killingray*
- Paul has been the ideal chairman to see BALH through somewhat difficult times. He has been enormously conscientious and generous with his time, always constructive

and conciliatory in his approach, always happy to engage with fellow trustees and committee members on a one-to-one basis, and always wholeheartedly supportive of the aims and activities of the committee I chair. I feel privileged to regard him as a colleague and friend. *John Chandler*

- Paul exemplifies leadership that is both effective and a pleasure to work with – clear, focused, well-organised, decisive and consistent. BALH has greatly benefited from Paul's dedication and hard work during his time as Chair. On a personal note, I much appreciate Paul's willingness to listen, his genuine kindness, and sense of fun – it's made working with him enjoyable and inspiring! *Jane Golding*
- Paul has been the heart of BALH for several years and has driven forward so much of what the Association has done – including much that was not strictly his role. For this he has sought no praise or plaudits but has continued quietly and efficiently across some difficult times to create great achievements. All while being a pleasure to work with. BALH and local history in Britain will continue to benefit from his work for some time to come. *Joe Saunders*
- Every good society needs a Paul – efficient, empathetic, aware, balanced, calm, welcoming, supportive, dedicated and instilling confidence. BALH has been most fortunate in recent years. Far too good for BALH to lose him completely even though no longer Chair! *Tim Lomas*

Paul himself has also provided the following appreciation of his colleague Iain:

Willing and, more importantly, able. As so often discussed in these pages and no doubt in societies up and down the country, these are the two most important criteria when recruiting officers and trustees (usually on a voluntary basis) to run local history societies. Skills and experience are in high demand, which is increasingly not met by supply. The Association has, however, been incredibly fortunate. Since being perhaps reluctantly



recruited by our former Chair, Professor David Killingray, in 2019, Iain Taylor has until our last AGM acted as Honorary Treasurer and Trustee. No one, least of all Iain, could have anticipated the tasks that would face him over those five years, but few could have undertaken the role so professionally and enthusiastically.

During Iain's tenure, we have faced unprecedented uncertainty through the Covid-19 pandemic, which meant the Association had to pivot to become a much more digital-first organisation. This required of a treasurer flexibility, ingenuity and marketing flair, for which a first career in public relations made Iain ideally suited. Iain has also overseen changes in our financial and constitutional management, leading on the Association's move to Charitable Incorporated Organisation status. It has been Iain who has brokered a more personal relationship with Moore Insight, our asset management company, so crucial to how the officers and trustees interact with our

members. He has also overseen a period where we have had to increase subscriptions to assist in balancing the budget as we faced internal and external financial pressures. Throughout he has tried to align the firm oversight needed of a financial manager, willing to take those tough decisions, with compassion and understanding for the needs of members. Iain, of course, is also a first-rate historian and during his tenure published with David Killingray his study on 18th- and 19th-century Sevenoaks (*Sevenoaks 1790–1914: Risk and choice in West Kent* (University of Hertfordshire Press, 2022)). He is also a lover of cricket and rugby, and will no doubt be enjoying some of the joys of a sporting summer to come.

Iain stood down as a trustee at the 2025 AGM in May. It is with the warm thanks and respect of the officers and trustees that we wish to pay tribute to Iain for all he has done for the Association and to wish him all the very best for the future.

## BALH Small Grants recipients

In August 2024 BALH launched a pilot Small Grants Programme (SGP) aimed at supporting local history projects with grants of up to £500. A total pot of £5,000 was allocated by BALH Trustees and the programme was promoted via *Local History News* and social media.

Over 20 applications were received and the SGP panel (consisting of BALH Trustees and committee members) had difficult decisions to make. From an early medieval conference in East Anglia and volunteer training in Cumbria to local history republications in Wales and Buckinghamshire, it was inspiring to see the range of projects looking for support. In total 11 projects received funding:

- Broadwindsor oral history project (pictured)
- Castle Point heritage plaques
- Foxton Canal Museum guidebook
- Hoar Oak Cottage exhibition
- Jane Austen Festival
- Early Middle Ages in East Anglia conference
- Hartlepool WW1 exhibition booklet
- History of Hedgerley book revision and republication
- History of Llansannor book revision and republication
- Kirkgate Arts and Heritage Centre, Cockerthorpe, volunteer training
- Bradford railway heritage project

The geographic spread, historical time span and range of outputs has been especially pleasing. It reflects the diversity of local history study and its ability to engage with a wide range of people.

A second round of the programme will be launched later in the year. Any enquiries can be directed to [outreach@balh.org.uk](mailto:outreach@balh.org.uk). *Stephen Miller*



# A historical danger to bear in mind

Alan Crosby

Until the 1960s Westhoughton was a small town about halfway between Wigan and Bolton. Now it is much larger, as a result of extensive private housebuilding, although schemes in the 1950s and 1960s to receive overspill population from Salford and Manchester came to nothing. Four hundred years ago, though, this was a small village in an almost entirely rural area – the sort of place where nothing ever happens. Or was it?

Alexander Laithwaite, who lived at Westhoughton, was as a man with a grievance, and he was determined to do something about it. In January 1634 he petitioned the county magistrates of Lancashire, ahead of the Epiphany quarter sessions, explaining to them that Westhoughton was on the 'high Rodde waye for Cartes horses and beastes leading betweene Wigan and Manchester and other market townes'. There was also 'a foote waie for men and woemen over the feildes'. Alexander lived with his family in 'a howse standing in the feildes in the foote waye'.

Having thus set the scene, he came to the substance of his complaint. 'At many and diverse tymes', he said, 'bellwards with their beares refuse the broadde waye and cometh with their beares the said footwaye' (the term 'bellward' was a quite widespread dialect variant of 'bearward', a keeper of performing bears). These bears were no ordinary bears, however: according to Alexander, they were 'Cursid beasses'. The footway 'lyeth by the cheeke of the howse dower of your petitioner' and the bears 'hath sometime broken in and frighted your petitioners wife and familie'.

Who was the guilty party? Laithwaite asserted that Alexander Ascrofte alias Orrinshawe of Wigan 'comyn diverse tymes the same waye with his beares', he (Laithwaite) had requested him not to come that way any more, but to take the animals along the highway instead. 'for feare of his wife and children and famelie and puttinge them in a frichte'. Predictably enough, Ascrofte was unmoved, and refused, speaking to Laithwaite in a 'most vile and malice' fashion. He sought the magistrates' order that Ascrofte should desist, it appears that his pleas were in vain, as no such order can be traced.

I first came across this quarter session petition about 35 years ago, and obtained a photocopy (which we did in those quaint pre-digital days), since for obvious reasons it was full of interest. Traffic hazards there are aplenty in Westhoughton today, but performing bears are not among them. The other day I was going through a file of yellowing photocopies and came across it again. As though I don't already have enough to do, I thought to myself that this would be worth exploring further. How common were performing bears in the reign of Charles I, and are there other examples from elsewhere in the country? And can we find out anything more about the two Alexanders, Laithwaite and Ascrofte?

So I idly googled a few key words to see what came up. And what came up was a definitive and magisterial paper entitled 'Bear journeys in early modern England', published online with free access by the journal *The Seventeenth Century* as recently as March 2025. The paper has six authors, from three universities (Southampton, Nottingham and York) and none of them is a historian, but I don't hold that against them. It is fully researched, full of interest – and, of course, it includes full coverage of the two Alexanders and the performing bears of Westhoughton (even if the name of the place is spelled incorrectly, as Westhaughton).

An important lesson is demonstrated – it



is always possible, and perhaps even likely, that someone somewhere has had the same idea as you. That pioneering, groundbreaking research that you have been planning, perhaps for rather too long, is already being written up by A N Other, and maybe has even been published by A N Other in a journal which you did not think about. That amazing piece

of local historical gold which you thought was unique to your community turns out to be commonplace and known to local historians far and wide. You can cross the idea off your list and abandon the plan. And that leaves only 27 other possible topics and sources to investigate...

*Cartoon by Ian West*

# BALH Outreach Team news

Joe Saunders

In the first part of 2025, BALH has organised a new series of lectures with the Historic Towns Trust with talks on Perth, Bradford, Ripon and Chester – a range of excellent studies by researchers working with the Trust on producing new historic maps of these places. BALH hopes to continue the association with the HTT in 2026.

Other talks in the spring of 2025 have included January's 'Breaking the Mold: Alberta Sturges, The Redefining of an American Heiress in the Gilded Age' with Julie Montagu and February's talk on heraldry by the excellent Anne Ballard. In March we held an online event with Historic England introducing the Local Heritage Hub, a digital hub that re-presents Historic England's existing data and content to more localised communities nationwide, providing a gateway to further historic interest in your local area.

More recently, BALH AGM business on Thursday 22 was followed by a talk 'Writing the Local History of the British Civil Wars' by BALH President Professor Jackie Eales.

Also in May, BALH is delighted to have presented Placing Jane – National Figures, Local Context, a conference in Southampton, as part of the Jane Austen 250 programme and Local and Community History Month. This event had been sold out for some time and promised to be an excellent gathering of local history discussing people and themes relating to Jane Austen's life and times.

As has become the way, our online talks will pause over the summer. We will be resuming in the autumn with a range of talks which will be announced shortly.

For 2026 work is already under way on a range of talks and events, including preparation

for another regional conference, this time in the Yorkshire Dales. Watch this space!

BALH attends as many events as we are able but we can only do so if we are aware of them. Please get in touch with our Outreach Coordinator Stephen Miller if you are running an event and would like us to attend: [outreach@balh.org.uk](mailto:outreach@balh.org.uk). We also have a stock of fliers and pencils which can be sent out. If you are interested in receiving some of these to give away then please also get in touch with Stephen. With your help we can grow awareness of the Association.

The BALH blog continues to draw in excellent research as does our popular series of online 'Ten-Minute Talks'. We are always looking for new blogs and videos so please get in touch if you would like to share your local history research with a wide audience. We continue to be especially looking to share ideas on 'doing' local history from researching to running a society. Get in touch with the Digital Team with your idea: [digitalteam@balh.org.uk](mailto:digitalteam@balh.org.uk)

We hope you enjoy the range of events and projects that BALH is involved in and the materials we work to bring you as members. We are always looking to arrange more talks, attend more events and run more projects but require volunteer assistance to do this. We are unable to carry out as much work as we would like, including attending and organising events across much of Britain, because of our small group of volunteers. The Publishing team are also looking for assistance to help with their activities. If you would be interested in helping in any way, please do get in touch.

Readers can keep up to date with our activities via *Local History News*, the BALH website and the e-newsletter.

# Notes News Issues

## The BALH team

### Helping local historians

BALH aims to advise and inspire local historians. To do this we share excellent research from which you can take encouragement, we inform you of events and new books and offer support in the process of doing your local history through our website, publications and events. It is in this vein that we are asking readers to help us help others with their local history. You possess a wealth of knowledge about the practicalities of local history, whether this is researching, writing, giving talks, publishing, teaching, running societies and more.

Please do get in touch if you feel you can share some of your knowledge with us in either a short, written piece for *Local History News* (please send your proposal to Andrew Chapman, editor.lhn@balh.org.uk), our blog and/or a recorded ten-minute talk (contact Joe Saunders, joseph6.saunders@hotmail.com).

### Ask BALH

Remember, if you have questions about local history research or any aspect of running

a local history society, do send them to our 'Ask BALH' feature via editor.lhn@balh.org.uk and we will aim to provide answers.

### BALH publications: your group can benefit

A reminder that we offer copies of BALH publications at a generous discount for resale by member societies, if ordered in multiples of five or more. We are keen that these should also be available for sale in archive offices and museums. Please contact John Chandler, chair of the Publications Committee, for further information: jh.chandler@hotmail.com.

### Next copy deadline

The next issue of *Local History News* will be out towards the end of August – please note the copy deadline for that issue (No. 156) is 1 July. If you wish to promote a society event here, it will need to take place not before late August – for earlier events, which we may be able to list at [www.balh.org.uk/events](http://www.balh.org.uk/events), contact the BALH Digital Manager, digital.manager@balh.org.uk

**On the BALH website:** As well as articles here in *LHN* and in *The Local Historian*, BALH publishes a wide variety of fascinating articles at its blog, [www.balh.org.uk/blog](http://www.balh.org.uk/blog) – and don't forget to watch the latest ten-minute talks at [www.balh.org.uk/ten-minute-talks](http://www.balh.org.uk/ten-minute-talks) and listen to the Local History Matters podcast at [www.balh.org.uk/podcast](http://www.balh.org.uk/podcast)

## New Outreach chair needed

BALH's Outreach Team requires a new chair. This small team of volunteers work remotely to help undertake the work of the Association. The Outreach Team chair is an unpaid position, but is a rewarding opportunity to contribute to the work of BALH. The role entails being a contact point for events, education and other outreach activities, and undertaking some of this work themselves. It includes answering correspondence, providing copy for print and digital publications, arranging meetings (including quarterly Team meetings) and reporting to the Board of Trustees. The role includes some capacity to influence the work of the Association. The role can be what you make of it but will likely entail a couple of hours' work a week. Experience in a similar role is preferred. Ideally suited to someone passionate about local history and a knowledge of the various forms people can engage others, with good administrative and time-management skills.

Please contact current chair Joe Saunders for further information: [joseph6.saunders@outlook.com](mailto:joseph6.saunders@outlook.com)

# BALH Officers and Committees

**President:** Professor Jackie Eales

**Vice Presidents:** Dr Christopher Charlton, Professor Claire Cross,  
Professor Norman McCord, Mr Phillip Snell, Dr Kate Thompson

## **Board of Trustees 2025:**

Sophie Anstee de Mas (*Treasurer*)  
John Chandler  
Morgan Ditchburn  
Jane Golding (*Vice Chair*)  
Daniella Gonzalez  
Tim Hamilton  
David Killingray  
Tim Lomas  
Joe Saunders (*Vice Chair*)  
Lisbet Sherlock  
Jack Southern  
Julia Tubman  
Martin Watts (*Chair*)  
Adrian Webb  
Laura Yeoman

## **Advisory Committees:**

**Outreach:** Joe Saunders (*Chair*), Sophie Anstee de Mas, Steve Barrett, Cheryl Butler, David Cant,  
Geoffrey Carter, Jane Golding, Daniella Gonzalez, Tim Hamilton, Tim Lomas, Jonathan  
Mackman, Susan Moore, Helen Palmer, Jude Rhodes, Lisbet Sherlock,  
Jack Southern, Dan Taylor, Julia Tubman  
*ex officio:* Paul Carter (Digital Manager), Stephen Miller (Outreach Coordinator)  
Megan Kelleher (Digital Strategy Coordinator), Catherine Warr (Digital Content Coordinator)

**Publishing:** John Chandler (*Chair*), Claire Cross, Paul Dryburgh,  
Roger Ottewill, Winifred Stokes, Kate Thompson, Nigel Tringham, Laura Yeoman  
*ex officio:* Andrew Chapman (Editor *Local History News*),  
Alan Crosby (Editor *The Local Historian*), Heather Falvey (Reviews Editor),

**Editor, *The Local Historian*:** Alan Crosby  
**Reviews Editor:** Heather Falvey  
**Editor, *Local History News*:** Andrew Chapman

**Digital Manager:** Paul Carter  
**Digital Strategy Coordinator:** Megan Kelleher  
**Digital Content Coordinator:** Catherine Warr

**Outreach Coordinator:** Stephen Miller

**Membership and Financial Services:** Moore Insight



# BALH

BRITISH ASSOCIATION  
FOR LOCAL HISTORY

[www.balh.org.uk](http://www.balh.org.uk)

The British Association for Local History (BALH) was created in 1982 as the successor to earlier organisations which had supported the study of local history over previous decades. Its purpose is

**to encourage and assist the study of local history throughout Great Britain  
as an academic discipline and as a rewarding leisure pursuit  
for both individuals and groups.**

To achieve this the Association

- serves as the national body representing local and regional historians
- hosts Local History Day, an annual event open to all, with discussions and a specially commissioned lecture based on current research
- publishes the prestigious quarterly journal *The Local Historian*, which includes regular features on themes, sources, websites, and a copious reviews section
- produces a quarterly members' magazine *Local History News* reporting on up-to-date developments and examples of best practice from around the country
- makes annual awards to individuals who have made a significant contribution to local history; for excellence in research and publication; and for an outstanding local society newsletter
- organises guided visits to places of relevant interest, often not easily accessible otherwise
- collaborates with other organisations to arrange conferences and similar events around the country
- provides a website for information and links
- publishes specialist handbooks.

The Association is an unincorporated registered charity, governed by an elected Board of Trustees, with two advisory committees dealing with publishing and outreach. It is financed by its members. Subscriptions are for a calendar year but may be started at any time; new members receive the material already issued during the year.

Individual	£36
Digital (NEW) – journals as PDFs	£30
Student on a full- or part-time course in local history	£25
Local society or group	£90
Institutions	£45
Overseas	£51

**Note: these are the new rates from 1 January 2024.**

(Libraries subscribing to *The Local Historian* via agents are treated as Institutional members)

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*Top: BALH's stall at the lively Wincanton History Day – see page 26.*



*Left: The 'heritage ruin' at Hoar Oak Cottage, Exmoor – see page 14.*

*Below: Intergenerational community collaboration in Paignton – see page 18.*

